

Colonization

To the fully colonized mind, colonization is viewed as positive or even God-ordained activity. Colonial heroes come to mind: Christopher Columbus and other “discoverers” and “explorers”, John Smith, William Bradford and the Pilgrim Fathers, the Founding Fathers along with various Presidents of the United States, rangers, wanderers and pioneers like Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett and, of course, all those missionaries. Colonized thinking perpetuates the idea that colonial heroes and pioneers settled vacant land, at most only thinly settled by uncivilized, barely human “savages” who had little if any claim to the land. Furthermore, colonized thinking includes a belief that we who are descendants of those “savages” are better off today than we would have been had colonization not taken place, as we are now beneficiaries of civilization with its culture and enlightenment, with its opportunities for individual advancement and development and especially with its knowledge of the “One True God” the “only hope of salvation.” Maybe one small step away from fully colonized thinking are those who, while acknowledging some level of excess or violence committed by “some” colonial heroes, pioneers and missionaries, hold up others as examples of kinder, gentler colonizers, such as Thomas Mayhew on Martha’s Vineyard, Roger Williams in Rhode Island or the French or the Russians. Furthermore, in the United States, colonized thinking perpetuates the idea that the 13 English colonies of North America, south of Canada, justly rebelled from their home country in order to set up a uniquely just democracy, a democracy that continues seeking the establishment of good and justice all over the Earth.

Everyone pretending to live
Calling exploitation progress
Calling submission freedom
Calling madness profit
Calling earth a plan et
Plaguing her with civilization

- John Trudell from “Arms Race”
in *Lines from a Mined Mind*

To quote from my paper entitled “Colonization: Weapons, Gifts, Diseases and Medicine”, indigenous thinking understands that “Colonization is violence and violation of the most extreme sort. Colonization is theft and rape and murder and cannibalism on the grandest scale. Colonization is genocide. There is nothing worse under the sun.” Colonization engenders an anti-culture based in fear through which expansion of and obedience to imperial order is imposed and enforced by military and police, through which colonial heroes and the colonizing empire itself are deified by subservient religious and educational systems and through which the insatiable appetite of the colonizing empire is fed by exploitative consumer capitalism. Changing ones viewpoint toward colonization is the first lesson that must be learned, the first attitude adjustment or paradigm shift that must be made before one may hope to turn from the direction of colonized thinking and begin moving in the

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direction of decolonization and indigenous thinking.

Indigenous thinkers understand that no European who ever came to this land that is now called “The Americas” may truthfully be described as a “discoverer” or “explorer”, as everything was already discovered, every place, every nook and cranny of the land already not just fully explored but intimately known from ages and ages of human habitation. Colonization of “vacant land” ended tens of thousands of years ago. No lands in what are now called “The Americas” or anywhere else on Earth with the exception of Antarctica, were without human habitation at the time European colonizers first arrived. In 1492 C.E., the human population in what would come to be called “The Americas” was greater and more stable than in Europe. Although introduced diseases played a role in population decline among indigenous peoples, had epidemics not been followed, time and again, by slaving and total war, including the killing of women and children and destruction of crops and homes leading to ongoing disruption and destruction of social structures and cultures, indigenous populations could have and would have recovered.

Columbus and the early Spanish colonizers were so monstrous as to put the Christian devil Lucifer himself to shame. Had those early Spanish colonization tactics not somewhat moderated, due in part to dissenting views expressed by Bartolome de las Casas and others such as Santo Tomas and Diego de Robles Cornejo, who were primarily interested in maintaining slave labor for mining enterprises, the populations of many of the so-called “Latin American” countries would be much different than they are today (Stannard pp. 145-146). Geronimo de Mendieta contended that, “Once the Indians are exterminated, I do not know what is going to happen in this land except that the Spaniards will then rob and kill each other” (Ibid p. 219). Yet, not even Bartolome de las Casas ever called into question the Doctrine of Christian Discovery, which is to say the assertion of the superiority of European Christians along with the supposed divine right of Christian nations to take possession of and control of lands and peoples not previously Christianized.

But, while the Spanish were unimaginably violent, the English were worse. Having learned from early Spanish colonization tactics, which they admired, the English first used those tactics on the Irish who, according to David E. Stannard, in his book *American Holocaust*, were described by the English of the time as “naked rogues in woods and bogs” whose diet was thought to consist of grass and human flesh (p. 99). Had the colonizing eye of the English not shortly been turned to the coast of North America, with more widespread lands populated by peoples much more different from the English and therefore easier to disparage and hate than the Irish, the Irish population may have been completely annihilated and replaced within a few decades. What about those kinder, gentler colonizers Mayhew and Williams? According to Howard Zinn’s book *A People’s History of the United States*, In 1642, when Mayhew first arrived on Martha’s Vineyard, the Wampanoag population there stood at 3,000. This was already greatly reduced from the island’s population a few decades earlier when the first English slavers entered the area. By 1764 that population had dropped to 313, a 90% reduction in little more than a century. Similar population declines occurred among the Narragansets and other indigenous peoples enveloped in Roger Williams’ Rhode Island colony during the same time frame. The numbers

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speak for themselves. In time, even as with the Spanish, the English began to somewhat modify their colonization tactics, and in response, 13 of the English colonies in North America rebelled from English governance. These Americans, as they came to call themselves, proved even more violent than the English had been, perpetuating the physical and cultural genocide of indigenous peoples from sea to shining sea.

