



Global Justice and Change

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*The Understory: Mapping the Roots of
Our Global Systems and Crises In Order
to Imagine Otherwise*

NISHA TOOMEY AND EMMA
WRIGHT



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About This Resource

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NOTE: This resource is currently in development. Version 1 will be completed in the upcoming months and this notice will be updated to confirm when all pending components have been integrated.

INTRODUCTION TO GLOBAL JUSTICE AND CHANGE

Indigenous Nations and Land Acknowledgements

Land Acknowledgement and Commitment to Anti-Colonial Struggle

This resource was created in **Tkaronto** (also known as Toronto). We (the authors and creators of this resource) honour the Indigenous nations of this territory, the Anishinaabe, Missis-saugas and Haudenosaunee, who have cared for this land since time immemorial. We strive to be accountable to the Dish With One Spoon Treaty and to the ongoing anti-colonial struggle for the return of stolen land and wealth to Indigenous nations and peoples. **We centre our work on relationship building, responsibility and accountability** and know that as non-Indigenous settlers to this land, while it is a given that we will continue to make mistakes, our mistakes will be held within the ongoing practice of unlearning colonial logics and behaviours, and learning from and with Indigenous nations and other peoples living in these territories about other ways of relating and being in the world together.



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For more information see “[Land acknowledgements: uncover-](#)

[ing an oral history of Tkaronto](#)” by Selena Mills and Sara Roque, Illustrations by Chief Lady Bird.

Explore Land Acknowledgements Further

For further context regarding the **performativity of land acknowledgements**, such as how they can work to ease settler guilt rather than address the relationship building required to confront colonial violence and erasure, please read [“What’s wrong with land acknowledgements, and how to make them better,”](#) by Ka’nnehsí:io Deer for CBC news, Oct 21, 2021

If you are not Indigenous to these territories, it is important to **consider the different ways of relating to land acknowledgements and colonial-settler history in Canada based on your own lineages**. Whether you come to Canada as a newcomer to these territories, were forcibly brought here by practices of enslavement or indentured servitude, or come from lineages of white settlers whose original and ongoing purpose on this land was to produce wealth by stealing territory and resources from Indigenous nations, your responsibility to Indigenous nations and the land upon which you call home will look different. To explore this further consider reading [“The shared struggles of Muslim Cana-](#)

[dians and Indigenous peoples,”](#) by Helyey Doutaghi and Ashley Courchene for rabble.ca, June 15, 2021.

Dish With One Spoon Territory

The acknowledgement below was created by X University's [Aboriginal Education Council](#):

Toronto is in the 'Dish With One Spoon Territory.' The Dish With One Spoon is a treaty between the Anishinaabe, Mississaugas and Haudenosaunee that bound them to share the territory and protect the land. Subsequent Indigenous Nations and peoples, Europeans and all newcomers have been invited into this treaty in the spirit of peace, friendship and respect.

The “Dish,” or sometimes it is called the “Bowl,” represents what is now southern Ontario, from the Great Lakes to Quebec and from Lake Simcoe into the United States. *We all eat out of the Dish, all of us that share this territory, with only one spoon. That means **we have to share the responsibility of ensuring the dish is never empty, which includes taking care of the land and the creatures we share it with.** Importantly, there are no knives at the table, representing that we must keep the peace. The dish is graphically represented by the wampum pictured above.

This was a treaty made between the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee after the French and Indian War. Newcomers were then incorporated into it over the years, notably in 1764 with The Royal Proclamation/The Treaty of Niagara.

Indigenous Nations and Territories Around the World

In addition to the territories that have directly sustained this project here in Tkaronto, the territories of Indigenous peoples

around the world (and the ongoing theft and exploitation of their lands), produces the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the technology that we depend on, the servers needed to sustain the internet, among so much more. For example, Zoom has erected its headquarters in San Jose, California, the traditional territory of the [Muwekma Ohlone tribal nation](#).

We (the authors and creators of this resource) honour the original peoples and caretakers of all lands around the world and join the struggle to end the ongoing colonial violence and erasure of Indigenous nations, peoples and non-human life globally.

Explore Further

- For more information on **Treaties and Agreements across Turtle Island**, see [Whose Land](#), a web-based app that uses GIS technology to assist users in identifying Indigenous Nations, territories and Indigenous communities across Canada.
- For **maps and data on Indigenous Land and Territories around the world**, visit [LandMark](#), an online, interactive global platform to provide maps and other critical information on lands that are collectively held and used by Indigenous Peoples and local communities.
- For more information on **Indigenous Nations and territories around the world**, see Amnesty International's resource and introductory information on [Indigenous Peoples](#) and Cultural Survival's (an Indigenous-led NGO) description of the [issues](#) Indigenous

peoples face globally.

Introduction

In dominant Western narratives, modern day life is often presented as highly globalized. Humanity is connected by international commerce, by migration and movement, by air travel and tourism. Culturally, the idea that the world is yours to explore is prevalent. However, this world of ease and movement is only accessible to a global wealthy elite. It ignores the fact that, in order to sustain such a world for a limited few, millions of people are exploited for their labour and the earth and non-human life are placed in peril.

The idea that some are more connected, more global, than others; the idea that wealth and privilege are created or accrued through individual worth and merit; among many other foundational notions of modern Western culture; are based on the notion that we (as people) are disconnected from one another to begin with. **Our dominant global systems are sustained by the illusion that humans can own and consume the world as if we are separate from it.** As if the comforts and securities enjoyed by a few, and the very ability to survive, do not depend on the labour and care of others and on non-human life and lands.

Modern day cultures of accumulation and consumption—despite what dominant capitalistic and colonial narratives may say—attempt to sustain an illusion of separation. They are based on a distorted claim that “globalization” has brought the world together—which presupposes a separation to begin with—when in fact **“globalization” is based on racial capitalism and colonialism.** These systems depend on socially constructed notions of worth, and have imposed a false sense of independence over the reality of interdependence.

On a practical level, we (here we are referring to the “we” of the global north, the “we” living in so-called Canada) eat food, wear clothes, and use the technologies produced by **so-called “resources” extracted from the earth and processed and assembled by poor Black and Brown people around the world** (Indigenous peoples whose land has been stolen and livelihoods denied to advance the global economy). It is simply impossible to access wealth and live a life of luxury without depending upon millions of other people and life forms. The production of cheap consumer goods that sustain an accumulation based society means we are directly implicated in the harm and violence caused by the dispossession and exploita-

tion of the people and places that sustain our comforts and securities.

On a broader level, **the world and all life on this planet is connected**. All humans, all creatures and plant life, and the very earth itself, are bound together by a shared atmosphere, a shared metabolism. We breathe the same air, drink the same water, and depend on the same regenerative processes to feed and sustain ourselves. Interdependence is the tangible reality of life on this planet and of human existence. And interdependence requires balance. Human history has demonstrated over and over again what happens when the axis tilts. When equilibrium is lost.

We, all humans and life on this planet, find ourselves at a pivotal juncture.

We (in particular the “we” who are benefitting) can continue advancing ways of being in this world that are based on antiquated logics. **We can choose to fight to sustain our current way of life**. To maintain the inequitable structures that provide security and comfort for some, while producing precarity and harm for others. We can choose to believe that it is “normal” to consume in excess, to ignore the violence that we perpetuate and enact, in order to extend the balancing act for just a little longer.

Or we can choose another path, as many communities and nations within so-called Canada and around the world are doing and have done since time immemorial. We can choose a way of existing on this planet that is led by Indigenous Nations and Black and Brown communities. A way that is based on maintaining equitable and caring relationships, centred on shared accountability and responsibility. To believe the lie that this is not possible is self-destructive and cannibalistic.

This introduction aims to situate the perspective and intention of this resource and project. The purpose is to **open dialogue and incite reflection** so that we as humans (wherever you exist in the hierarchies of worth that capitalism and colonialism have produced) can face hard truths to create space for other possibilities. This is about facing the reality that we are all implicated in this mess, and that to find our way out, we must get dirty.

This resource offers a door to many different paths. It does not claim to be the definitive source of information and knowledge. It is one among many and one that will constantly evolve and adapt. Our hope is that it will bring people together, for however brief a moment, to **spark the possibility of change, to develop the stamina to face the storm together**. This will look and feel different for everyone. But it is important to be aware

that we are talking about you. You as an individual and as a member of a broader collective, a member of your family, your community, as a human and life form on this planet.

This resource and program may ask of you things that you are not used to being asked. To start with, we simply ask that you **let your guard down** a little or as much as you are able. To stop that inner voice that may already be saying: what is this bullshit? This is not what I signed up for! Try to thank that voice for its critical thinking, for its discernment and its mistrust, because it is necessary. But try not to allow it to stop you from being vulnerable. From being radically honest with yourself. From moving forward not only from a place of thought and critical thinking, but also from a place of feeling and heart.

This is an **invitation to engage as your full self**. You don't have to meet anyone else's expectations or demands, only your own. You don't have to prove yourself as a "valuable" or "knowledgeable" student. You will be called on to reflect deeply about the world in which we live and how that world is embedded within ourselves, within our psyches and within our bodies. This is no small task, but we hope that you are surprised by how you may come to this with a sense of ease and openness, if you can find a way to allow yourself.

What to Expect

Project Overview

Modules 1 to 3 of this project are about exploring and describing the complex, interconnected global challenges we are facing. The modules focus on **naming and dissecting our current global systems in order to identify the root causes of our contemporary social and ecological crises**. They aim to spotlight a system and logic of racial capitalism, colonialism and supremacist ideologies and structures that seek to consume, control and limit what is possible. In order to explore how to shape and steward change, we must first develop the ability and stamina to sit with the trouble and mess we are in. Not to jump to simplified solutions or surface level responses, but to go deeper into the depth and complexity of our contemporary reality and the intersecting crisis that humanity and all life on this planet face. Subsequent modules of this project will explore how these systems, structures and ideologies shape our ways of knowing, being, sensing and relating on this planet. Limiting our ability to exist outside of these dominant logics, leading to the repetition of the same patterns and behaviours that have gotten us into this mess.

Learning Objectives and Outcomes

Each module contains a set of learning objectives that will be identified in the module's introduction. At the end of each module, we will ask you to reflect on your learning in relation to these objectives.

Below are the learning outcomes as they relate to the Global Justice and Change program as a whole:

- Identify and describe the **root causes** of contemporary global crises, both social and ecological
- Explore **ways of knowing, being and relating** outside of dominant white supremacist, capitalist and colonial logics

- Discuss and reflect how individuals, communities and nations on a global scale are both **complicit in and harmed by** structures and ideologies sustained by violence and harm

Learning Activities

Throughout this program, you will find various types of learning activities and opportunities to reflect on the content. Here is some of what you can expect.

Reflection Journal: Each chapter or module includes a reflection journal to accompany the content. At the beginning of each module you will be prompted to **create a copy of the journal** that can be saved to your Google Drive. Alternatively, if you don't have access to google drive, you can download a word copy to your desktop or phone. The questions found throughout each module have been copied into the journal templates. You will be prompted at specific moments throughout the resource to respond to reflection questions.

Check Your Understanding: In efforts to support your learning journey, we have included various learning activities. In some sections, you will encounter **brief quizzes** with multiple choice and true or false questions. The purpose of this is not to induce the stress and pressure that modern schooling tends to create, but rather to check in with yourself about what may be landing for you and what you may want to revisit and consider further.

Engaging With the Affect and the Body

As was discussed in the introduction, this project may be different from what you have experienced in an institutional learning environment previously. We will explicitly ask you to pay attention to what you are feeling. **Be attentive to the emotions that come up for you as you read, watch, listen and reflect on the content, and to the bodily sensations that may arise**, such

as a feeling of nausea, a tightness in your chest, a pain in your spine, etc. Learning does not solely occur through thought and the intellectual mind. Affect, or what we feel and how (not only our emotions but literally what we feel in our physical bodies), plays an important role in learning. Affect shapes what we are able to hear, understand and process.

We encourage you to explore the organizations and resources below as a starting point to consider this idea further.

- The [Embodiment Institute](#) and the work of Prentis Hemphill
 - “[Prentis Hemphill is Forging a Path Toward Collective Healing](#),” by Shar Josell. April 15, 2021
 - “[Prentis Hemphill on Choosing Belonging](#),” on for the wild podcast, July 28, 2021
- Louis Cozolino, “[Nine Things Educators Need to Know About the Brain](#),” Greater Good Magazine, March 19th, 2013

Music

Throughout this project we have created videos and integrated various types of content, including news articles, podcasts, interviews, etc. Music videos are also embedded into each module and we have created a playlist (in both Spotify and YouTube) that explores the program’s themes. We encourage you to listen and/or watch the music videos as you go, to engage with them as an **opportunity to reflect on the content and activate different parts of your senses and brain**. And we

encourage you to dance and move your body if you are able. Use it as a break to stretch, to release something of what you are holding onto. These topics can be heavy and difficult. **Music can help us process.**

How to Navigate Pressbooks

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Accessibility

This book was designed with accessibility in mind so that it can be accessed by the widest possible audience, including those who use assistive technologies. The web version of this book has been designed to meet the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0, level AA](#).

While we aim to ensure that this book is as accessible as possible, we may not always get it right. There may be some supplementary third-party materials, or content not created by the authors of this book, which are not fully accessible. This may include videos that do not have closed captioning or accurate closed captioning, inaccessible PDFs, etc.

If you are having problems accessing any content within the book, please contact: global.learning@ryerson.ca Please let us know which page you are having difficulty with and include which browser, operating system, and assistive technology you are using.

As of February 28th, 2022: Please note that some pending elements from our accessibility audit are still being implemented. This note will be updated when all accessibility concerns flagged in the audit have been addressed.

Self-Guided Learning

This program is based on the idea of self-guided learning. **How you engage with the content, in what order, and at what pace, is all up to you.** While we include recommendations of what we think may work well, it is up to you to determine what is the best method for you as an individual. Depending on your social location, lived experience and disciplinary background (area of study), you will engage with these materials in different ways.

If any of the **ideas feel new or difficult to grasp**, ask yourself why. We encourage you to take your time and explore the content at your own pace, as you are able. Consider where you may need to dive a bit deeper into a particular idea in order to strengthen your understanding. Is a specific concept new to you? Maybe you need to back up a bit and consider some of the foundational ideas (like, what is capitalism anyways?).

If any of the **ideas feel familiar**, take some time to consider why. This may be an opportunity to explore the additional resources section in more detail and challenge yourself in the reflection questions. How are these ideas present in your own lived experience, individually and collectively? Consider what may be missing from this content. Do you feel like there are any gaps or a particular area that just isn't clicking for you?

It is always helpful to dive deeper into an idea, regardless of how familiar we think we are with a topic. You can read or watch something 10 separate times, and each time learn something new or different. The idea that **learning never ends** is an important aspect of this project, in addition to the idea that **learning is non-linear**. The goal is not to read or engage with content once and then close the book and move on to something else. We encourage you to engage in multiple and diverse ways with a variety of content presented in this project.

Additional Resources

The additional resources provided throughout the modules are meant to **support further learning**. Pay attention to what feels confusing and move towards it, instead of away from it. Does

something stand out to you? Are you intrigued for some reason? Does something trigger complex or contradictory emotions? Explore further and dive deeper! Determine your own path based on your individual needs and interests.

We ask you to engage with additional resources and further learning with both your heart and critical eyes open. There is a lot of content and knowledge available in the world (and some in particular that we have selected for this project). The intention of this project is not to create more sources of knowledge and content, but rather to engage with what is already out there as a tool to begin to practice self-reflection and individual and collective change.

However, in this world of extensive knowledge and information about the challenges humanity is facing, it can be difficult to **identify the intention, perspective and lived experience** of those creating and producing content. Discernment starts with considering:

- who created the content
- why did they create it
- what is their personal/collective lived experience
- what are the relationships they have with those whose lived experiences is a central focus of the content itself

When diving deeper into news articles, YouTube videos, blogs, scholarly research, etc., **exercise your critical thinking alongside a sense of intellectual generosity.**

Identity and Social Location

As mentioned previously, who we are affects how we experience the world. How we interpret and understand ideas and information. Our **social, cultural and individual frames** create different lived experiences and realities. While our frames are constantly changing and evolving, whether as an individual, community or society, it is essential that we are aware of their existence. We ask you to consider how your frames of reference, your personal perspective, shapes your relationship with the content of this program.

For example, **you may feel connected to the content.** This may be because you yourself or those within your lineages have experienced what is described. This may feel validating or

it may feel painful (among many other emotions). Intergenerational trauma runs deep, while individual and collective healing is an ongoing process. Please pay attention to how this content makes you feel and ensure that you are taking care of yourself appropriately.

Alternatively, **this content may make you feel uncomfortable**. This may be because it is uncomfortable to acknowledge how individuals and societies (how yourself and your lineages) have benefitted from and continue to perpetuate harm caused to others. It is common to react from a place of denial. There is as much to unlearn as there is to learn. Everyone living today, in societies based on oppression and violence, are harmed by these systems (while of course the degree of harm varies greatly).

Facing the harm required to sustain the comforts, securities and entitlements that so called modern life provides requires humility, strength and courage. In order to steward genuine change, **we must hold ourselves and one another accountable, while centring love and care**. We must maintain a sense of discernment alongside the ability to face that which we are taught to avoid or deny within ourselves and within our society.



