

be exploited economically. The benefits of empire could come directly as taxes, as precious metals, or as raw materials for industries in the homeland. Colonies often were required to purchase their imports solely from the homeland, making them a captive market.⁵⁰

The mere presence of Indigenous people in these newly colonized lands blocked settler access to the land.⁵¹ To gain control of the land of Indigenous people, colonists negotiated Treaties, waged wars of extinction, eliminated traditional landholding practices, disrupted families, and imposed a political and spiritual order that came complete with new values and cultural practices.⁵² Treaty promises often went unfulfilled. United States General William Tecumseh Sherman is quoted as having said, “We have made more than one thousand treaties with the various Indian tribes, and have not kept one of them.” In commenting on Sherman’s statement in 1886, C. C. Painter, a critic of American Indian policy, observed that the United States had

never intended to keep them. They were not made to be kept, but to serve a present purpose, to settle a present difficulty in the easiest manner possible, to acquire a desired good with the least possible compensation, and then to be disregarded as soon as this purpose was tainted and we were strong enough to enforce a new and more profitable arrangement.⁵³

The outcome was usually disastrous for Indigenous people, while the chief beneficiaries of empire were the colonists and their descendants. Many of the colonies they settled grew to be among the most prosperous societies in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century world.⁵⁴ Settler colonies often went on to gain political independence. In the case of Canada and the United States of America, these newly created nations spread across North America. As they expanded, they continued to incorporate Indigenous peoples and their lands into empires. Colonialism remains an ongoing process, shaping both the structure and the quality of the relationship between the settlers and Indigenous peoples.

At their height, the European empires laid claim to most of the earth’s surface and controlled the seas.⁵⁵ Numerous arguments were advanced to justify such extravagant interventions into the lands and lives of other peoples. These were largely elaborations on two basic concepts: 1) the Christian god had given the Christian nations the right to colonize the lands they ‘discovered’ as long as they converted the Indigenous populations; and 2) the Europeans were bringing the benefits of civilization (a concept that was intertwined with Christianity) to the ‘heathen.’ In short, it was contended that people were being colonized for their own benefit, either in this world or the next.

In the fifteenth century, the Roman Catholic Church, building on the traditions of the Roman Empire, conceived of itself as the guardian of a universal world order.⁵⁶ The adoption of Christianity within the Roman Empire (which defined itself as ‘civilized’) reinforced the view that to be civilized was to be Christian. The Catholic papacy was already playing a role in directing and legitimizing colonialism prior to Christopher Columbus’s voyages