

# Indigenous Worldviews: Pre-Columbian and Post-Columbian

Bradley S. Hauff, M.Div., Psy.D.  
(Oglala Sioux)

## **United Nations definition of Indigenous:**

**Communities, peoples and nations which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them.**

## Indigenous and Judeo-Christian American Worldviews

There are hundreds of Indigenous tribes on Turtle Island, or North America. In what is currently known as the United States alone there are over 570. Tribes have different languages, traditions, creation myths and social practices.

There are some perspectives that are held in common however.



Indigenous worldviews and religions are inextricably grounded in the natural world: the Earth, geology and geography, weather, plant and animal life. The natural world is centrally featured in creation stories and myths, and the societal archetypes and ethics are based on it. Judeo-Christian worldviews, on the other hand, tend to be grounded in special revelation or scriptures, doctrines and dogmas, or narratives of some kind.



Indigenous worldviews and religions do not recognize a dichotomy of material and spiritual facets of life. Everything is spiritual, everything is alive. Christianity teaches that there is a dichotomy and what is material is inferior to what is spiritual.

Because everyone and everything is spiritual in nature, there is also no dichotomy of sacred and secular in Indigenous worldviews. Everything is sacred. Christianity teaches such a dichotomy, and separation of church and state is a basic principle in American government and society.

---

Indigenous worldviews see everything in the Cosmos as equal and related. We are all relatives – people, animals, plants, rocks, stars and planets, the weather, etc. Nothing is disconnected from anyone or anything else. Plants and animals are typically referred to as people. Christianity does not teach this, and furthermore teaches that there is a hierarchy in life, with humans at the top because they are made in God's image. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, humans are entrusted with dominion over the rest of creation. Indigenous worldviews and religions do not teach human dominance.

The Indigenous worldviews and religions do not see anything fundamentally wrong with people. There is no concept of original sin. Indigenous worldviews and religions recognize good and bad behavior, with resulting consequences, and values and ideals as well. But there is no intrinsic sin within people that needs to be atoned for or forgiven, which is very central to the Judeo-Christian worldview. Christianity tends to be sin based, whereas Indigenous worldviews and religions are virtues based.

