

What Does It Mean To “Decolonize” the Curriculum

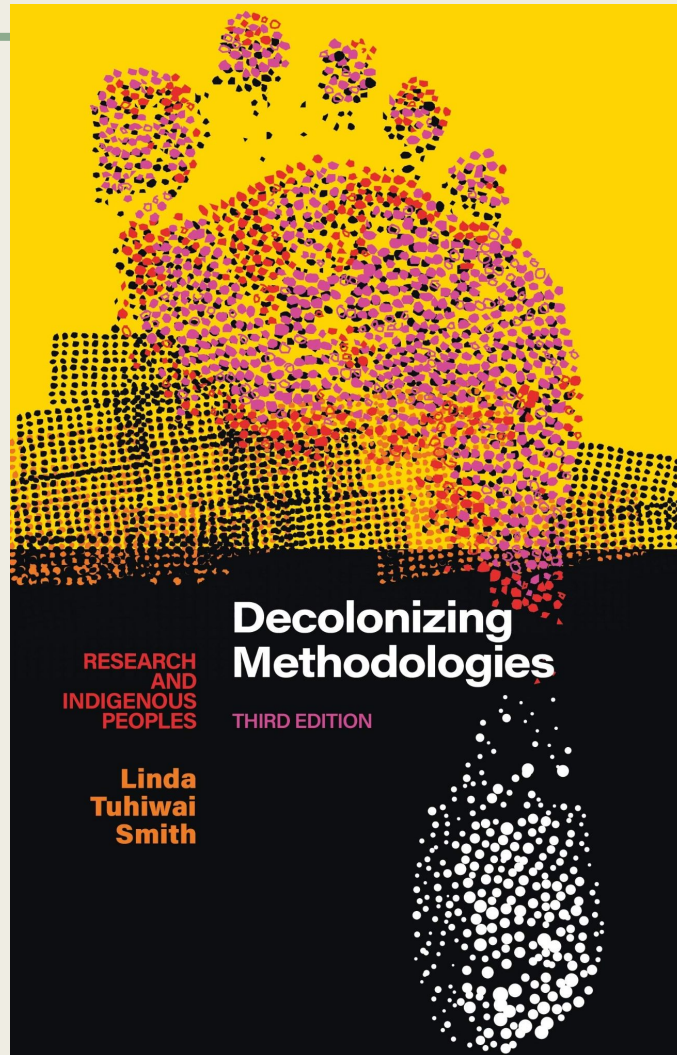
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- It is physically and emotionally draining to be called upon to prove that these systems of power exist. For many of us, just struggling against them is enough — now you want us to break them down for you? (Julianna Britto Schwartz 2014)
- The function, the very serious function, of racism is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being. Somebody says you have no language, so you spend twenty years proving that you do. Somebody says your head isn't shaped properly, so you have scientists working on the fact that it is. Somebody says you have no art, so you dredge that up. Somebody says you have no kingdoms and so you dredge that up. None of that is necessary. There will always be one more thing. (Toni Morrison 1975)

Have you read:

- The Great Gatsby
- Anything by Shakespeare
- Something by Ralph Waldo Emerson or Henry David Thoreau
- Something by John Muir

Have you read:



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Vol. 1, No. 1, 2012, pp. 1-40

Decolonization is not a metaphor

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Abstract

Our goal in this article is to remind readers what is unsettling about decolonization. Decolonization brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools. The easy adoption of decolonizing discourse by educational advocacy and scholarship, evidenced by the increasing number of calls to “decolonize our schools,” or use “decolonizing methods,” or, “decolonize student thinking”, turns decolonization into a metaphor. As important as their goals may be, social justice, critical methodologies, or approaches that decenter settler perspectives have objectives that may be incommensurable with decolonization. Because settler colonialism is built upon an entangled triad structure of settler-native-slave, the decolonial desires of white, non-white, immigrant, postcolonial, and oppressed people, can similarly be entangled in resettlement, reoccupation, and reinhabitation that actually further settler colonialism. The metaphorization of decolonization makes possible a set of evasions, or “settler moves to innocence”, that problematically attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity. In this article, we analyze multiple settler moves towards innocence in order to forward “an ethic of incommensurability” that recognizes what is distinct and what is sovereign for project(s) of decolonization in relation to human and civil rights based social justice projects. We also point to unsettling themes within transnational/Third World decolonizations, abolition, and critical space-place pedagogies, which challenge the coalescence of social justice endeavors, making room for more meaningful potential alliances.

Keywords: *decolonization, settler colonialism, settler moves to innocence, incommensurability, Indigenous land, decolonizing education*

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Slavery is a Metaphor: A Critical Commentary on Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor”

Sara-Maria Sorentino, Tapji Paul Garba

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Sharon Stein

How we teach/learn/read about “Discovery”, “Colonization” and “Westward Expansion”

- The “claiming” of land.
 - Instead of desecrating, stealing, taking, destroying.
- The “wars” with Indians.
 - Instead of massacres, exterminations.
- The “death” of Indians.
 - Instead of murders, killings, holocaust, genocide.
- The “colonization,” “settlement” and “contact” with Indians.
 - Instead of invasion, occupation, or “The end of the world.”
- The “dying” and “vanishing” Indian
 - Instead of “surviving” or “resisting” or “revitalizing.”

Contested histories (contested objectivity, contested narrative)

Abraham Lincoln was shot.

Abraham Lincoln was murdered.

Abraham Lincoln was assassinated.

Abraham Lincoln was shot; he later died from his injuries.

