

**Manifest Destiny:** the widely held belief in 19<sup>th</sup> century United States that its settlers were destined to expand across North America due to the special virtue of the US American people and their institutions, the mission to remake the west into an agrarian landscape, a prescribed destiny to accomplish this duty to the nation

U.S.

## The Pristine Myth

Charles C. Mann, the author of "1491," talks about the thriving and sophisticated Indian landscape of the pre-Columbus Americas

KATIE BACON MARCH 2002 ISSUE

For years the standard view of North America before Columbus's arrival was as a vast, grassy expanse teeming with game and all but empty of people. Those who did live here were nomads who left few marks on the land. South America, too, or at least the Amazon rain forest, was thought of as almost an untouched Eden, now suffering from modern depredations. But a growing number of anthropologists and archaeologists now believe that this picture is almost completely false. According to this school of thought, the Western Hemisphere before Columbus's arrival was well-populated and dotted with impressive cities and towns—one scholar estimated that it held ninety to 112 million people, more than lived in Europe at the time—and Indians had transformed vast swaths of landscape to meet their agricultural needs. They used fire to create the Midwestern prairie, perfect for herds of buffalo. They also cultivated at least part of the rain forest, living on crops of fruits and nuts. Charles C. Mann, in "1491" (*March Atlantic*), surveys the contentious debate over what the Americas were like before Columbus arrived—a debate that has important ramifications for how we manage the "wilderness" we still have left, if indeed it really is wilderness, untouched by the hand of man.

If it is true that the pre-Columbus Americas had tens of millions of people and highly developed civilizations, what happened? Why were there so few traces when the conquistadors and the colonists began to arrive in earnest? One demographer has estimated, according to Mann, that "in the first 130 years of contact about 95 percent of the people in the Americas died—the worst demographic calamity in recorded history." Others think this number is too high. But what is clear from oral history accounts is that Europeans who arrived early on found busy, thriving societies. When John Smith visited Massachusetts in 1614, he wrote that the land was "so planted with Gardens and Corne fields, and so well inhabited with a goodly, strong and well proportioned people ... [that] I would rather live here than any where." But by the time the colonists reached Plymouth in the *Mayflower* six years later, they found one deserted village after another—the Indians had been felled by European diseases to which they had little resistance. Mann writes,



Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz

The charge of genocide, once unacceptable by establishment academic and political classes when applied to the United States, has gained currency as evidence of it has mounted, but it is too often accompanied by an assumption of disappearance. So I realized it was crucial to make the reality and significance of Indigenous peoples' survival clear throughout the book. Indigenous survival as peoples is due to centuries of resistance and storytelling passed through the generations, and I sought to demonstrate that this survival is dynamic, not passive. Surviving genocide, by whatever means, is resistance: non-Indians must know this in order to more accurately understand the history of the United States.

## Genocide/Colonialism

A second pillar of white supremacy is the logic of genocide. This logic holds that indigenous peoples must disappear. In fact, they must *always* be disappearing, in order to allow non-indigenous peoples rightful claim over this land. Through this logic of genocide, non-Native peoples then become the rightful inheritors of all that was indigenous—land, resources, indigenous spirituality, or culture. As Kate Shanley notes, Native peoples are a permanent “present absence” in the US colonial imagination, an “absence” that reinforces, at every turn, the conviction that Native peoples are indeed vanishing and that the conquest of Native lands is justified. Ella Shoat and Robert Stam describe this absence as “an ambivalently repressive mechanism [which] dispels the anxiety in the face of the Indian, whose very presence is a reminder of the initially precarious grounding of the American nation-state itself.... In a temporal paradox, living Indians were induced to ‘play dead,’ as it were, in order to perform a narrative of manifest destiny in which their role, ultimately, was to disappear.”<sup>2</sup>