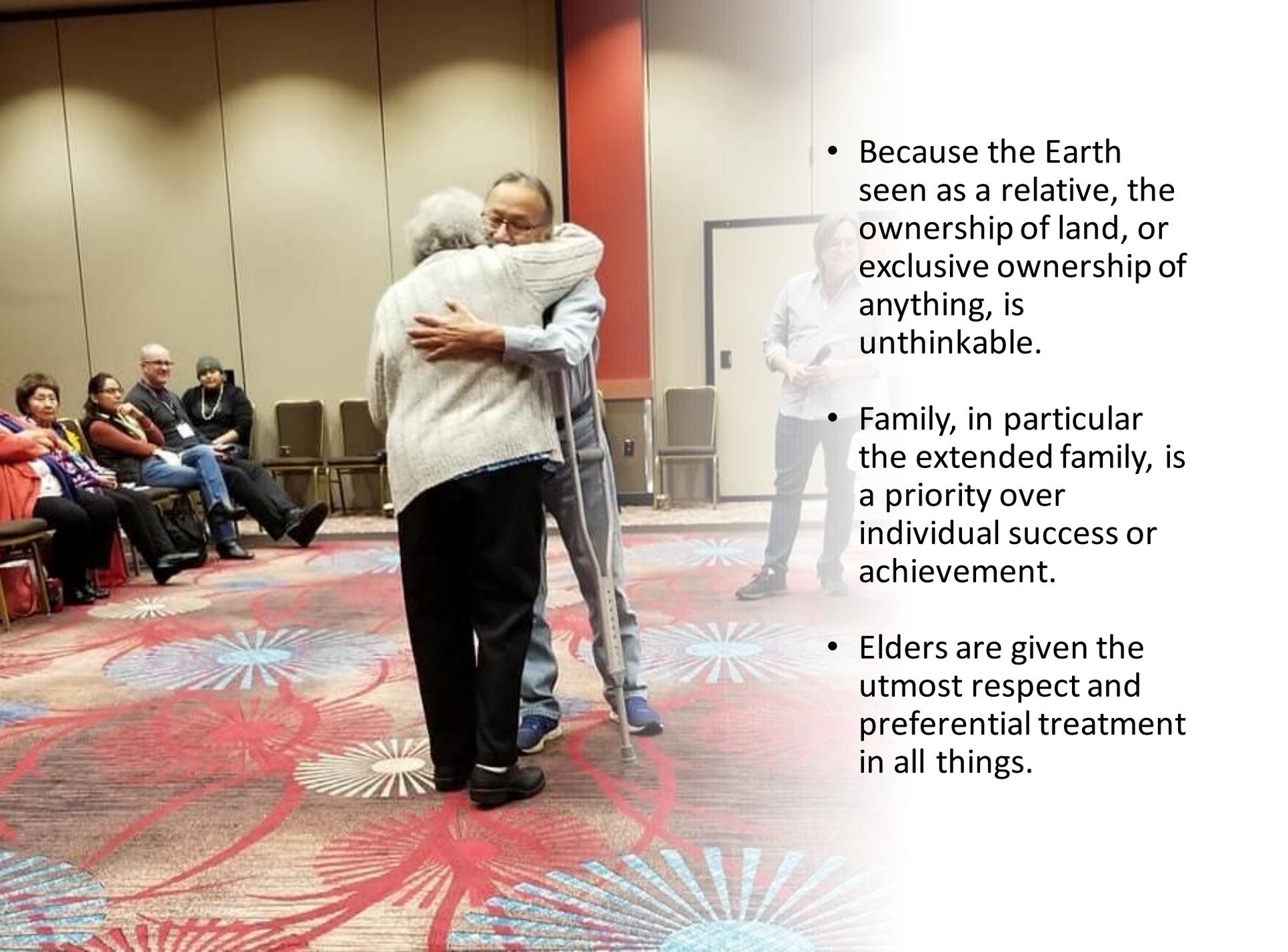


Indigenous religion is centered in and practiced within the community as a whole and not in a separate institution, unlike the Christian church. People did not “go to church.” Instead, spiritual ceremonies were a part of ordinary community and tribal life. While there were and are shamans, prophets and elders, they have lived and practiced within the community and have not been organized separately or in any hierarchical way.

# Other Indigenous Worldview and Societal Contrasts



- Many Indigenous communities were matriarchal in their organization, with females being the heads of households.
- People lived in the present, immediate state. In some Indigenous languages, there is no past or future tense.
- Direct eye contact is inappropriate for Indigenous people. It is seen as rude, even hostile.



- Because the Earth seen as a relative, the ownership of land, or exclusive ownership of anything, is unthinkable.
- Family, in particular the extended family, is a priority over individual success or achievement.
- Elders are given the utmost respect and preferential treatment in all things.



Indigenous cultures do not recognize binary gender classifications. There are either at least three genders or no word for gender at all.

# Indigenous Stages of Development

- Belonging
- Mastery
- Independence
- Generosity

*M. Brokenleg and L. Brendtro,  
"Reclaiming Youth at Risk"*



# Belonging

The primary need and developmental stage

Children need to understand that they belong to something greater than themselves that is benevolent and offers a place for them

For Indigenous children this is typically the extended family (*tiospaye* in Lakota) which teaches them this, and the understanding is extended to a clan, tribe or nation, eventually extending to the Sacred Circle of the Cosmos

# Mastery

Children and adolescents begin to understand what their duty or function is from the family, clan or tribe

This typically involves a talent or a skill with beneficial results

This skill contributes to the social structure

# Independence

With the establishment of at least one mastery talent or skill, the child is able to grow to a point of sustainability, when they no longer need to be taken care of to thrive

The point of independence is not so that the person can stand alone, independently, but as part of an interdependent social structure

# Generosity

Considered to be the greatest of Indigenous values

Involves the understanding that nothing belongs to anyone in particular but is to be shared

Existential equivalent is Self Actualization, except it is about the self's realizing full potential in making contributions to the whole



# The Post-Columbian World

Colonization changed everything

# The Doctrine of Discovery

A series of papal decrees (bulls) calling for the colonization of Africa and the Western Hemisphere, the taking of land, and the subjugation and religious indoctrination of the Indigenous people in those regions.



# GENOCIDE



Intentionally and systematically implemented on the Indigenous people of the Western Hemisphere from 1492 to 1890.

“Nearly all the population areas of the Americas were reduced by 90 percent following the onset of colonizing projects, decreasing the targeted Indigenous populations of the Americas from 100 million to 10 million. Commonly referred to as the most extreme demographic disaster – framed as natural – in human history ...” (Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States*)

Initiated by European invaders in North America and continued by U.S. Government and churches (through assimilation processes, namely boarding schools). There are numerous genocidal tactics, or ways of making a people disappear.