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Content Creators and Contributors

Below you will find a short bio and a response to “what does this project mean to you?” from the Global Justice and Change project team.

Primary Writers

Nisha Toomey



Bio: Nisha Toomey is a Desi settler based in Tkaronto, a facilitator, educator, editor and migrant rights activist. She is a PhD candidate in Social Justice Education at the University of Toronto. Her dissertation traces white supremacist and settler colonial logics in the fields of humanitarianism and interna-

tional development. Nisha has articles in *Mobilities*, *Critical Ethnic Studies*, the *International Journal of Border and Migration Studies*, and book chapters in *Indigenous Reconciliation and Decolonization* edited by Ranjan Datta and *Toward What Justice?* edited by Eve Tuck & K. Wayne Yang. When not teaching and writing, you'll find her playing outside with her children.

What does this project mean to you? Today, justice for human and nonhuman persons is a question of our survival as a species. I feel so passionate about helping people—and myself—to understand the complex systems we are in, and how they exploit, harm, and destroy in order to reap profits for the wealthy classes. I believe that learning can help us bring into being ways of living in which we relate to one another differently. This work tries to present difficult content in ways that can be engaged by a wide range of audiences; it's a difficult task for educators, but one that is so important!

Emma Wright



Bio: Emma is a mother, sister, daughter, friend, collaborator,

agitator, learner, unlearner, listener, and avid mistake maker, who is deeply committed to centring responsibility, accountability, humility, joy, care and humour in our relationships to one another and all life. Her familial lineages are shaped by the privileges produced by white supremacy and the harms caused by patriarchy, ableism and other forms of supremacy. She strives to disrupt and repair personally, relationally and structurally. Emma is a settler based in Tkaronto. She is Manager of Global Learning and Engagement at X University ([renaming in process](#)) and holds a Master Degree in Social Science in International Migration and Social Cohesion.

What does this project mean to you? I grew up in Treaty 6 territory in what is known as London, Ontario. I lived on “Attawandaron Road”, at the end of which was a historic and sacred site of the Attawandaron or Neutral Nation. I also went to a high school that was diverse, yet separate. Racial and class lines apparent everywhere, yet ignored. I was not taught about the significance of the sacred site that I called home, nor about settler violence, colonialism and racial capitalism. My path of learning and unlearning has led me to facilitate opportunities for others, particularly those benefitting from white supremacy like myself, to be able to see the world in which we find ourselves. To be stewards of change, instead of resisters to change. This project means the world to me because of that.

Artists and Musicians

Peatr Thomas



Bio: Peatr Thomas is a multidisciplinary Inineu and Anishinaabe self-taught full-time visual artist from the Pimicikamak and Miskoosepi territories. As part-time Youth Facilitator, he

is sharing passed down knowledge, teachings and the healing process in creating all forms of art.

What does this project mean to you? The history and truths told here are long overdue, necessary, and should be standard in education, just as we are taught other histories of settlers in high school. As an Indigenous person who struggled to overcome barriers before conversations of residential schools, colonization, and normalized racism, this is extremely important, great to see, and happy to be a part of.

Janice Jo Lee



Bio: Janice Jo Lee, aka Sing Hey, is a contemporary folk artist of Korean settler ancestry. She is a folk-soul singer-songwriter, spoken word poet, actor, bouffon, playwright, and educator. Lee is an award-winning performer who creates looping landscapes with her voice, guitar, trumpet and Korean jangu drum. She is a hard femme queer radical. She says the truth and gets in trouble for it often, on stage and off. She is interested in using art to build flourishing communities based in justice and joy. Her work explores gender justice, antiracism, friend-

ship, burnout, community, ancestry and the Earth. Find her on social media: @janjolee

What does this project mean to you? As an anti-capitalist at heart, it feels perfectly in alignment for me to contribute music to this educational project. I am looking forward to perpetuating this content when it is complete.

An instrumental version of Janice's song "All the times you were silent" was used in the introductory video of Module 1, Racial Capitalism and Colonialism. Watch and/or listen to Janice perform the song below.



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Amai Kuda et Les Bois



Amai Kuda et Les Bois don't fit into the usual boxes. Breaking boundaries is part of their superpower. Not a band or a solo act, they prefer to call themselves 'a movement.' Led by Amai Kuda, their shows and albums always begin with the pouring of libations and the invocation of ancestors. This spiritual element weaves its way throughout all their music, whether that be soothing acoustic ballads, dancy electronic grooves or alt-rock-hiphop-infused political tracks. **Ecouché**, for example, the "stunning new single" (Indie88) off the new album **EmUrgency!** is sung entirely in a language of ancestral communication and can't be delivered the same way twice. It embodies what NOW magazine has called the group's "*tantalizing Afro-soul*" fusion sound, "*earthy and rootsy and good for your ears*" (Errol Nazareth CBC in reference to **AfroSoul Volume II: MaZai**). Indeed, it is the genre-defying nature of their work which led their debut album, **Sand from the Sea**, to be named "*one of the year's most exciting discoveries*" (Nicholas Jennings – Canada's foremost music journalist).

Since that early accolade Amai Kuda et Les Bois have slogged away in Toronto's music scene, performing at venues like the Jane Mallett Theatre, Harbourfront, The Rivoli, and festivals such as Luminato, Kultrun, and Small World, as well as at venues and community centers on four continents. Amai Kuda et Les Bois have certainly paid their dues, and they haven't gone unnoticed. They've been featured in NOW magazine and on CBC's Canada Live and Big City Small World, while a single from their 2019 release with Version Xcursion, **Holding Back**, premiered on Strombo Show. The group also won the Best Folk/Roots award as well as placing 2nd for the Best Song at the Toronto Independent Music Awards. They've opened for Joel Plaskett, Kellylee Evans and Sarah Slean, and collaborated with M1 of the legendary Hip-Hop duo, **Dead Prez** on a call-to-action song called **We Can Do It**.

All that said, the group is acutely aware of the glass ceiling in the music industry that keeps artists like themselves from reaching wider audiences. Their new album, 'EmUrgency!' is largely about pushing back against this, and in the coverage it's received thus far (Strombo show, CTV National News, Welcome to the Music, RX Music Live and CJRU), they've made a point of talking about it. For Amai Kuda et Les Bois, music is about healing – ourselves, our society and the earth, and that can't happen unless we listen to the voices that have for too long been ignored. It is truly a 'listening EmUrgency!'

You can find their work at ynamai.com

Brian Bracken (Heading 3)



Brian Bracken is a musician, singer, songwriter and producer. From Port Hope Ontario, Brian Bracken has both shared the stage with and accompanied numerous Canadian and international award winning artists. His diverse musical attributes, dynamic style, creativity and character have earned him

respect with the highest caliber of musicians. This has made him an asset in both the studio as a musician/producer and on stage with his colleagues.

Brian Bracken has written, composed for and has appeared live in bands with many popular Canadian artists such as Maestro, Chocclair, USS, Ammoye, JD Era, Melodic, Najjah Calibur, Rich London and more. While continuing to perform live at local hotspots, he is known for breaking down musical barriers with his unique genre clashing styles.

Bracken's original music paired with his catchy and energetic performances have rewarded him with the privilege of appearing alongside many well known artists, including The Black Eyed Peas, The White Stripes, John Legend, Ben Harper, Jack Johnson, Naughty by Nature, Damian Marley, Kardinal Offishall, Justin Timberlake, Jully Black, Billy Talent, The Trews, The Rascalz, K os and many more.

With numerous TV appearances on "A" Channel, City TV, BT, SUN TV and Rogers TV, Bracken also had his original song "Feeling" featured in a commercial for MuchVibe TV receiving consistent rotation for a number of years. His first rock flavoured single "Give Love To You" was featured on 94.9 "the Rock" fm.

Gratitude for all Contributors

We are deeply grateful for the contributions, expertise and friendship of all of those who have supported this project in small and big ways.

Jade Nixon, Dino Siwek and Camilla Cardoso, who reviewed and provided invaluable feedback on early versions of the scripts for the introductory videos of Modules 1, 2 and 3.

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Peatr Thomas, Janice Jo Lee, Brian Bracken and Amai Kuda Yemoja Ile, the artists and musicians who brought beauty and life to this project. Words do not suffice for all that you bring to

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Phyllis Power from Wilfrid Laurier University; **Tom Gallini** from Queen's University; **Eunjung Riauka** from Algoma University and **Helen Balderama** from York University, our institutional collaborators. Thank you for your support and trust throughout this project.

The [Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures \(GTDF\) collective](#), **Sharon Stein**, **Vanessa Andreotti**, **Elwood Jimmy**, and many others whose work, care, and presence has been a pivotal source of inspiration for the content and direction of this project. Thank you for being and for showing up over and over again.

And to all of those that have fed us, cared for us, loved us, laughed with us and cried with us, while we have facilitated the creation of this resource. You are the reason for it all.

This project is made possible with funding by the **Government of Ontario** and through **eCampusOntario's** support of the Virtual Learning Strategy. To learn more about the Virtual Learning Strategy visit: <https://vls.ecampusontario.ca>

Feedback and Engagement

The project team, and in particular the writers and content contributors, do not represent all social locations and identities as they relate to the content presented. While this project has intentionally engaged Black, Indigenous and racialized collaborators, we look forward to expanding contributors to this project.

In addition, **we invite your feedback to continue improving the content.** If something doesn't feel okay in terms of how we have presented or described a topic or issue, let us know. We are open to dialogue and are committed to reflexive praxis. Contact us at global.learning@ryerson.ca

1. RACIAL CAPITALISM AND COLONIALISM

Introduction



Welcome to our first module on Racial Capitalism and Colonialism. In this module we're going to discuss the **interconnections between capitalism, colonialism and racism**. Racial capitalism is a term coined by Black Studies theorist Cedric Robinson. It explains how racism and capitalism are inseparable, and how notions of racial superiority and white supremacy underlie and uphold our global economic system. Capitalism requires the construction of the idea of race to function, while as a global system it begins at the moment of colonial contact; so capitalism and colonialism grow and evolve together, historically and in the present.

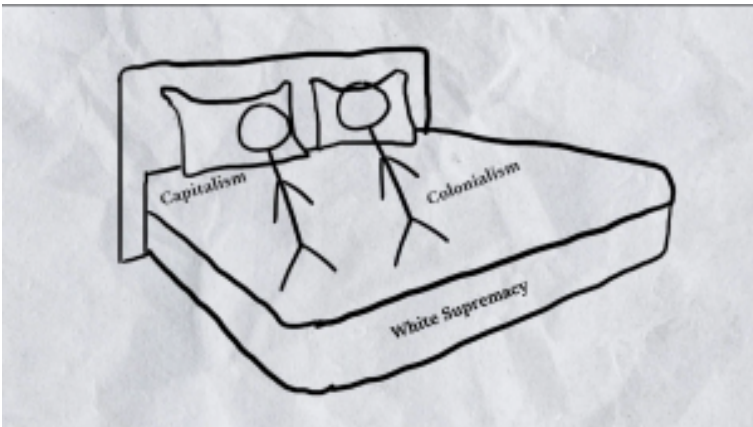


Illustration by Tina Huang, CC BY-NC 3.0

If these ideas feel big or daunting, don't worry! This module will help you connect the dots of this complex system.



Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, you should be able to:

- Describe the intersections between capitalism, racism and colonialism
- Critically assess how the fabricated notions of racial superiority and racial hierarchy sustain those positioned at the top
- Identify how slavery and indentureship create the conditions for wealth and accumulation-based society
- Analyze how global systems today depend on the perpetuation of these conditions through institutional structures and ideas of white supremacy and entitlement

How to Use This Module

This module begins with a 10 minute video that introduces you to these key ideas and concepts. The sections following the video will provide additional content to help you dive deeper into these topics. Learning activities are integrated throughout. It may take you **2 to 6 hours** to complete this module, including all learning activities. However, this will vary greatly by individual. Depending on your social location, lived experience and

disciplinary background (area of study), you will engage with these materials in different ways.

If you have not yet, visit the section on [Self-Guided Learning](#) in the introduction for reminders on how you can support your learning process. There are many ways to engage with this module. Please decide what works best for you.



Reflection Journal

Please open the google doc template for the [Racial Capitalism and Colonialism reflection journal](#). You can save your own copy to your Google Drive. Alternatively, if you don't have access to google drive, you can download a word copy to your desktop or phone. You will be asked to respond to the questions in your journal throughout the module.



Music

Another way of starting to explore the themes in this module is to listen to our **Racial Capitalism and Colonialism playlist**, available in the following formats:

- [Spotify](#)
- YouTube (*coming soon*)

You will also encounter music videos throughout the module to support further learning, reflection and movement.

WATCH Video 1: Racial Capitalism and Colonialism

To begin, we have created a **10 minute introductory video** that explores the concepts above. The intention of the video is to provide an accessible entry point for learners, whether or not you are familiar with these topics. However, this does not mean that this content is “easy”. These are complex topics!

Remember to take breaks if you need to. Stop and reflect on the content. Watch the video or specific sections multiple times if helpful. The more you listen and engage, the more familiar these ideas will become.



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Now that you've watched Video 1: Racial Capitalism and Colonialism, take some time to reflect. Complete the learning activities below.



Check Your Understanding



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<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=55#h5p-5>



Music



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<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=55#oembed-1>

For a transcript of the lyrics for the above song visit Genius's page for [How I Feel](#).





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<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=55#oembed-2>

For a transcript of the lyrics for the above song visit Genius's page for [24 \(Toronto Remix\)](#).



Reflection 1

After watching the video, respond to the questions below in your reflection journal:

- What was new or surprising to you from the

video (if anything)?

- What did you feel like you already knew or understood (even if in a small way)?
- In what areas do you feel like your knowledge or understanding increased in relation to the ideas of racial capitalism and colonialism?
- What things still feel a bit confusing or blurry for you?
- How did this video make you feel? What did you feel in your body? What types of emotions came up for you? Remember, you can feel many different things at once, like anger as well as excitement, you don't have to choose just one.

Note: to access your reflection journal please review the [Introduction section](#) of the Racial Capitalism and Colonialism module.

Back Up, What is Capitalism?



Reflection 2

Before you begin, enter your reflection journal and respond to the following questions:

- Where do you notice capitalism operating in your daily life?
- What may not look or seem like capitalism, but actually is?

Note: to access your reflection journal please review the [Introduction section](#) of the Racial Capitalism and Colonialism module.

Okay, let's dig a bit deeper into what capitalism is about. In Video 1: Racial Capitalism and Colonialism, our narrator began to describe Capitalism. Listen to the audio clip or read the transcript below for a refresher.



Audio Clip from Video 1



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<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=61#audio-61-1>

Transcript

“Most of us think we know, or at least have a loose idea of what capitalism means. You may even be familiar with some form of this definition: An economic system where private entities own the factors of production. The four factors of production are entrepreneurship, capital goods, natural resources and labor. The system is supported by laws, policies and regulations. It lays out a set of norms that we all follow, as well as pieces we don’t really feel like we have much say in. We all support capitalism in numerous ways, even if we don’t want to, even if we don’t notice. It might even seem to be both normal and like the only – and best – system we have. Since the effects of capitalism are broad and far-reaching,

even if you live completely off the grid in a community and culture that is anti-capitalist, you are touched by capitalism.” (Video 1, 0:44 to 1:42)

Let’s break this down a bit further. Click on each image to learn more.



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To explore the Four Factors of Production further, check out the video below.



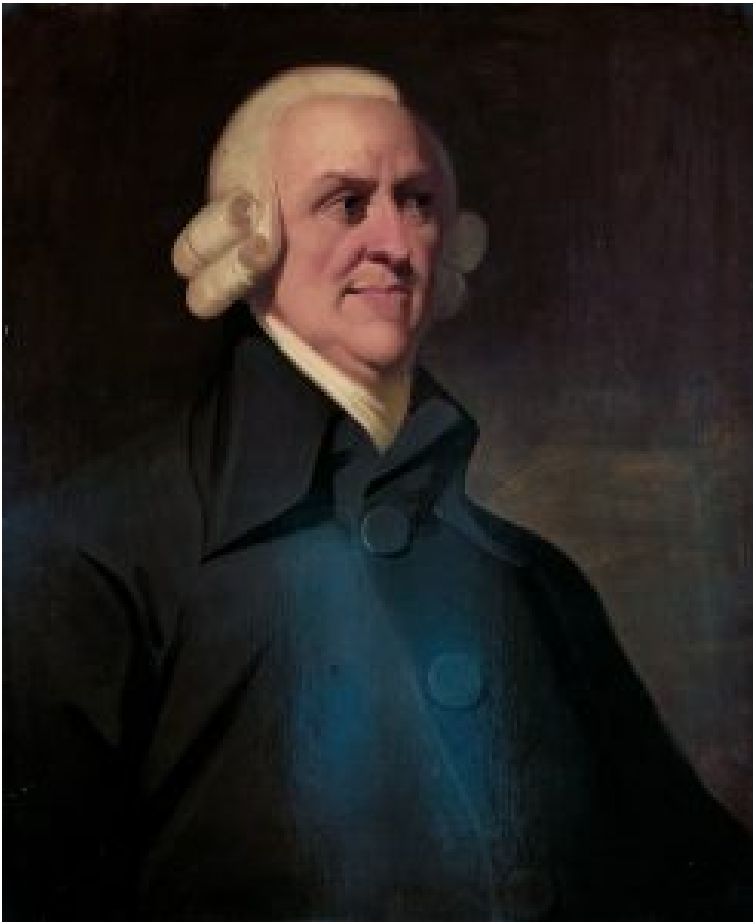
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[books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=61#oembed-3](https://press-books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=61#oembed-3)

In capitalism, individuals are seen as **private entities** who supposedly own their own labour and sell it for a wage. **Classic scholars of capitalism** say it starts with the industrial revolution

and with what is often understood as the advent of modern society. You may have heard about Adam Smith (1723-1790) and Karl Marx (1818-1883), two key economic and political theorists whose extensive work on capitalism continues to form the basis of our understanding today. Let's take a deeper look at their theories.

