In May of 1803, Dr. Benjamin Rush, acting as medical advisor for the Lewis and Clark expedition, produced a list of questions for Meriwether Lewis to consider when encountering Native American populations in the western territories. The list appears in Rush’s commonplace book, as well as in a more extensive list of questions prepared by William Clark in 1804. It is divided into three categories—physical history and medicine, morals, and religion—and it evinces a wide-ranging, proto-anthropological curiosity. Rush asks Lewis to record information about everything from illnesses to marital age to diet and the use of intoxicating substances among Native Americans. One of his most targeted questions, however, is reserved for religion. “What Affinity,” Rush asks, exists “between [Native American] religious Ceremonies & those of the Jews?”

Although the question might jangle in the ear of a twenty-first-century reader, it probably struck Lewis as neither odd nor out of place. Indeed, Clark retained a version of the query a year later, in his master list of ethnographic questions: “What affinity is there,” Clark writes, “between their religious ceremonies and those of the ancient Jews?”

Clark’s addition of the word “ancient” is significant for two reasons. First, it suggests that he did not merely copy out Rush’s questions, but revised them as he prepared his own guide for the expedition. Second, and more crucial for the purposes of this study, it reveals this question’s investment in a longstanding discussion of the origins of indigenous American peoples. Specifically, Rush’s inquiry and Clark’s revision demonstrate an interest in what I will refer to in this book as the Hebraic Indian theory—the notion that indigenous Americans might be, in part or in whole, descendants of the lost tribes of Israel. When he asks Lewis to look for traces of “Jewish” practices across the American landscape,
Rush does not have contemporary Judaism or actual Jewish people in mind. As Clark recognizes, Rush’s inquiry reaches instead for evidence of a past predating the development of the religion now called Judaism. Rush seeks the Kingdom of Israel, which disappeared around 722 BCE and which might, his question hopefully indicates, be on the verge of reappearance in the Americas.

In asking Lewis and Clark to determine whether Native American cultures demonstrated affinity with Judaism, Rush actually sought answers to two questions, one ancient, the other modern. These questions emerged in different historical periods, but over the course of the early modern era they became intertwined. The Puritan Edward Winslow summarizes the convergence of these questions in his 1649 work, *The Glorious Progress of the Gospel amongst the Indians in New England*. In perhaps the most concise summary of Christian investment in the Hebraic Indian theory, Winslow writes, “There are two great questions which have much troubled ancient and modern writers, and men of great depth and ability to resolve: the first, what became of the ten Tribes of Israel, that were carried into Captivity by the King of Siria, when their own Countrey and Cities were planted and filled with strangers? The second is, what Family, Tribe, Kindred, or people it was that first planted, and afterwards filled that vast and long unknown Countrey of America?”

Winslow’s hope is that English colonial efforts have revealed a single answer to both questions. “It is not lesse probable that these Indians should come from the Stock of Abraham, then [sic] any other Nation this day known in the world,” he writes, “Especially considering the juncture of time wherein God hath opened their hearts to entertain the Gospel.” Where are the lost tribes? In America. And who are the original Americans? The lost tribes. “The work of communicating and increasing the light of the Gospel,” Winslow asserts, “is glorious in reference to Jews & Gentiles.” If the lost tribes are the indigenous peoples of America, then the arrival of English Protestants and their Bibles bears the promise of biblical prophecy. What better justification of settler colonialism could there be than the conversion of a lost biblical population to Christianity? As Rush would nearly two centuries later, Winslow hopes to demonstrate that imperial endeavors may have providential consequences.
This book is the study of an error that emerged during the colonial period in the Americas and that persists in some corners to this day. Beginning with the earliest English-language expositions of the Hebraic Indian theory and tracing its multiple iterations through the nineteenth century, this study examines writings that typically present incorrect information about indigenous Americans and Jewish people. To work with texts that are both old and unfamiliar often is to inhabit the space of anachronism. At its best, anachronism can produce moments of delight and revelation. At its worst, though, it prods longstanding cultural wounds, and hinders understanding. Thus I wish to say a few things about the use of certain terms in this book before moving into my analysis.