Rayna Green further elaborates that the current Indian “wannabe” phenomenon is based on a logic of genocide: non-Native peoples imagine themselves as the rightful inheritors of all that previously belonged to “vanished” Indians, thus entitling them to ownership of this land. “The living performance of ‘playing Indian’ by non-Indian peoples depends upon the physical and psychological removal, even the death, of real Indians. In that sense, the performance, purportedly often done out of a stated and implicit love for Indians, is really the obverse of another well-known cultural phenomenon, ‘Indian hating,’ as most often expressed in another, deadly performance genre called ‘genocide.’”<sup>3</sup> After all, why would non-Native peoples need to play Indian—which often includes acts of spiritual appropriation and land theft—if they thought Indians were still alive and perfectly capable of being Indian themselves? The pillar of genocide serves as the anchor for colonialism—it is what allows non-Native peoples to feel they can rightfully own indigenous peoples’ land. It is okay to take land from indigenous peoples, because indigenous peoples have disappeared.



Andrea Smith  
(Indigenous  
Feminist  
Scholar)

Andrea Smith: “the practice of taking without asking, and the assumptions that the needs of the takers are paramount and the needs of others are irrelevant mirrors the rape culture of dominant society”—this is a sense of entitlement

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## Patrick Wolfe (Australian scholar of settler colonialism)

Patrick Wolfe's works are widely regarded as principal texts in mapping out the burgeoning field of settler colonial studies. His theorizations on race, and the 'logic of elimination' constitute a profoundly generative paradigm within which rich comparative studies have been produced. These case studies have traced and refined the framework outlined by Wolfe, while further accentuating the spatially and temporally specific manifestations of settler colonialism. Crucially, as embodied in the spirited resistance of the field's most prominent theorist, these studies impel us to dismantle settler colonialist structures in the daily practices of our lives.

<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3437-forum-on-patrick-wolfe>



As Patrick Wolfe puts it:

*Land is life—or, at least, land is necessary for life. Thus contests for land can be—indeed, often are—contests for life.*

**Wolfe:** Settler colonialism is a “structure not an event.”

### What Is Settler-colonialism?

We can begin by defining settler-colonialism as it relates specifically to Indigenous peoples of North America. The goal of settler-colonization is the removal and erasure of Indigenous peoples in order to take the land for use by settlers in perpetuity. According to Laura Hurwitz and Shawn Borque's "Settler Colonialism Primer," "This means that settler colonialism is not just a vicious thing of the past, such as the gold rush, but exists as long as settlers are living on appropriated land and thus exists today."

Historically, the settler-colonial agenda involved committing genocide by murdering Indigenous peoples (see Manifest Destiny, the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890 and the Wounded Knee siege of 1970, the Sand Creek Massacre, King Philip's War and countless other conflicts). That agenda also meant stealing land through treaties that were later broken or ignored (see the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie and the history of the Lakota and the unceded Black Hills). Students should understand that the United States couldn't exist without its settler-colonial foundation.

Today, settler-colonialism plays out in the erasure of Indigenous presence. American schools do not teach about Native Americans, past or present; when they do, information is often wrong or incomplete. Students are rarely taught about contemporary Native peoples who have survived the settler-colonial process and continue to thrive, create, practice their traditions and live modern lives.

Mainstream media outlets rarely feature stories about Indigenous peoples, and exceptions are usually during a crisis (see #NoDAPL and this latest event in D.C.). The government diminishes and destroys Indigenous nations by denying their sovereignty or stealing land for private corporations to use for drilling, mining, fracking, farming and more.

### Who Are Settler-colonizers?

Students often think that settlers are people from the past—early Europeans who came to North America to establish colonies. This is true. But understanding settler-colonialism means understanding that all non-Indigenous people are settler-colonizers, whether they were born here or not. Understanding settler-colonialism as both a historical position and a present-day practice helps students see how they fit into a settler-colonial system—and how that system shapes the impact of their actions, regardless of their intent.

This dual understanding is also useful when it comes to understanding how students without European ancestry benefit from settler-colonialism. Enslaved Africans, for example, weren't settlers. They had far more in common with Indigenous Americans; they were also colonized in their diaspora. But all non-Indigenous Americans benefit from the settler-colonial system as it stands today. It's just that those of us with primarily European ancestry in particular continue to benefit the most from that initial colonization and erasure of Indigenous presence. As you teach students about settler-colonialism, it is important that they understand that this isn't about guilt. Rather, this is a reckoning.