Our data shows how the Morrill Act turned Indigenous land into college endowments. It reveals two open secrets: First, according to the Morrill Act, all money made from land sales must be used in perpetuity, meaning those funds still remain on university ledgers to this day. And secondly, at least 12 states are still in possession of unsold Morrill acres as well as associated mineral rights, which continue to produce revenue for their designated institutions.

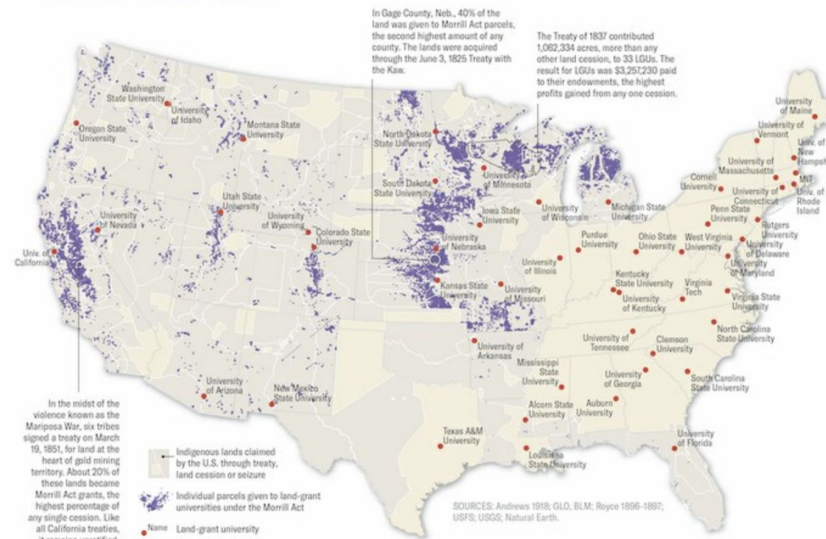
High Country News

Cornell University / University of Minnesota / University of California / Washington State University / Colorado State University / University of Florida / University of Arizona / Pennsylvania State University / Kentucky State University / Alcorn State University / Clemson University / South Carolina State University / Virginia State University / University of Kentucky / Massachusetts State University / University of Massachusetts / Middlebury College / Polytechnic Institute / Augustana University / Connecticut College / Dartmouth College / University of Pennsylvania / University of Wisconsin / University of North Carolina / University of Nebraska / University of Nevada / Ohio State University / Oregon State University / University of Rhode Island / South Dakota State University / University of Tennessee / Texas A&M University / Utah State University / University of Vermont / University of Wisconsin / West Virginia University / University of Wyoming

LAND-GRAB UNIVERSITIES

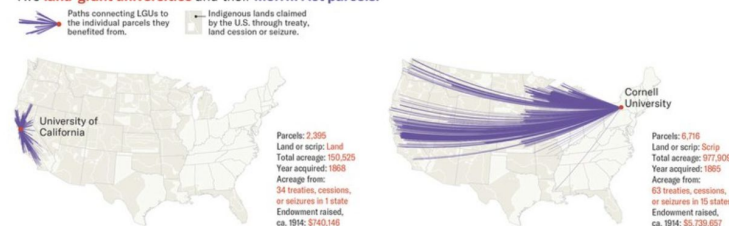
BY ROBERT LEE AND TRISTAN AHTONE
Vol. 52 / April 2020 / No. 4 • hcn.org

The Morrill Act gave 79,461 parcels of Indigenous lands, totaling about 10,700,000 acres, to 52 land-grant universities (LGUs) to fund their endowments.

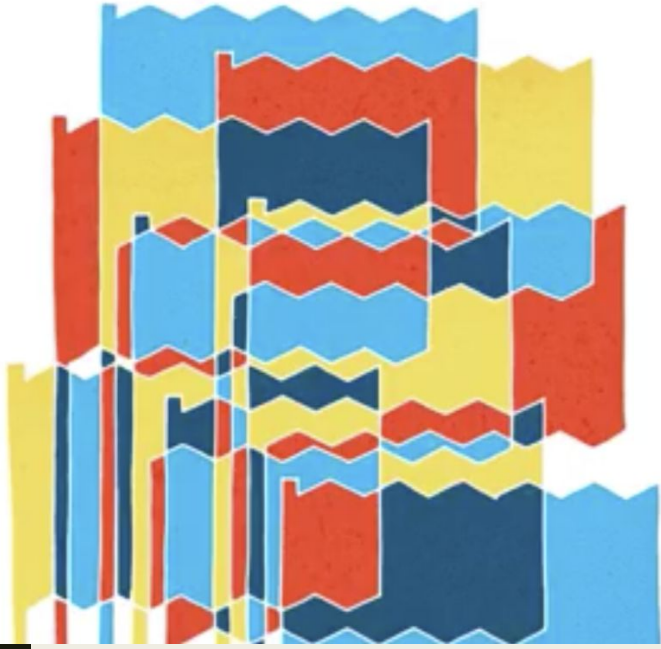


Map by Margaret Pearce for High Country News

Two land-grant universities and their Morrill Act parcels.



Map by Margaret Pearce for High Country News

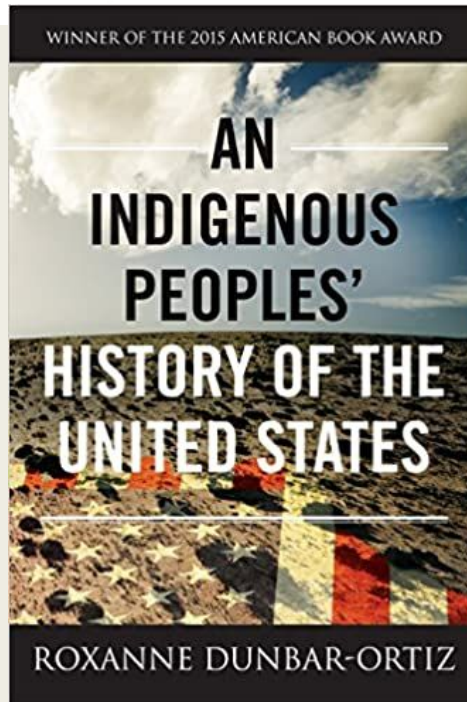


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Reflection Questions

Why did you sign up for this workshop? (What are you hoping to learn more about or what questions do you have?)

