to the Americas in the 1490s, largely by granting Catholic kingdoms the right to colonize lands they 'discovered.'[57] In 1493, Pope Alexander VI issued the first of four orders, referred to as "papal bulls" (a term that takes its name from the Latin word for the mould used to seal the document), that granted most of North and South America to Spain, the kingdom that had sponsored Columbus's voyage of the preceding year. These orders helped shape the political and legal arguments that have come to be referred to as the "Doctrine of Discovery," which was used to justify the colonization of the Americas in the sixteenth century. In return, the Spanish were expected to convert the Indigenous peoples of the Americas to Christianity.[58]

Other European rulers rejected the Pope's ability to give away sovereignty over half the world.[59] But they did not necessarily reject the Doctrine of Discovery—they simply modified it. The English argued that a claim to 'discovered lands' was valid if the 'discoverer' was able to take possession of them.[60] Harman Verelst, who promoted the colonization in the eighteenth century of what is now the southern coast of the United States, wrote that "this Right arising from the first discovery is the first and fundamental Right of all European Nations, as to their Claim of Lands in America."[61] This Doctrine of Discovery was linked to a second idea: the lands being claimed were *terra nullius*—no man's land—and therefore open to claim. On the basis of this concept, the British government claimed ownership of the entire Australian continent. (There, the doctrine of *terra nullius* remained the law until it was successfully challenged in court in 1992.)[62] Under this doctrine, imperialists could argue that the presence of Indigenous people did not void a claim of *terra nullius*, since the Indigenous people simply occupied, rather than owned, the land. True ownership, they claimed, could come only with European-style agriculture.[63]

Underlying these arguments was the belief that the colonizers were bringing civilization to savage people who could never civilize themselves. The 'civilizing mission' rested on a belief of racial and cultural superiority. European writers and politicians often arranged racial groups in a hierarchy, each with their own set of mental and physical capabilities. The 'special gifts' of the Europeans meant it was inevitable that they would conquer the lesser peoples. Beneath the Europeans, in descending order, were Asians, Africans, and the Indigenous peoples of the Americas and Australia. Some people held that Europeans had reached the pinnacle of civilization through a long and arduous process. In this view, the other peoples of the world had been held back by such factors as climate, geography, and migration. Through a civilizing process, Europeans could, however, raise the people of the world up to their level. This view was replaced in the nineteenth century by a racism that chose to cloak itself in the language of science, and held that the peoples of the world had differing abilities. Some argued that, for genetic reasons, there were limits on the ability of the less-developed peoples to improve. In some cases, it was thought, contact with superior races could lead to only one outcome: the extinction of the inferior peoples.[64]

These ideas shaped global policies towards Indigenous peoples. In 1883, Britain's Lord Rosebery, a future British prime minister, told an Australian audience, "It is on the British