Many of the texts examined here contain what are in retrospect obvious historical inaccuracies, and they also deploy outdated terminology—much of which is baldly racist and anti-Jewish. It is not my aim simply to critique these works for their errors. I am concerned with how the authors examined here marshal history as they understand it to further their religious and political interests. But it would be inappropriate to pretend that some of the texts covered in this book are, by virtue of their age, inoffensive. Two important issues arise in reading these works, which I want to acknowledge from the outset. The first is that the texts explored in this book by and large configure the Hebraic Indian theory in terms of “Jewishness” and offer proof of the theory’s veracity by comparing Native American cultural phenomena to “Jewish” practices. For this reason, the small body of existing scholarship on the theory has tended to refer to it as the “Jewish Indian” theory. I have opted for the term “Hebraic” instead, for two reasons. The first is historical: Assyria conquered the Kingdom of Israel before the development of the religion we now call Judaism. The lost tribes, in short, were not Jewish. Thus I am attempting to skirt the anachronism that structures Rush’s question about “the Jews” and most other expressions of the theory. I use the term “Hebraic” to refer to biblical peoples associated with the lineage of Eber, from whose line follow Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Although this book does explore one version of the theory that falls outside of this biblical lineage (found in *The Book of Mormon*), the term accurately describes the bulk of the theory’s permutations. “Hebraic” is not a perfect descrip-
tion of the phenomenon assessed in this study, but it is more capacious, and, I think, more accurate than “Jewish.”

The second reason I have opted not to use the word “Jewish” with respect to this theory is that most—though, importantly, not all—of the authors associated with it had very little interest in and even less knowledge of actual Judaism and Jewish people. What passes for “Jewish” in most of these texts is little better than a caricature drawn from longstanding anti-Jewish stereotypes and dubious interpretations of Leviticus. The primary materials examined in this study often refer to cultural practices as “Jewish,” but I avoid using the term when possible. This book is not about Judaism. It is, rather, about a distorted picture of Judaism that structures interpretations of Native American practices that are not Jewish.

Although I have altered the adjective most commonly found in this theory’s title, I have retained its equally fraught noun—“Indian.” This was not a choice I made lightly, as that word, too, carries within it an error. The word occupies a vexed position in studies of both the Americas broadly and US culture more specifically, because, as Scott Richard Lyons reminds us, it “is a misnomer having nothing to do with tribal peoples encountered by European explorers (nor for that matter with India) and everything to do with that great, world-historic navigational error of Columbus’s.” The word emerged and operated only within the frame of colonialism, and part of its work was erasure. “Indian” can be deployed to elide cultural specificity, and it also can efface pre-Columbian American histories. And yet, as Lyons puts it, “We find both European and native fingerprints at the scene of the sign.” Noting that some indigenous peoples actively adopted the term for themselves and strove to define it beyond colonizing sensibilities, he argues for the importance of moving beyond facile notions of the word as merely European or inauthentically indigenous and treating “Indian” as a complex sign embedded in ongoing, globally significant negotiations of identity. The term is an important component of the label I have adopted for this theory, precisely because it evokes the complexity of European and American encounters and highlights the stakes involved in their negotiations.

European notions of indigenous ancestry and history were fraught with mistakes from the start. Retaining the word “Indian” in this context
also highlights the lack of interest in specific Native nations that many European writers demonstrated in their pursuit of the theory. In the texts this study considers, the word “Indian” occludes myriad distinctions among cultures and histories. For these reasons, it is an appropriate descriptor for the theory, and I have retained it when it appears in the texts I cite. However, in my own analysis, apart from the name of the theory, I eschew the word “Indian” where possible, preferring to give specific tribal names or to use phrases such as “Native American” and “indigenous American” or simply “American” to describe actual Native populations.\textsuperscript{10} I do this in part in the interest of distinguishing my perspective from those of the writers I examine. I also do this because I am aware of the longstanding and ongoing violence against indigenous peoples that this word has abetted, even as it has been appropriated and reconfigured by some Native American groups. And I am, finally, not blind to my own position as a white scholar analyzing (mainly) white writers’ interpretations of Native American cultures. Just as this book is not about actual Judaism, neither is it about the real, lived histories of Native American people and nations. In tracing the Hebraic Indian theory from its origins in English literature through the nineteenth century, this book demonstrates how a fantasy of human origins infused the Western hemisphere and its colonial projects with urgent religious significance through three centuries.