Acknowledging our own individual roles and culpability in our settler-colonialist society hurts, but what is worse is denying this fact. When we don't see that, we can't see the real impact of our actions.

(both write on education + settler colonialism)



Tuck: Indigenous scholar

Yang - decolonial scholar / Ethnic Studies

Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012) underscore the intertwining of geographical, relational, and epistemic forms of violence:

In the process of settler colonialism, land is remade into property and human relationships to land are restricted to the relationship of the owner to his property. Epistemological, ontological, and cosmological relationships to land are interred, indeed made pre-modern and backward. Made savage, Indigenous peoples must be erased, must be made into ghosts. (pp. 5-6)

# Imagining a Better Future: An Introduction to Teaching and Learning about Settler Colonialism in Canada

FEBRUARY 25, 2014 | ANTHROPOLOGY | COMMENTARY

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Co-authored with Sarah York (DIPW)

(White settlers who teach about settler colonialism) →

A Quick Word on the Meaning of the Term "Settler"

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A lot of people in Canada take offence to being called "settlers" even though the term is not derogatory. Being a settler means that you are non-Indigenous and that you or your ancestors came and settled in a land that had been inhabited by Indigenous people (think: Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, etc.). However, it is important to recognize that while the term is not derogatory, it can often be very difficult to hear. Many people, particularly when first learning about the subject of settler colonialism, have strong and negative reactions to it. Andrea recalls yelling at the person who first called her a settler (thankfully Emma forgave me!), and Sarah recalls feeling like the rug had been ripped out from under her. Most of us like to think that we are good people, and being told that we're complicit in a colonial project can be emotionally wrenching. So we would like to encourage those who are interested in learning about this subject to make space for their feelings, recognizing them without judgement, and, whenever possible, to extend the same consideration to others. This is not to suggest that racist behaviour is acceptable under any circumstances, but, rather, that each person is on their own journey. We embrace the philosophy of love as political resistance whenever possible. However, part of this radical love is being open to learning and growing, even when it is painful.

## Passages from Sandy Grande's "Red Pedagogy: Native American Social and Political Thought" (2004)

The miseducation of American Indians precedes the "birth" of this nation. From the time of invasion to the present day, the church and state have acted as coconspirators in the theft of Native America, robbing indigenous peoples of their very right to be indigenous.<sup>1</sup> In terms of education, the thievery began in 1611 when French Jesuits opened the first mission schools expressly aimed at educating Indian children "in the French manner"<sup>2</sup> (Noriega 1992, 371). Not to be outdone, Spanish and British missionaries soon followed, developing full-service educational systems intent on "de-Indianizing" Native children. By the mid-eighteenth century Harvard University (1636), the College of William and Mary (1693), and Dartmouth College (1769) had all been established with the charge of "civilizing" and "Christianizing" Indians as an inherent part of their institutional missions. The American school was therefore a well-established weapon in the arsenal of American imperialism long before the first shots of the Revolutionary War were ever fired.

Perhaps at no other time in U.S. history did the church and state work so hand in hand to advance the common project of white supremacy as it did during the period of missionary domination. During this era, missionary groups acted as the primary developers and administrators of schools while the federal government served as the not-so-silent partner, providing economic and political capital through policies such as the Civilization Fund.<sup>4</sup> In 1819 Secretary of War John Calhoun declared it was the duty of all employees in government-funded missions, particularly teachers, to promote U.S. policies aimed at "civilizing" Indians. In Calhoun's words, it was their job to "[i]mpress on the minds of the Indians the friendly and benevolent views of the government . . . and the advantages to . . . yielding to the policy of the government and cooperating with it in such measures as it may deem necessary for their civilization and happiness" (Layman 1942, 123, cited in Reyhner and Eder in Reyhner, ed., 1992, 40). Indeed, the work of teachers, church leaders, and missionaries were hardly distinguishable during this era; saving souls and colonizing minds became part and parcel of the same colonialist project.