Evan Jones (originally from Wales) and his son John Jones were Baptist missionaries to the Cherokees, noted for learning the Cherokee language, walking the Trail of Tears and for allowing, in the mid 1800s, for a limited revival of certain Cherokee cultural practices, properly reinterpreted and Christianized. These men are often held up as examples of “good missionaries” by those who are also careful to point out that Cherokees accepted Christianity voluntarily. To begin with, I disagree with the notion that Cherokee acceptance of Christianity was voluntary. As stated in my paper “120 Questions”:

...while Cherokees still considered themselves to be, in some way, a viable sovereignty holding a line against European-American conquest, Christian conversion was either not happening at all or was proceeding at a snail’s pace and only with very young and impressionable school children. It was only as Cherokees began to feel themselves powerless in the face of European-American encroachment and conquest that Christian conversion began happening on any significant scale.... So, did Cherokees voluntarily accept Christian conversion? It seems to me that most Cherokees said “yes” to Christian conversion at a time when saying “no” had ceased to be a viable option. I do not see that as voluntary acceptance (p. 50).

What makes the idea of the voluntary conversion of Cherokees problematic is the power differential. Consider this: When a master has sex with a slave, it’s rape. The reason it’s rape has to do with the power differential. Since the slave lacks the power to freely refuse sexual advances, there is no such thing as free-consent in a master-slave relationship. It is the same with other colonizer-colonized relationships. When indigenous people lack the power to refuse the religious advances of colonizing missionaries the result is not voluntary conversion but spiritual rape. This power differential remains in place even today between missionaries and American Indians as well as between missionaries and indigenous peoples in other parts of the Earth. The good missionary is the one who does not traverse land and sea and so does not make a single, proselyted, twice-born son of hell. And yes, I am alluding here to a saying attributed to Jesus (Matthew 23:15). The good missionary is the one who remains in his own land to minister among his own screwed-up people rather than helping his people screw some other people out of their land and indigenous culture.

So what of the French and Russians? Some will say, “The French only came to trade.” Well, that’s just not true. The French came to claim land and control peoples, to expand their empire. Even their trade was exploitative, disruptive and destructive, even if the English trade was more so. The

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Russians came to Alaska to claim land and get furs. As pointed out by David E. Stannard in *American Holocaust*, systematic extermination of Aleut and other indigenous peoples of Alaska began shortly after first contact, (p. 128). However, since not enough Russians were willing to go to Alaska, indigenous peoples were also sought out as slave labor for the Russian enterprise. And so, according to the online paper "Southwest Alaska 1743-1867 Era of Russian Violence," missionaries were sent to make the indigenous peoples of Alaska into better slaves. Compared to the infamous Junipero Serra, the monstrous missionizer / death-camp warden of California, Innocent of Alaska (He was really of Moscow.) may not seem so bad, another example of a kinder, gentler colonizer. However, there is nothing innocent about colonization. And, as for the United States being a "uniquely just democracy" seeking nothing but universal justice and freedom, indigenous thinking sees the lie in this contrived political mythology (Stannard p. 13).

Indigenous thinkers understand that colonization began long before colonizers arrived here. Empire-building is a cancer in the Earth that may be traced to origins in the Caucasus Mountains but came to its full malignant development in the Mediterranean region before spreading from there, always with no regard for the land or the peoples of the land. Colonization is the process by which the cancer of empire-building metastasizes, attacking not just indigenous human peoples but endangering the very life of the Earth in all her varied aspects. The Europeans were colonized before they became violent colonizers. Indigenous thinkers understand indigenous peoples were not uncivilized before colonization, nor deprived or lost in any way. We had everything we needed before colonization began; now we are left with the malignancy of colonizing empire. A Maya writer expressed it this way:

They taught fear and they withered the flowers. So that their flower should live, they maimed and destroyed the flower of others....
Marauders by day, offenders by night, murderers of the world
(Stannard p. 86).

The human task to which we are presently called is to resist colonization and to be about the process of decolonization, as individuals and groups, through the revitalization of our indigenous cultures: language, oral tradition, ceremonies and agriculture, to re-indigenize or reconnect in proper ways with People and Land, Creator and Creation, to begin a process of healing that, who knows, may even prevent the Earth and all the peoples of Earth, the two-leggeds, the four-leggeds, the wingeds, the many-leggeds, the no-leggeds, the standing ones and the long people from dying out before our time and finally to co-create this new epoch we have entered into as a world in which there is no room for colonization, exploitation, hegemony or empire building of any sort.