Winslow’s concern with the location of the lost tribes of Israel was nothing new in 1649. As Zvi Ben-Dor Benite has shown in his expansive history of this ancient question, the “lostness” of the lost tribes has made them an object of international interest for millennia. Many different groups have sought them, and many others have claimed to be them. “Over the course of 2,000 years,” Benite writes, “Jews, Christians of various denominations, and, to a lesser extent, Muslims [have] used the tribes as a point of reference, tying historical developments to their exile and return.”\textsuperscript{11} The tribes’ story begins, as many biblical stories do, with an argument over succession and an account of divine ire. The tribes are the descendants of Jacob’s twelve sons, who for generations live in a unified kingdom ruled first by David and then by Solomon. They are named for those sons—Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulon, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Joseph, and Benjamin. The math around the tribes always is a bit off, because the Levites are hereditary priests with no
land of their own, and Joseph eventually splits into two tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh. Thus there are twelve landed tribes, plus the Levites who live among them. The narrative of the kingdom’s division into the “ten” tribes that will be lost, on the one hand, and those who will become the world’s Jewish population on the other, is found in the biblical books 1 and 2 Kings. The only use of the phrase “ten tribes” in the Bible appears in 1 Kings, when the prophet Ahija tells the Ephraimite Jeroboam that God, out of anger at Solomon’s transgressions, will divide the Kingdom of Israel. “Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel,” Ahija proclaims, “I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee” (1 Kings 11:31). Following a period of mismanagement by Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, Jeroboam fulfills the prophecy through a successful rebellion. The ten tribes secede, forming the Kingdom of Israel, while the tribes of Judah and Benjamin form the Kingdom of Judah, retaining control over Jerusalem.

Like Solomon and Rehoboam before him (and, really, like many biblical kings), upon achieving success through divine favor, Jeroboam begins a slide into iniquity and finds himself the subject of a new prophecy, also delivered by Ahija: “For the Lord shall smite Israel as a reed is shaken in the water,” the prophet says, “and he shall root up Israel out of this good land” (1 Kings 14:15). In subsequent years, Israel turns on itself, rendering it vulnerable to conquest. The second prophecy is fulfilled after two centuries of decline, when the Assyrian empire conquers the Israelites and exiles them. The collapse of this once-great kingdom receives only brief mention in 2 Kings: “Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes” (2 Kings 17:5–6). Following this description of their exile, the tribes vanish from biblical and other historical records. The consensus among historians is that nations conquered by Assyria generally assimilated into the cultures among which they were exiled. The “disappearance” of the tribes is therefore most likely a metaphor for gradual (though no less devastating) cultural change. Despite this fact, the status of the missing Kingdom of Israel became and has remained for some an important biblical mystery. This is the case because the tribes can be read into prophetic texts
that announce a future gathering of Israel and its remnants. The books of Isaiah and Ezekiel, for example, promise the nation’s someday readmission to its lost land: “For a small moment have I forsaken thee,” reads Isaiah, “but with great mercies will I gather thee” (Isaiah 57:7). Ezekiel appears to concur: “Thus saith the Lord God; I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel” (Ezekiel 11:17). If the historical record is silent on the location of the tribes, the prophetic record, from some readerly vantage points (though certainly not all), is explicit. The tribes have been scattered, but someday they will return, and thus they must be somewhere, hidden from view but waiting to reappear. They are lost, yes, but that means they could be found.

Though the story of Jeroboam’s rebellion and its aftermath might seem a straightforward account of national disputes and shifting borders, the narratives of 1 and 2 Kings are not history in any modern sense. “At least the first part of the actual (as opposed to the prophetic) history of the ten tribes story (the first book of Kings, which tells the story of the united kingdom created by David and its split into two under his grandson),” Benite explains, “is considered by biblical scholars to be almost entirely fictional. The second part, found in 2 Kings . . . is thought to have been heavily edited and full of interpolations.”

Like many religious and literary works, 1 and 2 Kings have undergone significant reevaluation by scholars over the past half-century. These books are products of both authorship and redaction, assembled over the course of many years from the writing and editing of source materials composed by several hands. In their introduction to a volume dedicated to the controversies and competing theories surrounding these texts, Klaus-Peter Adam and Mark Leuchter note that the “authors/redactors of the work regularly engage ideas both imported from foreign cultures and recycled from Israelite religious and social traditions, and the end result is a corpus that both creates a linear historical narrative and yields a complicated system of thought and political/theological meditation.” Within the field of biblical studies, debate over how best to understand Kings is ongoing, and scholars are particularly concerned with its relationship to other biblical books, such as Deuteronomy.

It is not the aim of this book to parse the historical accuracy of Kings, nor is it to stake out a position on its relationship to other biblical texts.
or the manner of its composition. Those questions are beyond the scope of my expertise, and they emerged after the texts examined here were written. The writers represented in this book took biblical texts seriously (often literally), read them closely, and debated their significance; but they were by and large unconcerned with the kinds of issues that have structured recent scholarship on sacred texts. I treat the story of the ten tribes as a significant mythology rather than documentary history, but it is important to keep in mind that the figures explored in this book believed—in different ways and for different reasons—that the narratives in 1 and 2 Kings and the prophecies that apparently referred to the tribes in other biblical books were true. The biblical account of the formation and conquest of the Kingdom of Israel may be a contentious puzzle to contemporary biblical scholars, but it operates more simply in the works assessed here: as a set of historical facts pointing to a sacred mystery with urgent bearing on the human present.

