

## **The "White Settler" State Mentality Destroying the World for Everyone**

Decolonizing scholarship has made significant progress in raising numerous challenges to the way knowledge has been constructed and is taught in universities, not just in the West but globally. Recent political changes in the United States, including mandated "political incorrectness" policies for universities imposed by presidential order, have raised alarm bells regarding the continued progress of anti-colonial critiques in liberating university education. These fears are somewhat overstated because, overall, universities were not doing nearly enough to foster meaningful change. Instead, many institutions have been appropriating the vocabulary of decolonizing the academy in ways that result in very little actual change—certainly not on the scale necessary to influence broader, society-wide social transformation in the United States.

Trump's re-election, despite numerous reasons he demonstrated he should never hold elected office again, highlighted the enduring appeal of white settler rhetoric. This rhetoric can be traced to speeches in the American West during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the pro-segregationist discourse in the American South in the 1960s, and John Wayne's Hollywood until the 1970s, when a more liberal filmmaking establishment emerged. The values espoused by a significant contingent of White Americans can also be found among White South Africans, White Canadians, White Australians, White New Zealanders, and in any place that emerged as a white settler colony rather than a franchise colony. For these populations, and for audiences in Europe inspired by the American West, white settlers, driven by a desperate need for survival, picked up stakes, loaded wagons, crossed frontiers, turned prairies into ploughed land, and stood heroically against ambushes by so-called "savages" intent on harming pioneers. Just as bravely, the all-white (in fact, they were not) U.S. cavalry would ride to the rescue, save the settlers, and confine the Indigenous populations to reservations for the supposed peace and well-being of all.

The result was the United States, the "greatest nation" on earth, whose national character was symbolized not by Eastern bankers and Midwestern industrialists—about whom few movies were made—but by the hardy Western pioneer. This was because the latter embodied the simple, clear test of physical, interpersonal violence, while the industrialists and capitalists operated behind the "greenback curtain" of systematic, structural violence, controlling national affairs and bankrolling the politicians who formalized their agendas. Settlers and the cavalry may have pulled the trigger, but it was the same capitalist establishment—running the country under either of the two major parties—that orchestrated the program. This included efforts to eliminate Native Americans, not just economically but physically, wherever possible. As Native Americans were recognized from the beginning as the rightful owners of the land, American expansion required forcibly removing them. This included forced migrations to reservations, such as Oklahoma—the "American Gaza" of the nineteenth century—and numerous other reserved territories that were gradually reduced, in repeated violation of treaties signed by the federal government with Native nations as foreign states. Like Gaza, Oklahoma was eventually opened up for a complete white settler land grab, a story romanticized in a Tom Cruise film.

The white settler structure that governs the United States revealed under Trump yet another core element of white settlerism: territoriality. Scholars of ecological history argue that the key change white settlers introduced into non-Western lands was a new attitude toward land, distinct from Indigenous perspectives. While Indigenous populations viewed land as belonging to nature, meant to benefit everyone sustainably, white settlers introduced notions

of individual ownership, including exclusive rights to everything on or in the land—and, until 1865, ownership of the labor used to work it. Non-white populations found in possession of land were treated as exclusive owners only for the convenience of treaty-making and commercial concessions, after which they were often dispossessed or eliminated. The American system of governance was built around this kind of dispossession of non-white populations. It led to the destruction of Filipino Republican forces (remembered in America as insurgents against law and order) during the conquest of the Philippines, American expansion in the Pacific, and helps explain the casual way Trump has proposed removing Palestinians from their homes without the right of return. Presumably, Gaza will not become the "French Riviera on the Eastern Mediterranean," as Trump claimed, but rather a "Guantanamo of the Suez Canal zone" or a "Fort Apache in the desert" alongside China's Belt and Road Initiative. Greenland and the Panama Canal were immediately identified by Trump as strategic interests, driven by fears of Chinese expansion; a clear case can be made that China, not Hamas, is at the core of his concerns.

However, the reach of American territorialism has spread far beyond its historical origins. The idea that the white settler can do anything with what is found on "their" land has today resulted in enormous climatic consequences for the entire planet. In the face of clear evidence of global warming and the accelerating countdown to existential threats for much of life on Earth, including large segments of the human population, Trump has proclaimed, "Drill, baby, drill." This represents a white settler genocide on a global scale. The damage caused by Trump's deregulation of the energy sector will likely render irrelevant any measures taken by other societies, even collectively, to slow the planet's ecological destruction. Today, the tragedy of white settlerism is acutely affecting the people of Gaza. There must be a fundamental re-evaluation of core American values to dismantle the systematic grip of white settlerism in the United States. Failing that, we are all doomed to become the Gazans of tomorrow.

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