

Colonialism, Explained: There were Two Major Waves of Colonialism in Recorded History

By Jamila Osman, Teen Vogue, November 22, 2017

Colonialism [is defined](#) as “control by one power over a dependent area or people.” In practice, colonialism is when one country violently invades and takes control of another country, claims the land as its own, and sends people — “settlers” — to live on that land.

There were two great waves of colonialism in recorded history. The first wave began in the 15th century, during Europe’s [Age of Discovery](#). During this time, European countries such as Britain, Spain, France, and Portugal colonized lands across North and South America. . . .

The second wave of colonial expansion began during the 19th century, centering around the African continent. In what is called the [Scramble for Africa](#), European nations such as Britain, France, Portugal, and Spain sliced up the continent like a pie, creating arbitrary borders and boundaries, and claiming large swaths of land for themselves. . . .

The treatment of the indigenous people on the land now known as the United States is [just as horrifying](#). The primarily British Europeans who settled here — just like the Europeans who settled in Africa and the rest of the Americas — overall did not care that there were people already living on the land. The majority did not want peace and harmony between cultures; they wanted the land for themselves. They did not want to share the abundant resources; they wanted to generate wealth to fill their own pockets. Most had no respect for indigenous cultures or histories; they wanted to enforce their own instead. These colonizers did not care that land was considered sacred and communal. Most believed that everything, including the earth, was meant to be bought and sold.

The Europeans who first settled along the East Coast of the United States believed it was their [Manifest Destiny](#), or God-granted right, to claim territory for themselves and their posterity. As they spread across the entirety of the continental U.S., they pushed the indigenous populations — who had lived on and tended to the land for millennia — farther and farther west. Native Americans were moved to reservations — parcels of land that were barren and far from economic opportunities. In 1830, President Andrew Jackson, which led to the forced removal, relocation, and mass death of thousands of indigenous people. In 1838, the Cherokee were forced west by the U.S. government, which seized control of their land. Forced to walk thousands of miles, an estimated 4,000 Cherokees died on what would later come to be called the [“Trail of Tears.”](#) This historic loss of lives, land, and culture has led to what Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, social worker and professor, [describes as historical trauma](#) — intergenerational emotional and psychological damage. . . .

Wherever colonialism has manifested in the world, from across the Americas to every corner of the African continent, it has been met with a fierce struggle of resistance. Throughout history, indigenous peoples have risen up and successfully overthrown colonial powers, demonstrating that while colonizers could steal land and resources, they could not take the dignity of a people determined to be free.

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Part I - Current Understanding

- *What is your current definition of colonialism? What do you know about colonialism?*

Part II - Defining Colonialism with Evidence

- Read the article.
- Re-read the article and underline the best evidence to develop a definition of colonialism.
- Select 3-5 pieces of specific evidence and add it to the organizer.
- Then select 2-4 specific examples of what makes colonialism in what is now the United States distinct.

Reading Questions:

<i>What is colonialism?</i>
<i>What is unique to colonialism in what is now the United States?</i>
<i>How does what you learned support, extend, or contest your previous understanding of colonialism?</i>

Part III - Settler Colonialism

The United States is described as a settler colonial nation. Based on what you read, and the evidence you collected, why do you think this term is used to describe what is now the United States?

Part IV - Imagining a Just Future

What will a future that reverses manifest destiny look like? [Source Set](#)