Scholars of the lost tribes phenomenon have outlined many of the features that have made it appealing for so many years to so many distinct groups with differing interests. In Benite’s view, “The lostness represented by the ten tribes is, in Western historical consciousness, one of the most acute and oldest known instances of loss still ‘alive’ today.” Global searching for the tribes is and will be ongoing, he suggests, because their “lostness” is at once simple and profound. They are missing, and thus they should be sought. In a sociological assessment of the history of lost tribes theories, Stanford Lyman notes that a “quest for the descendants of the lost tribes has been begun many times, usually associated with the resolution of immediate, local, secular, or sacred issues that emerged in a particular era and at a particular place.” Though the story of the tribes themselves—their rebellion, ascendance, and fall from grace—is frozen in a few biblical passages, their as-yet-unnarrated future holds infinite possibility for the remedy of national and religious crises. The tribes form a lacuna in the sacred as well as profane record, holding open the possibility that human and divine history someday will converge in a single line. Lyman’s survey of engagements with the tribes across two millennia demonstrates a paradox in lost tribes thinking: the tribes never emerge, and thus they always might emerge. The eternal deferral of their return makes them eternally available for narrative engagement. Tudor Parfitt makes a similar point about the malle-
ability of lost tribes mythology providing it with a unique staying power. “From generation to generation and from place to place,” he writes, “the way people believed the myth and precisely what it meant to them changed.” As Parfitt demonstrates in his own search for versions of the lost tribes myth, this is why the tribes have been “discovered” in every era and on every habitable continent since their disappearance. Because they are absent, the tribes always can be evoked as the solution to a crisis. This book will explore how one version of the lost tribes’ story, the Hebraic Indian theory, emerged time and again as a means of addressing a variety of American crises.

Lost tribes mythology always has been linked to developments in geographic knowledge. For Europeans, as the boundaries of the known world expanded, the tribes’ potential locations continuously moved to just beyond the edges of mapped territory. Thus, as Lyman notes, before the fifteenth century European postulations about the tribes generally situated them somewhere in central Asia, but “after 1492, the search for the Lost Tribes tended to shift, moving into the ‘New World’ of the Americas and toward the farther reaches of Africa, China, and India.” The line beyond which the tribes could be living kept just ahead of explorers encountering people who were new to them but who were not the Kingdom of Israel. The Americas never have been the sole focus of lost tribes theories, but they are the focus of this book, which will examine expressions of the theory concerned primarily with North America.

Although Columbus never admitted that he had not made port off the Asian coast, the reality of what his voyage revealed rapidly became apparent to other Europeans. Several scholars have noted that the publication and reprinting of Columbus’s accounts of his voyages posed threatening challenges to longstanding assumptions about the composition of the earth and its human inhabitants. Rather than returning with tales of “monstrous races,” as David Livingstone notes many Europeans expected, Columbus “explicitly informed Luis de Santangel that he had encountered ‘no human monstrosities, as many expected,’ in the islands, though he did consider that there were in existence cannibals—Anthropophagi—as well as men with tails.” Columbus’s simple description of the people he encountered as “well-formed” had world-altering implications. Europeans were accustomed to conceiving of the globe in three parts, each corresponding to the lineage of Noah’s
sons (Ham, Shem, and Japheth) following the flood described in Genesis.\textsuperscript{23} As Livingstone notes, this model “was an altogether tidy arrangement integrating a threefold continental schema with a tripartite racial taxonomy.”\textsuperscript{24} Europeans who subscribed to this scheme claimed descent from Japheth, while assigning Asian populations to Shem and Africans to Ham. The tripartite globe had the added benefit of taking the shape of a cross, further suggesting a conceptual link between the Christian sacred record and the material reality of life on earth. The possibility that a “fourth” kind of human lived on an unknown continent threatened to upend a millennium of geographic and biblical certainty. When Columbus’s voyages revealed not monsters but men, this model, with its neat biblical symmetry, became untenable. Thus the second question that would come to be embedded in Rush’s list emerged: who were the people of the western hemisphere?