**The Pope asserts rights to colonize, convert, and enslave**

***Dum Diversas (1452) and Romanus Pontifex (1454)***

were papal bulls issued by Pope Nicholas V to King Afonso V of Portugal confirming to the Crown of Portugal dominion over lands in Africa. Along with encouraging the seizure of the lands of Saracen Turks and non-Christians, they granted permission for the enslavement of such peoples.

IS Episcopus, Servus Servorum

Stephano Sidarouss, sacrosancti Episcopi tituli Salariae, ecclesie Patriarcha Alexandrino Capite  
Ecclesie laudes egregias, utpote sanctam Apostolicam commendationem invidiosam, sapientissimorum vicariorum doctrinam  
et qui non maxime per saecula fecerit. Quam et non, cum per lamentabilem exitum Marci Khuzam, huius, Feb  
ut in sufficientibus, qui per virtute tam sacrum Ecclesiam gubernet, consensimus Te ad hoc officium vocare, certe  
omninoque usum consensimus, ut in eadem sine terra natus et educatus in eadem Ecclesia Alexandrina monere huius  
erat quodammodo venerabilis Frater Noster S.R.E. Cardinalis S. Congregationis pro Ecclesia Orientali a S. S.  
inter Patriarcham Alexandrinum Capite nominatus et reverendus, solo regimine et administratione sui  
meritis, meritis et edificationibus, quae iuxta statuta leges ac iustitias consuetudines Universali Ecclesiae ad haec  
sunt. Te ad ea exornatus; ut intendam tuis sollicitudinis cura. Nam et hanc Apostolicam Sedem hactenus in hac huius  
communitate, reverentibus Fratres, tam venerabilibus, et non minus, ut per te, sollicitus, iustis  
conatus, parant. Item dilectus Filius e clero regulari in eminenter honoratur et non modo Te patrem  
etiam ut hanc supranatam religionem introducat, multum enim confert ad sui religionis prosperitatem  
et hoc Literis Nostre eius cura qui male Samaritanis Alexandrino Capite indicatur in tuis  
sua consuetudine. Ceterum, venerabilis Frater, vobis Dei optime maximo patris animo facimus ut qui  
omninoque salute quaerenda contulerit, iam tanta humanitate, cordium populi curam ita suscipias, ut et qui  
per ad Ecclesia sancta operaverit, in labore, sollicitudine, caritate, quantum fieri poterit, in eius sacra cura  
si, ante Deum multumque reverentissime prosequerentur. Sanctificatus Noster vicarius, etc.

Stephano Sidarouss  
R. S. Cardinalis

Stephano Sidarouss, pro Patriarcha



“We grant you by these present documents, with our Apostolic Authority, full and free permission to invade, search out, capture, and subjugate the Saracens and pagans and any other unbelievers and enemies of Christ wherever they may be, as well as their kingdoms, duchies, counties, principalities, and other property [...] and to reduce their persons into perpetual servitude.”

- *Dum Diversas*, 1452

## ***The Inter Cetera (1493)***

**Pope Alexander VI issues a papal decree, “Inter Cetera,” in which he authorizes Spain and Portugal to colonize the Americas and its Native peoples as “discovered” subjects (this was the first use of the term).**

**The decree asserts the rights of Spain and Portugal to colonize, convert, and enslave “discovered” Africans.**

*Verzijl, Jan Hendrik Willem; W.P. Heere; J.P.S. Offerhaus (1979).  
International Law in Historical  
Perspective.*



# The Treaty of Tordesillas (1494)

- Papal authority endorsed Spain and Portugal's extension of their states into the newly "discovered" Western Hemisphere.
- This treaty divided the Western Hemisphere, as it was known to be at the time, between Spain and Portugal, from what is currently Greenland down to Brazil.