Adam Smith



The first most popular theorist of capitalism is Adam Smith, who in 1776 wrote “The Wealth of Nations” which argues for “laissez-faire” economic policies in which the market is free to self-regulate. With minimal government intervention and taxation of free markets, Smith said, an **“invisible hand” would regulate the market itself**. Supply and demand would be managed naturally according to consumer needs: if suppliers met the needs and wants of consumers in a satisfactory way, they would be paid well for it.

Smith argued that this invisible hand was a natural phenomenon that would work out well for everyone because humans are naturally competitive and the need to turn a profit would make us do our best to create good products other people would want to buy. For Smith, **the market would help to create a “wealthy” nation- full of productive hard-working citizens** reaping the rewards of their hard work.



Reflection 3

The video below provides an overview of Adam Smith’s work. Remember to engage with this content with critical thinking, discernment and intellectual generosity.

Watch the video below and consider the following in your reflection journal:

- What may be **missing** from this particular video? For example, what about the **context and**

times in which Smith lived? What was happening globally to sustain the growth of consumerism?

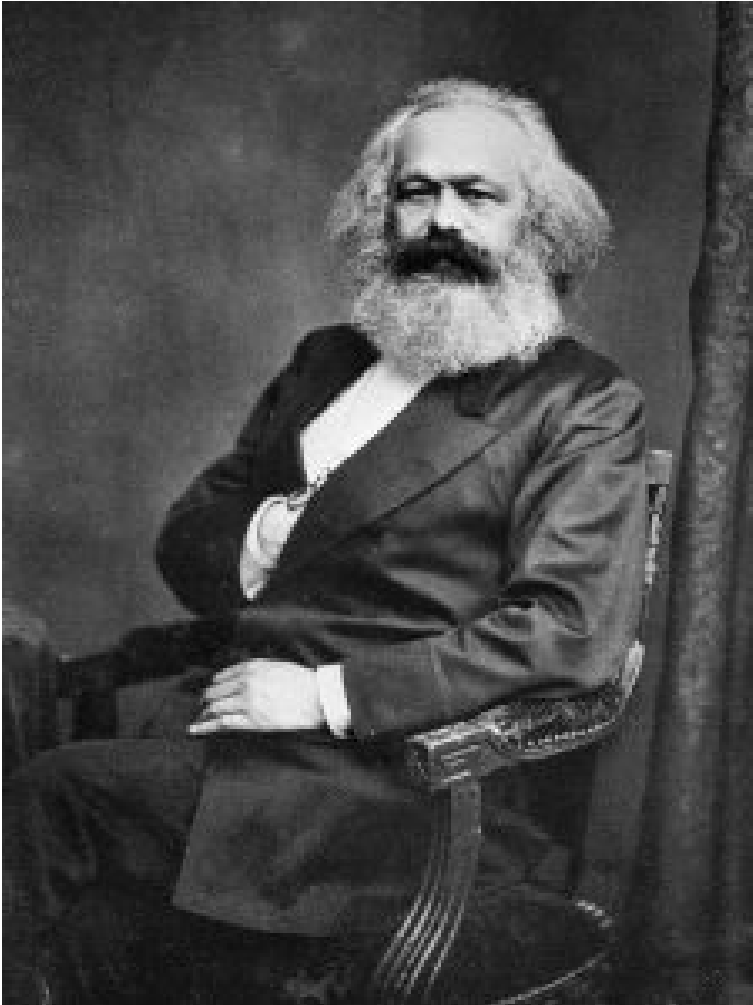
Note: to access your reflection journal please review the [Introduction section](#) of the Racial Capitalism and Colonialism module.



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Karl Marx



UNSPECIFIED – CIRCA 1865: Karl Marx (1818-1883), philosopher and German politician. (Photo by Roger Viollet Collection/Getty Images)

The other most famous theorist of capitalism is Karl Marx, who

comes along 100 years later. **Marx's critiques of and predictions about capitalism remain some of the most important of our time**, and people continue to study and dissect them with gusto. Marx made eerily accurate predictions about the trajectory of capitalism. First, some basics on Marx's theories.

Marx observes the driving force of capitalism is the endless accumulation of profits, which come from surplus value that can be squeezed out of the goods and services you and I purchase. Since there are often fixed prices for things like an egg or a plank of wood, Marx observed that the **easiest way to acquire surplus value was through labour**, or rather, acquiring labour for the cheapest possible price.

As an employer, you get labour out of people in a couple of ways: you can make your workplace really appealing to work at, or you could make sure the people you employ are really desperate for work.

Remember that Marx lived during the **industrial revolution**, one of the most miserable moments of all time to be a worker: many of the regulations and norms we have today did not yet exist. Being a factory worker meant long hours, six days a week of work, child labour, no days off, exposure to dangerous conditions and no protections. The people who needed to work these kinds of jobs had no other options. The people they worked for were generally rich and getting richer off of the accumulated surplus of the wage workers.

Marx argued that under capitalism, **this idea that individuals could own their labour- thus selling it at their own decided price** and nurturing a society in which goods and services are exchanged through a healthy system where everyone benefits- **is false**. Under capitalism, workers don't own the means of production, so when they sell their labour, they don't set the prices: their employers do. Essentially this means that workers are treated as machines working to produce profits for owners, who make profits by not giving workers their fair share of the profits. The employers in fact have an incentive to maximize profits while minimizing worker's rights to share in the profits.

Marx thus observes that **society is characterized by a class struggle**: between the proletariat (workers) and the bourgeoisie—the employer class who own the means of production. This observation has been a driving force in social movements fighting for the rights of workers, including unions formed to establish labour protection laws, and political movements toward communism that advocate for major government intervention in the production and distribution of goods.

In recent decades, theorists have argued that capitalism didn't just start with factories circa the 19th century, but actu-

ally began much earlier, with the **enclosure of the commons** and the beginning of an agrarian economy in which rural landholders were pushed from their lands and forced into wage labour, which happened throughout Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. Those who were seizing land from rural populations required laws of private property. We will continue to explore this in the next section on the Modern Nation-State System (section 1.4)



Reflection 4

Watch the video below and consider the following in your reflection journal:

- After watching the video about Karl Marx, consider why the **concept of race** does not feature in Marx's analysis.

Note: to access your reflection journal please review the [Introduction section](#) of the Racial Capitalism and Colonialism module.



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<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=61#oembed-5>

Cedric Robinson



Let's go back to Video 1: Racial Capitalism and Colonialism, where our narrator discusses how Cedric Robinson builds on

these ideas to identify what he calls racial capitalism. Listen to the audio clip or read the transcript from video 1 below.



Audio from Video 1



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<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=61#audio-61-2>

Transcript

“Cedric Robinson points out that capitalist production thrives on creating surplus value by devaluing labour, or making labour as cheap as possible. He argues that therefore, the perfect way to devalue labour is to create levels of unequal humans. In the Atlantic slave trade, people were dehumanized, stolen from their lands and forced to work for free. This was the ultimate way to create surplus value and power for the ruling classes. Robinson calls this “racial capitalism.” Racism and capitalism are not separate. Capitalism requires the construction of the

idea of race. The slave and the indentured labourer are fundamental to capitalist production. Economic and political theorists during the rise of capitalism, like Adam Smith and John Locke, spoke of 'natural human rights and laws'. These were based on the idea that the natural human was the Western European man. The Western European man had the right to private property and other forms of ownership while the rest of humanity was excluded from these rights." (Video 1, 4:27 to 5:38)



Check Your Understanding



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You can view it online here:*

<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/the-understory/?p=61#h5p-6>

Recommended Further Reading

- Kimberly Amadeo, "[What is Capitalism?](#)", the balance, October 21st, 2021 (article)
- Todd Gordon and Geoffrey McCormack, "[Canada and the crisis of capitalism](#)," Briarpatch magazine, February 25th, 2020, (article)
- Annie Lowrey, "[Why the Phrase 'Late Capitalism' Is Suddenly Everywhere](#)," The Atlantic, May 1st, 2017 (article + video)



Music



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<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=61#oembed-1>

For a transcript of the lyrics for the above song visit Genius's page for [Thirteen](#).



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<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=61#oembed-2>

For a transcript of the lyrics for the above song visit Genius's page for [The Taker](#).



Reflection 5

Open your reflection journal and respond to the following questions:

- How may your response from the beginning of this chapter (reflection 2) be different (or not) when considering Cedric Robinson's contributions?
- Reflect on the ways that capitalism and colonialism are inextricably linked.

Note: to access your reflection journal please review the [Introduction section](#) of the Racial Capitalism and Colonialism module.

The Modern Nation-State System



Reflection 6

Before you begin, enter your reflection journal and respond to the following questions:

- What does the term nation-state mean to you?

Note: to access your reflection journal please review the [Introduction section](#) of the Racial Capitalism and Colonialism module.

The Modern Nation-State System

In the Video 1: Racial Capitalism and Colonialism (1:49) the narrator explains that “To truly understand capitalism, we need to understand its relationship to “race”. To do this, we need to go

back, way back, to the beginning of colonialism." The modern nation-state system is an important piece of this puzzle too.

The nation-states we all live in today, and the borders around them, are not as permanent as they sometimes seem to be. **Most modern nation-states are very young**, and many nation-states do not include whole populations of people, who rejected the formations of these states from the outset. For example, Figure 1.1 is a map of the world that identifies regional concentrations of Indigenous peoples. How often do you see a map like this?



Figure 1.1. Regional concentrations of Indigenous peoples across the globe.

The modern nation-state system we live in today started through a few processes that begin in Europe: **colonialism** (as we introduced in the video), the process of **enclosing the commons**, and a different kind of relationship to **religion and the monarch**.



*An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text.
You can view it online here:*

<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=73#h5p-3>

So again, here's where capitalism and colonialism intersect. States desired the creation of private property, which they controlled and profited from economically. They seized that property through military force and by stealing lands from people and nations. Those people were also key to the economic dominance of the nation-state because they worked for low wages, while land, property and business owners reaped enormous profits from their labour.

John Locke



John Locke (1632 – 1704) is an important European theorist that helps us understand the importance of the notion of property to the existence and function of capitalism. Locke is often regarded as an **Enlightenment thinker**, a key period in European history that created the intellectual foundations for sys-

terms of domination, such as colonialism and capitalism. We will return to ideas of the Enlightenment in Module 3. One of Locke's essays, "Of Property", explores the notion of property as a principle in the market, and of lands as private property rather than places we might all share. **Locke explained property ownership as a fundamental natural right of humanity.**

But who was the human to whom this law of nature was endowed? It's important to ask this question, because up until the 20th century many took for granted who the human was. In order to steal lands from common peoples across Europe, those people had to be deemed inferior, their beliefs and traditions heretic. Christian tradition had long distinguished between notions of the supposedly "bestial" races and those who were human- those who were closer to animals, and those who were rational. This was used as an **excuse by feudal lords to take lands from rural populations**, who were then flung to the cities homeless, desperate and traumatized, all in the name of private property.

Keep this in mind while watching the video below. While the video does not include Locke's specific contributions regarding property, it demonstrates his importance in the development of a Eurocentric worldview (often tied to the Enlightenment) that was then imposed on populations around the world through colonialism and imperialism.



Reflection 7

Watch the video below and consider the following in your reflection journal:

- How do Locke's ideas relate to colonialism?
- Who is the “we” referenced in the video? Who might be excluded?
- While Locke's ideas are presented as a positive contribution to political theory, what may be missing from this portrayal?

Note: to access your reflection journal please review the [Introduction section](#) of the Racial Capitalism and Colonialism module.



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<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunder-story/?p=73#oembed-2>

Recommended Further Reading

- Niigaan Sinclair, “[Indigenous nationhood can save the world. Here's how](#),” The Global and Mail, September 12th, 2017
- Thomas Peace, “[The Nation-State is not what](#)

[we think it is: Teaching Canadian History from a non-national perspective](#)," Active History, December 8th, 2014

- Molly Malone, Libby Chisholm, "[Indigenous Territory](#)," The Canadian Encyclopedia, July 5, 2016



Check Your Understanding



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<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=73#h5p-7>



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<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=73#h5p-8>



Music



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<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=73#oembed-3>

For a transcript of the lyrics for the song above visit LyricsDB's page for [Child of the Government](#).



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<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=73#oembed-1>

For a transcript of the lyrics for the song above visit Genius's page for [Free](#).



Reflection 8

Open your reflection journal and respond to the following questions:

- Look back on your response from reflection 6, how may your response be different now (or not)?
- Reflect on the ways capitalism, colonialism and the formation of the nation-state are interconnected.

Note: to access your reflection journal please review the [Introduction section](#) of the Racial Capitalism and Colonialism module.

Slavery and Indenturement Today

As the narrator mentions at the end of the video, “there are still millions working in conditions of slavery and indenturement today. It’s a reality that is often hidden from and denied by mainstream society.” (Video 1: Racial Capitalism and Colonialism, 8:53)

Conditions of slavery and indenturement refers to those who are in situations of exploitation in which a **person cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, deception, or abuse of power** ([Walk Free](#)). Human trafficking and forced labour (see Figure 1.2 below) are common practices around the world that predominantly affect Black and Brown working poor people.

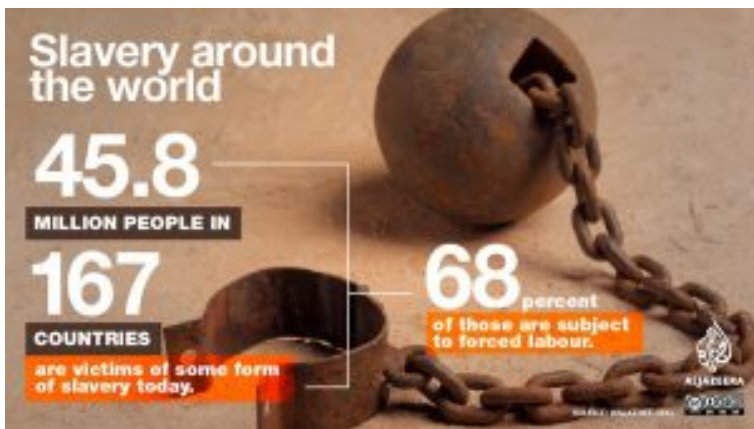


Figure 1.2. Statistics of modern-day slavery around the world.



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You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=78#h5p-1>

While exploring resources and information on the topic of what some refer to as “modern day slavery”, it is important to identify how mainstream movements for anti-trafficking, for example, **reproduce carceral logics of violence and punishment** (key features of colonialism and capitalism). This topic is very complex, and when understood from a capitalist and colonial lens, the supposed solutions end up repeating the same patterns. For example, arresting individuals for perpetuating human trafficking, who are then sent to prison and enter into forced labour.

Human Trafficking

According to the [United Nations](#), **human trafficking** is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them for profit.

For deeper dive into Human Trafficking in Canada, check out Jocelyn Davison’s talk for TEDxUAlberta found below called “People For Sale: Human Trafficking in Canada” (14 minutes). You can also explore APTN InFocus feature “[Bringing attention to Canada’s secret shame: Human Trafficking](#)” (1 hour).



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://press-books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=78#oem-bed-2>

Recommended Further Reading

- Trina Roache, "[\\$150B global human trafficking industry happening in plain sight in Canada say experts](#)," APTN National News, April 16, 2021 (article)
- Blair Rhodes, "[Canadians 'shockingly unaware' of human trafficking, says national organization](#)," CBC News, December 6, 2021 (article)

Forced Labour

According to the [International Labour Organization \(ILO\)](#), forced labour can be understood as work that is performed involuntarily and under the menace of any penalty. It refers to situations in which persons are coerced to work through the use of violence or intimidation, or by more subtle means such as manipulated debt, retention of identity papers or threats of denunciation to immigration authorities.

Some contemporary examples of forced labour today include

the internment camps in Xinjiang China, bonded labour in Pakistan and child labour in the chocolate industry in Ghana and the Ivory Coast (see articles below).

It is quite common, particularly in Canada, to think that these types of experiences don't happen here. Next we will highlight two specific examples that relate to the Canadian context as well: migrant and prison labour.