What are the reasons we should “decolonize” our

What does it mean to “decolonize” within the academy?

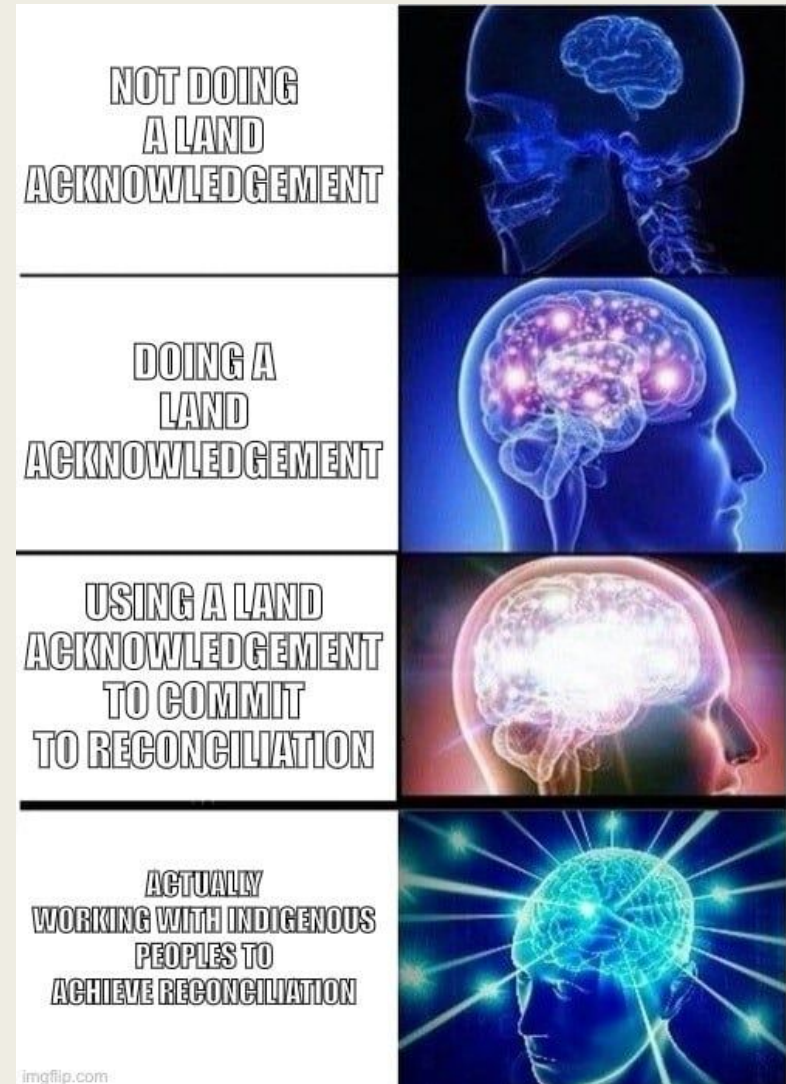
When you commit to “decolonizing my syllabus” what are you committing to?

