Savage Tales: The Colonialist Narratives Underpinning Indigenous Genocide

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Savage Tales: The Colonialist Narratives Underpinning Indigenous Genocide

Submitted to
Professor Jennifer Taw

By Riley Green

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Abstract

This thesis explores the settler-colonialist supremacist narratives - religious, racial, and civilizational - wielded in the territories that would become Australia, Canada, and the United States to justify displacing and killing Indigenous Peoples. The narratives and their effects persist: contemporary disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples reveal the narratives' institutionalization, as do modern incarnations of the same legitimizing tropes in Australian, Canadian, and US domestic and foreign policies.
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And to Colin, who is evidence that life is full of unexpected twists and turns – all we can control is how intently we feel the breeze on our skin and watch sunlight pass through the leaves swaying above us.
And that super-European monster, North America? What empty chatter: liberty, equality, fraternity, love, honor, country, and what else?

- Jean Paul Sartre, 1961
We hold these truths to be self-evident.

This project is a dismantling, and ultimate repudiation, of these truths. We learn, internalize, and reproduce blatant lies about the construction of our Western nations. In the United States of America, we suppress histories of violence on both American and foreign soil, justifying our virtuous mission of nation building under the myth of “Manifest Destiny.” Indigenous Peoples are classically referred to as “savages,” and the European Man as the “civilizing” force for peace, order, and enlightenment. We speak of atrocities abroad and condemn foreign governments for their incapacity to rectify injustice, suggesting violence and human rights abuses are inherently foreign to our Western sensitivities. Yet the Land of the Free was built through conquest and exploitation. The Home of the Brave is the home of the greedy, White aggressor who was motivated to kill Indigenous people to push the frontier westward. What are the truths strategically buried under our doctrines of freedom, liberalism, and the pursuit of happiness? Whose voices do we continue to suppress within the margins of our great nations?

The lies we present in our maps, national anthems, and origin stories are deeply woven into the framework of our policy, national identity, and foreign relations. We fashion exploitative and violent histories into digestible and acceptable tales of strength and leadership. Narratives of freedom, democracy, and liberalism allow us to perpetuate violence against Indigenous communities at home and leverage our soft power across the world. By tracking the evolution of these narratives, it becomes clear they are embedded within the Western consciousness; their persistence begs us to fundamentally reexamine the terms in which we engage with history and policy from the international to national level.
Terminology

Throughout this thesis, I attempt to remain clear and linear in whom I am referring to, but I frequently employ sweeping terms including: Indigenous Peoples, Aboriginal, First Nation, Indian, colonizer, settler, and colonialist. As I researched and wrote, my greatest fear was the reification of narratives of Indigenous homogeneity through a Eurocentric lens. Due to the brevity of this project, I wrote more generally about Indigenous Peoples in North America and Australia than I was comfortable with. I do not attempt to write the history of Indigenous Peoples. Rather, I shed light upon the grand hypocrisies of Western nation states through the analysis of narratives constructed by White colonialists, colonizers, and settlers. In doing so, I hope to create space for more conversations that center Indigenous resistance, ingenuity, sovereignty, and dynamism.

As this thesis emphasizes, the terms invoked to identify or describe Indigenous Peoples have immediate political, legal, and social consequences. Because my study connects the three cases of Australia, Canada, and the United States, I often refer to “Indigenous Peoples” in order to construct a cohesive comparative analysis. In country specific contexts, I attempt to employ the terms Indigenous Peoples use to describe themselves. In Australia, I use the terms Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, as these are the terms employed by Indigenous leaders in Australia today. In Canada, I refer to the First Nation, Inuit, and Métis Peoples for the same reason. In the United States, I use the term “Indigenous Peoples” to include remarkably diverse populations who have been referred to as “Indians” and “Native Americans,” as well as Indigenous folks who live outside the continent and have experienced colonization and/or imperialism by the American empire.
As I analyzed the legislation, narratives, and histories of settler colonization, the terms with which Indigenous Peoples are identified evolve in relation to racial formation and political transformation. In an attempt to counter the narratives I describe, I employ contemporary terminology and only invoke pejorative terminology within direct quotations.

With regard to colonizing forces, I use the term “settler” in reference to those who constructed a life in Indigenous spaces through the displacement of Indigenous Peoples. “Colonizers” also attempted to subjugate and exploit Indigenous Peoples, but their mission was not explicitly one of replacement. I refer to “colonialists” as those who supported the invasion and occupation of Indigenous spaces, but may not have been present in the colonies and/or nation states themselves. However, these terms are invariably interconnected, and some actors engaged in a combination of each of these practices. Therefore, I emphasize the persistence of the “settler” in North America and Australia, whose existence continues to be dependent on the displacement of Indigenous Peoples.

*Argument and Methodology*

My project aims to contextualize the construction of narrative through the process of settler colonialism from invasion to the present moment across time and place. This thesis will explore the following questions:

1. How did narratives constructed by colonizers and settlers in North America and Australia serve to justify colonialist expansion? How were these narratives institutionalized within the states of Australia, Canada, and the U.S.?

2. How do these narratives continue to harm domestic communities of Indigenous Peoples?

3. How do they persist in foreign policy?
In the first chapter, I outline the scholarly literature that assesses settler colonialism as a genocidal project. I analyze theoretical frameworks of the construction and perpetuation of political narratives, which underpin the structural integrity of settler colonialism in each of my cases. I introduce the institutionalization and interconnectedness of narratives of civilization, race, and religion in the West.

In the second chapter, I analyze the construction of narratives wielded against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to build and maintain a White Australia. The recent referendum on the “Indigenous Voice,” mass incarceration of Aboriginal Peoples, and the detention regime for undocumented immigrants manifest the persistence of racial narratives in Australia.

In the third chapter, I analyze the narratives employed in the construction of Canada upon the lands of the First Nation, Inuit, and Métis Peoples. I evaluate the persistence of narrative through the impact of Canada’s policies of assimilation, which continue to inform disparate Indigenous welfare and discriminatory immigration policy.

In the fourth chapter, I outline the evolution of narratives through the transformation of the British colonies into an American empire, which was contingent upon the spread of disease through Indigenous North America. I locate the persistence of these narratives within the exceptionalist American consciousness, which obscures imperialist foreign policy and contemporary exploitation of Indigenous lands.

I conclude by drawing connections and identifying distinctions of Indigenous declension narratives and Eurocentric ascension narratives and their institutionalization across the three cases. I insist we reconsider the terms in which Western narratives invoke disease as a “natural” cause of Indigenous death. Finally, I draw attention to the potential genocide of the Shompen
people on the Great Nicobar Island as a contemporary case of these narratives being deployed by the Indian state.

Chapter I: Narratives and Mechanisms of Settler Colonialism

Genocide

Raphael Lemkin, a Polish-Jewish lawyer, coined the term *genocide* in 1944. Writing from Poland in the wake of the Holocaust, Lemkin conceived of the term genocide in considering Hitler’s “Final Solution” for European Jewry and the phenomenon of violence perpetrated against entire groups. The field of genocide studies was born in the aftermath of the Holocaust, a crime for which there was no existing framework to understand the scale of death and destruction. In distinguishing between physical elimination of life and the destruction of the group itself, Lemkin emphasizes the broader cultural implications of genocide. Lemkin argued each culture has its own “genius,” an intangible vitality and collective memory that is vulnerable to destruction at the hands of *genocidaires*. Social death, or the dissolution of the social fabric from which one’s identity is woven, may precede physical death: this is Lemkin’s central evil and essential component of genocide.¹

Genocide remains outside of our capacity to fully understand, but scholars create histories and theories that attempt to describe and define the unimaginable. In doing so, some historians have framed genocide using the state as the fundamental unit of analysis, rather than humanized groups that include victims, oppressors, and spectators.² Lemkin resisted this approach, arguing “the fight against the destruction of the human group has a more profound

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¹ Claudia Card, “Genocide and Social Death,” *Project MUSE* 18, no. 1 (Winter 2003), 63.
moral significance than the fight between states.”

3 His motivation to define and describe genocide was an imperative for \textit{“consciousness-raising in the present,”} reaching far beyond the condemnation of perpetrators.\textsuperscript{4} Similarly, my investigation of settler colonialism and genocide of Indigenous Peoples is not born out of the desire to merely condemn individuals and institutions. Rather, it is to illustrate how violence is born from structures built from norms, narratives, and moral convictions. Formal and informal structures founded through settler colonialism continue to produce injustice and disparity in the present. An analysis of genocide via the state alone, including its policies and agents, fails to explain how lethal racism persists in Western institutions today.

Genocide unfolds through deliberate obfuscation of a reality by perpetrators and collaborators. Alternative narratives are constructed not only to deny the crime occurred, but also to shirk responsibility for the consequences. Practically, to commit genocide, perpetrators must gain support and/or ambivalence from domestic groups, attempt to keep victims ignorant of the conditions of their imminent demise, and blur the vision of concerned outsiders. Each of these practical concerns is woven into narratives constructed by \textit{genocidaires} to counter the truth survivors are left to bear. The \textit{genocidaire} convinces spectators and collaborators that violence and forced removal of human beings is natural. Life, for spectators, carries on.

An outsider, who is neither an immediate perpetrator or victim, may leverage their political interests by invoking genocidal rhetoric with respect to others’ violence. The rhetorical speech act of condemning genocide has massive implications of responsibility for intervention and/or reparations. The US, Canada, and Australia have refrained from retroactively condemning genocide committed within their borders to avoid facing immediate and long-term consequences.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{3} Moses, 8. \textsuperscript{4} Moses, 8.}
Although all these countries have formally recognized several genocides abroad, they have not accounted for genocidal acts committed in the construction and maintenance of their own respective nation states.

**Settler Colonialism as Genocide**

What we define, and do not define, as genocide has sweeping implications. Once *genocide* is used to define violence, perception of the threat is transformed into existential for the victims. These high stakes create domestic and foreign policy dilemmas with regard to intervention, remediation, and/or reparations. The condemnner assumes some degree of responsibility for individual lives and the physical, political, and cultural survival of the targeted group(s). As the US, Canada, and Australia have demonstrated, it may be politically expedient to condemn genocide and human rights abuses abroad. Acknowledging a genocide at home is a fundamentally different question of responsibility; it demands a shift in government management and treatment of humans affected by ongoing violence – death and trauma continue after weapons are laid to rest.

The states of Australia, Canada, and the U.S. were constructed through the replacement of Indigenous people with White settlers. To create space for themselves, settlers eliminated native people through forced relocation, cultural destruction, and explicit murder. Immerwahr identifies the strategic inclusion and exclusion of racialized groups within the White state: "Combine a republican commitment to equality with an accompanying commitment to White supremacy, and this is what you got: a rapidly expanding empire of settlers that fed on land but avoided incorporating people."\(^5\)

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By analyzing settler colonialism as a structure, rather than a completed event, we can identify and assume responsibility for inequalities that persist today. Wolfe argues, “Negatively, it [settler colonialism] strives for the dissolution of native societies. Positively, it erects a new colonial society on the expropriated land base – as I put it, settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event.” The descendants of settlers remain where Indigenous people are missing. The US government and its beneficiaries continue to profit off the land and resources stolen from Indigenous people, denying humanity and an equal right to life. Our failure to acknowledge the contemporary effects of settler colonialism in the West, while condemning genocide and human rights abuses elsewhere, is flagrantly hypocritical.

The structures of settler colonialism underpin the foundation of our nations, perpetuating cycles of violence, racism, and discrimination against Indigenous people. Yet Western leaders do not delve into discourse regarding the genocide at home because the same narratives used to perpetuate the domestic violence then underpin our foreign policy now. Narratives of grand civilizing missions for the promotion of democracy and freedom abroad are infused with White supremacy, religious piety, and patriarchal exploitation.

Genocide was not “prescribed” by settlers and colonizers. Dirk Moses proposes “genocide is to be explained as the outcome of complex processes rather than ascribable solely to the evil intentions of wicked men.” The fundamental aim of these states was not explicitly to murder the native populations who inhabited desired territory; rather, the primary goal was often land acquisition for the security and prosperity of a settler population. Wolfe illustrates: “Land is life – or, at least, land is necessary for life. Thus contests for land can be - indeed, often are -

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6 Wolfe, “Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native,” 338.
7 Moses, 7.
At the heart of settler colonialism is the desire to supplant an entire population. Therefore, the construction of an inhuman “Other,” who is dispensable, is foundational to the settler colonial project.

Construction of Narrative

State and non-state actors in Australia, Canada, and the U.S. constructed and institutionalized narratives to justify their claims to sovereignty and colonialist expansion. These narratives are based in racism, White supremacy, religious piety, exceptionalism, and Eurocentrism. Institutionalization of these narratives continues to harm domestic communities, as manifested in disparities in health and security between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The same narratives that contribute to protracted domestic conflict underpin these states’ foreign policies. Australia, Canada, and the U.S. openly condemn and criticize other countries for human rights abuses, corruption, and genocide – leveraging their power through the supposed advancement of freedom and democracy. Hypocritically, buried beneath the guise of democratic peace, human rights abuses and the sustained effects of settler colonialism continue to prematurely end the lives of Indigenous people and erase Indigenous cultures in the West.

Narratives are strategically constructed through the weaving together of experience, memory, and perspective to inform new and alternate identities, policies, and realities. It is “a discourse that feigns to make the world speak for itself and speak itself as a story.” Benveniste proposes that the narrativizing discourse notably lacks a “narrator,” or a storytelling agent; by intentionally removing the “ego” from a narrative, events and chronology appear to speak for themselves. The distancing of author(s) may create a façade of truth and authority in the

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8 Wolfe, 338.
10 White, 17.
narrative as a form of history because it appears to exist outside of politics and normative discourse. However, as Shanhav illustrates, “one of narrative’s defining features is that it is necessarily the product of a particular perspective.”

Therefore, narratives are constructed at the intersection of the real and imagined through the invocation of reality that lies beyond one’s lived experience. By constructing and invoking conceptions of the “Other,” authors may rely heavily on stereotypes, biases, and pseudoscience – all of which can be interpreted as real. The narrative, as it were, may be detached from objective reality, but must be perceived as “real” to resonate with an audience.

White argues it is the moral existence of events that allow them to be designated as real, and from where the audience derives meaning from narrative. Narrative is not merely a chronology, stripped of human influence; “every historical narrative has as its latent or manifest purpose the desire to moralize the events of which it treats.” Within this framework, what an audience considers morally appropriate, neutral, or reprehensible informs acceptance or rejection of narrative. If an audience has internalized White supremacy and Eurocentrism as morally sound realities informed by lived experience and the imaginations of the “Other,” a narrative that invokes those justifications for colonialist expansion might be accepted.

At the state level, narratives may be crafted in response to tensions that arise between morality and legality. In the invention of human rights, states have infused legal frameworks with rules closely tied to morals; Kant, on the other hand, distinguishes sharply between morality and the law as separate entities. This space, whether an intersection or divergence of law and morals, may be infused with narrativity, or the “impulse to moralize reality,” in response to

11 White, 248.
12 White, 8.
13 White, 26.
14 White, 18
“ambiguity or ambivalence regarding the status of the legal system.”¹⁶ The impulse to moralize may be considered at both the individual and state level when considering narrative justification for colonialis_date expansion.¹⁷

Hegel suggests that the tension between desire and law creates the reality in which narratives are necessarily created.¹⁸ In the construction of a state that is contingent upon settler colonialism, narratives that justify exploitative behavior are built contemporarily with the state’s legal system. Perceptions of law as inherently moral hinders distinctions between injustice and inherent truth. L.A. Hart articulates how law and morality are two distinct social phenomena; although morality may be influential in its construction, the law is not inherently moral.¹⁹ Therefore, immoral law may be institutionalized explicitly and implicitly. Narratives may compensate where the law fails to justify otherwise illicit behavior motivated by desire. In this way, law and narrative are produced in conjunction with one another by settler colonialist regimes. At the international level, there is no mechanism for law enforcement by design, preserving ample space for Western states to collaborate in exploitative projects. Between colonial powers, narratives, rather than law, underpin legitimacy of competition for influence and resources abroad.

The international system grants the state power to asymmetrically construct and diffuse narrative in its own benefit. Hegel argues “it is the State which first presents subject-matter that is not only adapted to the prose of History, but involves the production of such history in the very progress of its own being.”²⁰ Narrative may therefore be a mechanism in a self-fulfilling

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¹⁶ White, 18.
¹⁸ White, 8.
prophecy of sovereignty and expansion. As a state with colonialisit “desire” develops a legal system, narratives may moralize its ambitions, appealing to a public to approve and/or obfuscate the illicit or immoral action. The decision to construct narrative at the state level is consistent with Kant’s role of publicness in his system of right, which purports the state does not need to seek public approval at the international level, but does so anyway because it may benefit from doing so.21

Obfuscation through Narrative

In Doctrine of Right, Kant considers how and why narratives were built and invoked to justify colonialism. With reference to Kant’s work, Valdez underscores two themes essential to how colonizers seek to justify their actions: “first, there is no legal need for countries to resort to philosophic or diplomatic justifications, yet they do.22 Second, these justifications “obscure the unjust nature of the deeds of Europe.”23 Kant writes that the construction of narrative to justify territorial expansion may be unessential from a strictly legal perspective, but perceived as necessary in anticipation of public response.24 He argues that without a coercive system to hinder exploitation, the public should serve to condemn illicit behavior.25 Therefore, a state may preemptively protect its reputation through the manipulation of the public through narratives that defend its explicit and implicit policy. Notably, Kant makes a regional distinction – the unjust deeds of Europe – locating the dilemma of obfuscation within the Westphalian system. Within

60-6, Cited in White, 16.
21 White, 102.
23 Valdez, 102.
24 Valdez, 102.
25 Valdez, 103.
this system, European states and the former British colonies asymmetrically grant themselves power and influence at the expense of other members of the international community.

Audience members are primed to accept a narrative as “real,” but individuals retain agency in narrativizing discourse. An audience is composed of active agents who may disseminate and/or reject narratives. Valdez argues that in Perpetual Peace, Kant presents two fundamental dilemmas created by the “role of publicness.” First, he proposes the public may participate in “the international spread of discourses that obscure, rather than contest, injustices.” States incentivize public acceptance of exploitation by constructing narratives that employ the citizen as a functional unit of dissemination to strategically obscure the realities of colonialism. Second, Kant is concerned with “the way in which power inequalities make the cosmopolitan public sphere less effective or redundant.” The asymmetrical power dynamics baked within the international system not only allow for states and institutions to chronically fail marginalized people, but also allow for the public to accept inequality and disparity as normative. Essentially, “certain injuries are muted by excluding the victims from the cosmopolitan community or by covering them up through religious, diplomatic and supposedly cosmopolitan discourses.” In addition, the Western construction of universal and inalienable human rights obscured the systematic denial of rights on the basis of race, gender, class, and religion.

For an injustice to be recognized as such, rights must be invented and defined. Lynn Hunt asserts, “Human rights only become meaningful when they gain political content. They are not the rights of humans in a state of nature; they are the rights of humans in society.”

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26 Valdez, “Perpetual What?” 103.
27 Valdez, “Perpetual What?” 103.
28 Valdez, “Perpetual What?” 103.
29 Valdez, “Perpetual What?” 103.
30 Valdez, “Perpetual What?” 103.
members of the international community build and maintain asymmetrical power structures to serve beneficiaries by excluding individuals and groups. Because rights must be created, defined, and granted, they are not inalienable. Rather, the “inalienable right” is a rhetorical device leveraged by the state, and only guaranteed when politically expedient. In referencing Kant’s *Perpetual Peace*, Valdez explains “injuries [to rights] are not felt by Europeans because the inhabitants of faraway lands are ‘counted as nothing’ in contrast with the situation of cosmopolitan community in which a violation of right ‘in one part of the world is felt everywhere.’”

“Universal” rights are definitionally extended to all, but in practice, rights are only granted to selective members of sovereign states.

*Three Elements of Narrative*

Shenhav proposes breaking down political narratives into three elements: (1) “events, characters and background,” (2) “events in sequence,” and (3) “causality.” For each of my cases, I will introduce the social, legal, and political backgrounds within which narratives are constructed and institutionalized. This framework provides a basis to determine how and where certain narratives resonate and persist. In the following chapters, I outline “events in sequence,” detailing how relevant events unfold in chronological order. To reveal how the structure of settler colonialism continues to harm domestic communities, it is necessary to delineate not only violent events on the frontier and in colonized spaces, but also the inception of institutions that claim to defend freedom and democracy. In addition, I will attempt to determine the causal conclusions that actors engaging in narrativizing discourse draw to justify colonialism and exploitation.