Recommended Further Reading

- Jewher Ilham, "[There's a good chance your cotton T-shirt was made with Uyghur slave labor](#)," The Guardian, April 9th, 2021 (article)
- Shahzeb Jillani, "[Life of Slavery – the perpetuation of bonded labor in Pakistan](#)," DW, December 25th, 2019 (article)
- Oliver Balch, "[Chocolate industry slammed for failure to crack down on child labour](#)," The Guardian, October 20th, 2020 (article)

Example: Prison Labour

Prison or penal labour is a type of forced labour that prisoners are required to perform. It is often manual labour and has been referred to as involuntary servitude (which we discussed in our introductory video), penal servitude and imprisonment with hard labour. Its roots can be traced back to colonialism and enslavement and it continues to play a large role in present day mass incarceration. The video below by NowThis World "Is Slave Labor Legal in America?" focuses on the U.S. context, while this is a relevant conversation here in Canada too. Check out Justin Ling's exploration of [Prison Labour](#) for the Canadian

Bar Association and explore the work of the [Toronto Prisoner's Rights Project](#).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KtYMnavxaKc>

Note that the video above appears supportive of the existence in prisons, while simply questioning the use of prison labour. Issues with the prison industry and practice of imprisonment goes beyond the specific topic of prison labour. **Abolition** (which includes prison abolition) will be explored further in the next section. In the meantime, check out the short clips below of both Angela Davis and Ruth Wilson Gilmore talking about prison abolition.



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One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://press-books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=78#oembed-4>

Recommend further reading

- Whitney Bennis, "[American Slavery, Reinvented](#)," The Atlantic, September 21, 2015 (arti-

cle + video)

- Kevin Rashid Johnson, "[Prison labor is modern slavery. I've been sent to solitary for speaking out.](#)" The Guardian, August 23rd, 2018 (article)

Example: Migrant Labourers

For example, migrant labourers who are forced to travel internationally for work hold up the backbone of many Western economies. Yet they are treated as second-class citizens, in what is called a state of "unfreedom". They have little access to health care and education in their host countries, earn much lower than the minimum wage and are forced to travel back and forth between their home countries and places of work for years on end with no pathway to citizenship in the country where they work. These workers are hidden away from mainstream societies, often not talked about, even though they do some of our most vital work like food production and raising our children.

For a deeper dive into the experience of migrant farm workers in Canada and the systemic oppression and exploitation they face and resist on an ongoing basis, check out Min Sook Lee's film *Migrant Dreams*. The trailer is below, while you can access the [full film here](#).



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[books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=78#oembed-5](https://press-books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=78#oembed-5)

You can also check out episode 22 of the Henceforward podcast – [Migrant Labour, White Settler Anxiety, and No Returns](#). In the podcast Nisha Toomey and Chris Ramsaroop explore the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program in Canada.

To learn more about the experience of migrants in Canada explore local organizations further like [No One is Illegal Toronto](#) and the [Migrant Rights Network](#) who resist the unjust treatment of these members of our community.

Recommend further reading

- [“Exploitation of migrant care workers has increased since COVID-19 struck, report says,”](#) CBC, October 28, 2020 (article)
- Mary Baxter, [“‘They all were labour abused’: Demanding action on the exploitation of migrant workers,”](#) two, June 26, 2020 (article)
- Justice Beach, [“The Similarities Between Canada’s Temporary Foreign Worker Program and Slavery,”](#) Huffpost blog, April 17th, 2014 (article)
- Benjamin Harkis, [“Wage theft: the missing middle in exploitation of migrant workers,”](#) Open Democracy, January 21, 2021 (article)



Music



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=78#oembed-1>

For a transcript of the lyrics for the song Borders visit Genius's page for [Borders](#).



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<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=78#oembed-6>

For a transcript of the lyrics for the song Pa'lante visit Genius's page for [Pa'lante](#)



Reflection 9

Enter your reflection journal and respond to the following questions:

- What are products and/or services that you use regularly in your life that may require forced labour (what some refer to as modern day slavery) or indenturement?
- If you are unsure, consider using the following tool: <https://slaveryfootprint.org/>

Note: to access your reflection journal please review the [Introduction section](#) of the Racial Capitalism and Colonialism module.

Diving Deeper (Additional Resources)

There are many great scholars, activists, and leaders who are researching, exploring, discussing, and teaching about these topics. Below we have included a small list of resources that you can explore further. **It is up to you to determine where your learning will go** and to use your own sense of discernment, alongside your critical thinking and intellectual generosity.

Colonialism

Need a refresher on colonialism across the globe? Check out student **Roqué Marcelo**'s short video on the topic below (5 minutes).



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Eve Tuck, Associate Professor of Critical Race and Indigenous Studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto, is a leading scholar whose work addresses settler colonialism. Tuck's article co-written with K. Wayne Yang [Decolonization is not a metaphor](#) is an important contribution in relation to settler colonialism and conversations surrounding decolonization. To learn more from Tuck, check out the short video below focused on Indigenous Feminist Theories (12 minutes).



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Acclaimed filmmaker **Raoul Peck** has created a four-part documentary series called “Exterminate All the Brutes”. It explores the legacy of European colonialism from the Americas to Africa. To learn more about the series and Peck’s work, check out the interview from May 2021 with Democracy Now below (35 minutes). We recommend that you watch the complete four-part documentary series, especially if colonialism is a topic that you have not had the opportunity to explore in depth previously.



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Recommended Further Reading

- The UnLeading Project, “[Colonialism, Coloniality and Settler Colonialism](#),” York University
- Global Social Theory, “[Settler Colonialism](#),”

Gurminder K Bhambra (editor)

Racial Capitalism

While our introductory video offers a brief overview of racial capitalism, we recommend that you explore the work of key scholars working on this topic today.

Check out **Angela Davis** (political activist, philosopher, scholar, author and abolitionist) in an interview with Democracy Now “We can’t eradicate racism without eradicating racial capitalism” (2 minutes).



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[books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=740#oem-bed-9](https://press-books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=740#oem-bed-9)

Check out **Ruth Wilson Gilmore** (activist and public scholar and prison abolitionist) in a short film (16 minutes) by Antipode Foundation “Geographies of Racial Capitalism”.



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[books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=740#oem-bed-7](https://press-books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=740#oem-bed-7)

For an even deeper dive, check out **Robin D.G. Kelley**'s (historian, academic and Gary B. Nash Professor of American History at UCLA) lecture "What is Racial Capitalism and Why Does it Matter" hosted by the Simpson Centre for the Humanities (1 hour)



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[books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=740#oem-bed-2](https://press-books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=740#oem-bed-2)

We also recommend that you explore the work of **Sylvia Wynter**, writer, philosopher and cultural theorist, whose contributions to anti-colonial thought and analysis of European colonialism and the construction of race are essential to the field and what it means to be human.

Watch a short lecture (18 minutes) by **Kelsey Chatlosh**, Fulbright scholar and Doctoral candidate in cultural anthropology and the CUNY Graduate Center, exploring Wynter's concept of "genres of being human".



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[books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=740#oem-bed-3](https://press-books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=740#oem-bed-3)

For an exploration of the work of both Cedric Robinson and Sylvia Wynter check out **Bedour Alagraa**'s (Assistant Professor of political and social thought at University of Texas, Austin) lecture from Global Social Theory Lecture Series convened by the University of Chicago (1 hour and 20 minutes).



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[books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=740#oem-bed-4](https://press-books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=740#oem-bed-4)

A final topic that we have not focused on in depth, but that is essential to include connected to this topic and our resource more broadly, is that of **intersectionality**. While race intentionally takes centre stage in this module, it can only be understood through the lens of intersectionality. Check out the TED talk below (19 minutes) by **Kimberle Crenshaw**, scholar, writer, black feminist and critical race theorist who coined the term in 1989.



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[books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=740#oem-bed-5](https://press-books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=740#oem-bed-5)

Recommended Further Reading

- David R. Roediger, "[Historical Foundations of Race](#)," The National Museum of African American History and Culture, Smithsonian, Washington, DC.

- Kathryn Yusoff, "[White Utopia/Black Inferno: Life on a Geologic Spike](#)," e-flux Journal, Issue #97, February 2019
- Andrea Macdonald, "[Intersectionality: What it means, how to use it, and why to care in 2020](#)," Toronto Star, March 8th, 2020.

The Canadian Context

While this module and resource as a whole focuses on the global systems that shape our contemporary reality, we are situated on Turtle Island in the territories now known as Canada. This section focuses on the experience of Racial Capitalism and Colonialism in the Canadian context. You will find reference to Canada throughout this pressbook in efforts to demonstrate how these global systems and crises shape our local context.

For Canada's 150th anniversary of confederation the Onaman Collective created the video below with Poem and Narration by **Christi Belcourt** (2 minutes).



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El Jones, poet, journalist, scholar and activist, recites an original spoken word poem Canada is So Polite (5 minutes).



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CBC News feature “What systemic racism in Canada looks like” (10 minutes).



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WION Channel’s feature on “Canada’s cultural genocide unearthed” (5 minutes).



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CBC Doc on residential schools, Sarain Fox gathers stories from her auntie and matriarch, Mary Bell (44 minutes).



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— view them online here: <https://press-books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=740#oem-bed-14>

Historica's feature on "Africville: The Black Community bulldozed by the city of Halifax," (2 minutes).



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[books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=740#oem-bed-15](https://press-books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=740#oem-bed-15)

CBC docs POV "The Skin We're In: Pulling back the curtain on racism in Canada," featuring Desmond Cole (44 minutes).



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[books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=740#oem-bed-16](https://press-books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=740#oem-bed-16)

Recommend further reading

- Liam Midzain-Gobin, Heather Smith, “[Not in the past: Colonialism is rooted in the present](#),” The Conversation, March 28, 2021
- Kyle G. Brown, “[Canada’s slavery secret: The whitewashing of 200 years of enslavement](#),” CBC Radio Ideas, February 18, 2019
- Vince Wong and Kennes Lin, “[The racist history of Chinese labour in Canada shows not much has changed. Deemed essential, but still invisible](#),” Toronto Star, September 1, 2021
- Neil Price, “[It’s time to re-think what it means to be Black in Canada](#),” Now Toronto, July 15 2019 (focus on book [BlackLife](#) by authors Rinaldo Walcott and Idil Abdillahi)
- Yellowhead Institute, [Land Back](#) (October 2019) and [Cash Back](#) (May 2021)
- Chapter “[Multiculturalism and Myth-Making in Canada](#)” from the pressbook Canadian Settlement in Action: History and Future by Alexandru Caldararu, Julie Clements, Rennais Gayle, Christina Hamer, and Maria MacMinn Varvos

Abolition and Decolonization

In this module we discussed the **exploitation and harm of humans required to sustain our current global system, capitalism**. We discussed how capitalism functions through a racial hierarchy (racial capitalism), creating categories of unequal humans. We discussed how the enclosure of the commons, the formation of the nation-state system and colonization on a global scale are all key elements of our global systems today. And that the conditions of exploitation and expropriation are foundational and necessary to the very functioning of capitalism itself. Because of this, conditions of slavery and indenturement persist today.

These are heavy and hard topics. It is easy to fall into and get stuck in pain, grief, or rage. In guilt, shame, or horror. It is also tempting to just not think about it all– a form of denial. We might try asking, “how can I use those feelings to generate change?” While holding space for these realities and doing the work to understand how our current systems operate, it is essential to remember that none of these systems and ways of organizing as humans are set in stone. These are not natural nor normal ways of existing: **we humans make our social systems, and we can change them**.

Yes, these are the dominant systems globally at this particular moment in time. But there are many who have been resisting these systems, advocating for change, and creating and sustaining different possibilities, from the very onset of what we now know as racial capitalism and colonialism. **We encourage you to spend time exploring the power, beauty and hope present in past and present movements for change at the individual and collective level**. This is an important source of sustenance to continue to move towards different ways of relating to one another.

Abolitionist and anti-colonial struggles are key examples of the powerful and ongoing work to push back against these dominant systems, while also creating space to build something different. These movements and ways of being are increasing in momentum, as the realities of harm and violence that are racial capitalism and colonialism are no longer able to hide. It is increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to reason or

excuse the supposed necessity of a way of living based on violence, oppression and structural inequity.

Below we have shared a video of [El Jones](#), a spoken word poet, an educator, journalist, and a community activist living in African Nova Scotia. El Jones was the fifth Poet Laureate of Halifax. In the video below El Jones performs at the Women's March at Grand Parade in Halifax in January of 2017. For the full text of the poem see the Halifax Examiner's publication "[El Jones: "Still We Rise"](#)".



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Additional Resources (Diving Deeper)

There are many resources on decolonization/anti-colonial struggle and abolition, as well as many diverse perspectives on both. Below are a few. We encourage you to do your own research and exploration to learn more. And to share resources with others, either from this list or your own!

To begin, check out the video produced by **Yellowhead Institute** that explores the questions of **#LandBack** from the perspective of First Nation land defenders (4 minutes).



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We also invite you to revisit **Nikki Sanchez**'s talk at TEDxSFU titled "Decolonization Is for Everyone" (13 minutes).



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New to **abolition** and what it's all about? We started talking about this in our section on Prison Labour. To really dig into what abolition is all about, including its historical roots and contemporary manifestations, check out the episode of the podcast Word Bomb that focuses on [defining the mission of abolition](#) (23 minutes). Hosts Pippa and Karina talk about abolition with **Rinaldo Walcott**, Associate Professor at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE).



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To hear more from Rinaldo Walcott, check out **Idil Mussa's conversation with Walcott** "On Property with Rinaldo Walcott" presented in collaboration with the Ottawa Public Library at the Ottawa International Writers Festival (1 hour).



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In “Beyond Pipelines and Prisons: Infrastructures of Abolition with **Ruth Wilson Gilmore & Winona LaDuke**,” a conversation hosted by Social Justice Week at X University, Gilmore and LaDuke explore what a decolonized, ecologically and socially just future might look like (1 hour and 30 minutes).



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In “Feasting the Future: Pow Wow and Black-Indigenous Futures,” a conversation hosted within XU PowWow between **Karyn Reccollet, Megan Scribe and Karina Vernon** images how Black and Indigenous co-conspirators can work towards a decolonial future (1 hour).



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In “Homebound: Embodying the Revolution with **brontë velez**,” an episode from the podcast [For The Wild](#) velez explores critical ecology, radical imagination and decomposition as

rebellion, throughout focusing on the prioritization of Black wellness.



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Recommended Reading

- Karina Vernon, "[Black-Indigenous Futures in Art, Literature and #BlackLivesMatter](#)," July 7th, 2020
- Megan Scribe, Sefanit Habtom, "[To Breathe Together: Co-Conspirators for Decolonial Futures](#)," Yellowhead Institute, June 2, 2022
- Sidney Madden, Sam Leeds, Rodney Carmichael, "'[I Want Us To Dream A Little Bigger': Noname and Mariame Kaba On Art and Abolition](#)," NPR, December 19, 2020
- Harsha Walia, "[Decolonizing together: Moving beyond a politics of solidarity toward a practice of decolonization](#)," Briarpatch, January 1, 2012
- Bram Hubbell, "[People Who Have Inter-](#)

[rupted Empire: African and Indigenous Resistance to the Portuguese and Spanish Empires in the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries](#)," Liberating Narratives, October 13, 2020

- Idle No More, [Resources & Education](#)
- Abolition Now, Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art, Winnipeg, Manitoba



Music



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://press-books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=81#oembed-1>

For a transcript of the lyrics for the song above visit Genius's page for [Stand Up / Stand N Rock](#).



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Please note that a transcript for the lyrics of the song above is not currently available. We apologize for the inconvenience.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://press-books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=81#oem-bed-3>

For a transcript of the lyrics for the song above visit Genius's page for [Shock](#).

Watch this video to learn more about Ana Tijoux and her music: Democracy Now, [Chilean Musician Ana Tijoux on Politics, Feminism, Motherhood & Hip-Hop as “a Land for the Landless”](#), July 10, 2014



Reflection 10

Enter your reflection journal and respond to the following questions:

- Think back on when you may have first heard the terms abolition and/or decolonization. What did they mean to you at the time?
- Consider examples of abolitionist and/or decolonial/anti-colonial organizing and resistance. For example, individuals or organizations in your community.
- Consider the similarities and differences between abolition and decolonization/anti-colonial struggle.

Note: to access your reflection journal please review the [Introduction section](#) of the Racial Capitalism and Colonialism module.

Key Takeaways

Upon completion of this module, the intention is that you have achieved the **learning objectives** below. Practice discussing these topics with your friends and/or community. Try to explain to a friend what capitalism, racism and colonialism are and how they intersect and are dependent upon one another.

- Describe the intersections between capitalism, racism and colonialism
- Critically assess how the fabricated notions of racial superiority and racial hierarchy sustain those positioned at the top
- Identify how slavery and indentureship create the conditions for wealth and accumulation-based society
- Analyze how global systems today depend on the perpetuation of these conditions through institutional structures and ideas of white supremacy and entitlement



Music



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<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=83#oembed-1>

Please note that a transcript for the lyrics of the song We Can Do It are currently unavailable. We apologize for the inconvenience.



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<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=83#oembed-2>

For a transcript of the lyrics for the song above visit Genius's page for [It's a Good Day](#).



Reflection 11

Open your reflection journal and reflect on what you have learned throughout this module:

- What stood out to you the most?
- What do you want to learn more about?
- What did you find the most difficult?
- How do you feel? Check in with your body. Why do you think you feel this way? What parts of this module made you feel differently?

Note: to access your reflection journal please review the [Introduction section](#) of the Racial Capitalism and Colonialism module.