- **Patent Granted by King Henry VII to John Cabot and his Sons in 1496**
- **By this public document, Henry VII indicated his official, royal support for Cabot's enterprise. As an agent of the English Crown, Cabot was empowered to investigate, claim and possess lands "which before this time were unknown to all Christians" - which meant he could not intrude on Spanish and Portuguese discoveries. The king would receive one fifth of the value of merchandise brought back to Bristol, though he had invested no money of his own.**



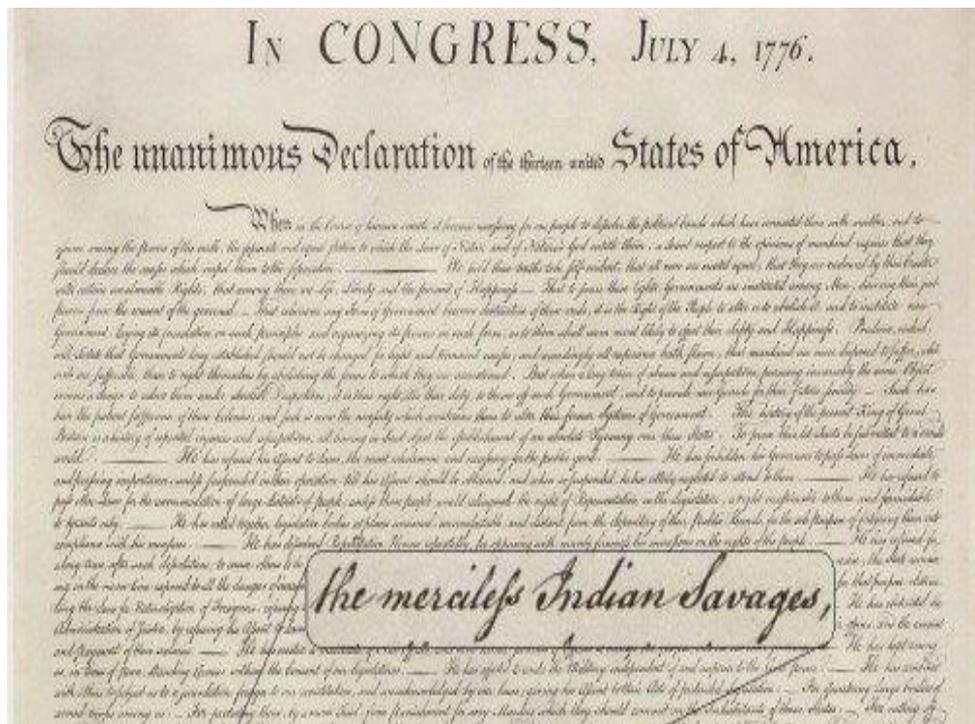
- **The theologically-grounded philosophy of the Doctrine of Discovery was subsequently promulgated by European monarchies in order to legitimize the colonization of lands outside of Europe.**
- **The philosophy allowed European entities to seize lands inhabited by Indigenous peoples with the justification of “discovery,” beginning in 1606.**