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31 Valdez, 103.
33 Shenhav, 251.
Using this methodology, I draw connections between disparity and the narratives constructed by settler colonialist nations. Although there are innumerable dependent variables impacting unequal outcomes for Indigenous peoples, institutionalized narratives based in White supremacy, elitism, and Eurocentrism underpin both the perpetuation and acceptance of disparity. I argue it is not only appropriate for Australia, Canada, and the U.S. to substantially increase remediation efforts, but also to critically analyze the hypocrisy of their foreign policy. Only by exhuming the structural frameworks of state and international institutions can we determine how to stop the continued devastation of marginalized communities they purportedly defend.

**Civilization**

Narratives that define Western Civilization as inherently legitimate and moral underpin justifications for the construction and domination of exploitative Western political, social, and cultural institutions across the world. Rhetoric invoking the intrinsic value of ‘civilization’ deems Western institutions inherently superior, which delegitimizes alternative modes of governance and life.

Civilization, as conceptualized by Mirabeau and Ferguson in the 18th century, was “incorporated into the self-concept of European-centered international society.” By posturing as benevolent diffusers of ‘civilization,’ Europeans of the Enlightenment positioned themselves as moral, political, and cultural leaders on the world stage. Images of Western civilization, composed of shining cities upon the hills of Europe, were fashioned to juxtapose against vast,
dark, and “empty” lands. In doing so, the colonizer strips Indigenous people of authority to govern themselves in the name of their own wellbeing.

The myth of “Teutonic political genius” bolsters arguments for the exceptionalism of Western civilization. In Essays in Anglo-Saxon Law, Henry Adams describes this peculiar genius as “the fundamental historic principle that the entire German family in its earliest known stages of development placed the administration of law… in the hands of popular assemblies composed of the free able-bodied members of the commonwealth.” The German people crafted a narrative in which they are preordained as legitimate rulers. But, within these civilizations, only “free able-bodied members” could be considered agents of their own governance. White, land-owning men “burdened” themselves with the responsibility of government. These self-ordained “Teutonic political geniuses” utilized this narrative to justify the domination of subjects residing in territory desired by the colonizer. “Civilizing missions” and colonization became inextricably linked.

At the turn of the 19th century, many English and American scholars and historians still considered international relations through this lens of superiority; they continued to found institutions in the name of a sacred Western civilization. Imperialist rhetoric of Western politicians, scholars, and businessmen in the 19th and 20th centuries reveals an entrenched commitment to the diffusion of Western civilization throughout colonies and territories. In 1905, Charles F. Dole argued “We [Americans] are the people who can provide the brains, the capital,

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and the political security requisite for the exploitation of practically a seventh of the surface of the earth.” Exploitation is framed as a security guarantee vis-à-vis the promise of civilization.

In the wake of newfound independence from Britain, leaders of the former colonies in North America and Australia claimed to be pillars of liberty and democracy. The Founding Fathers and their successors described “turning subjects into citizens and colonies into states,” and “were eager to push their republican form of government westward across the continent, from sea to shining sea.” The strategic transformation of the “subject” into a citizen created the illusion of rights granted. In reality, this narrative of “republican government” obfuscates the reality of rights denied on the basis of race and gender.

Politicians bolstered expansionist agendas by citing claims of operating within an inherently superior civilization, which transcended the realm of discursive politics. For example, Theodore Roosevelt declared that “The Monroe Doctrine should not be considered from any purely academic standpoint… but by the needs of the nation and the true interests of Western civilization.” The doctrine, which was intended to deter European colonization in the Americas, is an imperialist policy underpinned by the myth of civilization. Roosevelt’s claim unites White Americans in a defensive stance against purported foreign aggression, while hypocritically engaging in the offensive subjugation of Indigenous Peoples.

Scholars rebutted the invocation of the “civilizing mission” to justify imperialist missions to varying degrees. John W. Burgess, the founder of Political Science Quarterly, attests that the argument for diffusion of civilization should not obscure ulterior motives on behalf of an

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39 Immerwahr, 27.
empire. However, he maintains that “American Indians, Asiatics and Africans cannot properly form any active, directive, part of the political population that shall be able to produce modern political institutions and ideals. They have no element of political civilization to contribute. They can only receive, learn, follow the Aryan example.” His understanding of international relations is informed by his racialized belief in “Teutonic political genius,” which simultaneously creates space for American imperialism while condemning traditional European colonialism. On the other hand, Pagden illustrates that “Kant explicitly repudiates the founding of colonies to fulfill ‘the end of creation’ or in the name of ‘civilization’ as pretenses to hide injustice. In addition, he takes pains to describe the acts of savagery of Europeans, thus ranking them down in the civilizational scale.” Regardless of the philosophical debates, settlers and politicians alike employed narratives of civilization to execute the mission of settler colonialism.

Race

The construction and reification of race as a “natural hierarchy” is foundational to our international system and continues to color our private and public realities. Race is a social construct that supposes humans may be divided and prescribed characteristics on the basis of genetics, culture, and ethnicity. Social scientists and scholars manipulated the “science” of race to justify the creation of power structures which implicitly and explicitly designate particular “races” more power over others. Omi and Winant postulate “race is a master category - a

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41 Vitalis, 37.
44 Vitalis, 46.
fundamental concept that has profoundly shaped, and continues to shape, the history, polity, economic structure, and culture of the United States.” 46 Their assertion is applicable in the construction of the racist narratives weaponized against Indigenous people in Australia and Canada as well. However, as Andrea Smith notes, many scholars neglect to consider the unique and intersectional nature of “Indigenous genocide and colonialism in [their] analysis of racial formations,” partially due to the strategic consignment of the genocide of Native people to the past so that “the givenness of settler colonialism today can be presumed.” 47 Smith continues that “logics of settler colonialism are enabled through intersecting logics of White supremacy, imperialism, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism.” 48 Justifications of colonialism on the basis of race do so explicitly and implicitly, and my case studies locate narratives within the context that they were constructed to delineate how and where the effects are pervasive today.

The foundation of race as a legitimate justification for expansion and exploitation by Western states was built contemporaneously with the field of international relations in the 19th century. Vitalis locates the origins of this phenomenon in the movement away from theories of the human race’s common evolution towards the tracing of “evolutionary differences among races.” 49 Darwin’s On the Origin of Species (1859) proposes that “race was outside evolution,” but Darwin’s concept of “survival of the fittest” nonetheless was manipulated by scholars and social scientists to justify claims of inherent superiority. 50 Scholars invoked Darwin’s theory to justify realism: inherent differences between states, and those who constitute them, create a

48 Smith, 76.
49 Vitalis, 47.
50 Vitalis, 47.
natural order of domination and subordination. Race, although a construct itself, is foundational to international relations theory; the acceptance and institutionalization of racial hierarchy at state and international levels has yet to be reckoned with.

Racial domination and White supremacy are two sides of the same coin: justifications for exploitation are grounded in “natural” qualities inherent to White bodies, which are presented as absent from bodies distinguished by White people as “Other.” Omi and Winant propose *racial formation*, or “the process of race making,” as a means of analyzing “the sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed.” In this sense, the White colonizer embarked on a process of racial formation for himself and Indigenous Peoples, creating a technology of Indigenous subjugation. Iyko Day argues that even if White supremacy is not essential to settler colonialism, racial dominance is crucial to its structural integrity. In the context of the colonization of North America and Australia, racism in the form of White supremacy underpinned justifications of European expansion, colonization, and exploitation of Indigenous Peoples.

White supremacy and conceptions of racial superiority are inherently intertwined, but White supremacy specifically is foundational to European colonial projects. Lake and Reynolds describe “the spread of ‘whiteness’ as a transnational form of racial identification, that was, as DuBois noticed, at once global in its power and personal in its meaning, the basis of geo-political alliances and a subjective sense of self.” The construction of “whiteness” was the basis of

51 Vitalis, 47.
52 Omi and Winant, 109.
European alliances and mandates at home and abroad. On the international level, race was invoked to draw and erase borders, construct and destroy nations. Whiteness informs a privileged way of interacting with the world, and infuses the White man with the confidence, delusion, and hatred necessary to degrade and exploit humans whom he does not perceive as “white.”

In the settler colony, physical violence was perpetuated on the individual level as pioneers pushed frontiers deeper into Indigenous lands. The lowering of thresholds for violence were contingent upon narratives of White supremacy, which fundamentally dehumanize people of color. In addition, “white men monopolized the status of manhood itself,” stripping power and agency away from any man who may be strategically categorized as “Other.” Lake and Reynolds continue that “in the figure of the White man, the imperialist became a democrat and the democrat an imperialist.” The White imperialist strategically built and employed narratives of democracy, civilization, and economic prosperity to obscure his intentions and actions. He finds protection behind the facade of democracy, knowing his European brothers have his back; if one of their power structures is seriously threatened, White hegemony everywhere is at stake.

Vitalis argues “the creation of a ‘racial problem’ led to fierce debates about the causes of war, the future racial balance of power, and the increased likelihood of violent conflict across the color line” among White leaders in the early 20th century. These issues were fundamental to debates held at the First Universal Races Congress in July 1911. In an era of burgeoning human rights, White leaders manifested apprehension about the extent to which the rights of people of color would truly be realized. “False prophecies of the White world order’s end” threatened the

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55 Vitalis.
56 Lake and Reynolds, 5.
57 Lake and Reynolds, 7.
58 Lake and Reynolds, 9.
59 Vitalis, 57.
integrity of the Eurocentric international system and invited renewed institutionalization of White supremacy in an era of “increasing mobility and mobilization” by people of color.\textsuperscript{60}

White leaders planted and nourished fears of “racial mixing” to found and perpetuate White hegemony. Dilution of the “white race” threatened the success of colonialist projects. Apprehension of “racial mixing” remained a norm even after the pseudoscience of race was debunked because ideas of racial “purity” were integral to the existence of settler colonies.\textsuperscript{61} In nascent colonies and settlements along frontiers of expansion, White people were minorities among Indigenous people, and pioneers strategically replaced Indigenous populations through selective reproduction and anti-miscegenation laws.

The narrative of White peoples’ inaptitude for life in the tropics and supposed affinity for civilization in temperate zones preoccupied various scholars, academic programs, and foundations.\textsuperscript{62} William Ripley, an MIT economist, argued it was impossible for White people to colonize in the tropics, necessitating settler colonialism in North America and Australia where they could claim a special right to those lands.\textsuperscript{63} These claims to land served to delegitimize those of Indigenous peoples, and “all those peoples they would designate as ‘not-white.’”\textsuperscript{64} In these ways, the White man wields race and racial formation as malleable tools in the construction and maintenance of the White state.

\textit{Religion}

Religious narratives, practices, and institutions are essential to the justifications and structures of settler colonialism. Churches, missionaries, and interpretations of the Gospel were

\textsuperscript{60} VITALIS 62, 67.
\textsuperscript{61} VITALIS, 48.
\textsuperscript{62} VITALIS, 47.
\textsuperscript{63} VITALIS, 47.
\textsuperscript{64} LAKES AND REYNOLDS, 6.
integral in the construction of Australia, Canada, and the United States, but theorists of international relations do not traditionally consider how religious mechanisms influence our world order. Thomas Tweed suggests “religion is about finding a place and moving across space.” Settler colonialists intentionally spread Christianity to replace Indigenous people; in doing so, settlers moved into space strategically labeled as “empty.” The survival of young colonies hinged on the physical presence of settlers, some of whom justified their occupancy of land through their Christian identity. Once colonists arrived in foreign lands, many institutionalized Christian narratives in churches, schools, and local governments to legitimize and practice dominance over local populations. Tweed resists defining religion as a static entity, arguing “religions are not reified substances but complex processes.” I will explore how the dynamic nature of religion allows for the strategic reapplication and recontextualization of Christianity in narratives and structures of settler colonialism.

Narratives of religious piety intersect with narratives of civilization, the “providential” British Empire, nationalism, and “Native decline.” Religious rhetoric, including images of “God’s empire,” transcend normative nationalist sentiment, but remain rooted in the Westphalian system. Philosophers and scholars celebrated Christian virtues of “freedom, tolerance, justice and civic duty” as “uniquely British (or Anglo-Saxon)”. This innate “virtue” legitimized the founding of the British colonies, which were established through competition with other European powers. Through the invocation of religion, the White Christian colonist constructed

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66 Tweed, 59.
68 Carey, 5.
the Native “other” as his antithesis and justified a moral domination over Indigenous ways of life.

Theorists of international relations have traditionally neglected to seriously consider religion as a hard mechanism of power and influence.69 Realists, constructivists, and liberals fail to wholly consider how religion is wielded in narrative construction and state-building. Jack Snyder points to the significance of Christianity in an “anarchical European states system enshrined in realist balance of power theory… constituted in part through the dynamic of religious schism” between Catholicism and Protestantism.70 This realist framework, grounded in religion, legitimates competition between Christian actors for influence in purported terra nullius. Snyder emphasizes the dynamic relationship between religion and the state:

Religion helped to forge the system of sovereign states, yet cuts across it. Religion can help to legitimate state authority, yet may also undermine it. Religion may help to delimit the territorial boundaries of a state, yet also creates loyalties and networks that cross boundaries. Religion may reinforce ethnonational identity, bridge the gap between national identities, or divide a nation.71

In constructing the British Empire, colonialists at home and overseas invoked religion to create the illusion of transcontinental unity despite denominational and political divisions. Settlers accessed strength and stability through the spread of Christianity and oppression of Indigenous spirituality. However, by the later half of the eighteenth century, settlers in North America began to employ religious narratives to bolster arguments for independence from Britain. The

70 Snyder, 10.
71 Snyder, 7.
hypocritical American narrative of religious freedom is grounded in the destruction of Indigenous life and spirituality.

Because Christian narratives and institutions have asymmetrically benefited Western powers and actors throughout history, it is worth questioning whether religious influence and mechanisms are purposefully neglected within the field of international relations. Through a systematic analysis of religion, I identify how religion may be abused to obscure and justify exploitation, subjugation, and destruction of Indigenous Peoples.

*Empire Building and Nation Building*

As the settler colonies in North America and Australia grew, religious narratives were invoked by the British in the construction and maintenance of their empire, as well as independent state building by former colonies. Hilary Carey articulates two alternate visions of the British empire building: “one more or less spiritual, and the other a vehicle for the expression of a British nationalism that transcended religious, political, racial and class difference.”72 She argues “colonial missions of the major British church” attempted to “make God’s empire contiguous with the British empire,” transcending normative claims for legitimate governance. The construction of Great Britain as a political *and* religious empire infused the nation with inextricable power and legitimacy.73

To justify and protect British imperialism, British colonialists strategically constructed religious narratives in conjunction with narratives of nationalism. Duncan Bell explains the term “Greater Britain” was coined in the 1830s and 1840s amidst the Canadian rebellions, which inspired an impetus for heightened nationalism among the British.74 As Benedict Anderson notes,

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72 Carey, 6.
73 Carey, 4.
74 Carey, 7.
“nationalism was a kind of secular religion” in itself; the dual forces of secular and sacred religion both served colonialist missions. 75 Carey articulates the “fusion of piety, nationalism and missionary commitment” was “characteristic of the colonial missionary movement which flourished in all the major churches.” 76 Through building expansive transcontinental church networks, the British empire benefited from the churches’ active roles as moral leaders and mechanisms of enforcement for European values. Religious leaders obscured imperialist agendas through “colonial missions [that] were led and organized almost entirely by men in work that was conceived as much in terms of empire building as the development of religious and social infrastructure.” 77

Americans transformed the religious narratives of their colonialist mission in constructing the United States: their success relied on the systematic removal of Indigenous Peoples, and religion served to justify this aim. Stephen Green argues Americans constructed religious narratives in two primary instances: first, when “Puritans, as the symbolic progenitors of all colonial Americans, saw their mission as particularly endowed by God,” and second, in legitimizing the transformation of colonies into a united nation through claims of religious persecution. 78 Green proposes this evolution in identity from British colonialist to revolutionary American was catalyzed by “a phoenix-like event requiring the providential interworking of God.” 79 In this sense, the religious myths underpinning the foundations of the U.S. are “identity-creating narratives… [which] legitimize the past while they provide a unifying narrative for a distinct people… that frequently reinforce popular aspirations.” 80 The creation of

76 Carey, 9.
77 Carey, 62.
79 Green, 17.
80 Green, 15.
the United States was contingent upon such unity among White settlers. Religion was employed to distinguish between the American settler, British imperialist, and Indigenous native, regardless of the piety of individuals and communities.

Religion allowed for the creation of transcontinental networks, or “imperial pathways,” between colonies and the metropole which suffused colonies with spiritual and monetary support.\(^{81}\) These networks provided colonies with infusions of White settlers who eventually replaced Indigenous people on native lands. In the 1830s, Samuel Hinds was instrumental in constructing a religious basis for colonization, arguing “emigration was not just a solution to a social problem, but an opportunity to create Christian communities throughout the British world.”\(^{82}\) Denomination was irrelevant to the success of the colonisation project, so Hinds advocated that all denominations in Canada, Australia, and India should have a right to “build churches, maintain a minister and take a share in the religious establishment.” To this end, colonists liberally invoked religion as a “general civilizing balm.”

From Europe, British colonialists infused value in religion as a “civilizing force” that extended beyond the immediacy of the colony. In 1838, the Select Committee of the House of Lords Appointed to Inquire into the Present State of the Islands of New Zealand stated “A missionary station will spread Christianity immediately about; but when you come to contemplate the civilization of a whole country you must look for a stronger and more effective measure. What the savage wants is to have before his eyes the example of a civilized and Christian community.”\(^{83}\) Colonialists fused Christianity and civilization as indivisible and inherently European.

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\(^{81}\) Carey, 7.
\(^{82}\) Carey, 312.
Interdependence of Narrative

The narratives of civilization, exceptionalism, race, and religion I outline above are inextricably linked. They are produced, invoked, or institutionalized interdependently; the efficacy of one narrative is contingent upon the integration of others. Their potency is due to their intertwined nature; interconnectedness creates the conditions for obfuscation, refutation and denial of cause and effect. Settlers did not act on any singular narrative, but upon convictions informed by several. Structures built by settlers to subjugate Indigenous Peoples remain today. Although these narratives may be institutionalized differently, rhetoric of democracy, freedom, and egalitarianism continues to mask a largely unchanged reality.

The connection between colonialism in the past and inequity in the present is strategically obscured so that we may continue to lead ignorant lives in the pursuit of happiness. We still do not truly listen to Indigenous voices. We continue to live thoughtlessly on Indigenous land. We exploit, degrade, and destroy the Earth in places where Indigenous Knowledge and ways of life are conquered in the name of capitalism. Yet, Australia, Canada, and the United States condemn these same narratives with parallel effects elsewhere.
Chapter II: Australia

January 26th is a day of mourning for Indigenous Australians. Invasion Day, or Survival Day, commemorates the invasion of the Australian continent by British settlers. During the last week of January, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples organize marches, concerts, food festivals, and civil protests across the continent to remember and celebrate Indigenous history, tradition, sovereignty, and resistance. The variety of events demonstrates the diversity of Indigenous Peoples and the numerous ways individuals and communities continue to resist and persist in a colonial nation.

The majority of the nation celebrates “Australia Day” on January 26th. Every year, most Australians enjoy a holiday of swimming, barbeque, alcohol, and fireworks. Over two-thirds of Australians support calling the day “Australia Day” rather than “Invasion Day,” a statistic that has grown over the last few years despite “truth-telling” movements to acknowledge Australia’s colonist past. Remarkably, only 38 percent of Australians could accurately recount the historical significance of the day. The narratives that perpetuate the celebration of Australia Day are formally and informally woven throughout modern Australian institutions; they continuously obscure the history of a nation built on stolen land that continues to disadvantage the continent's original inhabitants. Australia completed its colonizing mission, and now positions itself as a global leader in human rights policy, technological development, and climate change initiatives. Australia occupies this privileged position in the global order by crafting

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deceptive justifications for the status of Indigenous Australians and altering them as they lose political efficacy.