While missions retained control well into the late nineteenth century, the period of federal government domination ideologically commenced with the passage of the Indian Removal Act in 1830.<sup>5</sup> The fallout from removal necessitated the appointment of a commissioner of Indian affairs, tellingly positioned in the U.S. Department of War. The collateral damage levied by

removal, namely, the decimation of Indian economies via displacement, required a systematic effort to "reeducate" Indians to live "domesticated" lives. Thus, in addition to dealing with the removed tribes, the commissioner was charged with overseeing a retooled system of Indian education, one which emphasized vocational training as the new panacea for assimilating Indians to industrial society.



Sandy Grande  
(Quechua scholar from Peru; works in N. America)

## Linda Tuhiwai Smith "Decolonizing Methodologies"

From the vantage point of the colonized, a position from which I write, and choose to privilege, the term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, 'research', is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary. When mentioned in many indigenous contexts, it stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful. It is so powerful that indigenous people even write poetry about research. The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world's colonized peoples. It is a history that still offends the deepest sense of our humanity. Just knowing that someone measured our 'faculties' by filling the skulls of our ancestors with millet seeds and compared the amount of millet seed to the capacity for mental thought offends our sense of who and what we are.<sup>1</sup> It galls us that Western researchers and intellectuals can assume to know all that it is possible to know of us, on the basis of their brief encounters with some of us. It appals us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be creators of their own culture and own nations. It angers us when practices linked to the last century, and the centuries before that, are still employed to ~~deny the validity of indigenous peoples' claim to existence, to land and territories, to the right of self-determination, to the survival of our languages and forms of cultural knowledge, to our natural resources and systems for living within our environments.~~



(5)  
Linda  
Tuhiwai  
Smith

(Indigenous  
feminist, New  
Zealand)

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## Hurwitz, Laura and Shawn Bourque, Unsettling Klamath River Coyuntura "Settler Colonialism Primer"

### Who is a Settler?

*"There are no good settlers... There are no bad settlers... There are settlers."*

—Corey Snelgrove

Anyone not Indigenous, living in a settler colonial situation is a settler. Therefore all non-Indigenous people living in what is today called the "U.S." are settlers living on stolen land. Settlers do not all benefit equally from settler colonialism. Many people were brought to settler states as slaves, indentured servants, refugees, etc. Race and class largely prefigure which settlers benefit the most from usurped Indigenous homelands. But as the Unsettling Minnesota Source Book proclaims, "it is all of our responsibilities as settlers, especially those of us who descended from European colonizers, to challenge the systems of domination from which we benefit."

### Racial Formation

*You will unite yourselves with us and we shall all be Americans. You will mix with us by marriage. Your blood will run in our veins and will spread with us over this great Island.*

—President Thomas Jefferson, 1808, to visiting Indian delegation

Under settler colonialism, different groups are racialized in different ways according to the needs of the settler society. Wolfe distinguishes between race as a doctrine and, "racialization as a variety of practices that have been applied to colonized populations under particular circumstances and to different (albeit coordinated) ends."

Requiring Indigenous Peoples to have a certain percentage of native blood to be deemed a tribal member (and the idea of "half breeds") forwards the goal of elimination of the Indigenous population. On the other hand, as more slaves meant more wealth for the slave-owner, the "one drop rule" in the United States declared that individuals were black if they had a trace of African blood. These stark differences in blood requirements to racially define people are profitable to the colonizer and strategically implemented at the expense of African and Indigenous Peoples. Wolfe argues that, "racialization represents a response to the crisis occasioned when colonizers are threatened to share social space with the colonized."