It rarely occurred to Europeans that they might take seriously indigenous American accounts of human history in the hemisphere, or that American peoples might have their own theories about the Europeans who landed in their territories. Indeed, Europeans may have responded to the revelations of Columbus’s travels and later explorations with more surprise than did their “New World” counterparts. John Sutton Lutz notes that the western hemisphere had been a cultural contact zone for centuries prior to Columbus’s voyage. “Five hundred years before Columbus, northern Europeans—Vikings—had built one and probably more settlements on the eastern shores of America. Possibly, other undocumented strangers had come from the east. Almost certainly, indigenous Americans had intermittent visitors from the west.”\textsuperscript{25} What is more, the people inhabiting the western hemisphere, like those inhabiting all the other populated continents, were accustomed to encounters with each other. When Hernan Cortes marched into Tenochtitlan in 1519, for example, the Aztecs only had occupied the city for two centuries, having arrived in the Valley of Mexico as a conquering force around 1300. To Cortes, the Aztecs were an indigenous nation; to the populations they had subjugated, the Aztecs were colonial invaders. This is a truism worth repeating: the history of human life in the western hemisphere before European arrival is not a singular history, and neither is the story of colonialism in the hemisphere simply one of European ascendance. Indigenous histories were readily available, but rather than
drawing on Native knowledge, Europeans attempted to reconcile their own systems of thinking with the new information produced by settler colonialism. As Lutz notes about Columbus, “His encounter was the product of expectations conditioned by imaginary worlds conjured up long before his arrival.” For Columbus, indigenous peoples were Asians, and thus his accounts of them mirrored Orientalist notions of life in the “East.” For those who could see the broader implications of his voyage, though, the question of lineage for American peoples was an epistemological entanglement that threatened to upend centuries of Christian thinking about the composition of the world.

Confronted with the realities of previously unknown continents teeming with previously unknown people, Europeans scrambled to either locate the western hemisphere in the biblical record or explain why it was not there. Many theories of life in what came to be called the Americas emerged among Europeans in the colonial era to explain the existence and histories of indigenous populations. These theories were as diverse as the aims of their theorists, and they occupied a broad spectrum of plausibility. This book is concerned with how the story of the missing Kingdom of Israel emerged in the aftermath of Columbus’s accidental stumbling into the “New World” to explain the existence of human life in the Americas. For its proponents, the Hebraic Indian theory possessed an elegance that others lacked, in that it simultaneously accounted for the presence of American peoples, explained their absence from biblical narratives, and solved a longstanding sacred mystery. If American people were the lost tribes of Israel, the hemisphere’s absence from biblical accounts of creation would make sense, because it would have been—eternally and by design—the designated hiding place for the tribes. Drawing on a variety of different expressions of the Hebraic Indian theory—from religious tracts to memoirs to novels—this book shows that the theory allowed writers to establish an eschatological timeline in conjunction with colonial pursuits and situate their own national interests within it. Although proponents of the theory assigned it global and immutable significance, they differed wildly in their exposition of its particulars and potential consequences. The Hebraic Indian is not, despite its proponents’ insistence, an unchanging figure. Rather, it serves as a flexible sign through which writers of several eras gather up the fraying strands of national time and tie them to a single cosmic destiny.
This book is comprised of six chapters and a coda. Its first three chapters explore the emergence and evolution of the Hebraic Indian theory from the colonial era to the early nineteenth century. Individually, these chapters chart the evolution of the theory from the earliest English encounters with American peoples through the era of Jacksonian Indian Removal. Together, they show how first European and then US writers struggled to align what they knew about Native Americans with the teachings of revealed religion. Although the idea of American Hebraism encountered skepticism from the moment it emerged, it persisted across centuries, evolving and reforming as historical circumstances changed.

The book’s second half explores critical responses to the Hebraic Indian theory in the nineteenth century, showing how US writers unconvinced by its claims used it to promote their own accounts of America’s sacred history and national destiny. As a whole, this study demonstrates the malleability of the Hebraic Indian theory, a discourse that through several centuries buttressed and contradicted Christian millennialist claims, highlighted and papered over the fractures within American Protestantism, legitimized indigenous and Jewish claims to sovereignty in the Americas, and made space for entirely new religions. The book’s coda jumps forward in time to examine twenty-first-century genetic studies conducted in the hopes of laying to rest debates over American origins. Though often “secular” in method, these scientific works are as fraught with religious stakes as the much earlier works I examine. By showing how the Hebraic Indian theory first allowed Christians to square emerging knowledge about the world with biblical history and then became a sticking point in discussions of US destiny, this book offers a new account of the intersections of religious belief and national interest. It also reveals the degree to which questions of human origins and migration patterns are enmeshed with beliefs about divine intent, providential history, and the biblical record.