Aboriginal people have inhabited the Australian continent for the last 65,000 years. Australia Day celebrates the birth of a young White nation that has only been developing for the last 236 years. By tracing Australia’s history of colonialism from January 1788 to the present moment, I demonstrate how the original narratives used by colonizers to occupy Australia have not disappeared; rather, they lie just beneath the surface of the nation’s domestic and foreign policy. These narratives subsume and supplant the rich history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The recent rejection of “The Voice,” a proposal to create an Indigenous advisory council to Parliament, reveals Australians are not only resistant to incorporating Indigenous people into a government created for and by White people, but also unwilling to begin excavating the foundation upon which its structures of inequality lie.

*From the First Sunrise*

Jenny Munro, an elder of the Wiradjuri nation, explains “from time immemorial, we believe as Aboriginal people, Australia has been here from the first sunrise, our people have been here along with the continent, with the first sunrise.” The Aboriginal Peoples’ origin myths reveal a rich and deep history stretching far beyond the arrival of White people in Australia. Both archeological and anthropological estimates of the size of Indigenous populations before invasion vary drastically, ranging from 300,000 to more than 1,200,000 people. A recent study

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87 Aboriginal Heritage Office, “A Brief Aboriginal History,” [https://www.aboriginalheritage.org/history/history/](https://www.aboriginalheritage.org/history/history/).

from the University of Wollongong estimates over 3 million people may have lived in the area that is modern-day Australia before disease and strife swept through the continent in the 18th century.\textsuperscript{89} Hundreds of nations and clans were established on the vast continent thousands of years prior to invasion. The majority of clans resided along the shore, which provided ample resources between the land and sea that were reinforced by trade with other groups. Aboriginal Peoples moved “throughout their country in accordance with the seasons,” leading self-sufficient and sustainable lives that only required four to five hours of work per day.\textsuperscript{90} This intimate relationship with the land left Aboriginal people with time to develop “a rich and complex ritual life – language, customs, spirituality and the law.”\textsuperscript{91}

Torres Strait Islanders are distinct from the Aboriginal Peoples; they migrated from Indonesia when the landmass of Papua New Guinea was still connected to the Australian continent.\textsuperscript{92} The Islanders are traditional fishermen, agriculturalists, hunters and gatherers” with communities “organized into clans through familial lines and totems.”\textsuperscript{93} There was great diversity in culture, language, and tradition among Clans, but the Islanders did not mark boundaries or “own” land.\textsuperscript{94} Their sovereignty became threatened in the early 19th century when colonizers flooded the islands and established systems of land, water, and hunting rights. They

\textsuperscript{89} University of Wollongong Australia.
\textsuperscript{90} Aboriginal Heritage Office.
\textsuperscript{91} Aboriginal Heritage Office.
\textsuperscript{92} Torres Strait Island Regional Council, “Torres Strait History.”
https://www.tsirc.qld.gov.au/our-communities/torres-strait-history#:~:text=The%20first%20inhabitants%20of%20the%20Strait%20in%201606
\textsuperscript{93} Deadly Story, “Torres Strait Islander People.”
https://deadlystory.com/page/culture/articles/World-s-Indigenous-Peoples-Day/Torres-Strait-Islander-people
\textsuperscript{94} Britannica Kids, “Indigenous and European Contact with Australia.”
forcefully employed Torres Strait Islanders in the business of pearling: a lucrative capitalist endeavor contingent upon the exploitation of Indigenous peoples and the sea.\textsuperscript{95}

\textit{The Birth of a White Australia}

The First Fleet, composed of over 700 convicts, free settlers, marines, soldiers, and civil officers, landed in Botany Bay in New South Wales in January 1788. Led by Captain Arthur Phillip, the fleet established the first permanent European settlement in Australia. A state-sanctioned rehabilitation program for British criminals obscured the nation’s true colonialist mission in Australia: to establish a profitable colonial economy that benefited from free labor, exploitation and erasure of people of color, and the stolen land of Indigenous Peoples.

Two fundamental narratives legitimized early British settlement in Australia: the land was unoccupied when the settlers arrived, and the colonies’ founders created a “free land.” When Captain Cook arrived at Kamay (Botany Bay) in 1770, he reported the land was ‘thinly populated’ by Aboriginal Peoples.\textsuperscript{96} The Europeans entrenched this lie within the fiction that Australia was a \textit{terra nullius}, an unoccupied prime land for colonization. \textit{Terra nullius}, or “land belonging to no one,” was “the legal concept used by the British government to justify” settlement on foreign lands.\textsuperscript{97} Between 1788 and 1868, the British government transported more than 162,000 convicts to Australia as punishment for their crimes.\textsuperscript{98} Royal Navy Captain Arthur

Phillip was appointed the first governor of the penal colony in New South Wales. With regard to the newly established colonies in Australia, Phillip declared to the British Home Office that “there can be no slavery in a free land, and consequently no slaves.” 99 The “free land” narrative is essential to the historical fiction constructed by the self-declared enlightened and civilized White European Man, and is entirely hypocritical and inaccurate. In addition to building the colony through the labor of convicts, British colonialists forced Indigenous Australians, South Pacific Islanders, Chinese, and Indians into indentured labor to create the modern state of Australia. 100 After the transport of convicts was banned, the British increasingly lured Pacific islanders to Australia to work on cotton and sugar plantations well into the 20th century. 101 This process, known as “blackbirding,” was halted and reversed once the White Australia policy was passed in 1901 in an attempt to “keep the country ethnically European.” 102

Rather than spend their sentences in jail cells, most convicts sent to Australia were mandated work sentences under the government or free settlers. The colonial administration viewed toil as an opportunity to redeem their crimes; the narrative of redemption justified the convict labor that built the nation. 103 After serving their sentences, or with a conditional pardon, White convicts were offered the opportunity to begin new lives in Australia. From Sydney in 1794, Reverend Richard Johnson declared “A great number of those whose terms have expired have turned settlers, some of whom are doing well, better than many farmers in England.” 104 Some White convicts were not only granted ultimate freedom, but also the opportunity to profit

99 Menzies Research Center, “Slaves to Misinformation.”
https://www.menziesrc.org/news-feed/slaves-to-misinformation
101 Kwai.
102 Kwai.
103 National Museum of Australia, “Convict Transportation Peaks.”
104 National Museum of Australia.
from the exploitation of Aboriginal land and labor. They not only performed invaluable roles in
driving the economy and building the state’s physical infrastructure, but in establishing the
permanence of White settlers by reproducing with one another, raising White children, and
occupying more space. The foundation of Wolfe’s “genocidal structure” was laid in the late 18th
century, and the growing population of White Australians continuously adjusted its narratives in
an attempt to suffocate Indigenous life from the continent.

Narratives and Mechanisms

The British constructed a civilized/barbarian binary between settlers and Indigenous
Australians, a religious imperative to spread Christianity, and bolstered all justifications with
dynamic narratives of the purported racial backwardness of Aboriginal people. The “civilized”
European declared himself more advanced than Indigenous Australians, whom he deemed closer
to the “state of nature;” this prevalent view was a product of Enlightenment thinkers in the late
18th century. Western civilization places value in productivity and stripping of land for profit.
In contrast, Indigenous Australians lived and worked with ancestral knowledge of how to live
with the land, rather than simply on the land. The distinction justified land grabs from Aboriginal
Peoples, who were labeled as lazy and unskilled. Captain Watkin Tench, who arrived on the First
Fleet, argued that if the Aboriginal Peoples were to “be considered a nation, they certainly rank
very low, even in the scale of savages… All savages hate toil, and place happiness in
inaction.” This narrative is flagrantly hypocritical considering people of color bore the burden
of forced labor in the colonies. It also underscores the inefficiency of the colonizers’ methods of

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106 McGregor, 2.
resource extraction in comparison to the sustainable lifestyles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples pre-colonization.

The “White Man’s burden” suggested the settlers take advantage of Indigenous Australian labor, and in doing so, provide productive work opportunities. While in Port Jackson, Tench proclaimed “Let those who have been born in more favoured lands, and who have profited by more enlightened systems, [be] compassionate, but not despise, their destitute and obscure situation,” because “by the fortuitous advantage of birth alone, they possess superiority.” In the early period of colonization, some British settlers believed Aboriginal people were ‘capable of civilizing,’ or assimilating into the British systems. In 1798, Judge-Advocate David Collins attested the Aboriginal people were not “wholly incapable of becoming one day civilized and useful members of society.” Through a Eurocentric and capitalist lens, Collins recognized not the humanity of Australia’s Indigenous Peoples, but their potential increased utility in becoming assimilated within British colonial society.

British colonizers invoked religion as a prerogative for this “civilizing mission” and justification for the oppression of native life. Reverend William Walker, one of the first missionaries in Australia, stated the Aboriginal was cursed to be “a servant of servants to his brethren.” Missionaries, the majority of whom were Evangelicals in the early colonial period, believed it was their duty to save the Aboriginal people by spreading the Gospel. Missionaries occupied foundational roles within colonial society, and whether “Christianity should precede

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108 McGregor, 3.
111 McGregor, 9.
attempts to civilise, or vice versa” became a contentious debate among colonial missionary circles.112 At Port Phillip, the Assistant Protector of Aborigines, James Dredge, declared the spread of the Christian religion was the “only infallible plan for effecting their civilization.”113 Christian and civilizing missions were inextricably linked; religion and its institutions became spiritual and institutional vehicles for “civilizing” Indigenous Australians, which justified their subjugation on the basis of race and religion.

The White Christian’s relationship with God legitimized theories of natural racial hierarchy, masking the direct relationship between British colonialism and destruction of Indigenous communities. Colonists argued it was preordained by God that Aboriginal Peoples would die and White settlers would carry on, and “the mysterious agency was the hand of God.”114 These narratives were informed by egregious claims such as William Hull’s, made to the Select Committee of the Legislative Council of Victoria in 1858: “it is the design of providence that the inferior races should pass away before the superior races… since we have occupied the country, the aborigines must cease to occupy it.”115

In the 1830s, the British began to leverage the introduction of race theory, persistent violence at the frontier, and increasing strength and population of the settler colonies, to weave together a narrative that proposed their burgeoning civilization would naturally assume legitimate rule in place of the Aboriginal people. The “doomed race theory” proposed the Aboriginal Peoples were destined to die out regardless of colonial intervention or nonintervention. In the words of English missionary Lancelot Threlkeld and William Hull, the

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112 McGregor, 12.
113 McGregor, 12
114 McGregor 25.
race had arrived at the “end point of a degenerative process” that would lead to inevitable extinction. McGregor argues “the growth of an expectation of extinction correlated closely with declining faith in Aboriginal abilities to become civilized.” It suggested ill-fated “attempts” by the White Man to assimilate Aboriginal Peoples into colonial society were admirable, but inevitably a waste. In addition, the Aboriginal Peoples purportedly could not be left to their own devices, warranting state “protection.” The theory conveniently explained the death, exploitation, and incarceration of Indigenous Australians while removing accountability from the genocidal practices of settlers.

The British argued the death of Aboriginal Peoples as the product of their own customs and culture. In 1846, William Westergarth listed the following reasons in *A Report on the Condition, Capabilities, and Prospects of the Australian Aborigines*: “their own mutual wars; their hostile encounters with the whites; the diseases and vices of European society… the common practice of infanticide; and, more remotely, perhaps, by the gradual disappearance of various animals used as food and of other sources of their support.” In 1937, Neville succinctly stated, “they are, in fact, being decimated by their own tribal practices. In my opinion, no matter what we do, they will die out.” The narratives Westergarth and Neville articulate paradoxically strip Aboriginal people of agency and remove the British from culpability. His claims identify the violence of Indigenous people as inherent to their race; yet, as Fanon articulates, reactionary violence to the colonialist enterprise is a mere reflection of the oppressor’s own violent actions and institutions.

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116 McGregor, 14.
117 McGregor, 13.
The British defined conflict amongst Indigenous Australians as degenerate, despite the empire’s own colorful history of military conflict. Instances of infanticide were seized upon as moral and racial explanations for the necessity of European colonialism. Marguerita Stephens argues the cultural ‘practice’ or ‘custom’ of infanticide amongst Indigenous Australians was a narrative constructed by the British to bolster the tropes of Indigenous savagery and racial backwardness, which served to justify the removal of Indigenous children from their families.\(^{121}\) Finally, the “gradual disappearance” of food and agricultural resources that Westergarth notes in the abstract was a direct consequence of British population growth; coastal and inland expansion disrupted traditional Indigenous food-gathering processes and introduced extreme resource scarcity.\(^{122}\)

With regard to the racial mission for the construction of White British colonies in Australia, McGregor points out “it was not predicted that Aboriginals would leave no descendants at all; merely that they would leave none of the full descent.”\(^{123}\) Despite the settlers’ view of Indigenous people as “savages,” White men engaged in sexual relationships with Aboriginal women, producing children regarded as “half-caste.” Strzelecki proposed that once a native woman had slept with a White man, she would no longer be capable of bearing children to a native man.\(^{124}\) This narrative illuminates an imagined virility of the White race that dehumanized and emasculated Indigenous men and women. Practically, some colonizers viewed reproduction with Indigenous women as an opportunity to “cleanse” the race. For over a century,

\(^{123}\) McGregor, 16.
\(^{124}\) McGregor, 16.
“half-caste” children were removed from their families to be raised by White women in colonial society through institutionalized child removal. Stephens synthesizes the substantial impact of narratives of ‘customary’ Aboriginal infanticide by stating “from the mid 19th-century, it underwrote the institutionalisation of generations of ‘rescued’ Aboriginal children. With that project of incarceration, Aboriginality became an anathema to social inclusion and citizenship in the radically democratic and radically White colonies of Australia.”

At the turn of the 20th century, the “doomed race theory” began to break down, but efforts to assimilate Indigenous Australians into White Australia only intensified with the burgeoning pseudoscience of eugenics. The foundational narratives delineated above inspired and perpetuated government policies of systematic child removal and segregation. During World War I, the Australian government passed policies to segregate Aboriginal people from the White population to avoid the nation’s “greatest danger,” which the Perth Sunday Times defined as the “pathetic, sinister third race which is neither” Black nor White. Dr. Cecil Cook, the Chief Protector of Aborigines, enacted policy with the belief that state-engineered human breeding programs could “breed out the color altogether.” At the 1937 Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities on Aboriginal Welfare, government officials openly conspired the official absorption of non-full-blood Aboriginal people into White society.

With the support of the police, White officials took an increasingly large role in ‘providing welfare,’ which was a euphemism for the increased role of the state in Aboriginal communities to control their futures, or lack thereof. In reality, welfare consisted of “separate education for Aboriginal children, town curfews, alcohol bans, no social security, lower wages,

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125 Stephens, 194.
126 McGregor, 18.
128 Knightley, “Longtime Australian Policy.”
state guardianship of all Aboriginal children, and laws that segregated Indigenous people into separate living areas, mainly on special reserves outside towns or in remote areas.”\textsuperscript{129} These policies created and augmented disparities between Indigenous and White Australians that persist today, including mass incarceration, poor health outcomes, and lower standards of education.

These narratives of race, religion, and civilization compounded into the institutionalization of policies that decreed it was legally in the best interest of Indigenous children for the state to assume responsibility for their wellbeing. Child removal policies were enacted by individual states before their ratification at the federal level. Victoria’s Protection Act of 1869 was the first law of its kind; over the next hundred years, formal state and federal bureaucracies developed to legally and efficiently remove Indigenous children from their homes and assimilate them into White society.\textsuperscript{130}

At the 1937 Commonwealth Conference, officials at the federal level agreed it was in the best interest of “half-caste” childrens’ futures to systematically place Indigenous children in government institutions, or “homes” run by churches and missionaries. With the support of the police, White welfare officials stole children from their communities; they were separated from siblings and denied the ability to speak their native language or practice familiar customs.\textsuperscript{131} Officials advocated the earlier a child could be taken, the better; Prime Minister Stanley Bruce suggested “if these babies were removed at their present early age… they would not know in

\textsuperscript{129} Working with Indigenous Australians, “Assimilation (1940s-1960s).”
http://www.workingwithindigenousaustralians.info/content/History_5_Assimilation.html#:~:text=In%201937%2C%20the%20Commonwealth%20Government%20assimilated%27%20into%20the%20wider%20population

\textsuperscript{130} The Victorian Government, “The Archived History of Stolen Generations in Australia.”

\textsuperscript{131} Healing Foundation, “Who are the Stolen Generation.”
their later life that they had Aboriginal blood and would probably be absorbed into the white population and become useful citizens.\textsuperscript{132} The repercussions of these policies remain salient; there are approximately 17,000 survivors of childhood removal in Australia.\textsuperscript{133} The long-term effects on the physical and mental health of the stolen children and their descendants, often called intergenerational trauma, continues to create and/or contribute towards disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians today.

\textit{Contemporary Disparity}

The average lifespan is 9.5 years lower for Indigenous women and 10.6 years lower for Indigenous men than their non-Indigenous counterparts, revealing an acute disparity in fundamental securities including health care, education, and employment opportunities.\textsuperscript{134} The leading causes of death for Indigenous Australians are heart disease, diabetes, respiratory disease, lung cancer, and suicide; in turn, the leading causes for non-Indigenous people causes are heart disease, dementia, cerebrovascular disease, lung cancer, and respiratory disease.\textsuperscript{135} Non-Indigenous people are passing away in higher numbers from dementia, the likelihood of which increases with age. Notably, Indigenous people are about 2.5 times more likely to die from suicide. Factors contributing towards higher rates of suicide include disproportionately high substance abuse, domestic and sexual violence, incarceration, psychological distress, and long-term health conditions.\textsuperscript{136}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{132} Knightley, “Longtime Australian Policy.”
\bibitem{133} Healing Foundation, “Who are the Stolen Generation.”
\bibitem{134} Healing Foundation, “Who are the Stolen Generation.”
\end{thebibliography}
Indigenous Australians are the most imprisoned population on the face of the earth. On the seventh anniversary of his formal apology to the Stolen Generations in 2015, former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd declared “Australia is now facing an indigenous incarceration epidemic.”

Indigenous Australians are fifteen times more likely to be incarcerated than non-Indigenous people. Although Indigenous Australians represent only 3 percent of the Australian population, a 2013 survey revealed they “comprised 27 percent of Australia’s full-time adult prison population” and continues to grow; by 2020, that number had climbed to 29 percent. Young Indigenous people make up a staggering 48 percent of the youth prison population. The Australian government continues to “disappear” Indigenous humans into a prison industrial complex that disproportionately incarcerates people of color, and shows no signs of substantial reformation.

The epidemic Rudd points to stems directly from centuries of over policing, disparate contact with the state, and systemic inequality created by the ‘welfare programs’ introduced in the 20th century. Nerrim Callope, a Kirraewhurrong and Gkuthaarn man, points to several “underlying causes of increased contact with the criminal justice system,” including “disengaging from school, unemployment, involvement in child protection or out-of-home care systems, poor mental health, social exclusion due to racism, substance abuse, cognitive impairment, being a victim of family or sexual abuse, and substandard or inadequate housing.”

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139 Australian Human Rights Commission, “Face the Facts: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People,”
140 Australian Human Rights Commission.
Indigenous people are overrepresented in each of these categories because of policies of “dispossession, disruption, and disempowerment.”

The perpetuation of racist narratives in Australia allows for White acceptance and/or disregard for mass incarceration of Indigenous people. Chris Cunneen argues that “racialization has enabled the massive criminalisation and imprisonment of Indigenous people throughout the country.” Indigenous Peoples have always been excluded from or pushed to the margins of White Australian society. Although the institutions for “half-caste” children of the 20th century have been destroyed, the state funds a vast system of prisons in their place. The criminal justice system is invoked as an instrument to ‘solve’ social problems defined by the state. Rather than allow for Indigenous sovereign governance, representation in Australian parliament, and welfare that allows for economic growth rather than dependence, Indigenous communities are suffocated by over-policing and paternalistic state intervention. Angela Davis articulates “prisons do not disappear problems, they disappear human beings.” In this way, the Australian practice of “disappearing” Indigenous people legally persists and is socially accepted. Legal and social reform in Australia is a matter of life or death. Reforms including “raising the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14, removing public drunkenness offenses, and removing offenses for non-payment of fines,” each of which disproportionately affect Indigenous Peoples, would be substantial steps towards decreasing the presence of the criminal justice system.