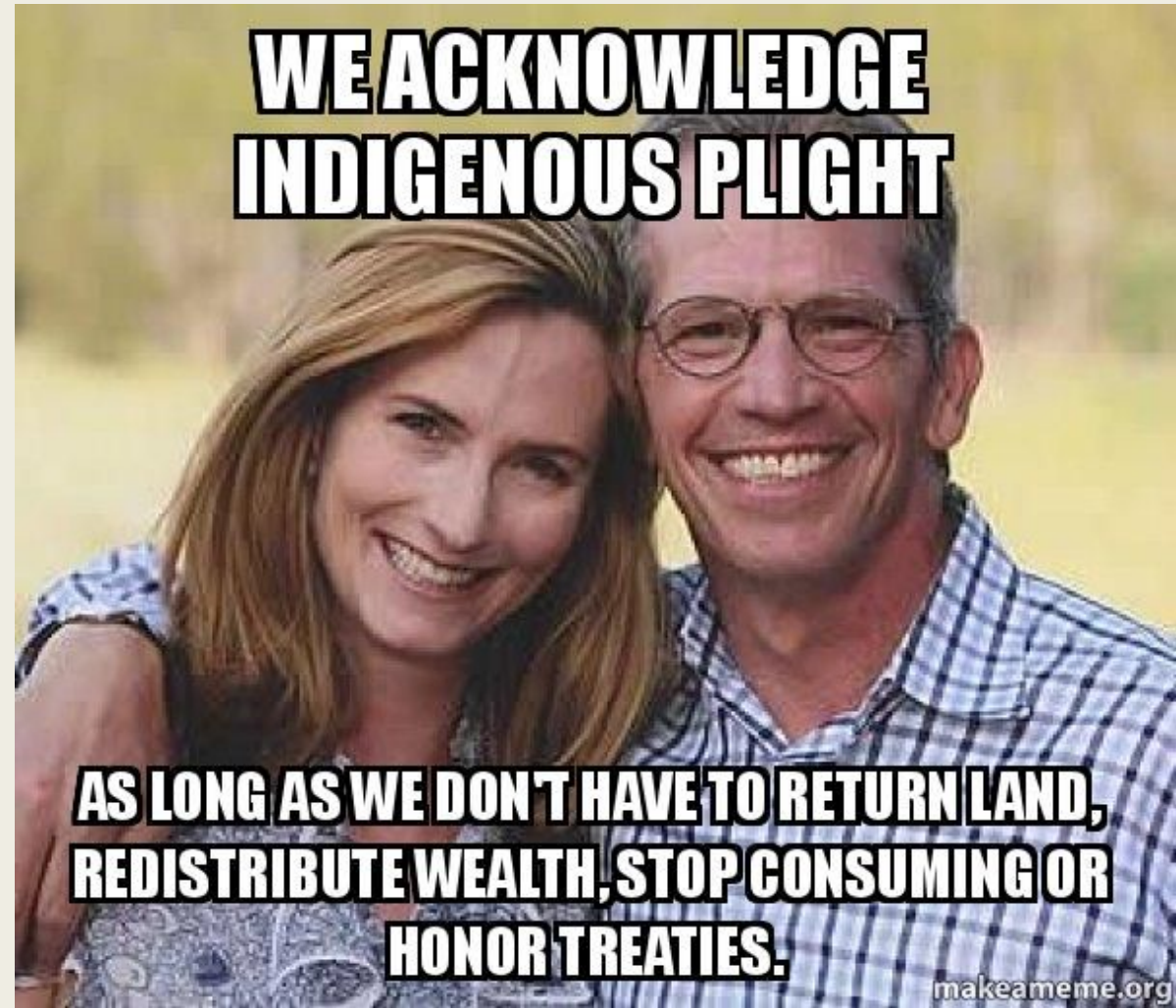
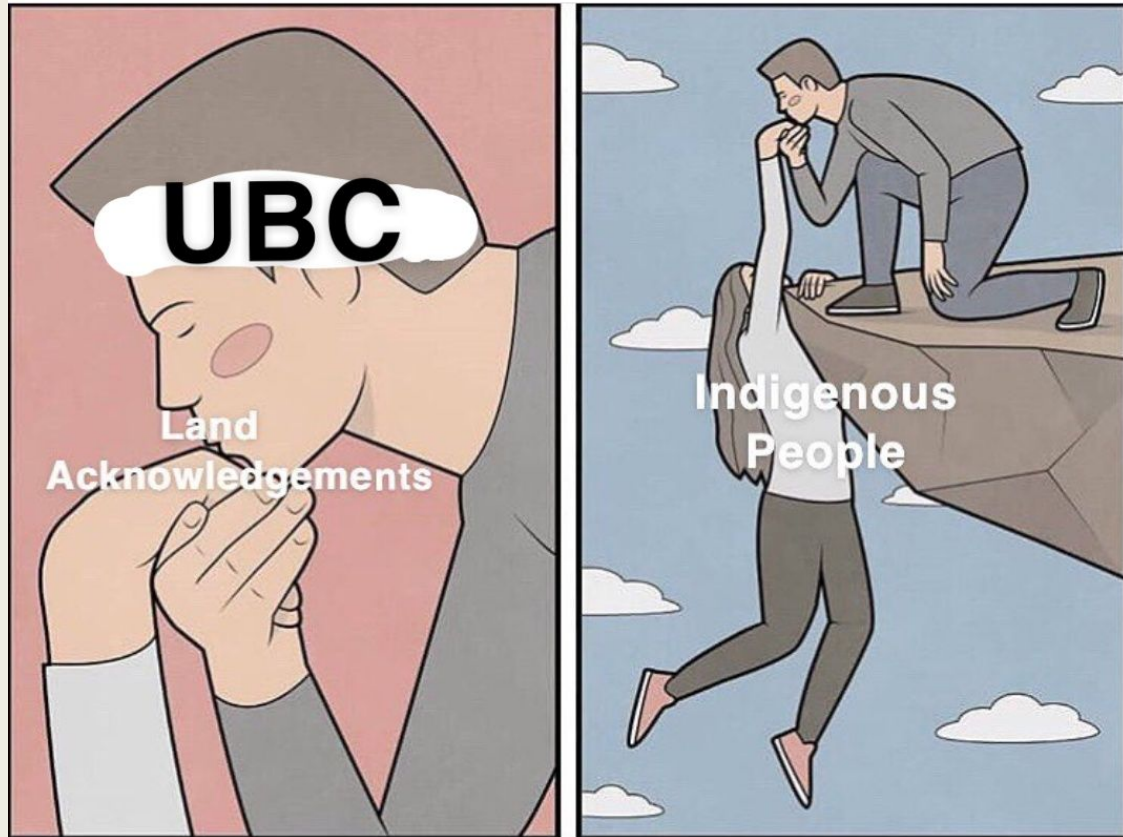
How do you plan to build a community of praxis surrounding this commitment?

Is putting a land acknowledgement statement in my syllabus “decolonizing my syllabus?”

Nope.

That’s called “the least we could do.”





THE POWER OF STORIES

- “I will tell you something about stories . . . They aren't just entertainment. Don't be fooled. They are all we have, you see, all we have to fight off illness and death.” –Leslie Marmon Silko
- “Story is the most powerful force in the world – in our world, maybe in all worlds. ...All my life, I have heard only one story about California Indians: godless, dirty, stupid, primitive, ugly, passive, drunken, immoral, lazy, weak-willed people who *might* make good workers if properly trained and motivated. What kind of story is that to grow up with? The story of missionization in California.”
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9lhs241zeg>

So then what is decolonization?

