Factsheet #1 Jordan A

She Must Be Civilized, She Paints Her Toenails

By Sharon Venne

Colonization as an Ongoing War

The arrival of Christopher Columbus marked the beginning of a war on Indigenous survival. Indigenous Peoples have been subjected to:

- o Genocide
- Slavery
- Diseases introduced by colonizers
- Forced displacement

Despite 500+ years of colonial violence, Indigenous Peoples continue to exist and resist.

Why does Indigenous survival threaten colonizers? **Because it** challenges the legitimacy of settler occupation of Indigenous lands.



Landing of Christopher Columbus 1492 (John Vanderlyn, 1846) https://www.aoc.gov/explore-capitol-campus/art/landingcolumbus

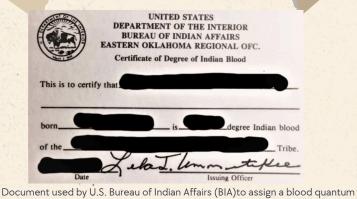
The Strategy of Erasure: Blood Quantum & "Legal" Disappearance

Colonizers use racial classification systems (such as blood quantum laws) to define Indigeneity on settler terms.

What is Blood Quantum?

- A colonial measure to define Indigenous identity by "percentage of blood."
- Still used today to regulate legal status and membership.
- Meant to "rob Indigenous Peoples of their inherent right to decide their citizenship."
- Over time, fewer meet the quota, so Indigenous Peoples "disappear" legally.

The goal: make Indigenous Peoples "disappear" on paper, so colonizers can claim their lands



percentage to determine Indigenous identity. (Voice of America News)
https://www.voanews.com/a/usa_some-native-americans-fear-blood-quantum-formulapaper-genocide/6208615.html

Terra Nullius ("Land Belonging to No One")

- If there are no legally recognized Indigenous Peoples, then the land is considered unoccupied.
- This justifies further land theft and ongoing colonial control.

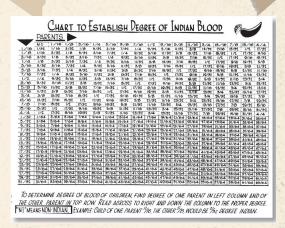


Chart used by U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to determine legal Indigenous identity. (SAGE Publications) https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1536504220950398?icid=int.sj-full-text.similar-articles.5

The Politics of Identity: Who Gets to be "Indigenous"?

- Being Indigenous is a political identity, not a racial one.
- Colonial definitions of Indigeneity (blood quantum, status cards) serve the interests of settlers, not . Indigenous Peoples.
- Colonizers allow Indigenous Peoples to perform culture (dancing, speaking their languages) but deny them
 political rights to land and sovereignty.
- **Venne's Experience:** At a human rights conference, she was dismissed because she was seen as "too civilized" (she wore Western clothes and had painted toenails), highlighting how she disrupted stereotypical and harmful ideas about what it means to be and look Indigenous.
- Key Idea: Indigenous identity is not about appearance, it is about connection to land, culture, and political sovereignty.

"The 'Acceptable' Indigenous Person: Seen, But Not Heard"

Settler society tolerates Indigenous culture only when it is non-threatening. Indigenous Peoples are expected to:

- Perform at powwows but not demand land rights.
- Speak their languages but not challenge colonial governments.
- Wear traditional regalia but not claim self-determination.
- Colonizers expect Indigenous identity to remain frozen in time—if Indigenous Peoples modernize, they are seen as "less Indigenous."

This erases Indigenous resistance and political power, ensuring that colonizers retain control.



Carlisle Indian Industrial School "Before and After" 1882-1885 (Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center.) https://rar.rutgers.edu/before-and-after-portraiture-photography-and-time-at-the_carlisle-indian-industrial-school-by-maria-beatriz-h-carrion/

Assimilation & The Myth of Progress

Colonizers claim Indigenous Peoples must "assimilate" into Western society to be considered "civilized."

False narrative: Colonization brings "progress," and Indigenous Peoples must abandon their cultures to survive.

must abandon their cultures to survive

Reality: Colonization has always been about control and exploitation of

Indigenous Peoples and their lands, not

progress.

- Western societies prioritize individualism, while Indigenous cultures emphasize collective responsibility to land, community, and future generations.
- Colonial systems (education, government, law) impose individualism, weakening Indigenous Nations and removing their ability to self-govern.

The Kari-Oca Declaration: Indigenous Resistance in Action

What is the Kari-Oca Declaration?

