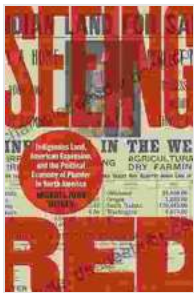


# Indigenous Land, American Expansion, and the Political Economy of Plunder

The history of the United States is inextricably linked to the dispossession of Indigenous land. From the earliest days of European colonization, Indigenous peoples have been subjected to a systematic and violent campaign of land theft, which has had devastating consequences for their communities and cultures.



## Seeing Red: Indigenous Land, American Expansion, and the Political Economy of Plunder in North America (Published by the Omohundro Institute of Early American ... and the University of North Carolina Press)

by Michael John Witgen

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The political economy of plunder has been a central driving force behind American expansion. The desire for land and resources has fueled a relentless westward movement, which has resulted in the displacement and dispossession of countless Indigenous nations.

This article will explore the complex relationship between Indigenous land, American expansion, and the political economy of plunder. It will examine the policies, practices, and consequences of land dispossession, and consider their impact on Indigenous communities and the formation of the United States.

## **The Doctrine of Discovery and the Myth of Terra Nullius**

The Doctrine of Discovery is a legal doctrine that was used by European powers to justify their claims to land in the Americas. The doctrine held that any land that was not inhabited by Christians was considered to be "terra nullius," or empty land, and could therefore be claimed by European powers.

The Doctrine of Discovery was first articulated by Pope Alexander VI in 1493, in a papal bull known as the Inter Caetera. The bull granted Spain and Portugal exclusive rights to explore and colonize any lands that they discovered in the Americas.

The Doctrine of Discovery was used to justify the colonization of the Americas by European powers. It was also used to justify the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their land. European colonizers argued that Indigenous peoples were not "civilized" and therefore did not have the right to own land.

The myth of terra nullius is a related concept that was used to justify the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their land. The myth of terra nullius held that the Americas were an empty land, devoid of human habitation. This myth was used to justify the colonization of the Americas by European powers, and it also served to dehumanize Indigenous peoples.

## **The Indian Removal Act and the Trail of Tears**

The Indian Removal Act was a law passed by the United States Congress in 1830. The act authorized the federal government to negotiate treaties with Indigenous nations in the eastern United States, and to relocate them to Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma).

The Indian Removal Act was a major turning point in the history of Indigenous land dispossession in the United States. The act paved the way for the forced removal of over 100,000 Indigenous people from their homelands in the eastern United States.

The Trail of Tears was a series of forced marches that took place between 1838 and 1839, as a result of the Indian Removal Act. Over 100,000 Indigenous people were forcibly removed from their homelands in the eastern United States and marched to Indian Territory.

The Trail of Tears was a brutal and traumatic experience for the Indigenous people who were forced to endure it. Over 4,000 Indigenous people died along the way from disease, starvation, and exposure.

## **The Dawes Act and the Allotment System**

The Dawes Act was a law passed by the United States Congress in 1887. The act authorized the federal government to divide up Indigenous reservations into individual allotments.

The Dawes Act was intended to promote the assimilation of Indigenous people into American society. It was hoped that by giving Indigenous people individual allotments of land, they would become farmers and adopt a "civilized" lifestyle.

However, the Dawes Act had a devastating impact on Indigenous communities. The act led to the loss of over 90 million acres of Indigenous land. It also undermined traditional Indigenous land management practices, and it contributed to the poverty and social problems that Indigenous communities face today.

## **The Political Economy of Plunder**

The political economy of plunder is a term that describes the systematic and violent dispossession of Indigenous land and resources. This process has been a central driving force behind American expansion, and it has had a devastating impact on Indigenous communities.

The political economy of plunder has been shaped by a number of factors, including:

- The desire for land and resources
- The ideology of Manifest Destiny
- The power of the United States government

The desire for land and resources has been a major driving force behind American expansion. The United States has always been a land-hungry nation, and its westward expansion has been fueled by the desire for more land and resources.

The ideology of Manifest Destiny has also played a role in the political economy of plunder. Manifest Destiny is the belief that the United States was destined to expand across the North American continent. This belief

justified the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their land, and it also served to glorify the United States' westward expansion.

The power of the United States government has also been a factor in the political economy of plunder. The United States government has used its power to dispossess Indigenous peoples from their land, and it has also used its power to suppress Indigenous resistance to land dispossession.

### **The Impact of Land Dispossession on Indigenous Communities**

The political economy of plunder has had a devastating impact on Indigenous communities. Land dispossession has led to the loss of Indigenous land, resources, and culture. It has also contributed to the poverty, social problems, and health problems that Indigenous communities face today.

Land is central to Indigenous identity and culture. For Indigenous peoples, land is not just a commodity; it is a sacred and living entity. Land is where Indigenous peoples live, hunt, fish, and gather. It is also where their ancestors are buried, and where their spiritual ceremonies are held.

Land dispossession has had a profound impact on Indigenous cultures. It has disrupted traditional land management practices, and it has led to the loss of Indigenous knowledge and languages.

Land dispossession has also contributed to the poverty that Indigenous communities face today. Indigenous peoples have been forced to live on reservations that are often located in remote and economically depressed areas. They have also been denied access to traditional economic activities, such as hunting, fishing, and gathering.

Land dispossession has also contributed to the social problems that Indigenous communities face today. Indigenous peoples have high rates of poverty, unemployment, and crime. They also have high rates of substance abuse and suicide.

Land dispossession has had a devastating impact on the health of Indigenous communities. Indigenous peoples have high rates of chronic diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. They also have high rates of infant mortality and low life expectancy.

The political economy of plunder has been a central driving force behind American expansion, and it has had a devastating impact on Indigenous communities. Land dispossession has led to the loss of Indigenous land, resources, and culture. It has also contributed to the poverty, social problems, and health problems that Indigenous communities face today.

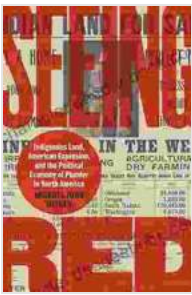
The United States must take steps to address the legacy of land dispossession and to support Indigenous self-determination. This includes returning land to Indigenous communities, investing in Indigenous education and economic development, and supporting Indigenous environmental stewardship.

By taking these steps, the United States can begin to heal the wounds of the past and build a more just and equitable future for all.

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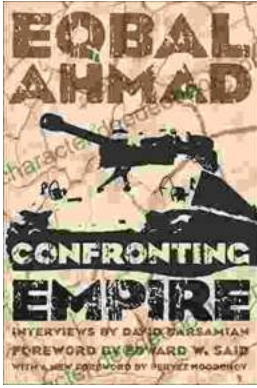
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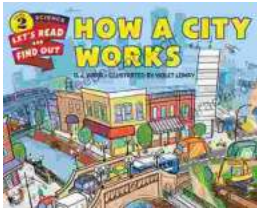
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