Land

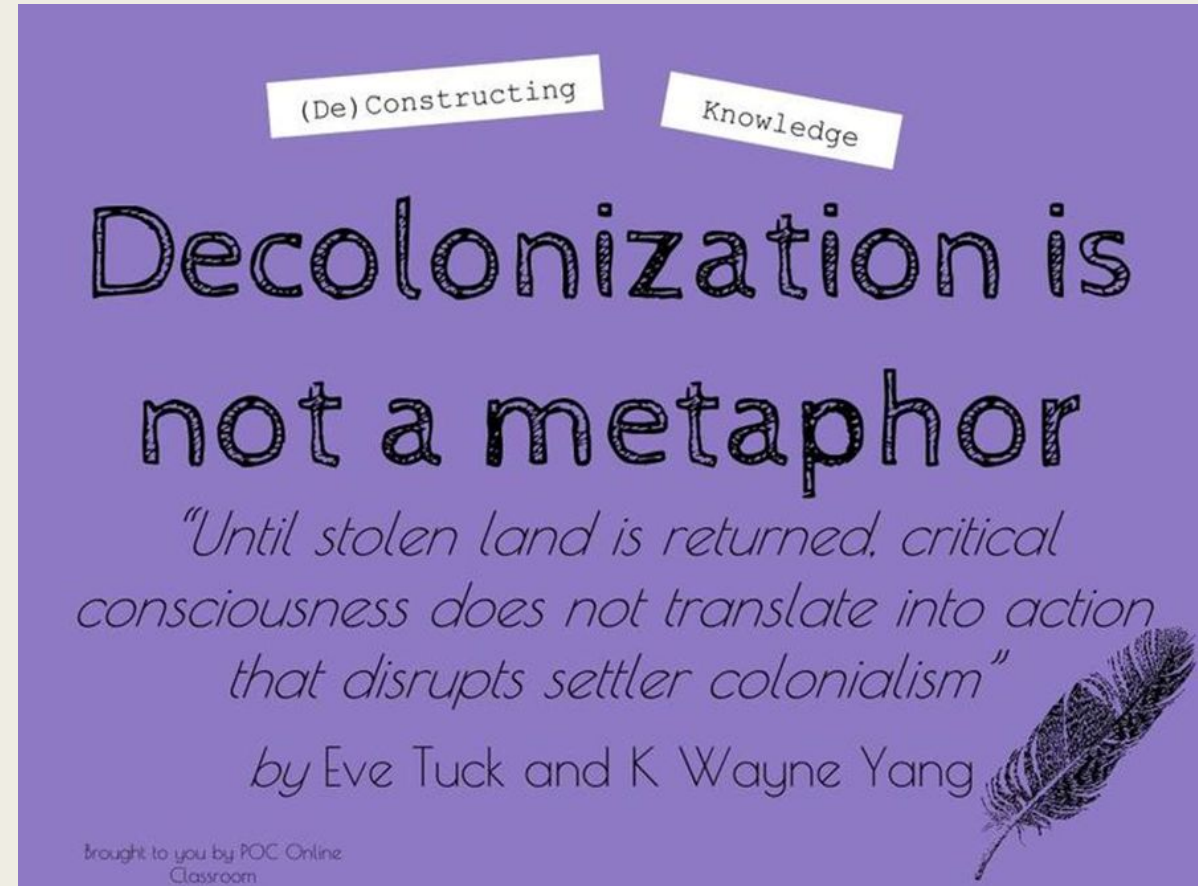
Back

(and water back and fire back and culture back)

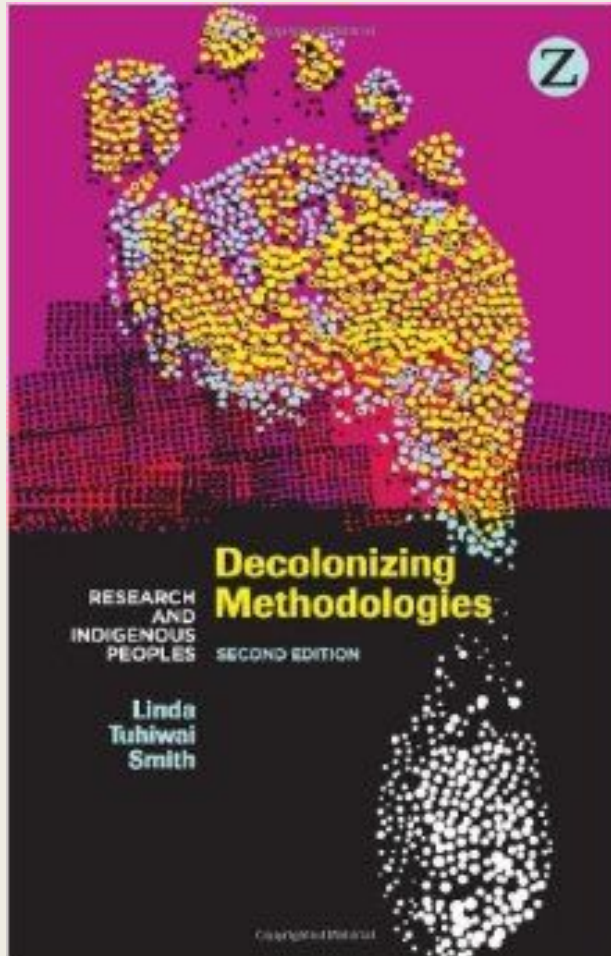
It's working toward a dismantling praxis that builds transformative, imaginative, futures where everyone can breathe.

It's seeing beyond capitalism, racism, settler colonialism, and empire.

It's a radical exercise in imagination, allyship, and reckoning that signs you up for committing to direct action.



Why “decolonization” (what’s at stake?)