Referendum

During the 1960s, the work of Indigenous activists to earn rights for their community members finally began to gain traction nationally. On 27 May 1967, the Australian government

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142 United Nations Association of Australia.
held the Indigenous Referendum, which proposed altering the Constitution to include Indigenous Australians in the official census and to allow for the federal government to make laws specifically concerning Indigenous Peoples. Prior to the referendum, Section 51 stated that “The Parliament shall… have power to make laws for the peace, order, and good government of the Commonwealth with respect to… The people of any race, other than the aboriginal people in any State, for whom it is necessary to make special laws.” 90 percent of Australians voted ‘Yes.’ However, the effects of the moment were more symbolic than practical; Indigenous Australians were still denied the right to vote. Rather than allocate any degree of sovereignty to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, the amendment simply transferred power from the hands of states to the Commonwealth, which had been formally ‘advising’ states on Indigenous matters for the last 200 years.

The disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples indicate that policy regarding Indigenous welfare be critically reevaluated with input and discretion of Indigenous Peoples themselves. In 2017, Indigenous Australians came together with non-Indigenous Australians to create the Uluru Statement from the Heart, an “invitation” that “calls for substantive reforms to help realize Indigenous rights, through the establishment of an Indigenous Voice to Parliament and a Makarrata Commission.” Pat Anderson, an Indigenous elder, described the Statement as an opportunity “to walk with us to a better future,” emphasizing a desire for reform rather than restitutions.144 The Statement describes a three-step plan of (1) creating the Voice to Parliament, (2) a Treaty with government, and (3) a process of truth-telling. In 2023, a nation-wide mandatory referendum was held to initiate the first step of the plan. The proposed law was “to alter the Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an

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144 Sydney Peace Foundation, “2021-22 Uluru Statement from the Heart.”
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice.” On 14 October 2023, the majority of Australians voted ‘No.’ Australia is unwilling to listen to Indigenous voices, and the action of silencing persists.

The referendum’s results are largely the product of racist and unfounded conceptions of an Australian future where Indigenous Peoples have full and equal rights: a scenario that threatens White supremacy and White privilege. Conservative opposition was fueled by narratives that suggested the Voice would pave the way for land and wealth seizure by Indigenous Peoples, threaten democracy, and increase racial tensions. Peter Dutton, the leader of the Liberal-National Coalition, stated the Voice would “permanently divide us by race” and “re-racialise” the nation. On the other side of the same coin of racial division, Jacinta Nampijinpa Price, an Indigenous woman, viewed the Voice as “another extension of the welfare model, and of separatism separating Indigenous Australians along the lines of race.”

Dutton argued the Voice would “confer a privilege” upon Indigenous Peoples. The NO Campaign played an integral role in garnering opposition for the Voice at

145 National Indigenous Australians Agency, “Referendum on an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice.”
146 Michael Bachelard, “Dutton’s claim the Voice will re-racialise’ Australia is wrong. Here’s why,” The Sydney Morning Herald, May 27, 2023.
148 Sydney Peace Foundation, “2021-22 Uluru Statement from the Heart.”
rallies and on social media, calling it “radical,” “dangerous,” and threatening it would “change the way our democratic parliamentary system functions.”\textsuperscript{149} The campaign appropriated artistic Aboriginal motifs in its graphic design in an attempt to create an illusion of solidarity with First Nations Peoples. The One Nation Party spread its opposition with the slogan “Say NO to a third tier of government.”\textsuperscript{150} This inflammatory rhetoric fueled a base of white voters to “protect” themselves from exploitation by constructing a narrative that their own rights were under assault. The privilege, of course, would continue to lie with the White Australian regardless of whether the Voice was passed or not. By constructing a threat to democracy, racist opposition leaders rallied a society benefiting from White supremacy to deny further rights to Indigenous peoples.

Following the vote on October 14th, Pauline Hanson tweeted “Today we are One Nation, One Country, One Mob.” Hanson, the senator from Queensland, is the founder of the right-wing One Nation party. Her statement employs populist and nationalist rhetoric in calling for “One Nation,” which is a coded White Australia. The colloquial Aboriginal term “mob” is meant to “represent your family group, clan group or wider Aboriginal community group.”\textsuperscript{151} By invoking the word, Hanson appropriates Indigenous language to create the facade of Australian unity while intending to perpetuate White hegemony.

An alternative opposition movement was led on the other end of the political spectrum: the Voice would not go far enough. Indigenous Senator Lidia Thorpe questioned, “Why aren’t we given power? Why is this advisory - why ‘advise’ us? What an insult to our intelligence, as


\textsuperscript{150} Pauline Hanson, “Keep Australia One Nation,” https://www.onenation.org.au/keep-australia-one-nation

the oldest continuing living culture on the planet.” Some Indigenous people viewed the Voice as a weak and half-hearted attempt to appease First Nations Peoples without taking any significant action to change the status quo. Thorpe, who founded the Blak Sovereign Movement (BSM), declared the Voice was “nothing but cheap window dressing.” The argument that truth-telling should be the first priority of the Australian government in collaboration with First Nations Peoples, not the last step in a process of assimilation, is fundamental to the BSM. The manifesto decries the Voice as “a destructive distraction, absolving the government of its continued crimes.” If truth-telling came last, the Voice would obscure the reality that Indigenous Peoples continue to be denied sovereignty and freedom in their own land. After all, the Voice was never intended to be a body with any tangible power. And yet, the Voice was silenced before given the chance to utter its first cry.

Immigration Policy

By examining Australia’s justifications for offshore detention facilities and protectionist immigration policy, I demonstrate how state actors implicitly and explicitly employ narratives of racism, nationalism, and sovereignty to maximize political ends. For the last 25 years, Australia has enforced strict immigration quotas with an incredibly aggressive and costly approach for individuals without pre-approved entry. When the flow of immigration from culturally and racially similar countries can be carefully controlled, it is celebrated as an opportunity for

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152 Frost, “The Aboriginal Australians Leading the Opposition to the Voice.”
154 Pauline Hanson @PaulineHansonOz, X, “Australia has voted No to the Voice of Division,” October 14, 2023,
https://twitter.com/PaulineHansonOz/status/171311044370603673?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Eembed
dimeline%7Ctwtterm%5Escreen-name%3AOneNationAus%7Ctwecon%5EIs1
Australian advancement and ‘multiculturalism.’ In contrast, the influx of refugees from non-White countries has been met with the construction of security dilemmas, which are justified with narratives of democracy and ‘social cohesion.’

Australian tolerance for immigration has varied drastically based on the predominant countries of origin of those seeking visas. Following World War II, the government substantially increased immigration quotas in response to the threat of Australian population decline and labor shortages.155 However, “in line with the White Australia Policy,” these immigrants were predominantly “comprised of people from the Baltic, who were considered to be similar to the British in their appearance and manners.”156 These individuals became known as ‘beautiful Balts,’ among Aussies. As Minister for Immigration Arthur Calwell put it, “it was not hard to sell immigration to the Australian people once the press published photographs of that group.”157 In other words, their whiteness provided the opportunity to construct the façade of a welcoming and humanitarian Australia: a nation that welcomed White immigrants from Europe while removing and forcing the assimilation of Aboriginal children into White society.

When the Whitlam government formally abolished White Australia policy with the Racial Discrimination Act in 1975, “Europe’s all-white outpost in [the] Pacific” began to fall – slowly.158 In the wake of the Vietnam War, Prime Minister Fraser committed to accepting high numbers of Vietnamese refugees in accordance with the “Convention Relation to the Status of Refugees,” which shaped resettlement between 1975 and 1985. But “as the numbers of people arriving by boat increased, opposition grew, with references in the press to an ‘invasion’, ‘flood’

156 National Museum of Australia, “Postwar Immigration Drive.”
157 National Museum of Australia.
and ‘yellow peril.’ Vietnamese refugees were referred to as ‘boat people,’ a derogatory term still used today in reference to Asian immigrants. Unions went on strike to protest ‘preferential treatment’ received by refugees and some cited concerns of communist infiltration and criminality.

Though the majority of Australians were supportive of immigration from Asian countries in the 1980s, the construction of ‘boat people’ as threats to Australian economic and social well-being would continue to intensify over the next two decades.

In the 1990s, the Keating and Howard governments responded to an increasing number of refugees from the Middle East with hardline immigration policies. In 2001, the Howard government formed the ‘Pacific Solution,’ an agreement between Australia and the governments of Nauru and Papua New Guinea to hold asylum seekers offshore while their requests for resettlement were ‘processed.’ By sanctioning the operation of public and private offshore detention facilities, Australia sought to prevent migrants and refugees from ever reaching the shores of Australia via boat.

Policymakers justified the detention centers as a deterrence mechanism for illicit immigration that posed a security risk to the nation and an assault to Australia’s sovereignty. An unauthorized attempt to seek resettlement in Australia could therefore end in detention for an indeterminate amount of time rather than result in entry. However, the facilities’ true nature was obscured to the domestic and international public. In 2005, a fact sheet from the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) reported the facilities were

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161 Gursimran Kaur Bakshi, “Australia’s Pacific solution for asylum-seekers neglects human dignity,” LSE, September 1, 2020. [https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/socialpolicy/2020/09/01/australias-pacific-solution-for-asylum-seekers-neglects-human-dignity/#:%7E:text=This%20%27Pacific%20Solution%27%20was%20first%2C%20asylum%2Dseekers%20to%20the%20islands](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/socialpolicy/2020/09/01/australias-pacific-solution-for-asylum-seekers-neglects-human-dignity/#:%7E:text=This%20%27Pacific%20Solution%27%20was%20first%2C%20asylum%2Dseekers%20to%20the%20islands)
“internationally renowned for the high level of care,” and offered “residents” health programs, “regular excursions for shopping and swimming,” access to education, and occupational activities.\textsuperscript{162} Notably, the very fact that DIMIA handled immigration, multicultural, and Indigenous affairs manifests the institutionalized “othering” of non-White Australians embedded within the framework of Australian bureaucracy. In addition, DIMIA’s characterization of the facilities as humanitarian havens for refugees was not only incongruous with their purported function as a deterrent, but mischaracterized the facilities that became epicenters of human rights abuses in the following decade.

Following a five-year hiatus from the use of the offshore facilities, the Rudd Government revitalized the detention regime in 2013. Prime Minister Rudd stated “From now on, any asylum seeker who arrives in Australia by boat will have no chance of being settled in Australia as refugees… If they are found to be genuine refugees they will be resettled in Papua New Guinea, an emerging economy with a strong future; a robust democracy which is also a signatory to the United Nations Refugees Convention.”\textsuperscript{163} His statement not only served to communicate his hardline stance, but also inferred that refugees were attempting to take advantage of Australian resources, rather than simply seek asylum. His narrative of resettlement in an “emerging economy” and “robust democracy” that abides by international human rights law obscured the reality of life, or lack thereof, as a refugee in Papua New Guinea and Nauru. The policy ensured refugees would be treated as criminals outside of Australian borders in collaboration with other governments.

In 2013, Tony Abbott ran for the office of Prime Minister with the slogan ‘Stop the Boats.’ The phrase not only reflects the increasing securitization of Australian immigration policy, but also employs dehumanizing rhetoric regarding the individuals experiencing displacement. Once Abbott and his Liberal-National Coalition gained control of Parliament, they implemented Operation Sovereign Borders, a “military-led border security operation designed to prevent boats carrying asylum seekers from arriving in Australia” by sending the boats back to their origins or to the detention facilities in Nauru and Manus Island. By constructing and securitizing the threat of uninhibited immigration, Abbott was able to present himself as a strong and patriotic protector of Australia – a tactic frequently employed among populist politicians today.

Detention centers were yet another Australian institution meant to “disappear” humans constructed as a threat to the sovereignty and culture of a White Australia. Until a landmark ruling from the High Court on 3 November 2023, Australia could legally detain people in offshore facilities “for the rest of their lives” without ever convicting them of a crime. In November 2023, the Washington Post reported “more than 1,000 people are in immigration detention and 127 have been detained for five or more years. The average stay is 709 days, and the longest-held has been there 16 years.” The individuals detained on Nauru were brought to Australia in June of 2023, and those detained at other facilities on Papua New Guinea were released with various stipulations and limitations in November 2023 following the Court’s ruling.

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Despite the current dismantling of the detention regime, One Nation’s official stance on immigration policy is visible in the video footage that plays on the website’s homepage: Hanson exclusively greets White Australians with the attention of a concerned caretaker. Immigration is listed as one of her four “balance of power priorities,” and is outlined as a “zero-net migration policy and focus on permitting only highly skilled migrants from culturally cohesive countries into Australia.” In addition, “migrants must demonstrate a sound level of English for assimilation purposes. Education courses in Australian universities should not be used as a backdoor to immigrate to Australia.” Hanson’s narrative of “cultural cohesion” for the sake of “assimilation purposes” is a veiled attempt to exclude people of color from entering the country. In describing universities as institutions that provide the risk of “backdoor entry,” to Australia, Hanson constructs international students as having ulterior motives to taking advantage of Australian educational resources. The narrative of “backdoor entry” simultaneously vilifies individuals seeking entry into Australia while constructing a sense of insecurity of Australia’s border control.

The use of media is integral to the spread of anti-immigration narratives throughout the country. Whether speaking on morning talk shows or tweeting on X, politicians and pundits on the far-right, including Hanson, employ public platforms to spread misinformation, fear, and hatred towards immigrants. These attacks have shifted the Overton window in Australia by normalizing the outright racist and xenophobic attacks of individuals and groups in the abstract. Following Queen Elizabeth’s death in September 2023, Senator
Mehreen Faruqi, the Pakistani-Australian representative of New South Wales, tweeted:

“Condolences to those who knew the Queen. I cannot mourn the leader of a racist empire built on stolen lives, land and wealth of colonised peoples. We are reminded of the urgency of Treaty with First Nations, justice & reparations for British colonies & becoming a republic.”

Faruqi appropriately points to the legacy of British imperialism that created unanswered questions of disparity in accessing life and liberty in Australia. Hanson’s response was a gross and racist assault towards Farqui herself, and an egregious demonstration of her construction of non-White Australians as inherently “Other” and corrupt. As Faruqi acknowledges the anti-racist work to be done in Australia to make it a true republic, Hanson perpetuates an environment of hate and exclusion.

**Conclusion**

Federal and state governments in Australia are making painstakingly slow progress towards building cooperative relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and the negative consequences of hesitancy towards truth and reconciliation cannot be understated. Ngarra Murray, a member of the Indigenous body in the Victorian assembly, emphasizes the urgency of the situation: “The justice system and child protection systems simply

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167 Mehreen Faruqi @MehreenFaruqi, “Condolences to those who knew the Queen,” X, September 8, 2022, https://twitter.com/MehreenFaruqi/status/1568054570169024514.

168 Pauline Hanson @PaulineHansonOz, “Your attitude appalls and disgusts me,” X, September 8, 2022, 11:05 PM, https://twitter.com/PaulineHansonOz/status/1568118251640750083.
aren’t working for our families and we need urgent reforms now. We need real action now.”

Although the recent referendum failed to pass the Voice, Indigenous Peoples are also in the process of negotiating state-level treaties. However, Indigenous leaders are forced to work with government officials who are “seeking more time to consider overhauling child protection and criminal justice systems.” The Victorian Allan Labor government recently accepted a mere four of the 46 recommendations made by the Yoorrook Justice Commission for truth telling and reconciliation.

Yet, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples continue to fight for space and place in Australia. June Oscar, an Aboriginal woman of Bunuba descent, reflects, “the referendum is our mirror. We cannot know our potential as a nation if we cannot truly see ourselves… The time is now to engage in truth-telling so we can ensure this nation-state reflects all of who we are and who we want to become.”

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170 Ore, “Victoria government blasted.”

171 Ore.

Chapter III: Canada

For I have known you when your forests were mine; when they gave me my meat and my clothing. I have known you in your streams and rivers where your fish flashed and danced in the sun, where the waters said ‘come, come and eat of my abundance.’ I have known you in the freedom of the winds. And my spirit, like the winds, once roamed your good lands.

– Chief Dan George, 1967

Indigenous Canada

First Nation, Inuit, and Métis Peoples have lived in North America, fostering sacred connections to land and sea, for millennia. Prior to the first European contact in 1497, between 350,000 and 500,000 Indigenous Peoples lived on the land that is now within the borders of Canada.\(^{173}\) By 1867, the Indigenous population had declined to 125,000 due to the impacts of settler-colonialism.\(^{174}\) Prior to colonization, six prominent geographic groups included distinct nations and cultures with various “social organization, food resources, homes, modes of transportation, clothing, and spiritual beliefs and ceremonies.”\(^{175}\) Some nations, including the Algonquian peoples, were nomadic, and traveled in the summer to trade, forage, and create alliances with other nations before dispersing into “kin-based hunting bands” for the winter.\(^{176}\) First Nations that inhabited more temperate climates could engage in year-round agriculture; numerous nations established and sustained sedentary societies. For example, “the Five Nations


\(^{174}\) Matheson et al., “Canada's Colonial Genocide of Indigenous Peoples.”


(also known as the Iroquois or Hodenosaunee), as well as the Huron, the Neutral, the Petun and the Erie, lived in villages of as many as 2,000 people in the area around Lake Ontario, Lake Erie and Lake Huron.”

First Nations Peoples have always conceived of power, rule, and governance in a multiplicity of ways, but colonial and Western histories flattened and silenced the intricacy of Indigenous governance to perpetuate colonizers’ self-interest as ‘natural’ rulers in North America. The construction and institutionalization of narratives that justified and obscured the cooptation of Indigenous life, land, and sovereignty through the colonial period and that continue to affect Canadian politics today include: Western sovereignty, “Doctrine of Discovery,” the “noble savage,” and “New World.”

Early Colonization

The first French and British explorers arrived in Canada in the late 15th century, but the first European settlements were established in the early 17th century and began to spread in earnest in the early 18th century. Europe’s Seven Years War took place in the mid-18th century and a significant part of it was the colonialist competition over North America between the British and the French. Over the two centuries from the first explorers to the end of the Seven Years War, Europeans’ relationships with the Indigenous people in Canada changed as the colonizers’ logic evolved to allow continuous exploitation of the land and labor of Indigenous people.

British and French explorers, and later colonizers, in North America initially were dependent on First Nations. In competition with each other, they worked with First Nations

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Peoples to gain knowledge of military strategy, access to natural resources, and trading partners. From the arrival of the first European explorers through the early days of colonization, First Nations Peoples could leverage the Europeans’ disputes to their own advantage, creating alliances with the French and British to empower themselves relative to their own Indigenous competitors. In the early 17th century, French relations with Indigenous people were characterized by “pre-existing intertribal conflicts,” which reveals how Europeans embedded themselves within the space on Indigenous terms. Without alliances or protection from First Nations Peoples, European settlements were more vulnerable to attack and starvation.

Until the end of the Seven Years’ War, both British and French colonial administrations facilitated the expansion of their respective territories and populations. French authorities encouraged their soldiers to remain in New France after their contracts overseas were fulfilled, recruitment offices offered promising economic incentives for becoming a settler, and King Louis XIV sent hundreds of *filles du roi* (“King’s Daughters”) to become wives and mothers in the settlements. However, the British colonies grew at a quicker pace, bolstered by strong economic and political ties between Hudson’s Bay Company and the British monarchy. By 1760, approximately one and a half million people lived in British colonies; in comparison, the population of New France totaled 70,000 people. After waging an effective offensive against French Montreal, the British prevailed in the colonial contest for North America. In 1763, the French ceded their territory to Britain in the Treaty of Paris.

Once the British defeated the French, the relationship between the colonists and Indigenous Peoples transformed. Rather than continuing to engage in strategic and trade

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relationships with First Nations, settlers and European leaders increasingly sought to own, develop, and dominate the land on which Indigenous people had always lived. As the settler population increased, traditional food sources waned and disease spread among the Indigenous population, leaving them more vulnerable to exploitation. The British monarchy and its colonial administrations created institutions and policies to enforce “regulatory mechanisms,” which were “extremely busy reaffirming and reproducing… possessiveness through a process of perpetual Indigenous dispossession.” Moreton-Robinson characterizes the “modes of rationalization” used to usurp Indigenous power and resources as “possessive logics,” which are “underpinned by an excessive desire to invest in reproducing and reaffirming the nation-state’s ownership, control, and domination.” The “regulatory mechanisms” invoked by the British and the narratives used to obscure and justify their devastating effects on Indigenous life and sovereignty are the focus of this chapter.