**White Supremacism and White Privilege**

*The most common mistake people make when they talk about racism is to think it is a collection of prejudices and individual acts of discrimination. They do not see that it is a system, a web of interlocking, reinforcing institutions: economic, military, legal, educational, religious, and cultural. As a system, racism affects every aspect of life in a country.*

*-Elizabeth Martinez*

Another aspect of racial formation is the ideas of "whiteness," and that white people are superior to other racialized groups. This system of white supremacy justifies the denial of basic human rights, and many times life itself, upon people of color, while entitling white people to unearned privilege. White supremacy is also a way of thinking and "knowing" that assumes an inherent superiority upon white people. Despite that the history of invasion and genocide wrought by settlers and colonization is well known, images of white purity and superiority are engrained in settler consciousness. These beliefs have permeated and distorted reality so deeply that white people who benefit from these structures are permitted to elude their existence. White supremacy is not just a manifestation of the Klu Klux Klan or racist skinheads but is a pillar of the U.S. settler colonial system and is inherent in everyday thinking. Andrea Smith relates white supremacy to the foundations of settler colonialism in the United States, "the three primary logics of white supremacy in the US context include: (1) slaveability/anti-black racism, which anchors capitalism; (2) genocide, which anchors colonialism; and (3) orientalism, which anchors war."

... Professions of white privilege from settlers without actions for change are not enough. Andrea Smith maintains that, "the undoing of privilege occurs not by individuals confessing their privileges or trying to think themselves into a new subject position, but through the creation of collective structures that dismantle the systems that enable these privileges."

In a settler colonial context, narratives that demean and demonize people of color and discourse that assume the superiority of white people are infused into settler psyche from birth, through children's books, schools, social discourse and the media. The non-Indigenous might state that, "all people are the same," but underneath this proclamation lies an indoctrinated belief that settlers are entitled to the land, lest the settler would have relinquished land, power and privilege long ago. For the benefactors of white supremacy and white privilege,

acknowledging is a first step. This must be followed up with the creation of a collective ethic of accountability designed to take these systems apart.

**Settler Moves to Innocence**

Settler identity has been built on a denial of settlers as non-Indigenous and a rejection of Indigenous Peoples rights to the land. The initial theft of land was often justified by *terra nullius*, that is viewing the land as empty and virgin, or at least not used to it's fullest potential by Indigenous Peoples. Another complexity to settler identity is explained by Wolfe:

*On the one hand, settler society required the practical elimination of the natives in order to establish itself on their territory. On the symbolic level, however, settler society subsequently sought to recuperate indigeneity in order to express its difference—and, accordingly, its independence—from the mother country.*

A product of this schizo settler identity; simultaneously denying Indigenous Peoples rights, claiming to be "native" and also wanting to be morally absolved of responsibility for the known atrocities that settler sovereignty rests upon, have been referred to as "moves to innocence." As Tuck and Yang write,

*There is a long and bumbled history of non-Indigenous peoples making moves to alleviate the impacts of colonization. We think of the enactment of these tropes as a series of moves to innocence (Malwhinney, 1998), which problematically attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity.*

Some of these moves to innocence include:



Vine Deloria Jr  
(Influential Indigenous  
writer - US)

### Settler Nativism

"In this move to innocence, settlers locate or invent a long-lost ancestor who is rumored to have had "Indian blood," and they use this claim to mark themselves as blameless in the attempted eradications of Indigenous peoples." As Vine Deloria points out, the relative is almost always an Indian grandmother. Tuck and Yang explain that the claiming of an Indian grandmother not a grandfather fits into the history of rape and sexual assault against Indian women and the racilization and assimilation practices of settler society.

### Fantasizing Adoption

"These fantasies can mean the adoption of Indigenous practices and knowledge, but more, refer to those narratives in the settler colonial imagination in which the Native (understanding that he is becoming extinct) hands over his land, his claim to the land, his very Indian-ness to the settler for safe-keeping." Often settlers see being adopted as a way out of guilt and creating a place for themselves on the land absolved from settler status, which as Tuck and Yang point out, "is a reaffirmation of what the settler project has been all along."

### Colonial Equivocation

In this move to innocence, settler colonialism and oppression/exploitation are conflated which, "creates a convenient ambiguity between decolonization and social justice work." As they put it, "We are all colonized," may be a true statement but is deceptively embracive and vague, its inference: "None of us are settlers."

### Conscientization or Free Your Mind and the Rest Will Follow

This is the idea if we change our thinking social conditions will transform.