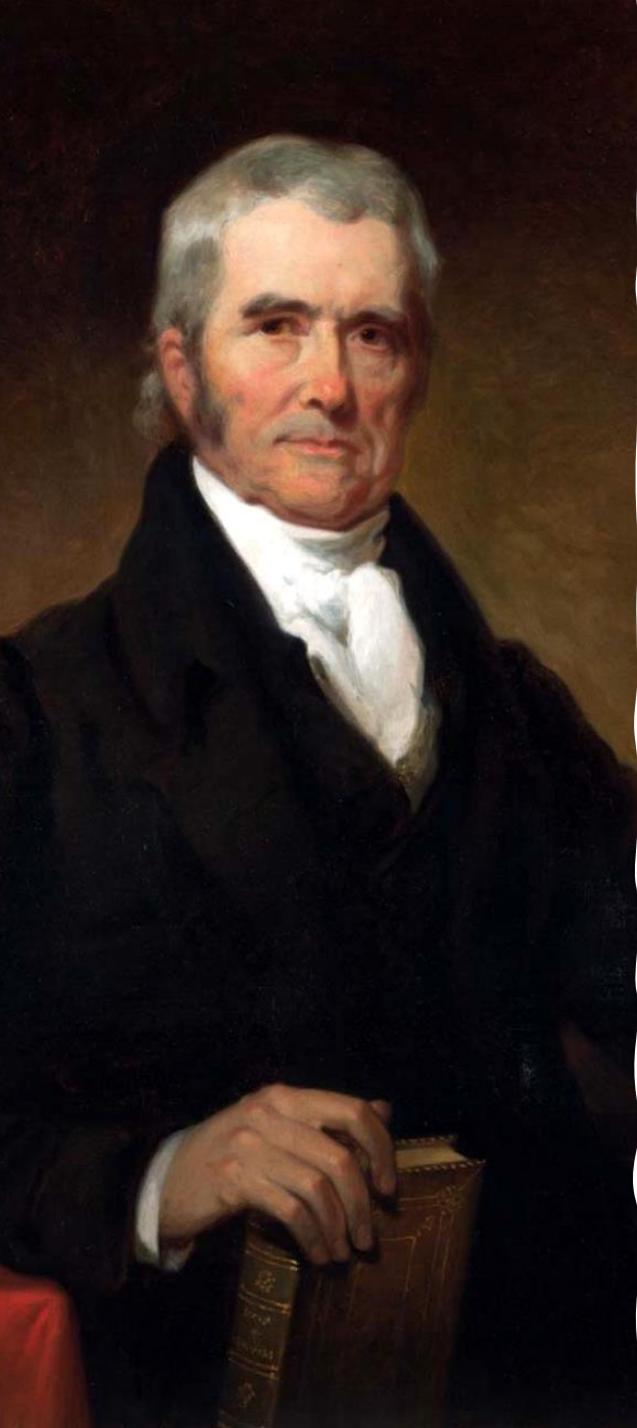


- In 1792, U.S. Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson declared that the Discovery philosophy would extend from Europe to the infant U.S. government. The Doctrine and its legacy began to influence American imperialism and the treatment of Indigenous peoples.

- *Dunbar-Ortiz, Roxanne (2014). An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States. Boston: Beacon Press.*

Jefferson, who wrote The Declaration of Independence in 1776, referred to the Indigenous people of the New World as “merciless Indian Savages” who would be specifically excluded from the principals of freedom and human rights declared in the document.





---

**In the nineteenth century United States, the Doctrine of Discovery was specifically used conceptually in the debate of public international law expounded by the U.S. Supreme Court in a series of decisions, most notably *Johnson v McIntosh* in 1823.**

**Chief Justice John Marshall said that the “right of discovery” was well-illustrated by the royal commission that England’s King Henry VII gave to John Cabot and his sons. That commission instructed the Cabots to “seek out, discover, and find, whatsoever isles, countries, and provinces of the heathens and infidels that before this time have been unknown to all Christian people.” The U.S. Supreme Court called this claim of a “right of domination.”**

- **Chief Justice Marshall explained and applied the way that colonial powers laid claim to lands belonging to foreign sovereign nations during the Age of Discovery.**

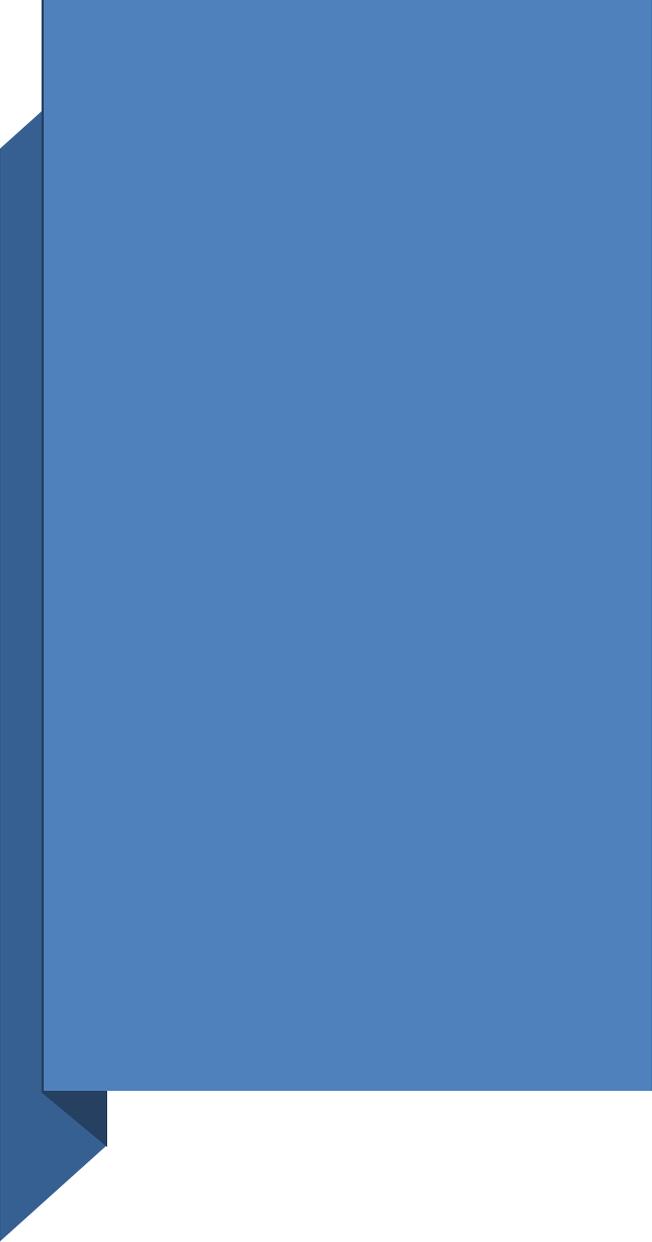
- **Under it, title to lands lay with the government whose subjects travelled to and occupied a territory whose inhabitants were not subjects of a European Christian monarch.**