**Indigenous Sovereignty**

Indigenous Sovereignty exists independently from Western conceptions and institutions that reify nation-state sovereignty; it “arises from Indigenous Traditional Knowledge, belonging to each Indigenous nation, tribe, and community. Traditional Indigenous knowledge consists of spiritual ways, culture, language, social and legal systems, political structures, and inherent relationships with lands, waters, and everything on and within them. Indigenous sovereignty exists regardless of what the governing nation-state does or does not do.” In other words, it is

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181 Mortenson-Robinson, xii.
“not a nation-state recognition of inherent sovereignty under nation-state dominion.”\textsuperscript{183}

Indigenous sovereignty may be rhetorically acknowledged or denied by state actors, but exists regardless of external validation or invalidation. Sovereignty is a fluid and evolving relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the physical and spiritual worlds they inhabit; it is not only an institution, but a practice, outlook, and way of being.

Robin Wall Kimmerer, a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, provides an enlightening perspective of Indigenous sovereignty in relation to the settler’s exploitation:

Children, language, lands: almost everything was stripped away, stolen when you weren’t looking because you were trying to stay alive. In the face of such loss, one thing our people could not surrender was the meaning of land. In the settler mind, land was property, real estate, capital, or natural resources. But to our people, it was everything: identity, the connection to our ancestors, the home of our nonhuman kinfolk, our pharmacy, our library, the source of all that sustained us. Our lands were where our responsibility to the world was enacted, sacred ground. It belonged to itself; it was a gift, not a commodity, so it could never be bought or sold. These are the meanings people took with them when they were forced from their ancient homelands to new places.\textsuperscript{184}

\textit{Imposition of Western Sovereignty}

Europeans’ unwillingness to conceive or allow alternatives to Western sovereignty is grounded in domination of the state, the functional unit of the contemporary international


The state is an “abstract concept empirically understandable only through the notion that authorized persons can effectively control certain territory.” Therefore, the state may exist unbounded from ‘real’ borders, governance, power, and/or control of territory or people. British and French colonial rulers imagined themselves as sovereigns in lands they defined as *terra nullius*; their construction of sovereignty was entirely detached from the reality of a populated continent of Indigenous peoples. Lorenzo Veracini explains the sovereignty of the settler is “typically imagined before it is practiced.” Canadian sovereignty was a self-fulfilling prophecy created by the rejection of Indigenous sovereignty.

Western sovereignty in North America is contingent upon the destruction, delegitimization, and/or redefinition of Indigenous sovereignty. The “Doctrine of Discovery,” which “emanates from a series of Papal Bulls… originating in the 1400s” has underpinned European claims to land through the present. Gaudry explains how by “using the language of discovery and sovereignty to obscure Indigenous governance already in practice,” colonizers violently supplanted structures of Indigenous life with their own. Although the focus of this chapter is on the legacy of British colonialism, French projects of settler colonialism crafted similar narratives and institutions to execute their colonial aspirations; the impacts of French colonialism cannot be decoupled from the British. An analysis of British methods of replacement, and subsequently Canadian methods as members of the Commonwealth, reveals a

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186 Siegfried, “Indigenous Sovereignty.”
continuous logic of dispossession and assimilation from the first moments of contact to the present moment.

The Proclamation of 1763, issued by King George III in the aftermath of the Seven Years’ War, officially declared ownership of British territory in North America. The British monarch institutionalized rights for Indigenous Peoples not to protect Indigenous sovereignty, but to limit the power of settlers and local governments. The Proclamation assigned the Crown exclusive power to settle treaties with First Nations, denying the right of British subjects to purchase land directly from Indigenous Peoples. It states “And We do further strictly enjoin and require all Persons whatever who have either wilfully or inadvertently seated themselves upon any Lands within the Countries above described, or upon any other Lands which, not having been ceded to or purchased by Us, are still reserved to the said Indians as aforesaid, forthwith to remove themselves from such Settlements.”189 The directive legally constrained the power of the settler, but did not do so in practice. The British military was unwilling and unable to remove or prevent the expansion of many White settlers.190

The Doctrine of Discovery and Royal Proclamation of 1763 appear fundamentally incompatible with one another, as one serves to obscure First Nations’ sovereignty and the other to acknowledge it. Yet the logic of the Crown was consistent: to maintain control over its territory and subjects without overstepping its capacity to rule effectively. In 1755, the Crown created the Department of Indian Affairs to manage relationships between British colonists and Indigenous allies amidst military strife with the French and their allies. The foundation of the

189 Indigenous Foundations, “Royal Proclamation, 1763,”
https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/royal_proclamation_1763/#:~:text=The%20Proclamation%20forbade%20settlers%20from%20buy%20land%20from%20First%20Nations.
institution lies in the British inability to survive without the assistance of First Nations Peoples; hypothetically, the narrative the Department perpetuated through the 20th century was of “Indigenous dependence” on British governance and welfare.

In 1867, the British Parliament passed the British North America Act, which founded the federal Dominion Government of Canada. Sir Leonard Tilley proposed the title ‘Dominion’ for the purportedly free nation, “inspired by Psalm 72 in the Bible which refers to ‘dominion from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth.’” From this moment forward, the myth of Canadian democracy, freedom, and equality began to serve the settler-colonialist enterprise that produced policies of replacement. The Indian Act of 1876, passed a decade later, began to formally impose European-style governance, education, and culture upon Indigenous Peoples. Relationships, treaties, and agreements became increasingly exploitative.

Fundamentally, the imposition of Western government and elections remade “traditional cultures in the image of the colonizers.” By incentivizing and/or coercing Indigenous Peoples to move onto reserves, removing Indigenous children from their families, and stripping Indigenous people of their “legal status,” the Canadian government facilitated the growth of a White nation-state through the destruction of Indigenous institutions, sovereignty, culture, and life.

Narratives and Mechanisms

Reserves

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192 Joseph, 21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act, 16.
Capitalist and religious prerogatives informed the European mission of “settling” Indigenous Peoples on reserves. The earliest attempts to create reserves for Indigenous Peoples were in 1637 by French missionaries who tried to “encourage Indians to settle in one spot and embrace both agriculture and Christianity.” In 1950, George Stanley at the *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* reflected on the ‘success’ of the first reserve at Sillery, which was constructed by Jesuit missionaries and inhabited by two Algonquian families in 1639: “Here, at last, was the beginning of a sedentary Indian colony to which other Indians might be induced to come and in which they might be sheltered from their former savage associations and kept under French and Christian influences.” The French and British both framed the project of cultural destruction as a mission to improve the material and spiritual condition of the ‘savage.’

In 1880, John Macdonald, the first Prime Minister of Canada, advocated “to wean them by slow degrees, from their nomadic habits, which have almost become an instinct, and by slow degrees absorb them or settle them on the land.” Macdonald spoke pejoratively about the ‘instinct’ of ‘nomadic habits,’ drawing upon narratives of Indigenous ‘backwardness.’ His advocacy for slowly ‘weaning’ Indigenous people from traditional way of life is a euphemism for the slow destruction of Indigenous Peoples who were perceived as inhibitions to the extent of European power. The concept of ‘sheltering’ Indigenous Peoples from their ‘former savage associations’ pervaded colonialist narratives and policy over the next two centuries; paternalistic narratives of ‘protection’ from ‘savage tendencies’ justified the introduction of new systems of governance, churches, and schools on traditional Indigenous lands and reservations.

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193 Joseph, 24.
The Canadian government facilitated and institutionalized a binary between White industry and agriculture and Indigenous waste and inefficiency. In 1872, the Dominions Land Act facilitated the expansion of settlers onto “uncultivated” land. To receive a land grant, settlers were required to demonstrate “their land was improved upon and had increased in value or use by constructing a dwelling or cultivating the land.” The government framed destruction of native landscape to make room for wheat and dairy production as inherently valuable, positioning Indigenous Peoples and their sovereignty as impediments to a successful colonialist enterprise. In 1918, Arthur Meighen, the Minister of the Interior and Superintendent of Indian Affairs, complained “We would be only too glad to have the Indian use this land, if he would… But he will not cultivate this land, and we want to cultivate it; that is all.” This narrative generated pressure on the federal government to facilitate leasing and the eventual relinquishment of Indigenous lands to settlers.

In 1894, an amendment to the Indian Act targeted vulnerable individuals by permitting “reserve land held by physically disabled Indians, widows, orphans, or others who could not cultivate their lands” to be leased “without band approval or surrender of title.” The devastating social and economic consequences of the Indian Act created the conditions for leases and land sale to be an “opportunity” for Indigenous people to alleviate debt and poverty on reserves. In 1906, another amendment allowed for Indigenous people to receive up to 50 percent of land sale profit; government negotiators reinforced the incentive structure by attending meetings with “strongboxes of cash.” Through the steady manipulation through variations of

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197 Arthur Meighen, Minister of the Interior and Superintendent of Indian Affairs, 1918. Cited in Joseph, 68.
198 Joseph, 68.
199 Joseph, 68.
200 Joseph, 69.
the Indian Act, the federal government strategically undermined sovereignty of both Indigenous Peoples and the British monarchy through justifications of increased productivity and civilization.

The project of Indigenous assimilation into White settler-colonial society developed as White populations and power grew. Assimilation not only served to reallocate Indigenous land titles, but eliminated Indigenous culture and society. Beginning in the 19th century, the Crown and Canadian government sought to Anglicize Indigenous life wherever it persisted and resisted. The Gradual Civilization Act of 1857 and the Gradual Enfranchisement Act of 1869 served to assimilate Indigenous peoples into White settler societies to circumvent and extinguish Indigenous rights codified in the Royal Proclamation. Once an Indigenous person was no longer legally defined as such by the state, their right to land and sovereignty was terminated. In 1887, Prime Minister John A. Macdonald declared, “the great aim of our legislation has been to do away with the tribal system and assimilate the Indian people in all respects with the other inhabitants of the Dominion as speedily as they are fit to change.”

Joseph describes, “Once they had learned ‘proper habits,’ they could then be released… into the general society as full citizens as equal rights and responsibilities, taking with them a proportional share of reserve assets.” By “granting” Indigenous people Western rights and responsibilities, the Canadian government obscured devastating effects of destroying Indigenous sovereignty.

To implement the colonizers’ vision of ‘civilization’ upon Indigenous peoples, colonial governments forcibly restructured Indigenous governments to “administer the Indian Act.”

Bob Joseph explains that the federal government considered “traditional band and tribal

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201 Indigenous Foundations Act, “The Indian Act,” [https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/the_indian_act/](https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/the_indian_act/)
government...an impediment... to plans for advancement.” The Canadian government alone held the power of disposing of the chief, and denied rights to women who were traditionally leaders in many Indigenous communities. When First Nations suffered due to inappropriate governance, capitalist mismanagement of land and resources, and European sicknesses, Indigenous people were blamed for failures of implementation.

The Canadian government consistently responded to the resistance of First Nations and Métis Peoples with amendments to the Indian Act. When the Act was passed, “the Plains Indigenous nations of the West — the Cree, Siksika, Kainai, Piikani, and Saulteaux — were facing disaster” due to the destruction of the bison population, expansion of railways and agriculture, and disease. In 1880, “Cree chief Mistahimaskwa (Big Bear), and Isapo-muxika (Crowfoot), leading chief of the Siksika, founded a confederacy to try to solve their people’s grievances.” Additionally, in 1885 Métis people “passed a 10-point ‘Revolutionary Bill of Rights’ asserting Métis rights of possession to their farms” and other demands. When their claims to sovereignty were ignored, some First Nations and Métis peoples took up arms in a violent resistance against settlers. The Canadian government quickly mobilized militia forces, and Indigenous leaders were convicted and executed. Although the resistance was unsuccessful in securing long-term rights to territory, the explicit exhibition of Indigenous power threatened the stability of the colonialist regime. In response to the turmoil of 1885, Prime Minister Macdonald exclaimed: “We must take a new course, we must vindicate the position of the white man, we must teach the Indians what law is, we must not pauperize them, as they say we have

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204 Joseph, 17.
205 Joseph, 17.
been doing.” The ‘new course’ Macdonald and his allies pursued was a regime of assimilation policy that sought to eliminate the need for reserves entirely.

Anti-Miscegenation Laws

Anti-miscegenation laws not only served to redistribute land to White families, but to inhibit Indigenous population growth through the mitigation of relationships with White settlers. Unlike in the United States, Canadian government did not explicitly prohibit interracial marriage. Canada’s anti-miscegenation regime took form through various economic, social, and political mechanisms that made it nearly impossible for both members of an Indigenous and non-Indigenous couple to retain or access their identity, rights, and agency. The federal government socially and politically engineered the burgeoning state by constantly redefining Indigeneity with respect to the needs and desires of the White Man. Debra Thompson articulates how “the interlocking and mutually reinforcing nature of patriarchal, white supremacist and capitalist systems of domination [and] the threat of non-white access to white capital” were embodied in a regime of Canadian anti-miscegenation laws. Many Indigenous women, caught at the intersection of racism and sexism, “have faced difficulty in being recognized as both Indians and women in Canada.”

The 1876 Indian Act constructed the categories of “status” and “non-status” Indians as a legitimized regulatory mechanism over Indigenous Peoples. The Act defined an “Indian” as “any male person of Indian blood reported to belong to a particular band, any child of such person, or

207 Joseph, 31.
210 Joseph, 21.
any woman who is or was lawfully married to such person.” Qualifications for “status” varied over time as the federal government attempted to construct a White Canada through the denial of Indigenous “status.” The implications of possessing “status” were not only political, but personal. Through this mechanism, the federal government influenced the rights of Indigenous Peoples to marry, bear and/or keep children, and live on traditional land and reserves.

Prior to the founding of the Dominion government, “intermarriage was encouraged and seen as vital to both by the European fur traders and Aboriginal groups” because of the immediate economic benefits for settlers and colonial ambitions of European leaders. However, from the mid-19th century onwards, the Canadian government invoked race to systematically acquire land from Indigenous people to circumvent Crown ‘protections’ of Native land. If Indigenous Peoples held rights to land that could only be relinquished through treaties with the Crown, the Canadian state could not grow limitlessly.

The Western institution of marriage provided the federal government with a mechanism to extinguish the “status” of Indigenous peoples, and consequently, the right to manage and/or own Indigenous land. The removal of “status” operated differently on gender lines: “Aboriginal women who married non-Aboriginal men and the offspring of these interracial relationships would be denied Indian legal status, while Aboriginal men who married non-Aboriginal women would retain the Indian status that would also be given to their wives and children.”

Indigenous women could then be assimilated into White society to be governed by their White husbands. On the other hand, Indigenous men retained their status when they married White women, and their wives and children were exiled from White society. Bonita Lawrence describes

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211 Joseph, 11.
how this “racist patriarchal framework governing white identities” informed a social reality where “European women who married Native men were considered to have stepped outside the social boundaries of whiteness,” which allowed for the perpetuation of a culturally homogeneous nation-state.214

By constructing the White woman as the protector of White prosperity and the Indigenous woman as her antithesis, the gender was institutionalized as a mechanism of social and political control. Narratives of the “pioneer woman” influenced and inspired generations of White, Canadian women to be cheerful and competent homemakers; their roles as wives, mothers, and companions were integral to the project of expansion. In Canadian literature, Elizabeth Thompson explains how “novels echo back to the past in featuring pioneer women who cope on a real, physical frontier, and forward to the future in featuring pioneer women who cope with a new type of frontier environment, one grounded in social and personal concerns rather than in the physical landscape.” White women, therefore, were not only typified as practically useful in execution of the settler-colonial project, but as integral to imaginations of the White Canadian nation state.215

The myth of the pioneering woman was grounded in her sensibilities as a “civilized” European. Debra Thompson illustrates how “White women were constructed… as the guardians of morality and the vessels through which White civilization would continue. For a White woman to marry an Aboriginal man, she would be required to commit the sin of crossing racial boundaries and stepping beyond the societal norms of acceptable behavior for the moral, chaste, proper, and civilized ideal of femininity.”216

216 Thompson, “Nation and Miscegenation,” 15.
If the White woman represented modernity, productivity, and civilization, settler-colonial societies constructed the Indigenous woman as her opposite, in large part to disempower their nations. In 1742, French Jesuit missionary Joseph-François Lafitau had noted how in Iroquois-speaking nations, “Nothing is more real, however, than the women’s superiority. It is they who really maintain the tribe… In them resides all the real authority… they are the soul of the councils, the arbiters of peace and war.” Indigenous women held immense power and influence within their communities, so subverting their political and social roles created space for colonizers to redistribute power amongst themselves. By recasting them as White when they married colonists, taking children to residential schools, implementing governmental oversight, and removing their status, government policy systematically marginalized Indigenous women within White and Indigenous communities.

Cheryl Harris’s conception of “whiteness as property” illuminates how the federal government protected and improved the material conditions of White people by legally defining Indigenous people as “status” or “non-status” Indians. Harris suggests that “possession - the act necessary to lay the basis for rights in property - was defined to include only the cultural practices of whites,” and therefore “whiteness - that which whites alone possess - is valuable and is property.” In order for White society to continue to grow, access to whiteness through marriage with Indigenous individuals needed to be mitigated. Whiteness, therefore, was legally and culturally defined in relation to Eurocentric perceptions and willful misrepresentations of Indigeneity. As I explore in the next section, the Canadian government continued to regulate Indigenous children’s proximity to whiteness through the residential school system, foster care, and birth alerts.

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Residential Schools

Canada’s residential school system, created to “assimilate” Indigenous children into the new nation state, is one of the most devastating elements of the settler-colonial project. The explicit goal of the residential schools was to “kill the Indian in the child,” as some Canadian leaders believed this would be the “final solution of the Indian problem.” By immersing children within Western institutions, settlers hoped to dissolve their Indigenous identities through the installation of Western values and prohibition of native language, customs, and traditions. Leaders viewed the “full indoctrination of the children into Christian beliefs and customs” as a policy priority that required the systematic removal of children from their families and homelands. Such extreme measures were justified through promises of ‘enlightenment,’ future economic prosperity, and religious piety; federal funding and management by Christian churches legitimized programs.

The residential school regime was a project of mass incarceration. Schools were centers of abuse, maltreatment, and exploitation; approximately 6,000 of the 150,000 children who attended a residential school died or disappeared between the 1870s and 1996. Although children frequently died from “disease, malnourishment, and broken hearts,” the regime continued because it served to disappear Indigenous children and replace them with White-coded and/or “culturally assimilated” children.

The Canadian residential school regime was inspired and influenced by American management of “Indian Affairs.” In 1879, Nicholas Davin traveled to the United States to become “acquainted with the establishment, cost and practical value of industrial schools among

218 Joseph, 53.
219 Joseph, 55.
220 Joseph, 55.
221 Joseph, 53.
the Indian populations,” a critical component in the nation’s “aggressive civilization” policy. Assimilation was not only a cultural project, but an economic investment in the production of a labor force to be integrated within the nation state, rather than outside of it. In his official Report on Industrial Schools for Indians and Half Breeds, Davin relayed recommendations from President Grant’s congressional Peace Commission, including that Indians should be “consolidated on few reservations” in “permanent homes,” gain citizenship in order to “enjoy the protection of the law,” and “aid in their preparation for citizenship by educating them in the industry and in the arts of civilization.” Children were particularly vulnerable to exploitation because they were viewed as malleable. In 1883, Macdonald attested to the power of “central training industrial schools” in assisting Indigenous children to “acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men.”

Davin made the case that “the influence of the wigwam was stronger” than the day-school, which could not wholly execute its agenda of Western acculturation. The White man’s perception of the day-school’s “failure” illuminates the power of Indigenous communities to persist and resist attempts of indoctrination through speaking native languages at home and holding underground ceremonies, even after the Indian Act banned them. However, there was little Indigenous communities could do to preserve cultural ties with children in residential schools where they were punished for expressing their Indigeneity.