2. ECOLOGICAL COLLAPSE AND CLIMATE CRISIS

Introduction



In this module, we're going to discuss how current global systems and patterns of consumption and resource extraction worldwide are unsustainable for a liveable future. We'll define key concepts around the climate crisis, while exploring the root causes of ecological collapse and how it intersects with racial capitalism, colonialism and social injustice.



Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, you should be able to:

- Describe how climate crisis is a result of current global systems based on racial capitalism, colonialism and social injustice

- Explore and engage with notions of collapse and the structural and relational factors that affect change making
- Identify key factors contributing to the denial of climate crisis and ecological collapse
- Reflect on the dominant responses to climate crisis from an Indigenous, relational perspective

How to Use This Module

This module begins with a 10-minute video that introduces you to key ideas and concepts about ecological collapse and climate crisis. The sections following the introductory video will provide additional content to help you dive deeper into these topics. Learning activities are integrated throughout. It may take you 2 to 6 hours to complete this module, including all learning activities. However, this will vary greatly by individual. Depending on your social location, lived experience and disciplinary background (area of study), you will engage with these materials in different ways.

If you have not yet, visit the section on [Self-Guided Learning](#) in the Introduction to Global Justice and Change for reminders on how you can support your learning process. There are many ways to engage with this module. Please decide what works best for you.



Reflection Journal

Please open the google doc template for the [Ecological Collapse and Climate Crisis reflection journal](#). You can save your own copy to your Google Drive. Alternatively, if you don't have access to google drive, you can download a word copy to your desktop or phone. You will be asked to respond to the questions in your journal throughout the module.



Music

Another way to explore the themes in this module

is to listen to our Ecological Collapse and Climate Crisis playlist, available in the following formats:

- [Spotify](#)
- YouTube (*in development*)

You will also find individual songs shared throughout the module to support further learning and reflection.

WATCH Video 2: Ecological Collapse and Climate Crisis

To begin, we have created a 10-minute introductory video that explores the main concepts of this module. The video asks: **When did ecological collapse really start happening? Who and what is causing it? And who is experiencing the worst of its effects?**

The intention of the video is to provide an accessible entry point for learners, whether or not you are familiar with these topics. However, this does not mean that this content is “easy”. These are complex topics!

Remember to take breaks if you need to. Stop and reflect on the content. Watch the video or specific sections multiple times if helpful. The more you listen and engage, the more familiar these ideas will become.



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[books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=377#oem-bed-1](https://press-books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=377#oem-bed-1)

Now that you’ve watched Video 2: Ecological Collapse and Climate Crisis, take some time to reflect. Complete the learning activities below.



Check Your Understanding



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Music



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<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=377#oembed-2>

For a transcript of the lyrics for the above song visit Genius's page for [Like Lightning](#).

For more information about this song and artist see: “[Foals rally against climate change in their dystopian animated 'Like Lightning' video](#)”, by Will Richards in NME, November 2019



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<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=377#oembed-3>

For a transcript of the lyrics for the above song visit Genius's page for [Another World](#).

For more information about this song and artist see: “[Antony Hegarty's 4 Degrees: a climate change anthem for our doomed planet](#),” by Ben Beaumont-Thomas in the Guardian, December 2015



Reflection 1

After watching the video, respond to the questions below in your reflection journal:

- What was new or surprising to you from the video (if anything)?
- What did you feel like you already knew or understood (even if in a small way)?
- In what areas do you feel like your knowledge or understanding increased in relation to the ideas of climate crisis and ecological collapse?
- What things still feel a bit confusing or blurry for you?
- How did this video make you feel? What did you feel in your body? What types of emotions came up for you? Remember, you can feel many different things at once, like anger as well as excitement, you don't have to choose just one.

Note: to access your reflection journal please review the [Introduction section](#) of the Ecological Collapse and Climate Crisis module.

Industry Examples

Before we move on, let's take some time to dig deeper into a couple of examples related to how we feed and clothe ourselves: industrial agriculture and the fashion industry. Below we explore how practices that are harmful to the environment and all life on this planet are built into these industries. But remember, they don't need to be. Humans have created these systems and humans can change them.

Industrial Agriculture and Food Waste



Audio



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=392#audio-392-1>

“Aside from the fossil fuel industry, one of the biggest causes of the climate crisis is industrial agriculture. It causes deforestation, mass pollution, and harms the environment with the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Based entirely on capitalist interests, it remains centred on profit and is a huge perpetrator of land theft from local communities. In addition, it has led to enormous amounts of food waste. A solid third of all food produced on this earth is wasted. That’s enough extra food to feed 3 billion people per year, or provide enough water for 9 billion people!”

Industrial agriculture- or agribusiness- refers to mass-production associated with:

- livestock and the dairy industry
- fruits, vegetables and grains produced for human consumption and for cattle feed,
- products including sugar cane used for “green energy”

As described in the introductory video, industrial agriculture causes:

- deforestation
- contamination and other health problems due to the use of chemical fertilizers
- soil depletion
- loss of biodiversity because wild animals and plants are pushed out to make way for industrial farms
- huge amounts of waste pollution through runoff into nearby waters and into soils
- loss of cultural diversity and Indigenous food systems that have sustained communities for time immemorial

Industrial agriculture is often thought of as a great solution to address food insecurity and an ever growing population, but a

closer look reveals its many flaws. Unlike independent smallholder farming, agribusiness is entirely wrapped up in a capitalist system that causes harm to the planet and non-human life, while exploiting the labour of Black, Indigenous and people of colour to maximize profit.

Industrial agriculture drives land theft worldwide. Private equity firms, corporations and the governments that support them view food as a kind of investment security, so they have an interest in acquiring large swaths of land, basically anywhere they can.

Starting after 2008, the scale and speed of what governments and corporations call “land acquisitions” have been accelerating. These groups often go after the lands of local communities who have been practicing customary agriculture for hundreds of years; they coerce them into giving up their lands through new laws and policies, often ones shaped on colonial era legislations.

The plan is to deforest these lands to make way for more industrial agriculture, despite environmentalists and climate scientists saying clearly that customary or smallholder farming is much better for people and for the planet. This is because smallholder farming uses rotational crop planting and promotes biodiversity.

Currently, industrial agriculture dominates in the US and Canada, but worldwide, at least half of food is still produced by smallholder farmers. So the fight of preserving smallholder farms and preventing their lands from being taken by massive corporations is ongoing. There have been huge protests by Indigenous and local communities to prevent land theft all over the world.

And not only does industrial agriculture hurt the environment and racialized and Indigenous communities, it is also super wasteful. A solid third of all food produced on this earth is wasted. That's enough extra food to feed 3 billion people per year, or provide enough water for 9 billion people!

People living in North America and Europe waste the most food. They waste about ten times more than those living in Asia, for example. Food waste is a massive emitter of greenhouse gasses: if it was a country, it would be about the third largest emitter on Earth.

Why does food waste happen? One might say, because of capitalism, or the drive to make a profit. In the US, half of all food is wasted at the farm: it's refused by retailers because it's deemed “ugly” and thus unsellable. Food retailers also overstock their shelves on purpose in order to draw in customers, because customers have been shown to buy less when shelves

seem understocked. This leads to more food being wasted at the store. Promotions and coupons also cause food waste because people buy more than they need and end up throwing it away at home.

Recommended Viewing

- [“Food Waste: Last Week Tonight with John Oliver,”](#) HBO, July 2015 (18 mins)
- [“Canadians get creative in solving feed waste problem,”](#) CBC News: The National, August 2018 (6 mins)

Fast Fashion

The principle that **when people acquire things at a very low cost, they value it less**, applies to another massive consumer driver of waste: clothing and textiles.

About 85% of our textile waste—that is, our clothes and drapery—ends up in landfills. Most textiles are now made of synthetic materials that come from fossil fuels (plastics). But even “natural” clothing requires a huge amount of resources, with one cotton t-shirt taking an estimated 2700 litres of water to produce.

The waste caused by the fashion industry can be largely attributed to fast fashion. Fast fashion has been a growing trend through the 21st century, one that has taken hold across the capitalist system. How does capitalism drive fast fashion?

Fashion companies are some of the biggest profit-reaping enterprises on earth. They have some of the highest profit margins because they employ people for so little, and pay nothing at all for their massive environmental impacts.

In just the United States for example, 95% of clothes were made within the country in 1960. Today, 97% of all clothes come from outside the country. Companies recruit cheap labor overseas to make their clothing. Clothes are made mainly through women's labour and women are paid some of the lowest wages on Earth for that work. Then, companies sell clothes at low prices to encourage high turnover in their stores; when consumers feel clothes are cheap, they throw them out more often. This demonstrates how the textile industry is at the intersection of climate change and capitalist exploitation.

Recommended Viewing

- [“Fast Fashion – The shady world of cheap clothing,”](#) DW Documentary, February 2022 (43 mins)
- [“The Ugly Truth of Fast Fashion,”](#) Patriot Act with Hasan Minhaj, November 2019 (29 mins)
- [“Recycling revolutionary Veena Sahajwalla turns old clothes into kitchen tiles,”](#) ABC News In-depth, February 2021 (29 mins)



Reflection 2

After watching the video “Man” by Steve Cutts found below, consider the following:

- Was the video hard to watch? Why or why not?
- Consider the examples of industrial agriculture and fast fashion. How are the harms these industries cause hidden and/or normalized? Why?

Note: to access your reflection journal please review the [Introduction section](#) of the Ecological Collapse and Climate Crisis module.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunder-story/?p=392#oembed-1>

Back Up, What is the Climate Crisis?



Reflection 3

Before you begin, enter your reflection journal and respond to the following questions:

- How do you witness or hear about the climate crisis in your daily life?
- What may not look or seem like it is connected to the climate crisis, but actually is?

Note: to access your reflection journal please review the [Introduction section](#) of the Ecological Collapse and Climate Crisis module.

In the introductory video, the narrator begins by focusing on perspectives and experiences that identify colonialism and racial capitalism as the causes of ecological collapse and climate crisis. Let's listen to a clip from the video.



Audio



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<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=380#audio-380-1>

“The founding of nation-states through brutality, dispossession, exploitation and resource extraction had devastating impacts. This is where climate collapse on a global scale began. This was apocalyptic for Indigenous peoples and ecologies around the world. As Anishnabeeg theorist and artist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson says, “Indigenous peoples have witnessed continual ecosystem and species collapse since the early days of colonial occupation. We should be thinking of climate change as part of a much longer series of ecological catastrophes caused by colonialism and accumulation-based society.” We can’t begin to imagine a way out of the destruction of life on earth without recognizing that ecological and climate crises are the result of the global capitalist system.”

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson quotation is from [“Indigenous Knowledge Has Been Warning us About Climate Change for Centuries,”](#) By Malcolm Harris in Pacific Standard, March 2019

Before we explore these ideas further, let’s first break down some of the contemporary understandings of climate crisis.

Global Warming, Climate Change and Climate Crisis

Global warming and climate change are now increasingly being referred to as a **climate crisis** because we are entering a moment when if we don’t do anything about the causes and effects of rising temperatures, we face huge consequences. People, plants and animals around the world are already experiencing many of these consequences.

Some have argued for the term **“global burning”** because warming is too mild—burning is closer to what’s actually happening. People also talk about **climate catastrophes** instead of just crises. And many have argued that, if actions are not taken, a complete collapse of the biosphere is inevitable.

Global warming describes the phenomenon of the temperature rising since the Industrial Revolution. The Industrial Revolution is largely attributed to the invention of the coal-powered engine in 1776. This sparked the production and use of fossil fuels: coal, oil and gas. Since then, despite the invention of other cleaner sources of energy, fossil fuels have dominated how humans power their worlds, supplying over 80 percent of the world’s energy.

EMBED PHOTO/VIDEO –

People started to keep track of average annual temperatures around the world starting in 1880. Between 1880 and 1980, the temperature rose 1 degree celsius. This might not seem like much but 1 degree means melting ice sheets and a rise in sea

levels, bleaching of coral reefs and heat waves that kill, among many other effects often referred to as “**climate change**”.

Since 1980, the temperature has been rising at more than double the rate than in the previous 100 years, meaning we are looking at adding another 1 degree of heat to our environment. This is largely attributed to fossil fuels, which in turn have supported a serious increase in human consumption. What we now call “**the climate crisis**” means that we are going to see more consequences of the added heat. These consequences are already affecting us all.

Scientists estimate that 2015 was the hottest year in 11 000 years: the temperate environments in which human civilization first grew and thrived were very different from what they are now. Since then, it’s become pretty clear that things are not all right with the environment. We are headed into a full blown collapse of our ecological systems.

EMBED PHOTO/VIDEO –

The starkest warning yet is found in the report, [AR6 Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis](#), released by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). IPCC is a panel composed of leading scientists from around the world. Its scientists warned that a 2 degree increase will be exceeded during the 21st century, unless rapid, global reductions and actions are taken.

The report sidelined the claims of climate change deniers, identifying the unequivocal human-caused crisis facing humanity now. And it outlined how climate science now has stronger understandings of the links between climate change and extreme weather around the world. The climate crisis and its effects will be far reaching and affect every region of the globe.



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Climate Justice, Greenwashing and Green Land Grabs

Climate or environmental justice describes the intersections between the ecological and social harms produced by and required for our contemporary global systems to function. As discussed in the introductory video, those who suffer the worst effects of climate change (like flooding, famine caused by drought, extreme weather events) are mainly the world's poor. Understandings of and responses to climate crises must take into account the social structures and inequities that pervade and sustain global capitalist systems.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://press-books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=380#oem-bed-2>

And, as was explained by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson in the introductory video, climate crises and ecological catastrophe are not new. For centuries, Indigenous populations and Black and brown communities around the world have been living with and addressing the ecological reality we find ourselves. **For those who may be new to these ideas and the feelings they induce:** don't panic. Generations of those on the frontlines of extraction and exploitation have been grappling with the ecological and climate crisis induced by racial capitalism and colonialism, and they continue to do so. You can grapple with hard truths and engage with and address the changes we are all facing too.

However, focusing solely on green energy, green design and green consumerism, also known as **green washing**, while millions around the world are left to suffer the effects of sustaining an inherently harmful global system, continues to uphold relationships of exploitation and expropriation. Until the structural and relational aspects of colonialism and racial capitalism are addressed, any action taken in response to climate crises is lim-

ited in scope and effect. Watch the video below to learn more about greenwashing.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://press-books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=380#oembed-3>

Green consumerism is often about making individuals feel good, as if they are doing their part to address the climate crisis when they recycle or purchase a green product. But the reality is that the issues we face are much more complex, socially and ecologically, and thus require more complex solutions than what is possible at the individual level.

Kandi White, Native energy and climate campaign coordinator at the Indigenous Environmental Network and a citizen of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nations, discusses green consumerism in an [interview with vice](#):

“It’s about making people feel good, even if in reality, they’re not helping solve the climate crisis. We have to see past that lie, and see past that ‘feel-good feeling’ if it’s not helping everybody as a whole on the planet—and not just humans, but all life on the planet, because we often forget about the four-legged, the winged, and everything that swims.”

While green consumerism focuses on sustaining accumulation based lifestyles, **green grabbing** is about the theft of land for supposed “green” outcomes. It is a term that refers to the role the conservation and environmental movements have played in the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands (also commonly known as land grabs or land acquisitions). Some examples of environmentally focused projects that push Indigenous nations and racialized communities off their lands include:

- The creation of parks, environmental protection zones and ecotourism destinations
- The creation of carbon offsetting zones and things like protected forests in order to trade on the “carbon market”
- The need for more land to produce crops needed to create biofuels

- The construction of renewable energy projects, like hydro-electric dams or wind farms

Green grabbing not only denies the rights of Indigenous nations and communities to their lands and sovereignty, but also ignores Indigenous leadership and the role Indigenous nations and communities play as effective stewards of their territories and the ecological relationships that they sustain.



Check Your Understanding



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunder-story/?p=380#h5p-11>

Recommended Reading

- [“‘Racism dictates who gets dumped on’: how environmental injustice divides the world,”](#) By Nina Lakhani for the Guardian, October 2019
- [“How Conservation Became Colonialism: Indigeneous people, not environmentalists, are the key to protecting the world’s most precious ecosystems,”](#) By Alexander Zaitchik for Foreign Policy, July 2018

- [“Indigenous peoples can manage their forests better than anyone else: Conservation doesn't have to undermine social justice,”](#) By Prakash Kashwan for the Grist, April 2017
- [Environmental Racism in Canada](#) (The Canadian Encyclopedia)
- [“Environmental racism in Canada: What is it, what are the impacts, and what can we do about it?”](#) by Dr. Elaine MacDonald for ecojustice, September 2020
- Listen (podcast): [Environmental Racism & Justice in Canada](#), The Ecopolitics Podcast



Music



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— text. You can view them online here:
<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=380#oembed-4>

For a transcript of the lyrics for the above song, visit Genius's page for [Feels Like Summer](#).



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<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=380#oembed-5>

For a transcript of the lyrics for the above song, visit Genius's page for [Trouble in the Water](#).



Reflection 4

Open your reflection journal and consider the following:

- Are you aware of climate or environmental justice issues in your community or region? If yes, consider how the issues are being addressed (if they are). If you are not aware of any, why do you think that is the case?
- Consider examples of green washing and/or green grabbing. In what ways may they work to counteract the climate crisis? In what ways may they actually be reproducing the same dynamics (i.e. the root causes of the climate crisis)?