- “Decolonizing Methodologies” by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999)
- History has been inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism.
- Indigenous claims to land, language, knowledge and sovereignty have usually involved contested accounts of the past by colonizers and colonized.
- What builds an indigenous “language of critique” is understanding the *continued impact* of imperialism and colonialism.
- History is not about “justice” or “enlightened decisions in the future” but about power.
- Native nations self-determination is tied to our (re)writing and (re)righting of history. This is a decolonizing methodology.

Decolonization

(from Deana Dart @ Live Oak Consulting)

Decolonization reimagines relationships with land, people, education, and the state.

Prioritizes Indigenous knowledge, goals, values.

This requires **study**.

It requires **conversation**.

It is a **practice**; it is an unlearning.

Applied Decolonization:

- Unsettling Western practice--**Humility**
- Restoring balance with Native values and goals--**Relationships**
- Anchoring an Indigenous agenda—**Policy**

-
- Decolonization brings about the repatriation of land and life. It is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies.
 - There is a long history of non-Indigenous peoples making moves to alleviate impacts of colonialism through easy adoption of “decolonizing discourse” or decolonization as metaphor.
 - Think of these as a series of “moves to innocence” which attempt to reconcile guilt and complicity.
 - Ultimately these represent fantasies of easier paths to reconciliation. There is much that is irreconcilable within settler colonial relations.
 - Numerous scholars have observed that Indigeneity prompts multiple forms of settler anxiety, even if only because the presence of Indigenous peoples.

First we have to get over ourselves.
Then we have to get over our disciplines.

- Humility
- Listening
- Humor
- “The seven stages of settler colonial grief.”

Stages of Settler Colonial Grief

1. Denial (*This can't be true. Are you sure? I'll have to Google that for myself...*)
2. Bargaining (*Settler colonialism has to be a good thing! Right, what about all the great stuff we brought over, like pants, computers, and cars?!*)
3. Anger (*You just hate white people. Why can't Indians get over it?! You're welcome for pants, computers, and cars!*)
4. Sadness (*I'm so very sad and guilty. Woe is me!*)
 - Cultural Appropriation
 - Cherokee Grandmother Complex & DNA Tests
1. Action (*Let's get to work and dismantle settler society! It's time to give the land back. All of it.*)

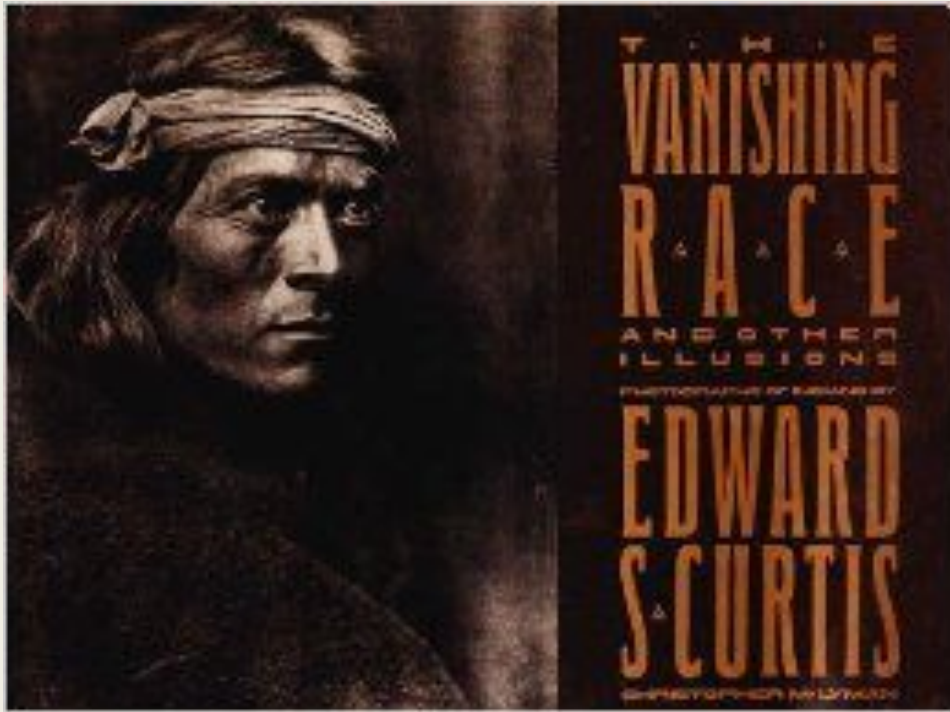
WHAT ARE THE “LOGICS OF SETTLER COLONIALISM?”

SETTLER COLONIALISM IS A STRUCTURE NOT AN EVENT

- **Terra nullius**: Empty land or “nobody’s land.”
- **“logic of elimination”**: Elimination is the goal of the settler colonial society. It is not a one-off invasion, it is a consistent structure. (Solving the “Indian Problem”)
- **“Destroy to replace”**: We must get rid of what was here before, not become a part of it, exchange or blend. And then settler colonial becomes the “Native.”
- **Heteropatriarchy** is “natural” and “normal.” (Heterosexual relationships, patriarchal structures of culture and society.)
- **Manifest Destiny**: Divine right to the land. The land was meant for the settler colonial group.
- **Dehumanization of the Native**: Native is primitive, nomadic, not civilized. Their destruction is normal and natural. They are emotionless and tragic. They are ancient/ from the past.

