

# HARD TRUTHS OF THE WEST

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## THE WEST

Often the West is understood as a collection of the most “successful” countries. However, the (supposed) success of a minority of countries depends on other countries being (supposedly) unsuccessful. Contrary to popular belief, the so-called success of Western countries is dependent on the **exploitation** of other countries, people and ecosystems, **not** on the hard work of its citizens. Unsuccessful in a context of exploitation translates to a low standard of living, little access to appropriate nutrition and freshwater, poor medical care, and more. It is time to stop romanticizing the West and to acknowledge past and present atrocities that are being committed in order to maintain the ‘success’ of Western countries.

## HOLD ON... WHAT’S THE WEST?



‘The West’ is a term commonly used to describe countries that are considered highly developed, industrialized, urbanized, capitalist, secular, and modern. Western countries are often represented in mass media as the most advanced, thus creating a criterion of evaluation which all other countries are compared and ranked against. The term (‘the West’) is invented and can be traced back to the industrialization of countries known as Western Europe and to the Enlightenment period; these phases of history created a spirit of superiority amongst so-called Western European countries.

## WHAT’S SO PROBLEMATIC ABOUT THE WEST?

The West is another term for modern day imperialism, as are “developed”, “first world”, and “rich”. Imperialism comes in many forms but is most recognizable as the usurpation of one nation’s land and resources by another nation.

In Canada, imperialism takes form in settler-colonialism\*. Colonialism is a system through which land, resources and labour are stolen from one group of people to benefit another. Settler colonialism is a system that relies on settlers making a permanent home on Indigenous land and forcing Indigenous peoples out of their homelands to gain power. In early Canada, military personnel, entrepreneurs, colonial officials, priests, and settlers came to see these lands as their home all the while forcing Indigenous peoples out of their territories. Canada and the USA became popularly understood as the ‘new’ West, or the land of opportunity. This idea of Canada and the USA is problematic because it wrongly asserts that the dispossession of Indigenous lands has been resolved. Settler-colonialism (and thus land theft) is still a problem today so long as settlers live on, control and exploit stolen Indigenous lands.

## THE WEST: NOT THE BEST

Moving forward, it’s important that we see ‘the West’ as it truly is. The West is **not** a collection of the most modern countries. The narrative that many settlers in Canada are told is that the West is the best, because of economic freedom. The West is a collection of countries that continue to accrue power through exploitation. The supposed economic freedom of a few rests upon stolen land, cheap and free labour, the destruction of ecosystems, and the oppression of people worldwide.



FOR MORE INFO, CHECK OUT THESE RESOURCES:

Hall, S. (2018). Essential Essays, Volume 2: Identity and Diaspora (D. Morley, Ed.). Duke University Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478002710>

Smith, L. T., & Dawson Books. (2012). Decolonizing methodologies research and indigenous peoples.  
<http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=StAndrews&isbn=9781848139534>