Note: to access your reflection journal please review the [Introduction section](#) of the Ecological Collapse and Climate Crisis module.

Ecological and Social Collapse

The intersections between various and dynamic crises on a global scale are leading some to refer to ecological and social collapse and what it may mean for humanity. Notions of collapse tend to ignite the type of apocalyptic thinking that the introductory video opened with. This is a difficult topic, as it often leaves us feeling overwhelmed, scared or hopeless. But we need to understand the root causes of ecological and climate crises and how they are grounded in colonialism and racial capitalism, if we are to make shifts that will lead to other possibilities and ways of existing on our planet. And not only do we need to understand the root causes, but we also **need to consider how dominant society approaches the very idea of collapse itself. What may other perspectives and approaches to collapse teach us?**

The text [Preparing for the end of the world as we know it](#), written collaboratively by a collective of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, artists, educators and activists from the Global North and South, weaves together Indigenous teachings that affirm the potential, likelihood or inevitability of social and ecological collapse. They describe how the potential of even talking about collapse in Western societies is often limited.

“People generally avoid this topic or deny its relevance in order to maintain a sense of hope in the future and continuity of the existing system. Many assume that, once people accept the likelihood of collapse, they will stop fighting for climate action and indulge in fatalistic behaviour since there is no utility maximizing or teleological motivation to act. Accepting the potential or likelihood of social and/or ecological collapse, in this case, is equated with speeding it up.

However, many non-Western cultures, including many Indigenous cultures, do not approach death, dying or the potential or likelihood of collapse in this way. **Societies that see death and life as integral to each other have processes and protocols of coordination and preparedness to deal with the inevitability of change, pain, loss and death that are unimaginable in Western**

societies. Indigenous people may often also be better equipped to work with and through complexities and paradoxes. [...] Therefore, not all, but many Indigenous scholars and activists encourage conversations and preparations for social and ecological collapse, albeit in different ways."

In the next section we explore the work of one of the many Indigenous scholars and activists referenced in the text above.

Relational Tipping Point and Kinship Time

Kyle Powys Whyte, a Potawatomi scholar and Professor of Environment and Sustainability at the University of Michigan School, uses the concepts of a "**relational tipping point**" and "**kinship time**" to discuss climate crisis and collapse. Kinship time understands time through the lens of relationship and the specific relational qualities such as consent, trust, accountability and reciprocity that are necessary. Similar to Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's assertion, if you look at the climate crisis through the lens of kinship time, it's a crisis that started several hundred years ago.

In an [interview with vice](#), Whyte explains:

"The way in which a lot of (climate) issues are described relies on language that doesn't emphasize what I am calling kinship issues. For example, it's usually described as if there's climate change, which has to do with chemicals in the atmosphere and all of that, and then there's the climate change impacts. But what if climate change was described more as something that is actually a social phenomenon? You start with the idea that people didn't respect each other's consent, and then from there, you move into how that generates climate change."

Whyte's notion of a relational tipping point refers to the fact that our societies, still centred in racial capitalism and colonialism, have already crossed a relational tipping point, long before the ecological tipping point that many refer to. **We simply do not have enough time to effectively address the climate crisis due to the slow and careful work that repairing relationships requires.** There are consequences to generations of exploita-

tion, oppression and appropriation and it is likely not possible to completely repair relationships.

In an [interview with Grist](#), Whyte explains:

“People need to realize that on the one hand, renewable energy technology is important, but until people can find a way in which people of color, Indigenous, the global majority can actually exercise self determination — develop their own economies, use equitable financing mechanisms, participate equally in education and training, receive adequate technical assistance — then what we’re going to see is a world that may have a lower carbon footprint, but could be worse for people that get left behind. That happens when these infrastructure investments don’t really connect to what they would need to make up for generations of colonialism, racial capitalism, and patriarchy.”

Climate Anxiety

At this point in the module, we ask you to take a deep breath and pay attention to any intense feelings and thoughts that may be arising for you in your body and mind. Check in with yourself and consider what you may need at this point in terms of self care if you are feeling overwhelmed or are feeling a strong resistance to continue forward with this content.

As explored in module 1 in relation to colonialism and racial capitalism, there are **many reasons to deny (consciously or unconsciously) or turn away from these hard truths**, especially if you live in a place and community that is still relatively unaffected by climate crisis events. You may still have a choice, while so many others do not. In [section 2.5](#) we will explore the topic of societal and structural denial, but we wanted to take a moment here to ensure that you consider your own emotional reactions to this content on an individual and personal level and to explore the topic of climate anxiety.

There are many who have flagged that not talking about big issues such as the climate crisis, is actually leading to an increase in feelings of anxiety, depression and anger. Ask yourself, what happens when something is really bothering you, but you don’t talk about it and you try to suppress your feelings? Or when you do try to talk about it, but others deny it, ignore it, or avoid conversations with you about it?

In a 2019 BBC article [The harm from worrying about climate change](#), Caroline Hickman, a psychotherapist and researcher who studies children's attitudes towards climate change, **describes climate anxiety- and climate depression or climate rage -as a reasonable and healthy response to an existential threat.** "I'd kind of wonder why somebody wasn't feeling anxious," she says. Instead of burying or denying the grief and sense of loss that climate crisis and ecological collapse may elicit, it is time to consider how our communities and societies can more effectively engage with these feelings.

Feeling part of a community that is aware of and engaged in these issues is important, while taking constructive measures to address what may feel like for some as "the end of the world". This connects to Whyte's assertion that our societies have indeed passed a relational tipping point and that the type of redress needed for generations of harm simply doesn't fit within the climate movements timelines for emissions reductions, for example.

However, the purpose and intention of recognizing and naming this reality is not so that we fall into a sense of doom or fatalism. It does not mean that your decisions and actions are pointless. **You have a responsibility to ensure that you are facing hard truths in order to steward change wherever you can. You are accountable to future generations.** We are already experiencing the effects of crisis and collapse. As the crisis deepens, the decisions and actions we take now shape the quality, experience and well-being of future generations of human and non-human life.



Check Your Understanding



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunder-story/?p=756#h5p-12>



Reflection 5

Open your reflection journal and consider the following:

- Are the ideas of ecological and social collapse new to you? What feelings arise for you when you consider the implications of collapse?
- How does Kyle Whyte's notion of a "relational tipping point" differ from the types of conversations centred at the UN's Climate Change Conference, for example?

Note: to access your reflection journal please review the [Introduction section](#) of the Ecological Collapse and Climate Crisis module.

Societal and Structural Denial



Reflection 6

Before you begin, enter your reflection journal and consider the following:

- Are ecological collapse and/or the climate crisis common topics of conversation in your community(ies)? For example, with friends, family or in class?
- If not, why do you think that is?
- If yes, in what places and spaces do the conversations feel more difficult or strained? Why do you think that is?

Note: to access your reflection journal please review the [Introduction section](#) of the Ecological Collapse and Climate Crisis module.

In the introductory video, the narrator discusses how a limited understanding of the climate crisis, alongside a disconnection

from the natural world, may cause individuals and communities to remain stuck in cycles of denial. Let's explore further why and how this may be happening.



Audio



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=382#audio-382-1>

“Dominant sources of information and knowledge don’t adequately address the severity of the crisis. In Canada, there is no government consensus on how or what to teach about climate collapse in schools. Climate change denial still plays an active role in influencing public opinion. Those profiting from the climate crisis, like the fossil fuel industry, are investing heavily in this denial. Meanwhile, many people are spending more time on their screens than outside. This has led to what some have started calling ‘nature deficit disorder’. If people are disconnected from the natural world and have limited awareness or understanding of climate collapse, it’s easy to

remain stuck in cycles of denial. While the realities we are facing on a global scale are daunting, it is essential that we grapple with hard truths.”

Financing Denial and Government Lobbyists

Fossil fuel companies are some of the wealthiest on Earth today, and hold huge amounts of power to influence governments. **Globally, 85% of taxpayer spending goes to fossil fuel subsidies;** the US government spends 10 times more to subsidize the fossil fuel industry than it does on education. In Canada, the government has spent 23 billion dollars just on pipelines since 2018. These staggering numbers can be attributed to lobbying by fossil fuel companies.

Lobbying refers to the legal act of persuading the government to pass actions, policies, laws and bills in favour of a certain industry or group. **In Canada, the vast majority of lobbyists are from fossil fuel companies.** They are in daily direct contact with government officials, influencing them to support fossil fuels. This has been the case for decades, but has been heightened since the 2010s. As public awareness grows about how damaging fossil fuels are to the environment, companies need to lobby to stay in business.

Between lobbying governments against making changes that would bring positive effects to the environment, and actively causing environmental damage, the fossil fuel industry is one of the major culprits pushing climate change into a climate crisis. **And while the fossil fuel industry is a major player in Canada, so too are the mining, lumber and agricultural industries.** Around the world, industries based on the extraction of “natural resources” use the tactics of denial and lobbying to influence politics and public opinion.

School Curriculum and the Media

Unfortunately, not everyone has the same access to information about climate collapse. **While information on the topic is widely available, many schools still don't really teach about the environment and the crisis we are facing today.** There are a number of reasons for this, including intergenerational and political gaps, as well as an active denial coming from the idea that we are separate from the natural world (we will explore this further below).

In Canada, there is no government consensus on how or what to teach about climate collapse; teachers are left to decide on their own whether to address the climate crisis, and how to do so. As a result, only about one-third of teachers say they feel equipped to teach about climate collapse. Despite all the knowledge about it that is widely available, those who do teach about it are reported to address the topic for an average of 1-40 hours total over one whole school year.

The mainstream news media has also been neglectful of making connections between the climate crisis and weather events, often covering them as “natural” instead of caused by human activity.

Talking about climate change in a mainstream context has been characterized by:

- Complete silence
- The use of terms that are not strong enough for the public to understand
- The idea of “balanced reporting”: the need to hear from people with a differing perspective
- A focus on personalized narratives, where news outlets make stories all about heroes or personal triumphs, rather than about overarching effects of weather events and how they are connected to climate change and to the wider society
- Alarmism: a feeling of doom and end-of-days that could make people feel they can't do anything at all to effect change

Disconnection from Nature

Researchers have found more and more of a disconnect with nature since the 1950's, mostly attributed to technological advancements, and a major drop since the arrival of the Internet in the late 1990's. Today, children's contact with the natural environment is at an all-time low, with kids spending more time on their screens than outside.

Some have started calling the negative effects of this disconnect **nature deficit disorder**, arguing there are health and behavioural problems caused by a lack of time spent in nature.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://press-books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=382#oem-bed-1>

[books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=382#oem-bed-1](https://press-books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=382#oem-bed-1)

Ethnobotanist Wade Davis has used the term **ecological amnesia** to describe the way we eventually forget what the world is supposed to look like, i.e. that we are supposed to be able to swim in natural bodies of water, that there should be a chorus of birds and insects and animals making noise outside our windows.

However, just because we aren't spending time in nature, it doesn't mean we aren't still a part of it: we are living on a huge bio-intelligent being that we are deeply connected to. We are a part of the biosphere no matter what, and as we cause its collapse, we feel the consequences.

We are also connected to each other and our actions have an impact on other people, which is made abundantly clear in the time of climate crisis and a global pandemic.

Denial of Entanglement and Interdependence

Societal and structural denial of ecological collapse is connected to the active denial of the fact that we are all entangled, connected and interdependent. Check out the video below that raises some questions about independence vs. interdependence.



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<https://press-books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=382#oem-bed-2>

Our socialization into this belief through racial capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy—among other systems—often causes us to feel like we are separate, independent, isolated. But this belief and feeling is not representative of reality. We are literally all connected and entangled with one another and all life. We are part of the world's ecology in diverse and contextual ways, while we all exist together in the earth's biosphere.

Feelings and beliefs of separation, isolation and independence feed into the notion that our decisions and actions are without consequence to others (both human and non-human life). They seek to uphold the illusion that we are not responsible for the harm and violence inflicted on all life on this planet in order to sustain our current and dominant ways of living globally. The denial of the fact that humans are causing the collapse of ecological systems and mass extinctions as we speak.

The denial of interdependence and entanglement also connects to how dominant Western society approaches feelings of deep fear and grief. When individuals, communities and society more broadly begins to face the difficult and harmful truths about racial capitalism and climate collapse there is often an inability, a lack of capacity or stamina, to face the pain that these truths elicit.

In the book [Towards Scarring Our Collective Soul Wound](#), **Cash Ahenakew**, member of the Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation

and Associate Professor and Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Peoples' Wellbeing at the University of British Columbia, discusses how modern societies relate to pain. He explores **how an avoidance or disconnection from pain itself contributes to the problems and crises we are facing.**

"In modern societies we have developed a very negative relationship with pain—we are terrified of being overwhelmed by it, and we are particularly scared of collective pain because we do not know what to do with it apart from wishing for anesthetic relief. Therefore, **in order to re-centre the land and become sensitized to its pain, we need to first change the ways we have been socialized to think about health and well-being in relation to pain itself.** Many Indigenous groups have practices that can change our relationship with pain and trauma release. In this text, I focus on sacred pain as one way to transform both individual and collective traumas. Sacred pain can support the work of scarring our collective soul wound, a wound caused by the illusion of separability that has been instituted through the **violence of colonialism. This violence involves the fracturing of our sense of entanglement with the cosmos, the earth, other species, and with each other.**"

Listen and/or watch the short video below of Dr. Cash Ahenakew describing his work.



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The root causes of today's crises go beyond the climate statistics and policy reforms at the surface of contemporary responses. What would an approach to climate crisis and ecological collapse look like if it was centered in a deep sense of entanglement and interdependence? If it faced the affective, the feelings of grief and horror that ecological and social collapse elicit, as well as the literal pain of the earth itself. **Would the perpetuation of these systems of violence, harm and destruction be possible if there was not only an understand-**

ing of these hard truths, but also the capacity and stamina to feel them?



Check Your Understanding



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunder-story/?p=382#h5p-13>

Recommended Further Viewing and Reading

- “[Facing human wrongs, \(un\)learning bundle 4: denial of entanglement](#),” Lecture by Will Valley and Vanessa Andreotti, July 2021 (**Note:** this lecture is from [Facing Human Wrongs](#), an online interdisciplinary course that is one of the inspirations for this resource. Some aspects of the lecture will likely be unfamiliar as they introduce ideas from other units in the course.)
- [A Spiritual Perspective on Climate Change](#),” By Mary Annette Pember for Indian Country

Today



Music



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<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=382#oembed-4>

For a transcript of the lyrics for the above song visit Genius's page for [Retribution](#).



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<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=382#oembed-5>

Please note that a transcript for the lyrics of the song Tlahuiliz/Light is not currently available. We apologize for the inconvenience.



Reflection 7

After completing the section on societal and structural denial consider:

- What may you be resisting or denying as you work through this module? For example, have you scoffed or laughed at anything? Have you had any strong negative reactions to any of the ideas or perspectives shared?
- What do you think, if anything, would support

you individually and/or collectively to be able to sit with the complexity and difficulty that ecological collapse and climate crisis elicit? What role would the affect (i.e. our feelings, like pain and fear) play?

Note: to access your reflection journal please review the [Introduction section](#) of the Ecological Collapse and Climate Crisis module.

Land Back and Indigenous Sovereignty

Let's go back to our introductory video one last time.



Audio



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<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=384#audio-384-1>

“Many of the proposed solutions, such as green technology and green consumerism, might be good first steps, but they won’t actually bring about the transformational change we need. These ideas are embedded in existing capitalist and colonial sys-

tems and ways of thinking. Indigenous critiques demonstrate how such solutions don't address returning stolen lands. As Kul Wicasa theorist Nick Estes asks:

'Why is it easier for some to imagine the end of fossil fuels, but not settler colonialism? To imagine green economies and carbon-free, wind turbine, solar power and electric bullet train utopias, but not the return of Indigenous lands? It's not an either/or scenario. Both are possible—and necessary.'

Quotation from Nick Estes from: "[A Red Deal](#)," by Nick Estes in Jacobin, August 2019

These ideas are central to "[Land Back: A Yellowhead Institute Red Paper](#)". The conclusion of the report, titled the Continuation of Life, references the UN's Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. The Land Back report finds that biodiversity is declining in all parts of the world; however, it is declining much less rapidly in those lands still managed by Indigenous communities. The Land Back report points to what many in Indigenous communities have been saying for generations: traditional land stewardship and caretaking practices are essential to slow ecological collapse.

Let's explore the Land Bank movement further, particularly here in Canada. The **Yellowhead Institute** describes the project of Land Back as about reclaiming Indigenous jurisdiction over land.



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Dr. **Pamela Palmater**, a Mi'kmaw lawyer, professor, writer and a member of the Eel River Bar First Nation, breaks things down further with The Breach, "Canada, it's time for Land Back".



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What happens when Indigenous Nations and communities defend their land? In the video below from the **Yellowhead Institute**, various Indigenous leaders discuss how the federal government uses injunctions to criminalize Indigenous land defense. For more information, including an explanation of injunctions and how they are used both by and against Indigenous people, read **Kate Gunn**'s article [Injunctions as a Tool of Colonialism](#) and watch the video below.