Jean O'Brien (Anishinaabe)

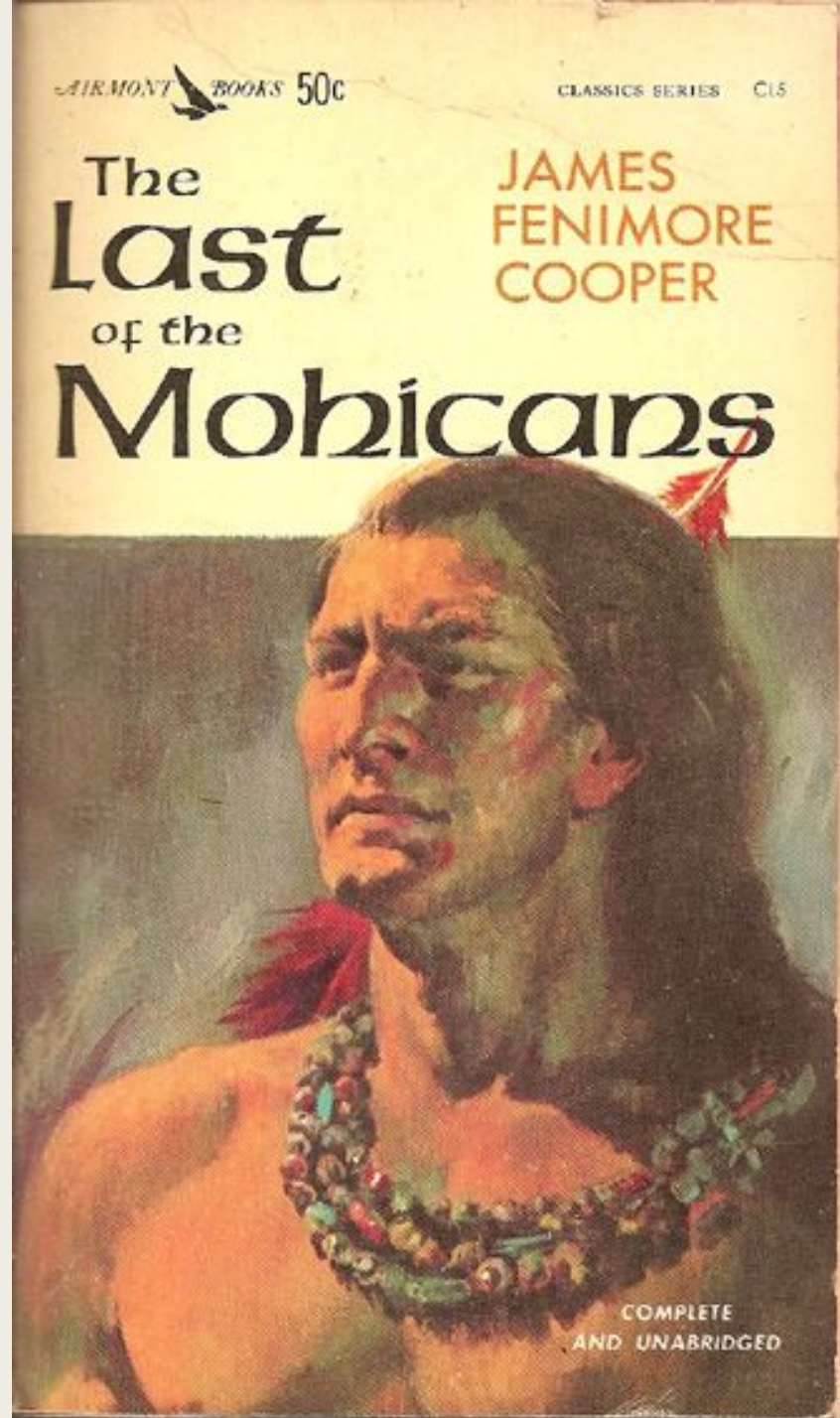
- “Firsting and Lasting”
- All over the continent, local histories, monuments, and signage narrate the story of the first settlement: the founder(s), the first school, first dwelling, first everything, as if there had never been occupants who thrived in those places before Euro-Americans.
- On the other hand the national narrative tells of the “last” Indians or last tribes, such as “the last of the Mohicans” “Ishi, the last Indian...” (Dunbar-Ortiz, 9).



THE LAST OF HIS TRIBE

...es, and buries his face on his knees
 ...s in the dark of his hair;
 ...not look up to the storm-smitte
 ...of the loneliness there —
 ...oss and the loneliness there.

...oes grope through the tufts of
 ...to their coverts for fear;
 ...in the ashes and lets them pass
 ...e boomerangs sleep with the s
 ...nullah, the sling and the spea



- My Country Tis of Thee

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sN2I6vdzgts>

- America the Beautiful

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wDxGQcNq0QI>

- This Land is Your Land

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FeMLaQTwlGU>

■ “Settler Common Sense” – Mark Rifkin

- How do texts register and recirculate everyday modes of settlement? What might reading such texts in this way tell us about how settler sovereignty functions as perception and possibility? What happens to our view of American history when Native narratives are not just included but privileged? Why are settler/colonial viewpoints considered “must-read” or “canonical?”
 - *Canonical American writers take part in the legacy of displacing Native Americans taking for granted the legal and political structure through which Native peoples continue to be dispossessed. Builds for new generations the “common sense” of manifest destiny, expansionism, dispossession of Native lands etc.*
 - Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* critiques property ownership as a form of perpetual debt. Thoreau's vision of withdrawal into the wilderness depends on recasting spaces from which Native peoples have been dispossessed as “untouched.”
 - Herman Melville's *Pierre* presents the city as a place to escape from inequities of land ownership in the country. This account of urban possibility overlooks the fact that the explosive growth of Manhattan in the nineteenth century was possible only because of the extensive and progressive displacement of Iroquois peoples upstate.

