



**ANALYZING THE TAKING OF INDIAN LANDS**

**Ideology** - a system of ideas that forms the basis for policy or action

**Colonialism** - policy of acquiring political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically

**European colonialism:** From the 1500’s - 1800’s, European nations of England, France, and Spain claimed “legal” ownership of land in North America claiming they “discovered” these lands, even though the lands had already been “discovered” and lived in for thousands of years by Native Americans. Property rights of the original residents were ignored. Because Europeans wanted these lands, they took them. Native people who resisted were either exiled, imprisoned, or even killed under policies of **genocide** (extermination).

**Ethical questions:** [ethical - morally good or correct.] How could “civilized” European nations possibly justify such unethical behavior - just taking someone’s land, and even killing them to do it? Didn’t the Europeans see this as violating their own 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Christian Commandments: Thou shalt not kill? or steal? Weren’t the Europeans simply invaders, thieves, and murderers?

As larcenous and violent as it seems from the modern viewpoint today, these takings were accomplished in **small steps over many decades, each excused at the time** under various arguments. (Think: what excuses are we making today for doing what we may know is wrong?)

Actually, **many white citizens did disagree** and felt the treatment of the Native Americans and the taking of their land was unfair and immoral, but these citizens were unable to stop the powerful forces of economic expansion. There was land to be taken and money to be made. (Think: what government and business policies today do many people disagree with, but they are still happening?)

**In the chart below,** at left are some of the arguments used as rationalizations for taking the land away from the Indian people. At right are the counter-arguments pointing out contradictions.

<b>ARGUMENTS FOR COLONIALISM</b>	<b>Counter-arguments - Contradictions</b>
<b>American exceptionalism:</b> American institutions of democracy and freedom are so exceptional and superior to other governments and societies that they should be spread across the continent, part of “Manifest Destiny”	However. . . Many Native American cultures were already very democratic and free. Ironically, to expand American government and democracy, the democratic rights and freedoms of the Native Americans were taken away through the exercise of authoritarian violence.
<b>Spreading Christianity:</b> God favors and even requires Christians to spread the gospel to other peoples who would be condemned to hell if they did not convert.	However. . . White settlement was accomplished through government-sponsored stealing and killing, often motivated by personal greed, all of which seriously violated the actual teachings of Jesus and the Golden Rule.
<b>Racism:</b> People of color - both Native Americans and Africans - <i>are inferior and not as fully human.</i> (Remember, the U.S. also allowed the “legal” enslavement of human beings kidnapped from Africa.) Some openly advocated genocide of Native Americans.	However. . . Throughout history, the justification for mistreatment of others involves attempts to diminish the humanity of the victims. Pseudo-science of the time was used to justify these conclusions. Nevertheless, in later years, the perpetrators are the ones invariably seen as inhuman, even monstrous.

Argument	Counter-arguments - Contradictions
<p><b>Highest Use - “Wasting” land:</b> The Indians were not fully <i>occupying</i> all their land, all the time - not farming and using it as intensely as the white settlers wished to do, and thus were thus <i>wasting*</i> the land. Therefore, they should have to give it to whites who would put to its highest use: farming.</p> <p>* a/k/a “neglecting” the land.</p> <p>The basic argument here is that preserving natural resources is wasteful. To the extent that humans depend on a healthy environment, what are the long-term implications of this approach?</p>	<p>However. . .First, based on this argument, any property that is not being used by the owner should be re-distributed to people who need it and would use it. But this idea was only applied to Indian lands. In contrast, wealthy whites who owned huge land tracts they seldom occupied were not considered to be “wasting” the land (even while many other whites were landless and homeless). Property rights of rich whites - to do or not do whatever they wanted with their land - were strictly respected.</p> <p>Second, the Indians’ “nomadic” lifestyle was not wasting land, but simply moving with the seasons to live in harmony with nature. Ironically, in less than a hundred years, much of the “wasted” Indian land had been settled and completely ruined - literally “<i>laid waste to</i>” by the whites who turned the rich prairies into a Dust Bowl through unwise farming practices.</p>

Sources: Burns, Louis F. *History of the Osage People*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004, pp 72, 90-94. Compiled by Anne B. Wilson.

**WRITE AN ESSAY ANSWER TO ONE OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS - Write a complete paragraph with topic sentence plus 4-8 sentences of supporting details (examples, reasons, etc.).**

- Hypocrisy** - the practice of claiming to have moral standards or beliefs to which one's own behavior does not conform.

Which of the arguments for colonialism do you think is most hypocritical, and why?
- Ethical question:** Is it true that “**The end (ultimate goal) justifies the means (method of accomplishing something)**”? First, put this saying into your own words within the context of colonialism.

Next, give an example of a compromise you think is acceptable: when the end justifies means which may be less than ideal.

Then give an example of a compromise that is NOT acceptable: when the methods of accomplishing something so violate the ideals tied to the goals that it is simply unacceptable.
- As with the colonialism of the 1800’s, what current **policies of our nation today** do you think might be seen in the future as highly **unethical** or **hypocritical**? i.e. policies on the environment, immigration, foreign interventions, health care, education, energy, safety, etc.

What are the arguments/excuses you hear for these policies? What are the contradictions within those arguments?
- Golden Rule:** How would Americans react today if **another country moved in** and treated us as the white settlers and U.S. government had treated the Indians?

What if the invading country used the same arguments to justify their actions against us as the early white Americans used against the Indians? How would we argue against these justifications without being hypocritical (considering our past)?