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Land defense movements exist around the world and are connected to lineages of resistance since the beginning of colonial occupation and global land grabbing regimes. Today, at the frontlines of extraction, Indigenous and local communities stand up against corporate, government and military forces who are trying to move them off their lands so that they can seize what they call natural resources in order to generate profits.

These movements are fighting back against extractive projects such as industrial agriculture, mining, underwater dredging and pipelines. Land defenders are fighting to protect their

land and our planet. And they are met with increasing violence, criminalization and oppression as the climate crisis deepens. These stories serve as a source of inspiration and demonstrate the continued power and strength of Indigenous land defense and movements for land back globally. They also highlight the need for action, rigor and care to support land back movements and land defenders around the world.

Check out the [Land Rights Now](#) Campaign to end the criminalisation of land rights defenders (1 minute).



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The video below from [Life Mosaic](#) explains what land grabs are, why they are happening and what their impacts are (14 minutes).



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://press-books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=384#oem-bed-5>

Case Study: The Last Warning Campaign, Indigenous Land Defenders in Brazil

The [Last Warning campaign](#) is a specific example of the centrality of Indigenous rights, land defense (or land back) move-

ments and the intersections with the global climate emergency. The “last warning” refers to the destruction of large parts of the Amazon rainforest if the Brazilian government is successful in opening up protected areas and Indigenous lands to mining, logging, and farming. **It quite literally is a last warning to the world that if the Brazilian government is successful, genocide will be enacted on Indigenous peoples in Brazil and their role as stewards of the Amazon forest will be jeopardized.** The climate implications, not to mention the loss of human and more than human life, are beyond catastrophic. We and all life on this earth are entangled and interdependent, and the continued genocide of Indigenous peoples and the destruction of the Amazon forest has implications for us all.



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The legal battle is ongoing, and while a landmark case was to be voted on in the Supreme Federal Court of Brazil last August 2021, the decision has been postponed to June 2022. Visit the website for ways that you can get involved and support the [Last Warning Campaign](#).



Check Your Understanding



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=384#h5p-14>

Recommended Reading

- Erica Violet Lee, "[Reconciling in the Apocalypse](#)" Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, March 2016
- "[Murders of environment and land defenders hit record high](#)," By Jonathan Watts for the Guardian, September 2021
- "[Murders of environment and land defenders hit record high](#)," By Jonathan Watts for the Guardian, September 2021
- Julian Brave Noisecat, "[We Need Indigenous Wisdom to Survive the Apocalypse](#)," The Walrus, July 2021
- International Land Coalition's Triennial Report 2019-2021, "[Land, People and Planet](#)"
- Global Witness' September 2021 report, "[Last Line of Defense: The industries causing the climate crisis and attacks against land and environmental defenders](#)".
- Prakash Kashwan, "[Indigenous peoples can manage their forests better than anyone else: Conservation doesn't have to undermine social justice](#)," The Grist, April 2017
- Alexander Zaitchik, "[How Conservation Became Colonialism: Indigenous people, not environmentalists, are the key to protecting the world's most precious ecosystems](#)," Foreign Policy, July 2018



Music




One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=384#oembed-7>

For a transcript of the lyrics for the above song, visit Genius's page for [Black Snakes](#).



One or more interactive elements has

 been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:
<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=384#oembed-8>

For a transcript of the lyrics for the above song, visit Genius's page for [Warrior](#).



Reflection 8

After completing the section on Land Back and Indigenous Sovereignty consider:

- What is the responsibility of those who are not on the frontlines of land defense (also referred to as low-intensity struggle) to the communities and individuals who are leading these movements (in

situations of high-intensity struggle, i.e. their lives are on the line)?

- What does Land Back and land defense look like or mean in urban settings? In places such as Tkaronto?

Note: to access your reflection journal please review the [Introduction section](#) of the Ecological Collapse and Climate Crisis module.

Key Takeaways

Upon completion of this module, we hope you have achieved the learning objectives below. Practice discussing these topics with your friends and/or community. Try to explain to a friend how the climate crisis is intrinsically connected to colonialism and racial capitalism. As a reminder, these were the objectives shared in the introduction to this module:

- Describe how climate crisis is a result of current global systems based on racial capitalism, colonialism and social injustice
- Explore and engage with notions of collapse and the structural and relational factors that affect change making
- Identify key factors contributing to the denial of climate crisis and ecological collapse
- Reflect on the dominant responses to climate crisis from an Indigenous, relational perspective



Music



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<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=387#oembed-1>

Please note that a transcript for the lyrics of the song and video above are not currently available. We apologize for the inconvenience.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=387#oembed-2>

For a transcript of the lyrics for the above song, visit Genius's page for [Agua](#).



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<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=387#oembed-3>

Please note that a transcript for the lyrics of the song Mountain are not currently available. We apologize for the inconvenience.



Reflection 9

Prompts for reflection after you have fully completed the module on Ecological Collapse and Climate Crisis:

- What stood out to you the most?
- What do you want to learn more about?
- What did you find the most difficult?
- How do you feel? Check in with your body. Why do you think you feel this way? What parts of this module made you feel differently?

Note: to access your reflection journal please review the [Introduction section](#) of the Ecological Collapse and Climate Crisis module.

3. THE EUROPEAN SUPERIORITY COMPLEX

Introduction



In this module, we're going to discuss the **global imposition of white supremacy and Western European knowledge and culture as universal**. In order to maintain dominance, whiteness and eurocentrism must project and present itself as naturally superior. This means idealizing capitalist and colonial logics—logics centred in harm and destruction—while presenting and masking as a system that is for the benefit of all. And when harm is inexplicably caused, whiteness is the benevolent altruistic helper there to repair it (supposedly).

This module traces the connection between whiteness and Western culture, and considers how both are presented as naturally superior.



Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, you should be able to:

- Describe European superiority and white supremacy and how they have been imposed on

- the world ideologically and structurally
- Critically assess the Myth of Meritocracy and how it shapes the economy and education
 - Identify how global inequality and “development” are shaped by European superiority and white supremacy
 - Analyze the trope of the white savior and reflect on how it shapes relations between individuals, communities and nation-states today

How to Use This Module

This module begins with a 10-minute video that introduces you to key ideas and concepts about the European superiority complex. The sections following the introductory video will provide additional content to help you dive deeper into these topics. Learning activities are integrated throughout. It may take you **2 to 6 hours** to complete this module, including all learning activities. However, this will vary greatly by individual. Depending on your social location, lived experience and disciplinary background (area of study), you will engage with these materials in different ways.

If you have not yet, visit the section on [Self-Guided Learning](#) in the Introduction to Global Justice and Change for reminders on how you can support your learning process. There are many ways to engage with this module. Please decide what works best for you.



Reflection Journal

Please open the google doc template for the [Euro-pean Superiority Complex reflection journal](#). You can save your own copy to your Google Drive. Alternatively, if you don't have access to google drive, you can download a word copy to your desktop or phone. You will be asked to respond to the questions in your journal throughout the module.



Music

Another way to explore the themes in this module

is to listen to our playlist, available in the following formats:

- Spotify (*in development*)
- Youtube (*in development*)

You will also find individual songs shared throughout the module to support further learning and reflection.

WATCH Video 3: The European Superiority Complex

To begin, we have created a 10-minute introductory video that explores the main concepts of this module. The video deconstructs the myth of Western European superiority and white supremacy, while exploring its influence on how we understand global issues today.

The intention of the video is to provide an accessible entry point for learners, whether or not you are familiar with these topics. However, this does not mean that this content is “easy”. These are complex topics!

Remember to take breaks if you need to. Stop and reflect on the content. Watch the video or specific sections multiple times if helpful. The more you listen and engage, the more familiar these ideas will become.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://press-books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=529#oembed-1>

Now that you’ve watched Video 3: The European Superiority Complex, take some time to reflect. Complete the learning activities below.



Check Your Understanding



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunder-story/?p=529#h5p-15>



Reflection 1

After watching the introductory video on the European Superiority Complex, respond to the questions below:

- What was new or surprising to you from the video (if anything)?
- What did you feel like you already knew or understood (even if in a small way)?
- In what areas do you feel like your knowledge or understanding increased in relation to the ideas of European superiority and white supremacy?
- What things still feel a bit confusing or blurry

for you?

- How did this video make you feel? What did you feel in your body? What types of emotions came up for you? Remember, you can feel many different things at once, like anger as well as excitement, you don't have to choose just one.

Note: to access your reflection journal please review the [introduction section](#) of the European Superiority Complex module.

Knowledge and Hierarchies of Worth



Reflection 2

Before you begin the section “Knowledge and Hierarchies of Worth” respond to the following questions:

- What is knowledge? How do you understand and/or define what is considered knowledge and why?
- What types of knowledge (and whose knowledge) do you think are valued over others (use the example of your courses, if helpful)?

Note: to access your reflection journal please review the [introduction section](#) of the European Superiority Complex module.



Audio

To refresh your memory, listen to the audio clip or read the transcript below from Video 3: The European Superiority Complex.

“Cultural supremacy exists when particular peoples and cultures are perceived to naturally embody authority. They are then able to impose what they believe are objective and universal parameters onto other peoples and cultures.”

“Other cultures were thought to have traditions, values, and beliefs, but they were not considered to have the ability to reason and produce knowledge of universal worth, the way white, Christian, Europeans did. In this logic, Europeans (in particular, upper class, white, cisgendered, straight and able-bodied men) considered themselves the apex of human evolution, and everyone else was inferior.”

Our introductory video to this module explored how European cultural supremacy is tied to specific understandings about what type of knowledge is considered valid and universal. We will not go into depth dissecting eurocentric thinking further, rather our intention here is to **focus on the effects of the imposition of a eurocentric worldview on the rest of the world.** These effects have included colonial violence, genocide, and positioning some peoples as superior while others are consid-

ered “less developed,” as if their cultures are in need of “catching up.”

Western Europe, and later what became defined as the Global North (or the broader “Western” world), controls much of the global systems that we depend on today. They control wealth and its movement, as well as the movement of people around the world through nation-states and border regimes. Both of which have huge consequences for people living in the Global South. They present themselves as an authority on the “best”, most “progressive” or “advanced” ways to govern and organize the economy, politics and society.

The notion that Western civilization is advanced, and everyone else is lagging behind, is a key part of Western identity. **The “West” presents its beliefs about the world as being universally true, a progressive blueprint for all humanity.** Those who wield and control the systems that organize society based on this particular worldview are then able to position themselves as the arbiters of truth and justice. The dominant culture controls cultural production and history. Their perspectives and experiences are presented as objective and universal truth. This diminishes the contributions and validity of knowledge systems, worldviews and cultures that don’t fit into eurocentric understandings.

An example of this can be found in the area of higher education and international engagement. When students and scholars from the Global North travel to the Global South for educational activities they tend to perpetuate these patterns. This belief system reinforces transactional relationships where the “other” to whiteness and Western Europe is expected to offer “culture” to be consumed, such as culinary or dance lessons, in return for receiving knowledge of universal value, such as technology, math or English.

Epistemicide

Let’s start by exploring some key concepts. **Epistemology** is a branch of philosophy that focuses on the study of knowledge. It focuses on questions like what is knowledge? and how is it acquired?

Epistemic privilege describes how a particular knowledge system or worldview is privileged over others. This connects to the idea of **Eurocentrism**, the tendency to interpret the world

from European or Anglo-American values and experiences, effectively privileging a European worldview over others.

Epistemicide refers to the destruction of existing knowledge and is often used in the context of colonization. It connects to the terms genocide, the intentional destruction of a people, and ecocide, the intentional destruction of ecosystems and ecologies. Not only did colonization murder and harm millions of people, non-human life and the planet, it also sought to destroy non-Western cultures, languages and knowledge systems. This is also often referred to as **cultural genocide**.

Below is a talk by **Fatima Khemilat**, a PhD fellow at the Political Science Institute of Aix-en-Provence, which explores European epistemic privilege and the pervasiveness of epistemicide today (16 minutes).



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[books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=523#oembed-1](https://press-books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=523#oembed-1)

The ‘Danger of a Single Story’

In her talk “The danger of a single story” **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**, renowned author and feminist, explores how stories shape our perception of others (19 minutes). She considers how those with power to wield and disseminate the narrative shape perception and what is imaginable. Adichie's talk connects the legacies of European cultural supremacy to the ways that many come to understand the world and one another today. And she points to the power of story not only to harm, but also to empower.



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Below **Priyamvada Gopal**, professor of Postcolonial Studies at the University of Cambridge, discusses her book *Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent* (2 minutes). She considers the stories that we have inherited from the empire and how we can think about them differently today.



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Ecology of Knowledges

Many scholars and storytellers are challenging the ways Western European cultural supremacy has sought to erase people, cultures and their knowledge systems. Others have pointed out that Western science often declares that it “discovers” theories that Indigenous peoples have been discussing long before Westerners did.

Māori scholar **Linda Tuhiwai Smith** writes about this at length in her classic book, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, explaining that Indigenous peoples often came up with concepts “proven” by Western science hundreds of years earlier. Smith also dissects the foundations of research based in Western traditions and the horrific treatment of Indigenous peoples around the world in the name of science. Watch the video below and listen to Linda Tuhiwai Smith describe the relationship between research, science and Indigenous peoples.



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[books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=523#oem-bed-4](https://press-books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=523#oem-bed-4)

Boaventura de Sousa Santos talks about the concept of epistemologies of the south, non-eurocentric knowledge systems, cosmovisions, and worldviews that are typically not understood or legible within Western European thought. Watch Santos describe some of these concepts below (6 minutes).



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[books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=523#oem-bed-5](https://press-books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=523#oem-bed-5)

However, as noted above, we are seeing more and more examples where Western knowledge is trying to consume knowledge and perspectives, trying to fit it neatly into its own paradigm of thought. But what may be missing or excluded if knowledge is approached in this way? If it is based on consumption and absorption instead of dialogue and relationship?

Sharon Stein describes Santos' 'ecology of knowledges' as one that would:

- Grapple with the diversity of knowledge systems and the reality that all knowledge is not equally valued nor included within educational institutions
- Value a particular knowledge system as it relates to a specific context, as all knowledge is context-specific, partial and provisional
- Create an opportunity for multiple knowledge systems to equitably coexist. It's not about deciding which is better than the other, or which can be consumed by the other or which can replace the other. How can a multitude of

knowledge systems and ways of perceiving and understanding the world enter into conversation?

- Recognize the interdependent nature of all knowledge systems. The idea that any particular knowledge system exists in isolation without interaction with other cultures and knowledges is just not the reality of the world. Just as food and goods have been traded around the world for centuries, so too have ideas.

What would an approach to contemporary climate and social crisis look like if it took into account, respected and valued the plurality of ways of knowing and being in the world?



Check Your Understanding



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunder-story/?p=523#h5p-16>

Recommended Reading

- George Nicholas, "[It's taken thousands of years, but Western science is finally catching up to Traditional Knowledge](#)," The Conversation, February 2018
- Stein, Andreotti, Susa, Ahenakew & Mario de

Souza. "[Who decides? In whose name? For whose benefit? Decoloniality and its discontents.](#)" *on_education Journal for Research and Debate*. No. 07, April 2020.

- Ahenakew C. [Grafting Indigenous Ways of Knowing onto Non-Indigenous Ways of Being: The \(Underestimated\) Challenges of a Decolonial Imagination.](#) *International Review of Qualitative Research*. 2016;9(3):323-340.
- Simpson, L.B. [Land as pedagogy: Nish-naabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation.](#) *Decolonization, Indigeneity, Education and Society*. Vol. 3. No. 3 (2014).
- Stein, Sharon. "[The Persistent Challenges of Addressing Epistemic Dominance in Higher Education: Considering the Case of Curriculum Internationalization.](#)" *Comparative Education Review* 61, no. S1 (2017)
- [Vanessa Andreotti: Allowing Earth to dream through us.](#) Green Dreamer podcast ep. 338. (audio + transcript)



Reflection 3

After completing the section “Knowledge and Hierarchies of Worth” consider:

- How has Eurocentrism (or European superiority/supremacy) shaped what you have learned in school (consider primary, middle and higher education)?
- Have you experienced a learning environment that incorporates any of the ideas of an ‘ecology of knowledges’?

Note: to access your reflection journal please review the [introduction section](#) of the European Superiority Complex module.

What About White Supremacy?

In Module 1, we explored how colonialism and race are foundational to capitalism and are required to sustain today's global capitalist economy. In Module 2, we explored the climate crisis and how those on the frontlines around the world (Black, brown and Indigenous communities) are both disproportionately affected by the crisis, while also leading movements for change based in Indigenous sovereignty and the return of land.

In Module 3 we focus on the imposition of a Eurocentric worldview and the hierarchies of worth that are produced and imposed globally based on this particular knowledge system. The notion of white Western superiority has been used to justify cultural, racial, gendered and other forms of oppression.

In this section we are going to focus on **white supremacy**, a system and ideology that is central to all of the topics described above. This term refers to a **political and socio-economic system** where white people enjoy structural advantages and rights that racialized people do not. It is also an **ideology and belief system**, a way of understanding and existing in the world that privileges the lives, voices, needs and wants of white people. It is a system that overvalues white culture and scholarship, while undervaluing the culture, knowledge and scholarship of racialized communities. In a white supremacist perspective, nonwhite cultures, art, foods, and belief systems are there to be consumed by whiteness.