- In 1992, Indigenous leaders were excluded from the UN Earth Summit, so they held their own gathering.
- They drafted the Kari-Oca
 Declaration, asserting Indigenous sovereignty and environmental responsibility.
- It was dismissed as "radical" by state governments and UN officials because it challenged colonial land theft and resource extraction.

Why does this matter?

- Indigenous Peoples did not wait for settler approval to define their rights.
- It demonstrates self-determination outside of colonial systems.
- Colonizers fear Indigenous selfgovernance because it disrupts their economic and political control.

Land & Identity: Why Territory Matters

- The land is not just property, it is identity.
- Indigenous identity is inseparable from land. Displacement from the land can lead to cultural and spiritual destruction.
- Colonial governments remove Indigenous Peoples from land to sever their identities and autonomy.
- Venne argues: "Where are you from?" is an Indigenous question that refers to one's territory (the ancestral land and Nation), not just a location (like a town or city).
- Western environmental destruction (mining, logging, deforestation, pipelines etc.) directly targets Indigenous survival.
- Indigenous Peoples resist by:
 - Protecting their lands through governance and legal action.
 - Reaffirming their cultural and spiritual connections to the land.

Scientific Colonialism: The Human Genome Diversity Project

- Colonization is not just political...it is scientific.
 Science has been used to justify control over Indigenous Peoples and their lands.
- In the 1990s, The Human Genome Diversity Project attempted to link Indigenous Peoples to Asia, implying they are not original to North America.



(All My Relations Podcast)
https://www.allmyrelationspodcast.com/post/ep
-4-can-a-dna-test-make-me-native-american

Why does this matter?

- If Indigenous Peoples are "migrants" rather than original caretakers of the land, colonizers can claim that their own presence is legitimate.
- Settler governments use science to try to rewrite history in their favor.

Further exploitation:

- Indigenous genetic material was studied and patented without consent.
- Colonial science treats Indigenous Peoples as objects of study, rather than sovereign nations.

Education & Erasure: Teaching Human Rights in a Colonial World

Venne's experience teaching Indigenous human rights in France:

- Many students (especially from Canada and the U.S.)
 refused to acknowledge their own countries' role in
 colonization.
- Western institutions resist acknowledging colonial violence.

Lesson: Even in "progressive" spaces, Indigenous voices are silenced when they challenge colonial power structures.

Why This Article is Essential to Understanding Indigenous Resistance

- Venne exposes the ongoing colonial agenda, erasing Indigenous sovereignty through racial policies, scientific narratives, and education systems.
- Challenges the myth of Indigenous disappearance. Colonial policies intentionally aim to eliminate Indigenous identity over generations.
- Reveals the double standard of Western society. Indigenous Peoples are allowed to perform their culture but not claim land or political power.
- Shows how Indigenous resistance continues, through activism, legal battles, environmental protection, and self-governance.



Sharon H. Venne https://adrbc.com/team/sharon-h-venne/

Bibliography

All My Relations. "Ep 4: Can a DNA Test Make Me Native American?" All My Relations Podcast, 16 May 2019, www.allmyrelationspodcast.com/post/ep-4-can-a-dna-test-make-me-native-american.

Architect of the Capitol. The Landing of Columbus. U.S. Capitol Rotunda, painted by John Vanderlyn, 1846, www.aoc.gov/explore-capitol-campus/art/landing-columbus.

Publications, https://doi.org/10.1177/1536504220950398.

Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center. Analyzing Before and After Photographs & Exploring Student Files. Dickinson College, https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/teach/analyzing-and-after-photographs-exploring-student-files.

Gonzales, Angela A., and Júlia Kertész. "Indigenous Identity, Being, and Belonging." vol. 19, no. 3, 2020, pp. 28–33. SAGE

Hilleary, Cecily. "Some Native Americans Fear Blood Quantum Formula Is 'Paper Genocide'." Voice of America News, 24 July 2021, www.voanews.com/a/usa_some-native-americans-fear-blood-quantum-formula-paper-genocide/6208615.html.

Venne, Sharon. "She Must Be Civilized: She Paints Her Toenails." In Being Indigenous: Perspectives of Activism, Culture, Language and Identity, edited by Neyooxet Greymorning, Routledge, 2019, pp. 171–184. Taylor & Francis, <a href="https://www-taylorfrancis-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780429454776-14/must-civilized-paints-toenails-sharon-venne?context=ubx&refld=45f18cfc-e7ab-4fab-a593-bd3bd104d0fa.