- **The doctrine has been primarily used to support decisions invalidating or ignoring Indigenous occupation of land in favor of colonial or post-colonial governments.**

*Watson, B. (2000). "John Marshall and Indian Land Rights: A Historical Rejoinder to the Claim of Universal Recognition of the Doctrine of Discovery."*

# Worcester v Georgia, 1832

- Marshall apparently changed his mind on the issue of Indigenous tribal rights to land and ruled in favor of several Southeastern U.S. Native tribes that the U.S. must establish relations with them as sovereign nations.
- President Andrew Jackson refused to support or enforce this decision. In fact, he defied it even though it was a Supreme Court ruling.
- The Trail of Tears followed.



- **“Manifest Destiny,”** a phrase coined in 1845 (attributed to NY newspaper editor John O’Sullivan), expressed the philosophy that drove 19th-century U.S. territorial expansion.

- **Manifest Destiny** held that the United States was destined—by God—to expand its dominion and spread democracy and capitalism across the entire North American continent.



# Colonization Destroyed the pre-Columbian Worldview

---

- Genocide
- Land theft
- Forced cultural assimilation
- Prohibition of Indigenous languages
- Religious indoctrination
- Depiction of Indigenous people as obsolete
- Depiction of the perpetrators as good guys





# Before 1492

The area now known as the United States was populated by Indigenous people of many nations and tribes, with their own languages, social customs and spiritual expressions.

The Indigenous population in 1492 is estimated to have been at least 10 million. Some suggest 50 million or more.

The US Indigenous population in 1890 was recorded at 249,000.

*(Native Americans in the Census, 1860–1890, National Archives)*









## THE CARLISLE INDIAN INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL

This school was the model for a nationwide system of boarding schools intended to assimilate American Indians into mainstream culture. Over 10,000 indigenous children attended the school between 1879 and 1918. Despite idealistic beginnings, the school left a mixed and lasting legacy, creating opportunity for some students and conflicted identities for others. In this cemetery are 186 graves of students who died while at Carlisle.

PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL AND MUSEUM COMMISSION

2003 ©

## INDIAN CEMETERY

BURIED HERE ARE THE INDIANS WHO DIED WHILE ATTENDING THE CARLISLE INDIAN SCHOOL (1879-1918). THE ORIGINAL INDIAN CEMETERY WAS LOCATED TO THE REAR OF THE GRANDSTAND ON INDIAN FIELD. IN 1931 THE GRAVES WERE TRANSFERRED TO THIS SITE.