Here's something important: **whiteness is a structure**. It does not describe "white people"; it is not about individuals. Whiteness describes a system, from which white people benefit greatly, but anyone can benefit from it if they can access it. It describes structural advantages and belief systems that are directly linked to colonialism, racial capitalism and the imposition of a eurocentric worldview globally.

Western Europeans have been constructed as white (a category that has shifted over time) and have produced a racial hierarchy globally to impose their superiority. White supremacy- alongside other forms of supremacy- is the direct result of these historical patterns and is an ongoing foundational feature of dominant modes of governance, economic production, and culture.

A focus on white supremacy centres those who are benefiting from and perpetuating it. It is not the responsibility of Black, brown, Asian, Indigenous or racialized communities to dismantle white supremacy. And it is no longer possible to deny its existence as an essential component of the very fabric of our society.

Watch **bell hook's** 1995 interview below, in particular from 1:10 to 2:06, where she describes why she prefers the term white supremacy to racism.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://press-books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=525#oem-bed-1>

Watch **Michelle Johnson's** TED talk, *There is no neutral*, below (16 minutes). She defines racism, discusses white supremacy, and shares her understanding of how trauma from these systems and ideologies affect the mind, body, spirit and heart.



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Check out the **spoken word poets** McPherson and Kyle “Guante” Tran Myhre below and how they describe the structure and experience of white supremacy.



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view them online here: <https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=525#oembed-3>



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Check Your Understanding



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=525#h5p-17>

Recommended further reading

- Ijeoma Oluo, "[Confronting racism is not about the needs and feelings of white people](#),"

The Guardian, March 2019

- Robert P Baird, "[The invention of whiteness: the long history of a dangerous idea](#)," The Guardian, April 2021
- Adrienne Maree Brown, "[a word for white people, in two parts](#)," June 2020
- Henry Yu, "[The white elephant in the room: anti-Asian racism in Canada](#)," The University of British Columbia, Beyond: People, ideas and actions for a better world
- Michelle Shephard, Ashley Mak and Kim Kaschor, "[White hot hate](#)," CBC news, November 2021



Reflection 4

After completing the section "What About White Supremacy?" consider:

- How does white supremacy shape your experience in the world?
- How do individuals, communities and/or mainstream culture deny the existence of white supremacy?

Note: to access your reflection journal please review the [introduction section](#) of the European Superiority Complex module.

The Myth of Meritocracy



Reflection 5

Before you begin the section “The Myth of Meritocracy”, consider the following:

- Do you think you earned or deserve your particular place in this world? Why or why not?
- Have you ever been made to feel that it was your fault you were unable to succeed, while the barriers and structures that affected you were ignored or denied?

Note: to access your reflection journal please review the [introduction section](#) of the European Superiority Complex module.



Audio

To refresh your memory, listen to the audio clip or read the transcript below from Video 3: The European Superiority Complex.

“This is where the myth of meritocracy comes into play. If you assimilate into Western culture, and become a wage labourer, you are promised access to the enjoyments and securities modernity and civilization have to offer. Anyone is able to ‘make it’ in a free, democratic, capitalist system, because everyone is supposedly on equal footing. You just have to ‘work hard.’

Let’s take a look at an episode of the series *Glad You Asked by Vox* (20 minutes). The host, **Fabiola Cineas**, explores the myth of meritocracy and how it perpetuates a white supremacist system. While the focus in the video is the U.S., consider how meritocracy is steeped in the fabric of Canadian society. And how does meritocracy play out on a global scale?



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It is clear that, as described in the video above, due to racial inequities (coupled with other forms of supremacy) not everyone starts off on an equal playing field. And the inequities that persist are remnants of generations of enslavement and servitude, of colonial violence and genocide. And not only are they remnants, as we have explored previously, they are in fact required for capitalist systems to continue functioning. As many have said, **the system isn't broken, it was designed this way.**

Thus the main tenets of meritocracy are faulty. First, it is simply **untrue to claim that equal opportunity exists** when today we are only two generations removed from state-sanctioned racial segregation. When, for example, the last residential school in Canada closed in 1996 in Saskatchewan. When a white supremacist system, alongside other forms of supremacy, continues to dictate opportunity and access for Black, Brown, Indigenous and racialized communities.

Secondly, it is **literally impossible within the current capitalist system contingent on racial hierarchy and colonial logic for everyone to "make it"**. The system currently functions and is entirely dependent on the fact that millions must not "make it", as their labour and the lands they call home are necessary for the production of cheap consumer goods and an accumulation-based society.

If meritocracy is a myth, then why does it continue to hold such influence?

Meritocracy masks the reality that generational legacies of colonialism, enslavement, and white supremacy created the conditions of wealth accumulation for a select few. It creates a **narrative of deservingness and righteousness for those at the top**, and a narrative of failure and worthlessness for everyone else. It deflects blame from those in positions of wealth and power, as all they did was work hard to get ahead (not depend on unjust and violent systems). Meritocracy places the blame on those who never really had a chance to begin with. If you can't make it, if you "fail", it is your own fault.

Meritocracy is one of the beliefs that sustains systems of inequity and supremacy, **invisibilizing the truth about who**

has access to wealth, resources and power in global capitalist systems. It ignores the fact that, not only is the game rigged to benefit a select few, it was actually designed this way.

The Role of Schools and the Education System

As explored by Cineas, while ideas of meritocracy are an integral part of our economic system, they play out in very important ways in our educational systems.

On a global scale, our current educational system based on schooling at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels was created as part of the colonial, capitalist, expansionist project. Its purpose was to **socialize communities into a eurocentric knowledge and belief system; to naturalize and normalize the single story.** Today, schooling around the world continues to perform a similar function, particularly in societies marked as “underdeveloped” and “left behind” as they try to catch up to the advanced West.

And although the idea of merit is claimed to be based on skills, knowledge, aptitude, etc, it is much more nuanced than that. As we have discussed, what is deemed valid knowledge and what is prioritized within school curriculums, for example, is based on eurocentric thinking. There is no universal knowledge system, no skills, beliefs and aptitudes that are naturally desirable or achievable for all. The type of knowledge, the structure of learning, and the underlying premise of schooling based on Western European supremacy is set up to sustain European dominance and global capitalist systems.

The documentary **“Schooling the World: The White Man’s Last Burden”** explores the effects of modern schooling around the world. You can watch the trailer below (3 minutes) or watch the [complete Schooling the World documentary](#).



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Within the West, to be able to succeed, students and their families need to demonstrate their ability to perform in this particular type of educational system. Families and communities socialized into, or part of White Western European communities, are already a step up. They are also more likely to have the ability to invest additional resources in their children's schooling. To provide tutors for their children or to attend private school. To know how to advocate for their children within the system or how to seek out the limited opportunities available to ensure that their children can excel.

Students also need to convince the arbiters of learning (teachers and school administrators) that they do indeed fit the mark. There is a lot of research available about **early streaming in schools**. About young children who are encouraged to take a particular educational or professional route in life, not necessarily in relation to their specific skills or aptitudes, but due to how they are perceived. Stereotypes and assumptions made by teachers -many of whom are socialized within white supremacy and eurocentrism- often outweigh or sideline a learner's ability to succeed, regardless as to whether or not they are able to simulate the skills and aptitudes desired by the institutional setting.

Thus, **early on many children experience the paradox of meritocracy**. They are told to dream big and pursue opportunities available to all, but maybe just these specific opportunities that are best suited for them. They are told that in order to be a good student they must work hard and study to be able to access more educational opportunities, but they just have to be sure to pass a series of aptitude tests (designed to disadvantage them).

Meritocracy is a foundational narrative and belief that permeates our society. But it is one that, once looked at more closely, is representative of the broader cracks and ruptures within dominant social systems. While it is a narrative that is still upheld by many, it is also just as frequently dissected and challenged by those experiencing its harmful effects.



Check Your Understanding



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<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunder-story/?p=527#h5p-18>

Recommended reading, watching and listening

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Reflection 6

After completing the section “The Myth of Meritocracy” consider:

- Review the UN’s Development Goal for [quality education](#). What type of education and schooling do you think is being referred to? (watch the [Schooling the World](#) documentary if you have time).
- What does the idea of meritocracy hide or ignore?

Note: to access your reflection journal please review the [introduction section](#) of the European Superiority Complex module.

Global Inequality and “Development”



Reflection 7

Before you begin the section “Global Inequality and Development” consider:

- What does development mean to you? What about sustainable development?
- What do you think are the causes of global inequality today?

Note: to access your reflection journal please review the [introduction section](#) of the European Superiority Complex module.



Audio

To refresh your memory, listen to the audio clip or read the transcript below from Video 3: The European Superiority Complex.

“One of the ways the Western world affirms its superiority is through humanitarian and international development work. Many who commit to ending global poverty and inequality do so from a presumed place of innocence and superiority. Essentially, they are saying ‘I have not created your problems, but I am benevolently here to help you solve them with my good will, knowledge and expertise.’ Definitions of ‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped’ are inherited from ideas of human progress and modernity. Some countries (and the people that live there) are ‘developed’ and more modern, while others are underdeveloped and lagging behind.”

[Survival International](#) created a short satirical video about sustainable development (2 minutes). Check it out below. Is this what you think of when you think of the term sustainable?



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[books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=531#oem-bed-7](https://press-books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=531#oem-bed-7)

The **international development industry** presents another paradox of society today. The problems that this sector is trying to address are in fact created by the same countries and people claiming to do the “helping”. Those who are in a position to offer help globally are typically the ones that benefit from what creates poverty and inequality in the first place, an accumulation-based culture and the global capitalist system. The symptoms of poverty and inequality are the focus rather than the much more complex systemic causes.

The idea of progress and development as defined by Western thought does not serve to actually address human suffering and inequality. Rather, it contributes to the narrative and single story of European supremacy, sustaining the underlying beliefs used to justify ongoing colonial and capitalist violence. As is the case with meritocracy, it **deflects the blame from those creating global inequality**, those who are accumulating and hoarding wealth through violence and appropriation, **and instead places the blame on those who are unable to “get out” of their circumstance: the world’s poor**. When yet again, we must name the fact that the very existence of a global working class is what sustains our capitalist system and the world’s wealthy elite.

There are many different ways of describing the relationships between rich and poor countries around the world, the most recent of which try to take into account global power dynamics, such as Global North and Global South. While we won’t go into an exhaustive list here, terms such as **developed, developing, less developed and underdeveloped**, remain some of the starkest examples that uphold European supremacist thinking.

These terms are based on the idea that there are certain countries that are considered “developed”, more advanced, civilized, progressive. While there are others lagging behind who are trying to catch up. Poverty, failed states, economic stagnation, and joblessness are all seen as the fault of the “poor” countries themselves. As mentioned above, this framing deflects

away from the systemic causes. And not only this, it also hides the fact that “poor” countries are actually the ones financing the “development” of rich countries to begin with.



Audio

To refresh your memory, let's listen to another audio clip or read the transcript below from Video 3: The European Superiority Complex.



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<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=531#audio-531-1>

“There is much evidence demonstrating that it is not rich countries that support the development of poor ones, but actually the other way around. As Machado de Oliveira describes, ‘Most of the wealth of countries in the global north comes from and is sustained by historical and systemic processes of exploitation, resource extraction, land-grabbing, unfair trade, enforced debt, and tied aid.’ Rich countries and people tend to present themselves as

altruistic helpers. When, in fact, the food, clothes, health systems, social security and technologies enjoyed by rich people are subsidized by the exploitation of poor people, lands and non-human life.”

Let's explore below some of the statistics behind global inequality and ideas of “development”. Check out **theRules.org**'s video below on global wealth inequality (3 minutes).



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[books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=531#oembed-2](https://press-books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=531#oembed-2)

David Jefferess is a Canadian scholar whose work centres on the intersections between saviourism (which we will explore in the next section) and the development and aid industries. In a 2021 article titled “[On saviours and saviourism: lessons from the #WEscandal](#)” Jefferess outlined the following:

“In 2012 the people/nations of the global North ‘gave’ more than \$126 billion in development aid to ‘poor countries,’ but more than \$3.3 trillion left these states through debt repayments, the profits of multinational corporations, and illicit capital flight, much of that a result of an unjust international system of trade. It is this structure that produces ‘need,’ yet saviourism overwrites this real relation, a **‘complex’ of government, schooling, and NGOs propagating the story that the North gives to the South rather than takes**” (p.424-425).

There is plenty of information and research available that quantitatively demonstrates how the global south in fact sustains and subsidizes the wealth of the global north. Yet pow-

erful dominant narratives of Western European supremacy (including its former settler colonies such as Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand) continue to claim benevolence and good intentions. Why and how are many of those in low-intensity struggle in the global north able to deny and ignore this truth?

To consider further, take a look at the video “Who Profits From Poverty?” with Ananya Roy below.



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Recommended Reading and Watching

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- Festival of Dangerous Ideas 2013: [Vandana Shiva – Growth = Poverty](#). (watch: 59 minutes)
- [The End of Poverty?](#) (1.5 hours) – Documentary by Philippe Diaz

The White Savior

While questions of global inequality and the flow of capital are essential, we return to some of the ideological and social implications of European and white supremacy. The hierarchies of worth produced by our current global systems normalize historical and ongoing slavery, colonialism, imperialism, racism, capitalism, heteropatriarchy, ableism and other forms of supremacy and violence. These hierarchies condition how we feel about ourselves and how we relate to others and the world, regardless whether we identify with them or not.

In the particular context of global inequality, **Vanessa Machado de Oliveira** describes how “those in the ‘developed world’ are represented as intelligent, benevolent, clean, capable, deserving, and entitled to leadership and to dispense rights; while those in the ‘developing world’ are constructed in deficit and pathologizing terms such as inadequate, ignorant, unsanitary, violent, helpless, and lacking knowledge, information, manners, work ethos, education and rights” (pg. 73).

Teju Cole’s 2012 article [The White-Savior Industrial Complex](#) explores the ongoing proliferation of **white fantasies of conquest and heroism**. A white savior is someone who rescues Black, brown and racialized communities from their oppression. A white person from Europe or its settler colonies can go to a country in Africa or Latin America, for example, and at the very least have their emotional needs of “making a difference” or “doing good” satisfied. They can claim they are there to rescue local populations from violence and poverty, while they are having a travel experience.

Similar to how we discussed the development industry above, the ideas of “helping” and “saving” the world’s poor, “helpless” and “underdeveloped” people and regions goes beyond the development sector. The “white savior” is also seen in the tourism and humanitarian industries and the proliferation of what many call **voluntourism**. Check out [nowwhitesaviors.org](#) to explore this topic further and watch the satirical video created by [SAIH Norway](#) (4 minutes).



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The “white savior” is also a persistent **trope within film and television**. White characters take the lead, challenging racism or confronting their peers, all without facing systemic issues and the pervasiveness of white supremacy. It’s another way that whiteness deflects blame. White characters are portrayed as playing pivotal roles in challenging injustice. For example, thanks to their help, racial segregation is defeated! It had nothing to do with generations of resistance and movements towards liberation of Black people leading change for their own communities. And it by no means problematizes the ongoing realities of white supremacy; rather, the white savior trope serves to uphold white dominance instead of challenging it.

Check out **The Take**’s video on the White Savior Trope below (21 minutes).



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<https://press-books.library.torontomu.ca/theunderstory/?p=533#oem-bed-2>



Check Your Understanding



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Recommended Reading and Listening

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- “[WE Charity and the white saviour complex](#),” By David Jefferess for Canadian Dimension, August 2020
- “[Neoliberal White Saviourism w/ David Jefferess](#),” The East is a Podcast



Reflection 8

After completing the section on “The White Savior” consider:

- Can you think of any other examples found within Western European culture and society that depend on the trope of the white savior?
- How does the white savior connect to the structure of white supremacy?

Note: to access your reflection journal please review the [introduction section](#) of the European Superiority Complex module.

Key Takeaways

Upon completion of this module, we hope you have achieved the learning objectives below. Practice discussing these topics with your friends and/or community. Try to explain to a friend why European superiority and white supremacy exist and how they are sustained. As a reminder, these were the objectives shared in the introduction to this module:

- Describe European superiority and white supremacy and how they have been imposed on the world ideologically and structurally
- Critically assess the Myth of Meritocracy and how it shapes the economy and education
- Identify how global inequality and “development” are shaped by European superiority and white supremacy
- Analyze the trope of the white savior and reflect on how it shapes relations on a global scale



Reflection 9

Prompts for reflection after you have fully completed the module on the European Superiority Complex:

- What stood out to you the most?

- What do you want to learn more about?
- What did you find the most difficult?
- How do you feel? Check in with your body. Why do you think you feel this way? What parts of this module made you feel differently?

Note: to access your reflection journal please review the [introduction section](#) of the European Superiority Complex module.

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Glossary of Terms

Abolition

An ideology and ongoing practice that examines the root structures of violence, and seeks to create alternative systems beyond the ones that currently exist. Abolitionists, particularly prison abolitionists, understand that the structures of violence that shape our world are functioning the way they are supposed to (with the intention to cause violence and harm) thus such systems need to be dismantled and others need to be ushered in to create a more just world. In an interview, Mariame Kaba explains that part of her work as a prison abolitionist is to “think of how we can crowd out the current system by building the things that we want to see in the world, that will promote our well-being”.