In its focus on beliefs about the lost tribes of Israel, this study joins a growing body of scholarship concerned with American religious traditions. Moving away from traditional accounts of Puritanism as the exceptional origin point for US culture, in the past decade scholars have offered a more nuanced portrait of the nation’s religious landscape and worked to better situate that landscape in a global frame. Such work has been deeply intertwined with scholarship addressing the parameters of
secularism and its complex relationship with (rather than simple opposition to) religion. It has explored the many divisions within American Protestantism, the role of Catholicism and Judaism in the hemisphere, the United States’ complex and varied engagements with Islam, and the fraught relationships between slavery and religion. This book contributes to this field by showing how one biblical narrative shaped colonial and nineteenth-century attitudes about issues as diverse as evangelism, trade policies, national expansion, and scientific endeavor. It also departs from much previous scholarship (including my own) by focusing on a single theological proposition—that the lost tribes of Israel remain intact somewhere on the globe—rather than a specific religious tradition or moment in American religious history. The Hebraic Indian theory captivated writers across a broad theological spectrum, from the Calvinist settler colonists of Massachusetts to the English moderates they left behind to the Methodist Pequot William Apess to the prophet Joseph Smith. It varies widely in its appearances in the literature of the period, as do the consequences different writers assign to it. Still, at the core of every exposition of the Hebraic Indian theory lies a set of epistemological puzzles: How can secular evidence answer biblical questions? How can biblical books respond to profane crises? And how should revealed religion respond to changes in scientific understandings of the world?

Charting two centuries of inquiry into the origins of American peoples, it offers insight into the impossibility of separating ostensibly secular accounts of the world from their religious counterparts and considers the longstanding consequences of one Bible story on the American landscape.

Crucial to this book has been recent scholarly work uncovering how first European and then US religious beliefs—particularly Christian millennialism—simultaneously abetted the project of settler colonialism and were transformed by it. As Stephanie Kirk and Sarah Rivett’s work has shown, the western hemisphere operated as both a site of religious desire in the colonial era, as sects competed for dominance within it, and as a space of religious change, as European colonists adapted to meet the demands of a “New World.” “The collision of European traditions with American environmental and cultural realities,” they write, “the reinstitution of religious hierarchy in colonial settings, and the challenge of indigenous cultures and new population configurations engen-
dered religious innovation.”30 European nations certainly viewed control of American territories as an avenue to greater wealth and power,31 but religious considerations are inseparable from economic and nationalist ones in the history of American colonialism. From the earliest Spanish incursions into the region to later voyages by the English, European colonial efforts were couched in religious rhetoric and often configured as efforts to spread Christianity—Catholic or Protestant—to the furthest corners of the earth. In the English context, the survival of first Protestantism in the face of European Catholicism and then Puritanism in the face of English Anglicanism often was depicted as the engine driving settlers across the Atlantic, while the conversion of Native populations was offered up as the force that kept them in the Americas once they arrived. This rhetoric of religious imperative persisted even as settler colonists engaged in genocidal conflicts over land and introduced African slavery into the hemisphere. The notion that American settlement marked the fulfillment of a divine order, in other words, justified all manner of colonial horrors.

Of central importance to this study is the notion of providence, particularly its significance first within English colonial endeavors and then to the emergence of the United States as a settler state.32 Nicholas Guyatt’s study of the long history of providential thinking within English and American colonialism provides crucial context for this work. As Guyatt notes, “Two basic presumptions [about providence] enjoyed wide currency in Europe from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century: first, that God controlled everything that happened on earth; second, that God had a particular plan for human history.”33 Within the framework of providence, everything serves a divine design, and humans can read the signs of that design in both the workings of their own lives and the larger trajectory of history. The limits of human perception, however, prevent perfect knowledge of the workings of providence as well as of its ultimate end. The gap between intent and interpretation, Guyatt demonstrates, has produced a structure in which atrocities could be justified by recourse to providential history. This is especially clear in the context of Indian Removal and genocide, as well as New World slavery. Guyatt’s work aptly shows how colonial and nationalist projects in the Americas often were preoccupied with the question, “What was the providential significance of the American Indians?”34 Had Europeans been directed
by a divine hand to the Americas to Christianize these populations? Or were Native peoples, as many Protestants asserted, divinely destined to “vanish” from the earth in the face of white Christianity? The Hebraic Indian theory sits at the crux of such questions, presenting its proponents with the possibility not only that contact between Europeans and Americans had set the stage for the providential fulfillment of biblical prophecies but also that indigenous vanishing would reach its apex when Native American populations remembered their history and transformed into the “Jews” they had been all along.