Churches across the burgeoning nation framed the education of Indigenous children as a Christian prerogative; collaboration between the federal government and churches in operating the residential school system continued until the end of the 20th century. At the height of the

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regime in 1930, “the residential school system totalled [stet] 80 institutions. The Roman Catholic Church operated three-fifths of the schools, the Anglican Church one-quarter and the United and Presbyterian Churches the remainder.”225 The indivisibility of Canadian prosperity and the Christian faith drove Christians to support residential schools, where teachers preached the gospel and “criticized or denigrated Indigenous spiritual traditions.”226 In a report for the Alberta Methodist Commission in 1911, a church representative declared “the Indian is the weak child in the family of our nation and for this reason presents the most earnest appeal for Christian sympathy and cooperation.”227 This narrative of Christian altruism justified intervention on behalf of the church and state, and obscured the abuses and inhumane conditions Indigenous children experienced in the school system.

The government sought to benefit from Indigenous children’s assimilation into the settler-colonial economy while spending as little as possible on running the schools. Joseph explains “to augment the finances of the schools, the [Indian] Act included a statute that allowed the government to collect any treaty annuities due to the children and use the money to maintain the school that the children attended.”228 In addition, the schools cut costs through forced labor veiled as vocational or technical schooling; many boys engaged in “carpentry, construction, general maintenance and agricultural labor” while girls completed housework.229

As the Canadian government and allied institutions disappeared Indigenous children from reservations and traditional homelands, Indigenous communities suffered irreparable damage.

226 Miller, “Residential Schools in Canada.”
228 Joseph, 58.
229 Miller, “Residential Schools in Canada.”
The loss of children, whether physically and/or culturally, continues to produce poor mental health outcomes for survivors and their families. The narratives that justified the removal of Indigenous children from their families persist in the form of child welfare policies that disproportionately affect Indigenous People in Canada today.

The institutionalization of the Indian Act not only influenced the material conditions of First Nations Peoples, but fundamentally transformed conceptions of Indigeneity in Canada. Because the Indian Act “shaped contemporary Native life in ways that are now so familiar as to almost seem ‘natural,’” non-Indigenous policymakers continued to imagine a future of Indigenous sovereignty constricted by narratives of “dependence.”

*Contemporary Disparity*

*Unraveling the Indian Act*

The Canadian government has issued apologies for the harm it inflicted upon Indigenous Peoples, but official statements ring hollow without being accompanied by substantial work to combat the effects of settler colonialism. Parliament reformed the Indian Act multiple times since the 1950s, but it remains in effect today. The perpetuation of narratives including the inherent righteousness of ‘Canadian values’ not only veil the lingering effects of colonialism in Canada, but are invoked in contemporary domestic and foreign policy issues, including immigration and foster care. The narratives and institutions that underpin the oppression of Indigenous sovereignty have only been adjusted, not dissolved.

The unconditional right to vote was extended to all Indigenous Peoples in 1960, but lacked real political outcomes for Indigenous people because the federal government continued

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230 Bonita Lawrence, “Gender, Race, and the Regulation of Native Identity in Canada and the United States.”
to deny Indigenous sovereignty and remediations. In 1969, the government of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau released a White Paper that advocated for the termination of the Indian Act, to “void all treaties between Indigenous Peoples and Canada,” and “dismantle the Department of Indian Affairs.”231 The Paper’s foreword states the Government will offer “another road for Indians, a road that would lead gradually away from different status to full social, economic and political participation in Canadian life. This is the choice. Indian people must be persuaded, must persuade themselves, that this path will lead them to a fuller and richer life.”232 At this juncture, the dismantling of the Indian Act was intended to perpetuate the project of assimilation through policy veiled as an extension of equal rights.

The Paper invokes a narrative of “Indian people’s role of dependence” that blames Indigenous communities for their material conditions rather than structures and policies created by the Canadian government that create unequal outcomes. As the Civil Rights Era progressed from 1960 onwards, the government’s extension of “rights” was coupled with the expectation that Indigenous Peoples should give up “status,” or “privileges” in order to fully integrate within Canadian society. By loudly calling for First Nations to relinquish “status” and “privilege,” the Canadian government constructed a narrative of Indigenous indolence and greed while positioning itself as a generous benefactor and provider of welfare. However, some First Nations expressed concerns over the removal of the Act because it also served to uphold agreements between the British monarchy to preserve Indigenous territory through the process of treaty-making.233 Therefore, the pursuit of Indigenous rights and sovereignty cannot be decoupled from Canadian legislation.

231 Joseph, 90.
233 Joseph, 90.
For the last twenty years, the Canadian government has taken significant steps to confront its foundation as a settler colonialist nation through civil cases regarding environmental, educational, and economic policy. On 19 September, 2007, the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, the largest class-action settlement in Canadian history, took effect. During the legal proceedings, the Assembly of First Nations, Government of Canada, legal counsels for Churches and former students, and various Indigenous organizations reached consensus to implement a “fair and lasting resolution to the legacy of Indian Residential Schools.” The agreement includes five core elements: a Common Experience Payment, Independent Assessment Process for those who experienced sexual or physical abuse, healing measures, commemorative activities, and the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The Government of Canada funds TRC’s work to create historical records of the school system, host national events to spread awareness, and commemorate survivors and victims. In 2015, the TRC published a 6-volume Final Report, detailing the history and legacy of the residential school system. This official report necessitates the Canadian government take concrete steps for remediation and reconciliation. The commission completed its mandate in 2015, but Indigenous Peoples and their allies continue to pursue more extensive policy responses and fiscal compensation in response to the TRC’s findings.

In 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized on behalf of the Canadian government, recognizing assimilationist policies have had a “lasting and damaging impact on aboriginal culture, heritage and language.” However, his comments at the G20 Summit in

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania the following year reveal a disconnect between his government’s official stance and his candid sentiment regarding Canada’s relationship to Indigenous Peoples: “We also have no history of colonialism. So we have all of the things that many people admire about the great powers but none of the things that threaten or bother.” This explicitly revisionist history of Canada, which positions the nation as a great power without any of the vices ascribed to the United States or Australia, obscures pressing domestic disparity while attaining political cache at the international level. Although Canada is relatively progressive in its approach to reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, discriminatory practices remain embedded within the structures of Canadian welfare.

*Child Welfare*

Today, Indigenous children are vastly over-represented in Canada’s child welfare system. Federal and provincial authority over the welfare of Indigenous children is a continuation of paternalistic state intervention manifested in the reserve and residential school systems. Although Indigenous children only make up 4.1 percent of children under age 15 in Ontario, they comprise 30 percent of the children in foster care. In British Columbia, an Indigenous child is “six times more likely to be taken into care than a non-Aboriginal child.” The system of birth alerts disproportionately affect Indigenous Peoples; child protection services consistently deem Indigenous parents unfit to care for their child upon birth at higher rates than non-Indigenous parents. The foster care system allows the state to assume responsibility for babies without

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237 Ljunggren, “Every G20 nation.”
239 Baswan and Yenilmez, “The Sixties Scoop.”
240 Baswan and Yenilmez.
parental consent, and usually places children in non-Indigenous homes: a direct parallel to the regime of residential schools.

An underlying belief that White Canadian parents are inherently better equipped to raise children than Indigenous parents underpins the diversion of Indigenous children from their communities to non-Indigenous homes. Justifications for nonconsensual foster care are based on the material conditions of parents, which can be mitigated by the state through earnest efforts for remediation. Andre Bear attests, “When we look at social work, we have to look at rebuilding the nationhood of Indigenous peoples. And that starts with the family and making sure that we are not doing more to destroy those families, that we are doing the best that we can to keep them together.”

Initiatives led by Canada’s National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls address this crisis by truth-seeking missions and the publication of reports detailing abuses by the welfare system and its agents. The organization actively reclaims the power and place of Indigenous Peoples in Canada through formal inquiries and hearings with Knowledge Keepers and experts within and outside of government. In addition, leaders in Indigenous communities consistently attest to “specific colonial and patriarchal policies that displaced women from their traditional roles in communities and governance and diminished their status in society, leaving them vulnerable to violence.” Indigenous families and communities would benefit from the deconstruction of welfare systems that disproportionately deny women the right to raise their children. Grassroots movements led by women, elders, and


their allies to reclaim power and agency in civil society would reinforce and reassert the sovereignty of First Nations from the ground up.

*Immigration Policy*

Canada has not received heavy criticism regarding its immigration policy, and the public has been overwhelmingly receptive to the resettlement of refugees. In 2022, 69 percent of Canadians disagreed when asked whether immigration levels were too high. However, many Canadians express concerns regarding assimilation, dilution of “Canadian values,” and how “dependent” refugees will be on state welfare. In this way, xenophobic and racist undercurrents continue to inform the nation’s immigration policy. In positioning itself as a multicultural haven, Canada obscures its past and present discriminatory practices.

Policies intended to mitigate the racial heterogeneity were packaged as policies intended to facilitate conformity to Canadian society and culture. Through the 20th century, federal and provincial immigration policy was shaped to benefit the Canadian economy without substantially altering the racial makeup of the nation. When Chinese workers were in high demand to build the Canadian Pacific Railway in the 1880s, British Columbia welcomed the labor, but attempted to prohibit the permanent settlement of Chinese men. Policies including the Chinese Head Tax, restriction of Japanese immigration, and a proposed ban on Black Americans were characterized as protections of the economic wellbeing of Canadian workers, but were inherently racial projects.

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The designation of space as ‘White’ in the early 20th century manifests the perceived success of the settler colonialist project. Between 1905 and 1912, some Black Americans turned towards Canada to escape racial persecution in Oklahoma. However, they faced discrimination as immigrants in Canada due to fears of the degradation of White Canada. In 1911, the Edmonton Chapter of Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire in 1911 lamented “[This] immigration will have the immediate effect of... discouraging white settlement in the vicinity of the Negro farms and will depreciate the value of all holdings within such areas.”

The value of Canadian property was still informed by race; the presence of people of color threatened the profitability of land that settlers reallocated from ‘Indigenous’ to ‘White.’ The fear and rejection of racialized ‘others’ in Canada was inspired by and contingent upon Indigenous Peoples’ perpetual disconnection from White Canadian society.

Canadian immigration policy is relatively liberal compared to other Western countries, but public approval remains heavily informed by conceptions of “Canadian values” and economic “dependence” rooted in the racialization of ‘outsiders.’ A nationwide poll in 2022 found that “the most common reasons for too much immigration are that it represents a threat to Canadian or Quebec culture (e.g., identity, values, language) (24%), that immigrants are a drain on public finances and the welfare system (23%), or that they are generally bad for the economy (e.g., taking jobs away from other Canadians (21%)).” The narrative of immigrants producing economic turmoil by “taking jobs” and “draining” public finances is reminiscent of rhetoric used to accuse Indigenous Peoples of reliance on state welfare. Prime Minister Trudeau’s immigration plan counters these narratives by advocating for an expansion of immigration “as a way to build

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246 “Canadian public opinion,” Environics Institute.
up the Canadian economy, which faces labor shortages and a declining birth rate” and “prioritizes bringing in skilled immigrants.”247 The category “skilled immigrants” reifies a group of people as distinct from “unskilled” immigrants, a malleable collective who may be discriminated against on the basis of race, nationality, or language.

Conclusion

Canada continues to make great strides in progressing towards a more equitable future for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples, but the path forward will not be forged without serious resistance from stakeholders benefiting from access to Indigenous resources and dismissal of Indigenous sovereignty. The government must prioritize serious consultation with First Nations’ in approving and implementing environmental projects, including those meant to mitigate the effects of climate change. For example, the proposed Lake Manitoba and Lake St. Martin Outlet Channels Project, which entails the construction of two 24-kilometer-long flood diversion channels to prevent future flooding, currently threatens the Indigenous Peoples who live in the watershed.248 The Impact Assessment Agency of Canada invited First Nations to provide input on the project before May 2024; it is crucial the state sincerely considers the assessment of Indigenous leaders and community members before proceeding if it intends to realize promises to Truth and Reconciliation. Bob Joseph aspires that “In the short term, if Canadians can stay committed to reconciliation, personally review the 94 recommendations drawn up by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, and pursue the ones relevant to them, perhaps we could see the strengthening of the nation-to-nation relationship and create a better, more

prosperous Canada that lives up to its fundamental ideology of recognition of human rights not just abroad but at home as well.”

Chapter IV: The United States of America

Inventing “Manifest Destiny”

Over 23,000 thousand years ago, people traveled via land and sea to North America; since then, Indigenous Peoples have produced vibrant and diverse histories. Yet, the prevailing American histories are told from the perspective of European colonizers. U.S. history traditionally taught in schools, which positions the “discovery” of the continent in 1492 and the history of its civilization at the point of the initial Dutch and British settlements, obscures the failures, transgressions, and egregious actions of European explorers and settlers of the “New World.” The terms “pre-Columbian” and “post-Columbian” North American history reify the significance of colonization by deeming Columbus’s voyage as a singular, pivotal moment in the history of Western civilization. Ironically, given Columbus’ and his crew’s depravities, colonists and, later, historians, constructed narratives of the savagery and backwardness of Native Peoples to justify exploitation, plundering, and destruction.

As in Canada, early European settlers in what would become the United States strategically positioned themselves as equal partners to create treaties, but, once established, Europeans, including the British Crown, deemed themselves civilized benefactors when seeking to assume rights and territory. Indeed, the terms by which state and federal governments, after the establishment of the United States, confiscated Indigenous land were born from political,

249 Joseph, 105.
250 National Park Service, “Archeology This Month: Native American Heritage,”
https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/archeology-this-month-native-american-heritage.htm#--text=Archeological%20and%20gene
economic, and military insecurities that hindered complete domination and assimilation of Indigenous Peoples. The construction and transformation of narratives of British imperialism, American democracy, and Indigenous sovereignty are fundamental to the evolution of power and agency in the United States.

Indigenous Peoples prevented and resisted significant colonization until the 18th century; it was only at this point that the impact of disease began to shift the power dynamic between settlers and natives significantly enough for White settlers to violently supplant Indigenous sovereignties along the Atlantic coast. Colonizers argued their cultural superiority and relationship to God not only preordained their survival and success as colonialists, but validated the destruction, and subsequent replacement, of Indigenous Peoples. As settler populations increased and Indigenous populations waned, colonists forged West with families and African slaves, following their “Manifest Destiny.”

Contemporary disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples in access to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are grounded in institutions of property rights, education, agriculture, and industry that were built by White settler colonialists. Both material conditions and abstract conceptions of Native Americans continue to be warped through purportedly neutral narratives of civilization, race, and religion. These narratives allowed for acceptance and perpetuation of racial capitalism that originated with the colonial economy and continue to justify the nation’s imperialist and racist foreign policies. The terms of colonialist and neocolonialist American history continue to inform the great myth of “one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

Invasion

From the late 16th to 18th centuries, the Atlantic coast was a site of competition between Spanish, French, British, and Dutch actors to pursue various economic, religious, and political gains by settling on Indigenous land. During this early period of colonization, Indigenous people largely allowed and/or rejected European settlement on their own terms. Colonies that survived only did so by accepting invaluable resources and knowledge shared by Indigenous leaders and community members. Settlers constructed and exported narratives of European dominance upon their arrival in North America; their religious and economic prerogatives to “civilize” the natives and land fostered the movement of European people and resources to the “New World.” However, contrary to popular narratives about the invariable strength of European civilization, colonies only became viable after disease significantly weakened Indigenous populations.

In 1508, Florida was home to over 350,000 Indigenous people; when Ponce de León of Spain arrived with the intent to build a Spanish colony, he was quickly driven away by the Calusas people. Despite León’s explicit failure, King Ferdinand praised his success as an explorer and granted him ‘permission’ to colonize Puerto Rico with military support. León’s second attempt to create a Spanish colony in 1521 resulted in his death from an Indian arrow; Indigenous people assertively held the Spanish at bay. Despite a few “petty plunder regimes,” ruled by Spanish conquistadors, “North America was still essentially Indigenous” by the end of the 16th century.

Farther north, the Roanoke Indians received the first English settlers in 1584. The settlers proceeded to barricade themselves within an encampment, which failed after a year. Myths of

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252 Hämäläinen, Indigenous Continent, 63.
253 Hämäläinen, 37.
254 Hämäläinen, 37.
255 Hämäläinen, 58.
the colony’s mysterious disappearance persist today. Some narratives emphasize the vicious nature of the Roanoke Indians, rather than the invasion and subsequent ineptitude of the British to sustain themselves in an extreme and self-isolated environment.

In 1606, three ships carrying Englishmen arrived on the shores of the vast Powhatan Empire. The empire, ruled by Wahunsenacawh, stretched to the Appalachian mountains and contained nearly 24,000 members at the time. In stark contradiction to European narratives of *terra nullius*, Algonquian-speaking peoples had deemed the area ‘Tsenacomoco,’ meaning ‘densely inhabited land.’ Jamestown, the nascent British settlement named after King James II, quickly fell into a state of emergency as the colonists failed to transpose European agricultural practices onto American lands. Because the colonists were desperate to trade special tools and metals such as copper for food, Wahunsenacawh found value in acceptance of the English under his domain. Powhatan women, “highly autonomous and public actors,” advocated for the protection of the colonists, and with their help, Jamestown survived. However, the colonists’ relationship with Wahunsenacawh and his people was “still a tenuous one.”

In 1619, more English settlers arrived in Jamestown with African slaves, who performed domestic and agricultural labor, including growing large quantities of tobacco. Tensions between colonists and Indigenous people festered as the settlers profited from tobacco, their numbers grew, and livestock destroyed Indigenous land. In 1622, Opechancanough, Wahunsenacawh’s successor, waged an assault against Jamestown, sensing his window of opportunity to protect his

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256 Hämäläinen, 63.
258 Hämäläinen, 63.
259 Hämäläinen, 63.
260 Hämäläinen, 63.
lands and people was closing. Opechancanough's soldiers killed one-third of the settler population in the attack. Despite their clear military inadequacy, English who remained and wished to stay in the colony declared “conquering them is much easier than civilizing them by fair means.”

As the colonists and Powhatan people engaged in a war of attrition over resources, colonists hypocritically spoke of the behavior of “the savages” while obscuring or justifying their own gruesome and inhumane assaults against Indigenous Peoples. After Opechancanough was killed in his old age by an English soldier, the empire, “built on kinship ties… backed by military power,” began to disintegrate under the destruction of European livestock and disease. By 1675, the population of Jamestown totaled 40,000, but the colony was “curbed, cramped, and unhealthy,” limited to the coast and surrounded by Indigenous populations who continued to resist expansion.

Algonquian Peoples ruled to the north; they demonstrated impressive sea power that “kept much of the Atlantic coast free of colonial bases for decades.” When, in 1620, a year after Jamestown was first settled, the Mayflower reached the Atlantic coast, the Puritan separatists found empty villages left behind by the Indigenous Wampanoag population – 90 percent of whom had died from disease in recent years. Ousamequin allowed the settlers to build Plymouth because he and his people were desperate for new allies, and saw potential in the colonists as trading partners. Notably, unlike in Virginia, English separatists in Plymouth hoped to lead private lives, rather than execute Britain's economic and imperial ambitions for personal gain.