Although we all do need to decolonize our minds, this is just a start. It is more comfortable for settlers to focus on consciousness raising then confront the more unsettling undertaking of handing over stolen land and material privilege.

### Other Observed Moves to Innocence

There are as many moves to innocence as there are settlers. Here we present a non-exhaustive list of observed examples.

### Indians are Drunk and Violent

This move to Innocence is born of both the "Natives as savages" myth and the "degenerating/disappearing Native" myth. Settlers can justify their place by viewing Indigenous peoples as not Indigenous enough nor productive enough to deserve their land. Here Indigenous peoples become the scapegoat and the system of settler colonialism is left unquestioned. Often this move extrapolates that settlers are also more suitable stewards of the land, justifying their ownership and occupation.

### One Love/One People

This is similar to the "colonial equivocation" move, yet it has been depoliticized. Settlers attest to their lack of regard for the race, creed or color of people and belief that all of humanity is one people. How could the idea of equality and unity among people be a settler move to innocence? These sweeping claims of a "color blind" world are easy to assert from a position of power and privilege. Distinct rights of Indigenous sovereignty and claims to the land are glossed over. Despite the fact that all people belong to the human family we cannot all be one people while settler colonial systems remain intact.

**Land Bridge/Migration**

In this move settlers use a historical "out" describing how people have always migrated around the planet and how Indigenous people's themselves migrated here. What this fails to take into account—besides Indigenous accounts of their own origin—is the vast time that Indigenous Peoples have inhabited, managed and coexisted with their homelands. Not to mention the silencing of violence which has displaced Indigenous peoples; migrants join a culture, settlers eradicate them.

**Indians are not Indians anymore**

Here settlers turn to blood quantum as a measure of Indigeneity and attest to the fact that both settlers and Indian societies contain mixed heritage. Another aspect of this move to innocence is that Indigenous people do not know much of their own cultures anymore and in fact at times settlers claim to know more. The throw backs to racialization, assimilation and cultural appropriation flushed out elsewhere in this paper are clear. This move masks the fact that Indigenous Peoples do still exist and have retained their cultural practices despite every attempt that could be thrown at them by colonization.

**Doing My Best as an Individual**

Often, when settlers are faced with the reality that settler colonialism is an ongoing system of oppression from which they benefit, they fall back to a safe place that claims a person's role in society is limited to what they can do as an individual. This allows settlers to continue to remain complicit to settler colonialism while declaring that they are a good person doing the "best they can" and this is all a person can do in this life. Taking responsibility for our role as settlers must entail working collective for material changes to settler colonialism.

**"Helping" Indians**

As the saying goes, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. While many settlers have the intention of "helping" Indians, which makes them feel good about themselves, these efforts often end up as colonial projects. Historically, many of the worst things that have happened to Indigenous People's came from the "help" of settlers. The group "Friends of the Indian" instituted boarding schools, the Dawes Act claimed to be "helping" Indians (leading to a "paper-trail of tears," and creating, "a faster method of land transference than the cavalry") and missionaries prided themselves on "saving" Indians. Today researchers, activists, and nonprofits continue this course, assuming they know what Indigenous Peoples' need. This usually follows settler myths and stereotypes about Indians and imposes settler values as to how Indigenous people should live and what is best for them, continuing the project of assimilation. While all along, material conditions are maintained. Bluntly said, settlers might do best to look at how to "save" themselves/ourselves and get there/our own selves together before worrying about Indians. The colonizer is in the most need of decolonizing.

**Cultural Appropriation**

The general definition of cultural appropriation is the mimicking of the cultural practices of one group by an outside culture. More insidiously, it refers to a dominant cultures theft of material and spiritual customs from an oppressed culture. It involves, "taking intellectual property, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, or artifacts from someone else's culture without permission."

In the context of settler colonialism, where settlers are appropriating culture and spirituality from Indigenous Peoples whose lands they/we are also occupying, a long history of colonization reverberates. This acculturation is founded on Indians being a thing of the past and settlers being the torch bears of Indigenous culture, thus legitimizing settler claims to Indigenous land.