This book begins with an examination of the documents comprising the first sustained English engagements with the Hebraic Indian theory: Thomas Thorowgood’s books, *Iewes in America* (1650) and *Jews in America* (1660). Though their titles are nearly identical, these works are distinct, complementary engagements with the theory and its potential consequences for English and Anglo-American readers. The first chapter demonstrates that Thorowgood’s work employs an emergent notion of probability to make its case for American Hebraism. His works are religious treatises, certainly, but they anticipate a shift in the discourses of science and mathematics, drawing on a concept of “the probable” that would become increasingly operant as the century wore on. Both *Iewes in America* and, even more explicitly, *Jews in America* deploy the concept of probability to argue that absolute certainty of the Hebraic Indian theory is not required for that theory’s general acceptance and to posit that in the absence of conclusive evidence of a religious postulation, belief is always a better bet than disbelief. Thorowgood’s recourse to the probable, rather than the certain, situates him at the fore of evolving European attitudes regarding epistemology. It also allows him to incorporate evidence of the theory from a variety of sources, including the Puritan divines John Eliot and Roger Williams, who did not agree with his thesis but whose work nonetheless made it seem probable. In pushing the theory into the space of the possible, Thorowgood set the stage for its survival in English discussions of American origins.

That the Hebraic Indian theory did not die on the vine in the seventeenth century owes much to the publication of James Adair’s *History of the American Indians* (1775), which significantly altered the discourse of indigenous origins by grounding it in what might be called an anthropological approach. The earliest expositions of the Hebraic Indian theory
relied mainly on biblical exegesis for their claims, and many were written by those who never set foot in the Americas. Writing to contradict the theory of polygenesis—that is, the theory that indigenous Americans derived from a distinct, non-Adamic creation—Adair insisted that careful observations of Native cultural practices revealed incontrovertible proof that they derived from a biblical source. A self-proclaimed “Indian trader” who from about 1735 lived in what is now the southeastern United States, Adair offered readers detailed, personal accounts of several American cultures. His *History* thus asserted that American Hebraism was observable, tenable, and available to anyone who cared to look. Adair has been long ignored by literary critics and scholars of this period, so this book’s second chapter aims in part to recover his important place within early discussions of indigenous history. More particularly, though, it shows that Adair’s approach to the question of American origins, which privileged empirical observation, allowed his work to become the proof text for later versions of the Hebraic Indian theory. Adair refrained from drawing conclusions about the religious implications of his theory, and thus his *History* was of use to millennialist Christians such as the Reverend Ethan Smith and the Jewish utopian Mordecai Manuel Noah. His work also laid the groundwork for scholarly studies of indigenous peoples of the southeastern United States. Through analysis of Adair’s methods and his work’s legacy, this chapter explores the complex relationship between biblical inquiry and anthropological study in the United States.

This book’s third chapter examines the most significant exposition of the Hebraic Indian theory produced in the nineteenth century, Elias Boudinot’s 1816 treatise *A Star in the West*. Boudinot was a prominent Presbyterian and former president of the Continental Congress, and his reputation lent a degree of legitimacy to the Hebraic Indian theory. Beginning with an analysis of Boudinot’s professed “accidental” reading of the apocryphal Book of Esdras, the chapter first explores how he uses the notion of the accident to construct a theory of providential history that culminates in the revelation of the Hebraic Indian. It then turns to William Apess’s 1829 memoir, *A Son of the Forest*, which incorporates Boudinot’s book as an appendix. A dedicated Methodist and self-described Pequot Indian, Apess might at first seem an unlikely proponent of the Hebraic Indian theory. The theory, however, allows
him to situate his own Christianity outside of English and US colonial practices—to reach back to an earlier historical source for his religious identity. It also, this chapter contends, enables Apess to present his version of American history as running along a timeline distinct from that of white Christians and to disrupt the teleologies of both white ascendance and Native disappearance in the Americas. Apess’s conversion of Boudinot’s book into an appendix thus creates a temporal disruption in *A Son of the Forest* that enables the Pequot to lay claim to Christian sovereignty by assuming the mantle of a lost Israelite.

Having examined the most significant expressions of the Hebraic Indian theory produced into the nineteenth century, this book turns to revisions to, and rejections of, its claims. Chapter 4 explores a significant but often misunderstood revision of the Hebraic Indian theory: *The Book of Mormon*. *The Book of Mormon* posits a Hebraic origin for indigenous Americans, but it explicitly rejects the lost tribes theory. Its indigenous Americans derive from previously unknown biblical disappearances. Although they are absent from its narrative, though, the lost tribes of Israel operate at *The Book of Mormon*’s margins. Analyzing the book’s simultaneous evocation and deferral of lost tribes mythology, this chapter argues that *The Book of Mormon* formally presents sacred time as iterate and proliferating rather than linear and singular. *The Book of Mormon* thus forces readers to confront the continued “lostness” of the tribes and the theological consequences of their absence. In its closing section, the chapter turns to later writings that combine *The Book of Mormon*’s claims with contemporary scientific (and pseudo-scientific) theories about the earth to explain the continuing absence of the lost tribes. For over a century, writers affiliated with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have posited a variety of locations for the tribes: from outer space to the earth’s core. This chapter shows how *The Book of Mormon*’s relegation of the tribes to still unknown parts of the universe creates a paradox within its theology, by coupling an insistence upon imminent millennium with the endless deferral of one of that millennium’s main prerequisites.

