



“So long as [the crime]
took place on Indian land”:
Borders, Colonialism,
and Indigeneity in *Winter Counts*
Nicole Kenley

Abstract. The exploration of criminally instantiated settler colonial borders by David Heska Wanbli Weiden in *Winter Counts* includes the lasting repercussions of neglect and stigmatization that perpetuate ongoing crime in the Lakota community. Weiden uses detective fiction’s generic conventions of resolution and restoration to offer the dissolution of settler colonial borders as the crime’s true solution.

David Heska Wanbli Weiden’s debut novel, *Winter Counts*, juxtaposes the relationship between indigenous borders and colonial ones via the lens of criminality. Weiden’s detective, Virgil Wounded Horse, is an enrolled member of the Sicangu Lakota Nation who experiences firsthand the hostilities between the tribal government and U.S. law enforcement agencies when a drug trafficking ring begins selling heroin on the Rosebud Indian Reservation. This drug trade, run by Mexican cartels, targets the tribe’s adolescent members and poses a grave threat to the future of the reservation and the surrounding South Dakota area. The Tribal Police clash with the FBI over the authority to address the cartel’s incursions, with the FBI unwilling to devote federal resources to policing crimes committed outside of its jurisdiction and the Tribal Police unable to prosecute felony crimes that occur within their nation. These conflicting borders allow the drug cartel to flourish unchecked, highlighting the ways in which U.S. borders effectively impose criminality on the Lakota.

Nicole Kenley is the director of First-Year Writing in the English Department at Baylor University. Her work focuses on the relationship between contemporary detective fiction and globalization and has appeared in edited collections such as *The Cambridge Companion to World Crime Fiction* and *The Routledge Companion to Crime Fiction* as well as crime fiction journals such as *Clues and Mean Streets*. She also coedited the *Journal of Popular Culture*’s 2021 special issue on place, space, and the detective narrative.