

**10.29.21 OLOC RACISM AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLE** in the Americas and what would become the United States. Christopher Columbus did not “discover” America – what followed was genocide, stolen land, forced removal, boarding schools, and assimilation that continues to present time.

***From the Book: An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States for Youth***

In the late fifteenth century, as European explorers sailed to unfamiliar places, their actions and beliefs were guided by the Doctrine of Discovery – the idea that European nations could claim the foreign lands they “discovered.” The Doctrine of Discovery was laid out in a series of communications from the pope, leader of the Catholic Church, who was extremely influential in European politics at the time. It asserted that Indigenous inhabitants lost their natural right to that land as soon as the Europeans arrived and claimed it. People whose homelands were “discovered” were considered subjects of the Europeans and were expected to do what the “discoverers” wished. If they resisted, they were to be conquered. This enabled Columbus to claim the Taino (Tay now) people’s Caribbean home for Spain and to kidnap and enslave the Indigenous peoples.

Christianity came to be identified with being European, being light-skinned. As those light-skinned Christian Europeans became interested in conquering other places, they took with them the assumptions that they were inherently superior to many of the peoples they encountered. Their belief in white supremacy made it possible for them to think it was acceptable to enslave or eradicate those other people. They quickly called Indigenous populations “children of satan” and “servants of the devil.” In this way they could justify what they did to the Indigenous peoples.

Similarly, the pilgrims and the puritans, the first groups from England to settle in what became the United States, believed they had a covenant with god to take the land. The Doctrine of Discovery influenced the policies of the young United States and directly affected the lives and the very existence of the Native people.

Most of the Europeans who traveled to what they called the New World were those whose families had been displaced when the commons were converted to private property. They carried with them a hunger to own land and other forms of wealth, including gold.

The “nation of immigrants” framework obscures the US practice of *settler colonialism*. The goal of settler colonialism is to take over all resources in a region, particularly the land. During the colonial era, for example, European business corporations received military support to take over and use land and other resources for profit around the world including what came to be known as the Americas. As more and more settlers arrived, one settlement paved the way for another, and another. This gave the European governments and the government-backed corporations control and influence farther and farther from the original settlements, which was the growth model the United States following independence.

The following are basic to American settler colonialism:

- **White supremacy.** The idea that European American “civilization” is superior to all others which means that “white” lives are seen as more valuable than those of darker skinned people.

- **A policy of genocide and land theft.** The United Nations defines *genocide* as an act, or acts, “committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.” Examples include:
  - a. Killing members of the group;
  - b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
  - c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
  - d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
  - e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

The following statement from General William T. Sherman in 1873 is an example of what genocidal attitudes sound like: We must act with vindictive earnestness against the Sioux, even to their extermination, men, women and children. During an assault, the soldiers cannot pause to distinguish between male, female, or even age.

The continued influence of this settler colonialism and genocide show up when history is retold in a way that celebrates settlers and makes Indigenous peoples disappear from the historical record. This practice is sometimes called “firsting and lasting.” All over North America there are places that are described as “the first” settlement, building, or school which means created by white settlers, as if no one lived there before they came. And other stories full of the “last” Indians or tribes such as “the last of the Mohicans”.

Over the following centuries, the white settlers’ descendants would develop those terminal narratives such as - “the end of Indigenous peoples” - to explain and justify their actions.

I would like to add this statement by Bill Penzey who owns Penzey Spices from one of his emails to customers: I would like to share this quote from the groundbreaking film director Melvin Van Peebles, who died this past September 21st at the age of 89, as told by his son Mario Van Peebles:

**"True liberation did not mean imitating the colonizer's mentality. It meant appreciating the power, beauty and interconnectivity of all people."**

Bill adds, our country’s founders overthrew those who colonized this land but failed to overthrow their mentality. And obviously none of us were alive back then, but how much of that colonizer’s mindset still lives on in all of us?