



Settler Colonial Policies Still Seek the Eradication of Native People

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In the throes of climate change and after generations of extractive and unsustainable water use in the Southwest United States, there is huge water crisis. States and different interest groups are trying to secure what they need, but last month, the Supreme Court ruled the United States is not responsible for supplying the Navajo Nation with drinking water, which they desperately need to live. Though we are dependent on and made of the same water, the Diné people have been sequestered to land without water rights, and much of their groundwater has been polluted by uranium mines. This is not an isolated unjust ruling—it is part of settler colonial policies that continue towards the eradication of Native people. Most contemporary generations of settlers—that is, those of us with European settler ancestry—cannot imagine partaking in the kind of gruesome violence we read about in a limited number of history books, in which settlers killed communities and families en masse and forced people from homelands their parents and ancestors are buried on. Since we cannot imagine participating in this kind of explicit violence, we view ourselves as more evolved. But it was whiteness that evolved, not us.

Growing up, I was made to believe that colonization was something that happened: the violence was tragic, but now it is done, and we are left to make the world better with socially conscious capitalism! I read *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* in fifth grade through a white gaze and knew it was a sad story, but it was in the past. I learned about the Massacre of Sand Creek in school growing up but was never told it was carried out in large part by a volunteer militia of influential Boulder settlers who were squatting on Indian land and who eradicated the Native people because they wanted to keep the land and other valuable resources, like water. Water was plundered like timber and gold. These settler colonial capitalist policies are still in place. They connect our modern water economy and

Southern California, Nevada, Arizona, and more still.

Sand Creek was one of many massacres that blurred together in a single sad history of Native people I felt no connection to or responsibility for growing up in present day Boulder, Colorado. This is the spiritual violence we—the ancestors of colonizers, the current settlers of the land—inherit. We are dead to our relationships with the land and water and people past, present and future, who we are deeply interconnected with. But to understand continuing settler colonialism in the United States—or more importantly, our relationship to and role in it—we must understand the machinations that power and sustain colonization and know it is still an ongoing project. It needs us, but we can repent. We can turn and make another way. In the process, we must supply clean drinking water to all people and undo and repair these violent settler colonial policies.

¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2023/06/22/supreme-court-navajo-nation-water-supply/>

² There are historians and theorists who illuminate and analyze with much more detail and eloquence the structures and histories of settler colonialism and Indigenous resistance and self-determination. Three that have been very helpful and valuable to me, and are more accessible to a non-academic audience are 1) Raoul Peck's 2021 HBO documentary series, *Exterminate all the Brutes*, 2) *Sai Englert's Settler Colonialism, an Introduction* (2022, Pluto Press), and 3) *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz (2014, Revisioning American History).

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