An aerial photograph of a lush, green valley. A river flows through the center of the valley, surrounded by dense forest. In the background, there are rolling hills and mountains under a clear blue sky. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

TENDING NATURE

INDIGENOUS LAND STEWARDSHIP

Decolonizing the Syllabus

Localize

1. **Take a Native American Studies Class** (unless you majored or minored in NAS then congrats you get a “Pass GO” card!)
2. **Put a land acknowledgement in your syllabus** but follow-up in your course with how students can truly support Native peoples.
3. **Reconfigure your syllabus to center BIPOC voices and provide a critique of the western frameworks of your discipline.** (Consider your disciplines role in the “logics of settler colonialism.” Be unapologetic. Dismantle the canon.)
4. **Build pedagogical practices that center relationality.** Centering “professionalism” or “career readiness” is not building a praxis for change. Remind students of the knowledge they bring and combat imposter syndrome.

Indigenize

1. **Give the land back.** Insist. (Give spaces back to support growth of our disciplines and our programs).
2. **Support Native American Studies (NAS) and Critical Race Gender & Sexuality Studies (CRGS) through radical-relational allyship.** Encourage students to take these courses. Put them into your major. Radically re-envision your department curriculum.
3. **Do the hard work to speak up and envision decolonial futures as possible.** Be the first to push back against decolonization as a “metaphor.”
4. **Ask “where are the Indigenous voices in this” proposal, plan, committee etc.**
5. **Provide funding, volunteer, encourage students to get involved.**

Decolonizing the syllabus

Our syllabus is ugly, unfriendly, and reads like a “terms of service.”

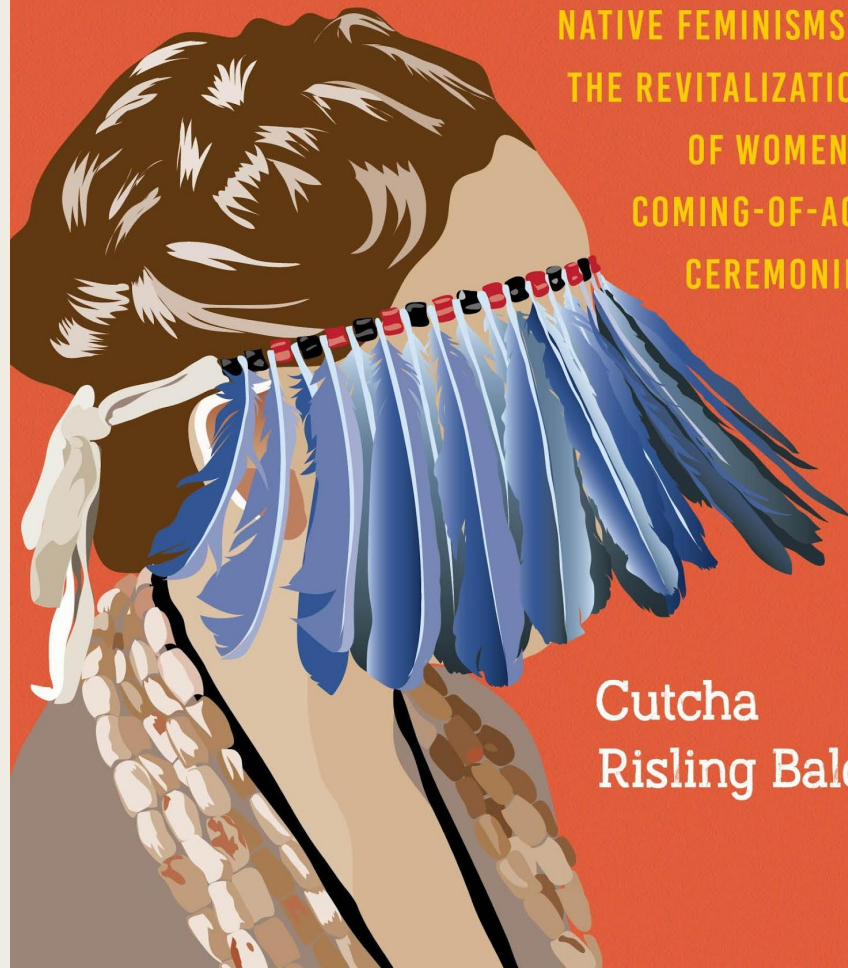
- Recent studies show that first-gen and students-of-color will review the syllabus but won't engage with it unless it is a more inviting and easy to read.
- Students then also engage and reflect more on the student learning outcomes.
- Aim to empower BIPOC and first-gen students to self-advocate and gain agency. (Statements on late assignments, missing class, feedback on readings etc.)

Step 1: Reflection

- Is your pedagogy “strengths-based” or “deficit-based?”
- Build pedagogy that is based within the Indigenous community philosophies, upholding relationships with Indigenous communities and extending research opportunities to Indigenous communities.
- Link to Indigenous languages, using Indigenous words for understanding things (like health, wellness, mental health, sustainability, etc.)
- Find ways to address structural problems such as racism and prejudice, poverty and misogyny.
- **Consider - why are courses in NAS and voices/work that centers the most marginalized and do the “decolonization” theoretical work as foundational the hardest to implement and include in curriculum across disciplines? Why are these courses not part of the “accreditation” standards for certain majors? What would it mean to center these voices? What structures exist that decenter these courses, pedagogies, and programs?**
- **Why do our departments which emerged from activism and efforts to center decolonization remain some of the smallest and most underfunded? How do we create a mass push for supporting these historically underrepresented disciplines?**

we are dancing for you

NATIVE FEMINISMS &
THE REVITALIZATION
OF WOMEN'S
COMING-OF-AGE
CEREMONIES



Cutcha
Risling Baldy