Chapter 5 explores the waning influence of the Hebraic Indian theory in the aftermath of the era of US Indian Removal, taking as a case study James Fennimore Cooper’s most explicit engagement with the theory, *The Bee-Hunter; or, The Oak Openings*. Published in 1848 but set during
the War of 1812, *The Bee-Hunter* is emblematic of midcentury rejections of the Hebraic Indian theory, which tended to present it as the irrational fantasy of overly enthusiastic millennialists. In *The Bee-Hunter*, Cooper establishes an orderly colonial geometry that depends simultaneously upon the practice of honey gathering and the disappearance of indigenous peoples. A threat to this frontier order arrives in the figure of Parson Amen, an itinerant Methodist who has traveled to the nation’s western edge to convince Native Americans that they are latent “Jews.” Amen’s theological geometry operates in opposition to that of the bee hunter, and thus the parson’s message must be neutralized within the novel. In Cooper’s work, then, it becomes apparent that the Hebraic Indian theory presents a problem not only for Protestant eschatology but also for the project of Indian Removal. Ultimately, in *The Bee-Hunter*, the vanishing that becomes most important to white nationalism is that of the Christian sympathetic to the cause of indigenous sovereignty. The death of the parson and the conversion to Christianity of the novel’s most radical Native American figure foreclose the possibility of the alternate American history offered by the Hebraic Indian theory. The future Parson Amen predicts is replaced by the steady progress of white Christianity, and in declaring himself “no Jew,” the Native American becomes a vanishing Indian.

Building on the fourth chapter’s discussion of early Latter-day Saint interest in hollow earth theories, chapter 6 recovers and analyzes De Witt Clinton Chipman’s long-forgotten 1895 novel, *Beyond the Verge: Home of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel*. A fanciful account of an indigenous American man who encounters the lost tribes and travels with them into the earth’s core, Chipman’s novel distinguishes between indigenous Americans and Hebraic peoples but nonetheless posits an American journey for the tribes. This chapter first situates *Beyond the Verge* within the long history of American “mound-builder” literature, a collection of texts concerned with the possibility that white people might literally excavate American history from the earthen mounds that dotted the hemisphere. Writers from Thomas Jefferson to William Cullen Bryant describe the possibilities and disappointments involved in digging into American soil to uncover its past. In Chipman’s novel, the mound builders reject the lost tribes and have no bearing on the earth’s millennial future. For him, the truly important discovery within the earth
will be the hidden city at its center. The chapter shows how Chipman’s novel operates within a larger, scientific discussion about the possibility of a habitable hollow earth. Edmund Halley had endorsed the notion as early as 1692, and the hollow earth theory gained popularity through the nineteenth century. In shifting the lost tribes into earth’s core, *Beyond the Verge* suggests that America’s destiny lies not beneath its own soil, where only the bones of dead and forgotten peoples lie. In Chipman’s rendering, the Americas are not the site of millennial glory but rather a waystation for the tribes as they march into the earth’s core to await a better and more universal destiny.

Although the Hebraic Indian theory might itself seem a strange relic of the past, its echo can be heard in contemporary discussions of the origins of human life. As knowledge of the earth’s habitable spaces has expanded, and the territory available to the lost tribes has disappeared, a new space of possibility has opened in discussions of the tribes: DNA. This book concludes with a brief coda discussing the mutual impact that the Hebraic Indian theory and the popular discourse of human genomics have had upon each other. As this book’s chapters demonstrate, the Hebraic Indian theory often inhabits the space of epistemological change. Developments in probability theory, ethnography, geography, astronomy, and geology all have served as sites for the theory to manifest and evolve. This is no less true, it turns out, of advances in genetics. Exploring both general studies of human genomic sequencing and works specifically interested in the question of whether traces of Hebraic origins might be found in “Native American DNA,” this conclusion suggests that a notion of the sacred is as operant in the search for human origins today as it was three centuries ago. Just as earlier efforts to uncover the American past bore religious weight for those who engaged in them, popular discussions of human genetics often are couched in the language of creation, teleology, and salvation. The search for American ancestry, however secular its method, always is infused with the sacred.