LE  
OE  
OTOC  
29 1890

PERCY  
WHITEBEAR  
CHEYENNE  
JULY 22 1899

JAMES  
CORNMAN  
SIOUX  
APRIL 21 1891

HANNA  
DECHIZIEN  
MAY 4 1839

ANTHONY  
NUSKE  
APACHE  
APRIL 7 1887

BEAULAH  
ISTONE  
APACHE  
AUGUST 12 1889



UNKNOWN

UNKNOWN

LUCY SPALDING  
MAY 1860  
MARCH 23 1905

MABEL STOCK  
AUGUST 18 1864

UNKNOWN

THE BENNET  
MAY 18 1860  
MAY 10 1900

SARAH WRAY  
MAY 18 1860  
MAY 10 1900

SON OF  
T. R. BAGLEY  
U.S.A.  
SEPTEMBER 18 1860

INFANT  
SON OF  
MR. & MRS. J. B. BAGLEY  
U.S.A.  
SEPTEMBER 18 1860

ERINO VITANO  
MAY 18 1860  
MAY 10 1900

DAVID GODDING  
MAY 18 1860  
MAY 10 1900

FRANK  
MAY 18 1860  
MAY 10 1900

ERINO VITANO  
MAY 18 1860  
MAY 10 1900

UNKNOWN

UNKNOWN

UNKNOWN

UNKNOWN

UNKNOWN

UNKNOWN

UNKNOWN

UNKNOWN

UNKNOWN



WALLACE  
LOUANE  
MAY 1901  
OCT 1947  
1947

WALLACE  
LOUANE  
MAY 1901  
OCT 1947

UNKNOWN



Three Lakota Boys, Carlisle, ca. 1900







MANUEL C MORAN



JENNIE MAE GILLESPIE



LEROY A. BAD WOUND



PEARL BISSONETTE



JACK R. RUNNELS



BILLY YELLOW



REBECCA IRON HAWK  
SECRETARY



MARION JANIS  
VICE - PRESIDENT



SYLVAN HAUFF  
PRESIDENT



ETHELVN JACOBS  
TREASURER



BOBBY B.



BILLY BREWER



MR. CLIFFORD W. KING  
PRINCIPAL



MRS. EVELYN BERGEN  
SPONSOR



LAVERN H. LITTLE HAWK

1949

U.S. SENIOR

---

**The Episcopal Church repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery in 2009. Many Christian denominations have done so since then.**

**Today, however, the Doctrine of Discovery remains unknown to most Americans, and alternative views of history have been vigorously attacked.**

**Statement  
issued by  
Presiding  
Bishop  
Michael Curry  
and House of  
Deputies  
President Gay  
Jennings  
(2021)**

---

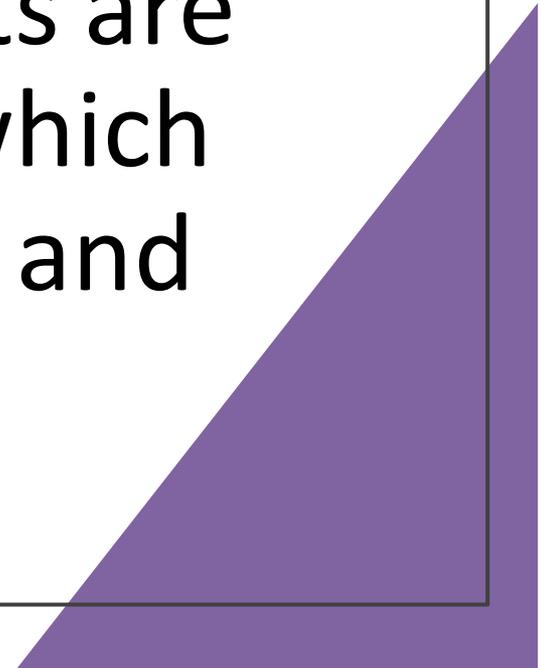
“While complete records are unavailable, we know that The Episcopal Church was associated with Indigenous schools during the 19th and 20th centuries. We must come to a full understanding of the legacies of these schools.

---

“To that end, we commit to the work of truth and reconciliation with Indigenous communities in our church. We pledge to spend time with our Indigenous siblings, listening to their stories and history, and seeking their wisdom about how we can together come to terms with this part of our history.”

# Repatriation

The remains of Indigenous boarding school students are being returned home, which is important for cultural and spiritual closure



**Holy Apostles Episcopal Church**

**CARLISLE  
CHILDREN  
SUNDAY 1030 AM**



**2937**



**OPHELIA POWLESS**

(CARLISLE STUDENT)