261 Hämäläinen, 66.
262 Hämäläinen, 68.
263 Hämäläinen, 68.
264 Hämäläinen, 71.
265 Hämäläinen, 71.
Whether Puritans or Royalists, however, upon their arrival in North America, the English immediately began to construct narratives of their cultural superiority in relation to the native population. Governor William Bradford denounced the Wampanoag people as malevolent savages.\textsuperscript{266} Despite the fact that the colonists sought native assistance in planting and sustaining crops of corn, one settler described how “we are encompassed about with helpless and idle people, the natives of this country, which cannot, in any comely or comfortable matter, help themselves, much less us.”\textsuperscript{267}

In 1629, King Charles I issued a royal charter for settlement of the imagined Massachusetts Bay Colony without Indigenous consent. During the Great Migration from 1630 to 1633, the colony imported three thousand Puritan men and women, who “began to spread in all directions, clearing forests, marking out farms, and building out roads without consulting the Indians.”\textsuperscript{268} The charter justified claims to “fictional property rights over Indigenous territories,” a practice which would be perpetuated over the next two hundred years.\textsuperscript{269} The official seal of the colony depicted an Indigenous man holding a bow and arrow with the words “Come Over and Help Us” emerging from his mouth. This myth of Indigenous desire and need for “saving” projected the image of Indigenous Peoples as welcoming and receptive to Christianity and Western civilization. This narrative remained essential to the project of settler recruitment into the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

As the colonists broadcast this message of harmonious collaboration back to England, the British settlers engaged in protracted conflict with Indigenous Peoples to hold and gain territory. Many Indigenous groups forged alliances with one another, including the Five Nations, who

\textsuperscript{266} Hämäläinen, 73.
\textsuperscript{267} Hämäläinen, 73.
\textsuperscript{268} Hämäläinen, 76.
\textsuperscript{269} Hämäläinen, 74.
leveraged their strength in negotiations with British and French colonizers. As disease tore through Indigenous communities, the British pointed to the intervention of God, who “seemed to have intervened on behalf of the righteous, striking down their enemies.” Narratives of White dominance, therefore, were tied to their relationship with God. Indigenous rebellions spread through all regions of North America at the end of the 17th century, threatening the imperial ambitions of the English, French, and Spanish and fostering concerns that the New Englanders’ “god was displeased with them,” which fomented dissent and distrust within settler communities. Although the colonies were plagued with internal and external political, economic, and religious strife, their populations continued to increase and disease spread, which shifted the balance of power in favor of colonists with regard to both Indigenous and imperial forces.

The Birth of (Another) North American Nation

The end of the French and Indian War was a critical juncture for relations among British imperialists, American colonists, and Indigenous Peoples. Although the British Crown imagined the line dividing English and Indigenous territory in the Royal Proclamation of 1763 as an “instrument of peace and stability,” the imperialists incorrectly assessed that separation between colonists and Indigenous Peoples would mitigate conflict on the continent. The arbitrary line in the sand between Indigenous and non-Indigenous North America was impossible for the British to enforce, and heightened tensions with Indigenous Peoples, who became increasingly marginalized from borderland trade and the colonial economy. The Proclamation failed to

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270 Hämäläinen, 77.  
271 Hämäläinen, 189.
consider the dynamic nature of military and economic alliances and relationships between colonists and Indigenous Peoples – many of which were on Indigenous terms.

The Proclamation of 1763 not only failed to “protect” Indigenous sovereignty, but instigated separatist attitudes among settlers, which produced severe consequences for Indigenous life and land. George Washington and elite colonists viewed the British Crown’s controls on trade, migration, and expansion as discriminatory and unfair. For colonists disillusioned with British imperial interventions in the American colonies, the Proclamation “marked the beginning of a clear ideological break with the mother country,” which “ultimately aided in pushing the colony to rebellion in the following decade.”

Narratives of the barbarity and inhumanity of Indigenous Peoples entrenched within the minds of settlers who consistently used violence as a tool of westward expansion. Once French ambitions in the interior were extinguished, they were quickly replaced by colonists who assessed the formerly “French territory” as open range for settlement. Ignoring the regulations put in place by the Proclamation, Anglo settlers plunged farther into the interior. In 1763, the Paxton Boys, a group of Scots Irish settlers, waged a ruthless campaign as they drove west; during a rampage in 1763, they “hacked fourteen Conestoga people, eight of them children, to pieces. The only reason for the killing seemed to be ingrained hatred of Indians”. The British government was “powerless to stop the vigilantes, who openly defied British authorities and laws.”

In 1763, Pontiac and his allies waged a collective response to the influx of Anglo settlers and began an assault against the British that swept through the Great Lakes region, Ohio Country, and Illinois Country. Pontiac’s Rebellion seriously threatened British rule in the region

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273 Hämäläinen, 296.
but dissolved in 1764 after it failed to capture Fort Pitt and Fort Detroit. Although Pontiac and his allied nations fell short of preventing further expansion, they revealed the instability of British military power on the American continent, contradicting narratives of inevitable European domination.

At the same time, tensions between colonists and the British raged along the Atlantic coast. Popular understandings of the American Revolution as a European great power conflict neglect the fundamental roles of Indigenous Peoples in the war. As the Founding Fathers created arguments for American independence, “native nations were, from the start, necessary and ambiguous actors in the war, whether in the battlefield or as props for propaganda.”^274^ Patriots simultaneously called for freedom and democracy; degraded and violated Indigeneity sovereignty; and recognized their necessity of the incredible power and influence of Indigenous Peoples to win. In *Common Sense*, Paine attested the King was more savage than a “naked and untutored Indian.” The Declaration of Independence protests the King has “excited domestic insurrections amongst us and has endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rules of warfare, is an indistinguishable destruction of all ages, sexes, and conditions.”

These narratives position Indigenous Peoples as fundamentally external to the American nation. However, because the war was fought on Indigenous territory, with significant material consequences for the future of Indigeneity, it was inescapable._^275^ Hämäläinen articulates that “the majority of Native nations wanted nothing to do with the war, but some saw it as an opportunity to revive the strategy of playing off one colonial power against another. Some were simply swept

^274^ Hämäläinen, 307.
^275^ Hämäläinen, 308.
into the conflict.”  

276 The sovereignty of the United States has always been contingent upon the relinquishment, denial, or destruction of Indigenous sovereignty.

Narratives and Mechanisms

Westward Expansion

Once the revolution was won, American leaders and White settlers adjusted British narratives of Native barbarity, dependency, and racial backwardness to meet the needs of the nascent nation which sought uninhibited growth. In the late 18th century, the creation of formal executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the United States added new dimensions to the power struggle between Indigenous Peoples and White settlers. The Founding Fathers hypocritically railed against the exploitation of the British Crown while conspiring the domination of Indigenous Peoples for economic and political gain. The state-sponsored removal of Indigenous Peoples to “create space” for American settlers became foundational to American politics. The incredible extent of forced removals through the 20th century was not inevitable; it was a slow process of degradation met with incredible resistance from Native Peoples. In 1803, the Osage nation relinquished 80,000 square miles of territory, hoping to guarantee its people’s future security. However, sweeping policies of “Indian removal” provided a politically expedient alternative to extermination and assimilation, and “within two years, approximately a thousand Cherokees had been removed to Arkansas against their will.”

277 “Civilizing missions” served as justifications for the infiltration of White settlers on native lands. In the early years of the republic, Jefferson argued that a “nascent civilization program, which was designed to turn Native hunters into farmers and Native women into

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276 Hämäläinen, 308.
277 Hämäläinen, 388.
housekeepers by providing the necessary tools and reeducation,” would assimilate Indigenous people into Western society; he perceived this as an ideal outcome for Indigenous nations.\textsuperscript{278}

Assimilation, therefore, was a tool of entrenching social and economic White supremacy as settlers continued to infiltrate and populate Native lands. However, the most intensive assimilationist policy could only be implemented after federal policy created the conditions to deprive Indigenous Peoples of rights to inhabit and/or govern their traditional lands.

White settlers understood the expansion of the cotton industry to be contingent upon the ‘redistribution’ of Indigenous land. However, Indigenous Peoples were already economically productive; White settlers wanted to assume complete ownership of their means of production to “create space” for King Cotton. Hämäläinen illustrates the disconnect between the impulse to acquire more land from Indigenous Peoples and the actual demand and capacity for development: “Congress was concerned that the supply of public land far exceeded the demand… It was clear that the underlying motives driving Indigenous dispossession were not economic but racial.”\textsuperscript{279}

Racial logics were increasingly invoked to justify the expulsion of Indigenous Peoples precisely because Indigenous Peoples were outperforming and competing with Americans in their own “civilization.” In the early 1800s, several Indigenous nations strategically adapted their traditional practices to fit with Western “civilization;” by countering the narratives that justified removal, Indigenous leaders hoped to invest in their future sovereignty.\textsuperscript{280} Although the settlers described themselves as inherently more efficient, Indigenous Peoples proved to be competent, if not more productive, in Western methods of land cultivation. In the 1820s, Indigenous Peoples

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{278} Hämäläinen, 349.
\item \textsuperscript{279} Hämäläinen, 391.
\item \textsuperscript{280} Hämäläinen, 390.
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including Cherokees, Chickasaws, Choctaws, and Muscogees, lived on the most fertile land, practiced Western agriculture, and even enslaved African people.

The Cherokee nation “adhered to the American standard of civilization to convince the U.S. government to let them stay on their ancestral homelands” by creating a Western-style legal code, centralizing power, publishing newspapers, boasting a literacy rate over 90 percent, and “improving” the land.\(^{281}\) Moreover, some Indigenous people elected to receive Western education in order to formally learn the mechanisms and justifications of American expansion and then manipulate tools of exploitation, including treaties and property ownership. For example, Indigenous people engaged in land speculation to increase the price and drive down the demand for their land, protecting it from White settlement.

Simultaneously, American leaders advocated for the “removal” of Indigenous Peoples to create space for White settlement. In 1829, President Andrew Jackson began to transform the concept of “Indian removal” into a formal American project. Jackson constructed the illusion that Indigenous people were *naturally* receding further into the interior as American pioneers forged westward. The Indian Removal Act of 1830, which authorized the president to exchange land west of the Mississippi for land within state borders, institutionalized the practice of forced removal of Indigenous Peoples onto “territories.”\(^{282}\) The Cherokee Nation, led by Chief John Ross, contested their displacement, and petitioned to the federal government, arguing “we are deprived of membership in the human family!” Indigenous Peoples resisted assaults by rogue settlers and the federal government to occupy their lands but were met with violence. In 1838, President Martin Van Buren sent General Winfield Acott and 2,200 soldiers to forcibly remove

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\(^{281}\) Hämäläinen, 390.  
Cherokee people from their homes at bayonet point. The US Army rounded up and incarcerated Cherokee people within temporary camps, where death from starvation and disease was common; after months of “roundups,” survivors were forcibly marched west on the “Trail of Tears.”

Ironically, “civilization” programs were active and growing as land surveyors marked Indigenous Peoples for removal by the U.S. Army. Forced removals and land grabs were decentralized and unorganized in practice; White settlers claimed land illicitly, and their violence was left unchecked by government officials. By the 1840s, Indigenous Peoples no longer dominated the West; official “Indian territory” was relegated within the interior, where settlers perceived Indigenous Peoples as a “barrier” to westward expansion incited by the gold rush. The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 constructed the two states in the “heart of Indian Country,” opening up the Indigenous land for White settlement. The act not only provoked violence among Americans over whether slavery should expand westward, but also over the “land they had wrestled from Indians in a complex process involving railroad companies, federal agents, armed squatters, the military, and a haze of dubious legal claims.”

Expulsion to Assimilation

By the end of the Civil War, Indigenous Nations were reeling from widespread removal from traditional homelands, the incessant spread of disease, and protracted violence with settlers. At this point, the federal government had enough power to enforce “national laws upon tribal

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284 Hämäläinen, 395.
285 Hämäläinen, 395.
286 Immerwahr, How to Hide an Empire, 41.
287 Immerwahr, 41.
members under its jurisdiction.”288 Therefore, narratives constructed with regard to Native Americans became increasingly infused by ideologies of “forcible inclusion and assimilation.”289 In practice, federal and state governments “assimilated” Indigenous Peoples by denying Indigenous sovereignty and identity through the reservation system, anti-miscegenation laws, and residential schools. Paradoxically, the U.S. government boasted the freedom, material support, and opportunities it “granted” Indigenous nations, while systematically denying Indigenous Peoples access to life and liberty.

Between Reconstruction and World War II, state and private actors negotiated contracts to assume the rights of Indigenous land that commonly violated treaties between the U.S. government and Indigenous Nations.290 The widespread subversion of the federal government undermined the diplomatic illusion of U.S. and Indigenous affairs; in addition, the federal government actively supported the privatization and nationalization of Indigenous lands through its own legislation. The General Allotment Act of 1887, also known as the Dawes Act, implemented an allotment system in which “Individual tribal members, not communal bodies or governments, received title as the federal government aimed to alienate individuals from collective structures of tribal governance.”291 To receive an “allotment” from the federal government, individuals had to register with the Bureau of Indian Affairs; agents then determined whether their claims would be recognized.292 Indigenous sovereignty, therefore, was systematically denied at the individual and tribal levels.

289 Blackhawk, The Rediscovery of America, 349.
290 Blackhawk, 349.
291 Blackhawk, 349.
The subdivision of reservations weakened the cohesion and power of Indigenous collectives to resist projects of assimilation. In 1887, Native Peoples governed 138 million acres of land; by the time the act was repealed in 1934, they governed 48 million acres. The Gradual Allotment Act was bolstered by the Homestead Acts; while decentralizing Indigenous property ownership and governance, the federal government created opportunities for White homesteaders to claim Indigenous lands for agricultural “development.”

As the United States expanded farther into Indigenous lands, legal and extralegal mechanisms implemented by the federal government ensured Indigenous Peoples remained external to the project of White nation building. Native American individuals were not counted in the census. From 1885 to 1940, the Census Bureau produced the Indian Census Rolls, a racialized project parallel to the federal census that systematically excluded Indigenous Peoples from the state. In addition, the 14th Amendment had no consequence for Native Americans, who the Constitution defined as “Indians not taxed,” and therefore without citizenship.

As in Canada, anti-miscegenation laws in the United States served to expand and protect the property rights of White men; however, they were often more extreme and explicit. State laws prohibited interracial marriage with a wide range of criteria framed as “scientific,” which racialized groups differently throughout time and place. The prohibition of marriage between White men and Indian women was intended to “ensure the protection of settlers’ property” by preventing the transfer of property ownership from a White husband to an Indigenous wife upon her partner’s death. For example, in 1922 Ophelia Paquet, “lost control of her late husband’s estate to her brother-in-law when the Oregon Supreme Court ruled her marriage of thirty-three

293 National Park Service, “The Dawes Act,”
294 Blackhawk, 332.
years null and void, because her husband had been white” in accordance with the 1866 Act to Prohibit the Intermarriage of Races.295

On the other hand, marriage could allow White men to assume the property of Indigenous women, who could be denied access to their assets after marriage. Notoriously, White men married into the Osage Nation to steal Indigenous wealth accumulated through oil extraction. State legislatures strategically constructed and invoked anti-miscegenation laws to aid White men in their pursuit of Indigenous land, resources, and wealth.

*Residential Schools*

While some Indigenous people leveraged Western education to protect their own sovereignty, Americans viewed education as a tool of the assimilationist project grounded in religious and social imperatives. Between 1819 and 1969, the United States “operated or supported 408 boarding schools across 37 states (or then-territories)… in pursuit of a policy of cultural assimilation that coincided with Indian territorial dispossession.”296 In 1819, Congress passed the Indian Civilization Act, which allocated federal dollars to residential schools and White-run schools on tribal land. In addition, the government supported schools with money from Tribal trust accounts, “including those based on cessions of Indian territories to the United States.”

Proponents of residential schools constructed them as democratizing institutions that deemed Indigenous peoples as “deserving” of Western education and acculturation. In 1892 at the National Conference of Charities and Correction, Captain Richard Henry Pratt coined the

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notorious phrase, “Kill the Indian, Save the Man.” In his speech, he asserted the “savagery” of Native Americans is a learned behavior; when placed within the “surroundings of civilization, he will grow to possess a civilized language and habit.” Paradoxically, Pratt argued that residential schools would grant Indigenous children “the opportunities and privileges which we possess to enable him to assert his humanity and manhood,” while attesting to the “inalienable right to liberty and opportunity” of Indigenous people. Americans conceptualized the rights of Indigenous People in accordance with their proximity to whiteness; the colonizers’ perceived “benefits” of assimilation justified the erasure of Indigenous culture and sovereignty.

As in Canada, residential schools were collaborative projects between the federal government and religious missionaries. The Department of the Interior’s 2022 Report on residential schools found that “50 percent of Federal Indian boarding schools may have received support or involvement from a religious institution or organization, including funding, infrastructure, and personnel.” Both the philosophy and practices of the school administrations were similar in Canada, Australia, and the United States. Indigenous children suffered “physical, sexual, cultural and spiritual abuse and neglect” after being removed from their homes and families, and then were “punished for speaking their Native language, banned from acting in any way that might be seen to represent traditional or cultural practices, stripped of traditional clothing, hair and personal belongings reflective of their native culture.” As the federal government built an American empire through the 20th century, Indigenous children were increasingly swept up into residential schools. 20,000 children were in boarding schools in 1900;

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298 The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, “US Indian Boarding School History,” https://boardingschoolhealing.org/education/us-indian-boarding-school-history/#!--text=There%20were%20more%20than%20523,they%20spoke%20their%20Native%20languages.
five years later, the number had tripled. By 1926, nearly 83 percent of Indian school-age children were attending boarding schools.299

Residential schools were a critical component of the imperialist mission to expand the borders of the United States beyond the continent. Schools for Indigenous children operated by settlers, agents, an/or missionaries were prevalent outside the continental United States; colonizers established dozens on Native Hawaiian and Alaskan lands. Hawaiian schools, which the territorial government established to deepen “colonial efforts to dispossess Native Hawaiians of their land and culture,” often operated along gendered lines and exploited the labor of Indigenous children.300 In Native Alaskan territories, Christian missionaries built schools from 1878 onwards, and many were taken over by the federal government in the 20th century as the government sought to incorporate Alaska as a state.

Contemporary Disparities

As in Australia and Canada, Indigenous Peoples in the United States and its territories face disparate outcomes in economic, physical, and mental wellbeing in relation to White Americans. American Indians and Alaskan Natives face a life expectancy 5.5 years lower than the population of all other races in the United States.301 Leading causes of death are heart disease, cancer, accidents, diabetes, and alcoholism.302 Rates of suicide are 1.7 times higher for Indigenous Peoples.303 The Indian Health Service, a federal health program, provides healthcare, generates reports, and creates action plans concerning the healthcare of American Indians and

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301 Indian Health Services, “Disparities,” https://www.ihs.gov/newsroom/factsheets/disparities/
302 Indian Health Services, “Disparities.”
303 Indian Health Services.
Alaska Natives. By providing resources for receiving services, generating tribal and urban partnerships, and distributing tribal management grants, the service seeks to confront the historic malpractice of federal agencies in their relations with Indigenous Peoples. However, the healthcare delivery system is chronically underfunded and continues to fail Indigenous Peoples.

In addition, the acute disproportionality of Indigenous children in the child welfare system reveals the legacy of federal and state policies that intentionally damaged relationships between children, their homes, and communities. The Indian Child Welfare Act was passed in 1978 as a response to welfare practices that targeted Indigenous children for removal from their homes; however, biases regarding the ability of Indigenous Peoples to care for their children continue to influence which children enter the foster care system and which children stay in their communities. When a child is American Indian or Alaskan native, reports of abuse are twice as likely to be investigated and have “allegations of abuse or neglect substantiated.” Therefore, Indigenous children face more contact with the state, and ultimately are “four times more likely to be placed in foster care than Causasian/White children.” In response, collectives including the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) support the security of Indigenous children within their communities, while organizing tribal governments to enact change at the federal and state levels.

In 2023, President Biden’s Department of the Interior announced steps to “strengthen the nation-to-nation relationship with Tribal Nations, including new efforts to increase Tribal co-stewardship of lands and waters, incorporate Indigenous Knowledge into the Department’s work, and preserve and protect sacred sites around the country.” A focus on repairing

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nation-to-nation relations must be bolstered with the allocation of significant funds to support tribal improvement of Indigenous education and healthcare systems. As part of the American Rescue Plan, the Biden Administration “invested $32 billion in Tribal Nations and Native communities, the largest single financial assistance investment to Tribal governments in history.” Continuous infusions of fiscal support, coupled with bilateral engagement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders, has the potential to dramatically improve the security of Indigenous Peoples.

This relationship becomes increasingly important in the face of climate change: non-Indigenous Americans must embrace a more sustainable way of life wherever possible. Robin Wall Kimmerer reminds us, “The trees act not as individuals, but somehow as a collective. Exactly how they do this, we don’t yet know. But what we see is the power of unity. What happens to one happens to us all. We can starve together or feast together.” The future of life in North America depends on the connection of green technology, sustainable environmental policy, and Indigenous Knowledge, which should be underpinned by respect of Indigenous sovereignty.