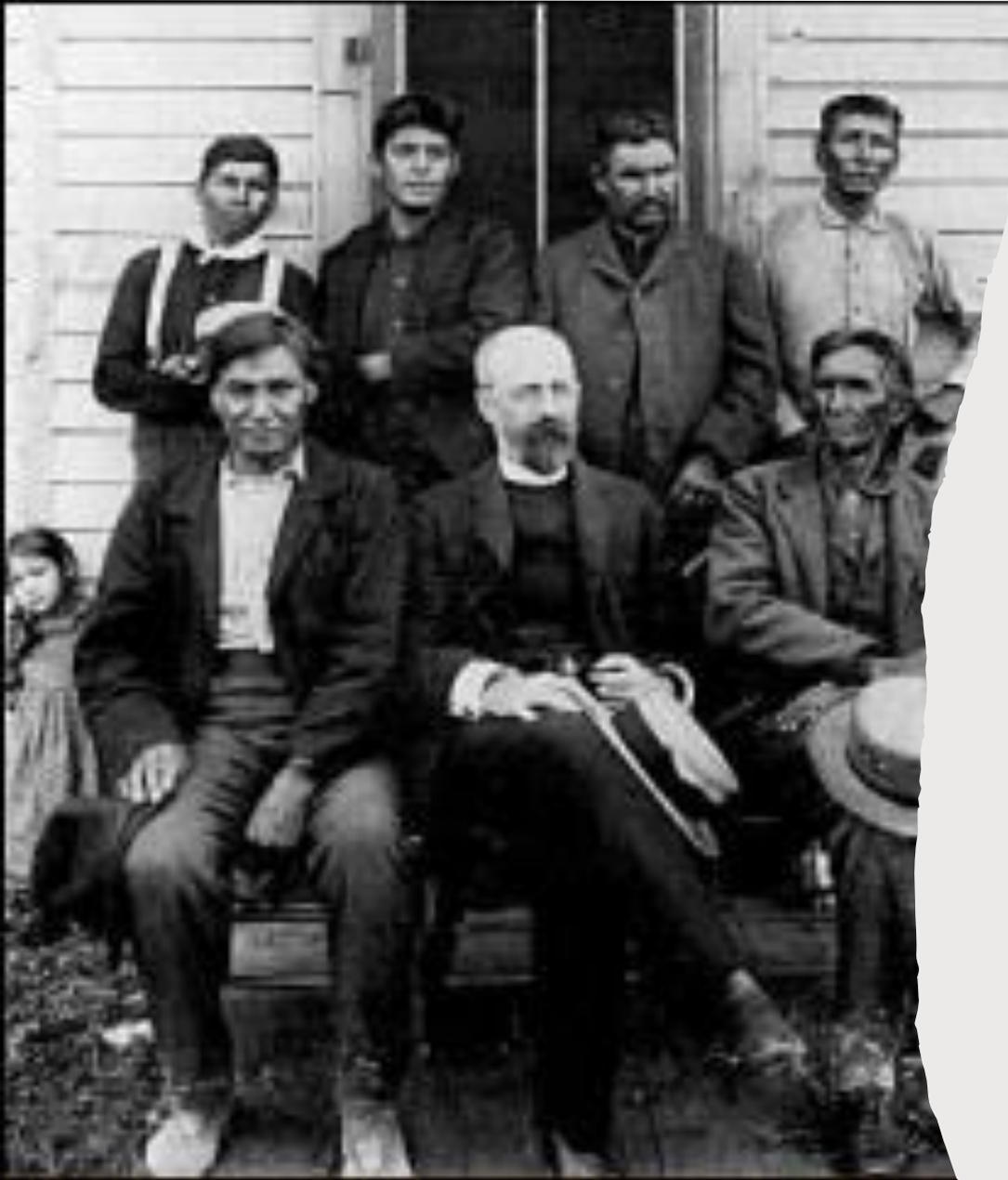
AUG. 15, 1875 – FEB. 2, 1891

DAUGHTER OF PETER AND SARAH

ARRIVED HOME JUNE 30, 2019

# Being Indigenous and Christian

- An impossibility, according to Vine Deloria, Jr.
- Possible only if Jesus is seen as the Native Messiah, fulfilling the teachings of traditional Indigenous ways, according to Steven Charleston



Episcopal missionary with Dakota  
Indians, Minnesota, 1897

# Reasons Indigenous People Wanted to Become Christian in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

- In order to survive
- Traditional worship and spiritual expressions were made illegal because they were seen as a threat to the government and militia
- The universality of the Christ figure was recognized by elders and spiritual leaders



Understanding  
Jesus as the  
Native Messiah

---

Central to the future of  
an Indigenous  
understanding and  
expression of the  
Christian faith

---

Can exist within or  
outside of a particular  
denomination or church



The post-Columbian worldview has been all about survival



# Survival involves ...

---

- Living in the face of nearly insurmountable personal and social issues and trauma
- Resilience
- Hope





## Suggested questions

---

What did you learn from this presentation?

---

Did you experience anything as surprising or unsettling?

---

Do you see the church or America differently as a result of what you have learned? Why or why not?

---

Others?

# Produced by The Episcopal Church Office of Indigenous Ministries