*Constructing the American Empire*

Popular narratives and scholarly accounts have always positioned Indigenous Peoples as external to both modern and contemporary history. American history attributed the decimation of Indigenous communities as the unfortunate, but unavoidable, product of disease, poor governance, and the inherent superiority of White settlers; these narratives deflected the need for

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307 Kimmerer, 15.
political accountability and critical scholarly investigation. Through the construction of historical narrative, as well as political and economic privileges White Americans accessed through Indigenous displacement, the U.S. government had ensured its stakeholders would not demand answers to questions of tribal welfare; after all, the nation was built and is sustained by Indigenous land and resources.

Ned Blackhawk describes how the “scholarly infrastructure” of the United States reifies Indigenous Peoples as inhabitants of “the twilight of the past.” As Americans displayed their ingenuity and “progress” at World Fairs, scholars and politicians invoked narratives that positioned Indigenous Peoples as “not simply outside of American ‘civilization’ but antithetical to it. They remained naturalized in ‘another time’ and represented the obverse to the nation’s fulfillment.”

Significantly, American studies were framed by Perry Miller’s Puritan origin story and Frederick Jackson Turner’s “thesis about the ‘vacant’ frontier as the enabling condition of American democracy.” As Dawson and Schueller point out, these histories were constructed at the same moment that Frantz Fanon built “radical anticolonial treatises questioning the universality of modernity.” Narratives of American expansion and progress were coupled with the false historical consciousness of democracy and freedom on the American frontier, which assumed an exceptionalist nature; indeed, “imperial policies are both a consequence and cause of a certain kind of culture” of exceptionalism.

The same narratives of development and civilization were deployed to justify the nation’s imperialist endeavors outside the continent from the 20th century onwards. Because the pursuit of “Manifest Destiny” was championed as a success story in North America, it could serve as

308 Blackhawk, 368.
310 Dawson and Schueller, Exceptional State, 5.
311 Dawson and Schueller, 5.
justification for American imperialism in Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Hawaii, Alaska, Panama, and the Samoan Islands. President Theodore Roosevelt’s imperialist ideology was informed by his understanding of U.S. history as intrinsically tied to expansion of American civilization across all borders: real and imagined. He conceived of the nation’s future in the same condescending terms used to describe U.S. relations with Indigenous leaders: “The reasoning which justifies our having made war against Sitting Bull also justifies our having checked the outbreak of Aguinaldo and his followers.” Therefore, if the U.S. was “morally bound to abandon the Philippines… we were also morally bound to abandon Arizona to the Apaches.”³¹² The moral dilemma Roosevelt constructed is rooted in the belief that American imperialism is a vehicle of civilization and democracy. This ideology is fueled by racist visions of those “who need saving.” Rudyard Kipling’s poem “The White Man’s Burden,” in which he describes the “new-caught, sullen peoples, / Half devil and half child” of the Philippines, encapsulates the racialized core of American imperialism that would supposedly “improve” the lives of Filipinos, Puerto Ricans, and Chamorros.³¹³

The persistence of narratives with “religious, economic, cultural, political, and racial elements” underpins the continuity of American exceptionalism by informing the “conviction shared by many contemporary politicians and citizens alike that the United States has always been and will always remain the provider and protector of the free world.”³¹⁴ American conceptions of the “free world” pertain to both political and economic realms. The ideological underpinnings of neoliberalism, the hegemonic paradigm of macroeconomics from the 1980s until the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, were “presented as common sense and ultimate good

³¹² Blackhawk, 376.
³¹³ Dawson and Schueller, 3.
³¹⁴ Dawson and Schueller, 15.
for all” by the United States. In describing the “so-called free market through institutions controlled by the United States,” American politicians, economics, and scholars relied on rhetoric that focused on how neoliberalism granted economic and political freedoms, obscuring the production and perpetuation of inequality intrinsic to the system.

Narratives of American exceptionalism also underpinned justifications for U.S. invasion and occupation in Afghanistan and Iraq. President George W. Bush constructed his Global War on Terror as a mission to protect all civilians from terrorist groups by installing democracy in the Middle East. His patriotic cries to defend the free world overshadowed ulterior motives for invading the Middle East: increased control of oil supply, vengeance for the supposed assassination attempt of George H. W. Bush by Saddam Hussein, and bolstering of the military-industrial complex. Kehinde Andrews argues, “the invasion of Iraq in 2003 was the most blatant neo-colonial expression of hard power of the twenty-first century.” He continues, “as has been the case for anywhere there has been colonialism,” the United States faced incredible resistance while fighting wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, yet constructed narratives of decisive victories that fit with the image of U.S. hegemony.

To disguise the politicized nature of war, Bush and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld appealed to the American ambition to defend the homeland, as well as democracy around the world, through the perpetuation of racist stereotypes. They drew from a xenophobic and anti-Muslim sentiment in the American public to demonize Muslim people, thereby justifying the rapid deployment of American troops, massive spending, and the bombing and subsequent murder of civilians in the Middle East. Yet, the American people could stomach the

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high rate of civilian casualties, deemed “collateral damage,” because the war was fought out of sight, and in the name of peace and liberation.

Contemporary Exploitation

The U.S. government continues to encroach upon Indigenous lands by extracting oil, gas, timber, and water from reservations - often without the approval or consideration of Indigenous Peoples. The legal agreements that permit the extraction of natural resources continue to infringe upon or completely deny Indigenous sovereignty.\(^{318}\) By maintaining “state trusts” on Indigenous lands, states take advantage of the federalist system to exploit Indigenous resources under the guise of federal protection. The term “state trust” invokes notions of conservation and preservation that conceal realities of development and destruction. The extent of state ownership of reservation land demonstrates this is not a phenomenon, but a systemic means of resource extraction contingent upon the violation of Indigenous sovereignties; as of February 2024, “ten states own 1.6 million acres of land within 83 tribal nations’ reservations.”\(^{319}\) As Smith and Parazo reveal, “states rely on Indigenous land and resources to support non-Indigenous institutions and offset state taxpayer dollars for non-Indigenous people. Tribal nations have no control over this land, and many states do not consult with tribes about how it’s used.”\(^{320}\) In this system of “trusts,” the state may sanction the extraction of surface and subsurface resources to fund public projects and institutions, including schools and penal reform institutions.\(^{321}\) Critically, the profits do not funnel back towards the communities to whom the land belongs; it is non-Indigenous outsiders who benefit from exploitation of Indigenous lands through resource

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\(^{319}\) Smith and Rose, “How states make money off tribal lands.”

\(^{320}\) Smith and Rose.

\(^{321}\) Smith and Rose.
consumption and engagement with public institutions. In this way, the “reservation” continues to function as a rhetorical device that obscures assaults on Indigenous lands, rather than protects them.

Conclusion

In Australia, Canada, and the United States, settler colonialism shared the same core elements: manipulation of Indigenous sovereignty through treaties, exploitation of resources, annihilation of communities by disease and violence, and extensive projects of forced assimilation. Indigenous Peoples in Australia and North America resist the force of colonizers and settlers by adapting to the ever changing landscape of their physical and spiritual conditions. Yet, histories of resistance are written over by the triumphant ascension narratives of European civilization and its expansion into the “New World.” Narratives of race, civilization, and religion that underpinned the execution of settler colonialism, colonization, and genocide persist in the present; they are ingrained in Western conceptualizations of history, law, and civil institutions. Narratives of White supremacy and religious piety created self-fulfilling prophecies; by framing the destruction of Indigenous Peoples as inevitable and preordained, colonizers found justification for land deaccession and forced removals.

At the core of each case is hypocrisy to the greatest scale: the colonizer, self-identified as civilized, righteous, and enlightened, is the ‘savage’ and manipulative aggressor. These Western states, beholden to settlers, slave-holders, and expansionists, constructed grand illusions of democracy and civilization through the destruction of Indigenous Knowledge and sovereignty. The frontier of modernity was always the death and decay of Indigenous modes of being.

Indigenous declension narratives and Eurocentric ascension narratives persisted and evolved 1) organically through North America and Australia through competition and
collaboration between colonizing states and 2) through top-down dissemination from the British crown. Colonizers were the primary agents in crafting narratives that intentionally obscured the failures of colonial life in North America and Australia in the early periods of colonization. As Indigenous Peoples resisted the invasion and settlement of Europeans, colonizers not only responded with violence, but adjusted their narratives of “success” to garner support and funds from the Crown, and British society at large, to survive. Therefore, narratives of race, civilization, and religion became embedded across all levels of the civil society: from Parliament to settlement.

The interconnectedness of these narratives ensure their potency and staying power. As the colonies grew, formal mechanisms were required for settlers to justify their activity in Indigenous spaces. The Western conceptualization of law and order as the ultimate form of truth and justice allowed for the rule of law to justify egregious actions. The founding of sovereign nation states allowed nascent governments to further institutionalize narratives of Western superiority. Legislation passed to “grant” Indigenous sovereignty and “educate” Indigenous children entrenched narratives of civilization and assimilation within public and private infrastructure. In addition, interactions among colonizers contributed to the invention of new mechanisms of exploitation, including residential schools.

In the cases of the U.S. and Canada, settler colonialism transpired contemporaneously through competition and collaboration between the colonizing forces. Competition between colonizers preserved the need for constructive relationships with Indigenous Peoples during the Seven Years’ War, Revolutionary War, and Civil War. Once internal and external competition for power among colonizers settled, the Americans’ attention turned towards annihilation of Indigenous Peoples in the name of “Manifest Destiny.” The Canadians, who remained part of the
British Commonwealth, sought to expand west, but were not propelled by the same desires to expand slavery and the cotton industry. Yet, Canadian leaders engaged in similar rhetoric of cultural superiority and economic development to justify the nation’s expansion; they turned towards the U.S. to learn from its “aggressive civilization policy.”

The British invaded Australia two centuries after colonists began to settle in North America; therefore, narratives of Indigenous “barbarity,” White supremacy, and civilizational superiority were already well established in Great Britain. Australians relied on these narratives, as well as the myth of “terra nullius” and the colonizers’ religious piety to justify the establishment of exploitative economic and political systems integral to the construction and maintenance of a White state. Unlike Canada and the U.S., Australia did not compete with other colonizing powers to gain land and power on the continent; therefore, leaders had little reason to strategically ally themselves with Indigenous Peoples, allowing for a more rapid assault of Indigenous spaces.

In each case, the law, presented as neutral and just, served the interests of the state to undermine both Indigenous sovereignty and, although illegitimate, British sovereignty. Generally, the U.S. Congress institutionalized mechanisms of Indigenous exploitation and repression along a similar timeline to the Canadian Parliament. For example, in 1879 Nicholas Davin published his notorious report after traveling to the U.S. to study the efficacy of the residential school system in “civilizing” Indigenous children. In the following years, the Canadian government cooperated extensively with religious missionaries to execute their contemporaneous mission of Indigenous assimilation vis-à-vis residential schools and anti-miscegenation laws. The conception of “reservations” for Indigenous Peoples seems to have developed independently in both cases, but the practice of relocating entire communities away
from their homelands was more extreme in the United States. Yet, in both nations the federal government forced distinct First Nations or tribes to cohabitate on the same land, violating Indigenous sovereignty and connection to place.

The mechanisms employed to acquire Indigenous lands were necessarily different between states due to the sustained influence of the British Crown in Canada and Australia, which contrasts with American independence. In Australia, the federal government did not implement a widespread system of federal reserves; however, churches established “missions,” where Aboriginal people were forcibly relocated. Australian colonizers invaded and settled upon Indigenous lands through more decentralized, but no less potent, mechanisms: forced child removal, destruction of Indigenous resources, sterilization, and violence. Yet, the justifications were similar to those used in Canada and the U.S.

In both Canada and the U.S., multiple levels of governance passed laws regarding Indigenous sovereignty, which allowed for the illusion of the states’ innocence through “legal” assaults on Indigenous sovereignty. In Canada, legislation designed to acquire land needed to subvert the exclusive right of the Crown to make treaties with Indigenous Peoples. The Canadian Indian Act of 1876 created “status” and “non-status” titles to delegitimize the rights of Indigenous Peoples to their land; the 1894 amendment allowed for Indigenous land to be leased without band approval. In addition, the 1872 Dominions Land Act facilitated the expansion of settlers onto “uncultivated” land. In the United States, the federal government pursued its own treaties with Indigenous peoples, which were violated through both federal and state laws. For example, the General Allotment Act of 1887 constructed a system of registration with the Bureau of Indian Affairs for Indigenous individuals to “receive” an allotment of land that damaged the cohesiveness and power of tribal collectives. American legislation constantly undercut treaties
between Indigenous Peoples and the U.S. federal government while injuring the power of Indigenous collectives. This dynamic is clear today in the establishment of “state trusts” on reservations.

Universally, disease was the decisive factor in the ability of settlers to succeed in their mission of replacement. The annihilation of Indigenous communities is not to be understated: “for the New World as a whole, the Indian population decline in the century or two following Columbus’s arrival is estimated to have been as large as 95 percent.”322 The critical question that demands further scholarly attention is the extent to which colonizers intentionally weaponized the spread of disease.323 Europeans witnessed the decimation of Indigenous communities with their own eyes; Jared Diamond asserts that “in countless cases, whites were actually there to witness the destruction occurring when the germs arrived.”324 In 1887, White settlers watched the population of the Mandan Indian tribe fall from 2000 people to 40 after the community contracted smallpox from contact with a steamboat that passed through the Missouri River.325 When children at residential schools died after contracting European illnesses, administrators chose to keep them running, rather than quarantining the children or sending them home before disease spread. Mass unmarked graves have been uncovered on the land of residential schools across North America and Australia; these children remain “missing,” an assault to Indigenous Peoples that continues to inform intergenerational trauma.

Crucially, Western nations must begin to confront histories of Indigenous death that frame disease as the unfortunate but inevitable consequence of modernity at the shores and on the plains of North America and Australia. White settlers have always been agents who carry

325 Diamond, 285.
disease rather than passive hosts. Elizabeth Fenn proposes that although it is nearly impossible to determine if colonizers had intent behind the spread of disease, Europeans did have the “knowledge and technology to attempt biological warfare with the smallpox virus.” 326 It remains contested whether General Jeffery Amherst, the commander of Fort Pitts, ordered his soldiers to distribute blankets infected with smallpox during Pontiac’s Rebellion. Following further investigation of interactions between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples, Fenn suggests “the Amherst affair becomes not so much an aberration as part of a larger continuum in which accusations and discussions of biological warfare were common, and actual incidents may have occurred more frequently than scholars have previously acknowledged.” Whether or not Amherst did employ bioweapons against Indigenous Peoples, he is recorded to have deemed smallpox a method to “Extirpate this Execrable Race.”327 In describing smallpox as a mechanism of Indigenous destruction, Amherst ascribes agency to both White soldiers and the disease. Other narratives of disease intersect with colonizers’ sense of religious superiority, constructing Indigenous death by disease as divine intervention. By analyzing narrative to assess the role of disease, intent becomes a piece of a broader conversation of White acquiescence, if not explicit celebration, of disease as a tool of settler colonialism.

Although these narratives are institutionalized differently in each nation, their invocation continues to have universally disturbing effects on domestic Indigenous affairs. Indigenous Peoples are disproportionately incarcerated, mistreated by welfare systems, denied substantive healthcare, and underrepresented or entirely excluded from political life in the nation state. With regard to remediations, Canada’s actions to confront its past as a settler colonial state extend far

326 Fenn, “Biological Warfare in Eighteenth-Century North America.”
beyond those in the United States and Australia. Most appallingly, Australia still does not formally recognize the sovereignty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Although reconciliation is impossible, it is imperative that each state take more substantial action to confront poor health and security outcomes for Indigenous Peoples.

In each case, the same narratives cast upon Indigenous Peoples inform the states’ immigration policy. Overtly racist narratives are mainstream in the U.S. and Australia; in Canada, most leaders are making “the case for immigration reduction in terms that are academic and utilitarian, rather than emotive and atavistic.” Populist leaders in the U.S. and Australia continue to assume power through the construction of non-White individuals as threats to cultural and social cohesion. When engaging in civil discourse regarding immigration policy, it is imperative to scrutinize narratives of security and state sovereignty, which are frequently underpinned by racism and hypernationalism.

Today, these narratives are employed outside of the West; some nations with emerging markets, including post-colonial countries, seek economic expansion and increased geopolitical prominence through the exploitation of Indigenous spaces. India is currently employing narratives of “development” to justify and obscure the potential annihilation of the Shompen people. The Shompen are indigenous to the Great Nicobar Island: the location of a mega-project deemed the “Hong Kong of India.” The Indian state has constructed plans for “an international container transhipment terminal, associated port and harbor facilities, airport, power plant, defense base, industrial zones, as well as major urban development” on the island, which will begin an onslaught of disease, environmental degradation, and the obliteration of Indigenous

328 Michael Cuenco, “Canada’s immigration backlash is far from populist,” UnHerd, February 1, 2024, https://unherd.com/2024/02/canadas-immigration-backlash-is-far-from-populist/
The Indian minister of ports, Sarbanada Sonowal, declared “this project will be a major landmark in developing India to become a self-assured and self-reliant nation and will support the economic development of the country.” As India attempts to secure its status as a key geopolitical actor, it has looked inwards to sustain a protectionist economy. This narrative of development in the name of Indian “protection” masks the negative implications of the mega-project for the Shompen. As in each of my cases, justification on the basis of “bringing development to them” underpins India’s argument for invading Shoshone lands.

In addition, the minister of tribal affairs, Arjun Munda, remarked that the “project will be executed with utmost precautions to maintain the sanctity of the place and its people.” Hypocritically, the execution of the project will inevitably violate the “sanctity” and sovereignty of the place and its people. The Indian state has refrained from voicing any serious consideration of the Shompen other than stating they may be “relocated if required.” Anata Nayak, an Indian leader of tribal affairs, deemed criticisms of the project an “international conspiracy” against the Indian government. By engaging in this rhetoric, the state seeks to avoid all accountability for a project that would inevitably be genocidal; ‘relocation’ is a death sentence, not a solution.

‘Relocation’ of Indigenous peoples in Canada, Australia, and the U.S. entailed violent physical assaults and egregious violations of sovereignty, which were amplified by and contingent upon

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332 Dhillon, “India’s plan for untouched Nicobar isles.”

333 Dhillon.
mass death due to infectious disease. A collective of 39 scholars of genocide and human rights from 13 countries wrote a formal letter to President Murmu, underscoring the devastating consequences of the project for the Shompen: “simple contact between the Shompen – who have little to no immunity to infectious outside diseases – and those who come from elsewhere, is certain to result in a precipitous population collapse. The mass death of the entire Shompen tribe will ensue.”

Leaders, international institutions, and global spectators must make enough noise so the political cost of the project will outweigh the Indian government’s assessment of the economic and geopolitical benefits development will yield. Otherwise, narratives of civilization, development, security, and modernity will triumph once again.

In the era of social media, narratives embedded with misinformation and bigotry spread like wildfire on platforms with billions of users. With translating tools and natural language processing, narratives cross linguistic boundaries immediately. Recommendation algorithms push consumers into echo chambers, where views are reinforced and intensified. The interconnectedness of social media users is primed for the dissemination of harmful narratives. Yet, social media is also democratizing technology that transforms users into spectators. We witness human rights violations, international crises, and domestic injustice through our screens while scrolling through the endless seas of content. The narratives produced in response by leaders, stakeholders, and common users demand our critical attention.

By consuming content produced by Indigenous creators, we begin to reorient ourselves towards the voices that have been drowned out for too long. However, Indigenous Peoples must not be the only ones to bear the burden of truth-telling missions. The emotional cost of this work, compounded by intergenerational trauma produced by the persistent narratives and mechanisms

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334 Dhillon, “India’s plan for untouched Nicobar isles.”
of settler colonialism, make it necessary that non-Indigenous folks take responsibility for
decolonizing our nation states. The imperative work of antiracism and decolonization begins at
the individual level; we must challenge the narratives that cast objective histories of Western
policies and institutions.

As Robin Wall Kimmerer reminds us in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, “transformation is not
accomplished by tentative wading at the edge.”\(^3\) Only through serious investment in this work
may Westerners begin to live up to their democratic values stated at home and projected abroad.
Until Western states reorient and restructure to fully respect Indigenous sovereignty, their leaders
will continue to lack sincerity in condemnation of other states’ abrogation of Indigenous rights.
Only at this point will global norms begin to shift so that Indigenous Peoples across the world
may reclaim space and place: legally, socially, economically, politically, and intellectually.

\(^{335}\) Kimmerer, 88.
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