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Indigenous Leaders Want Pope Francis To Rescind Bull Justifying Imperialism

The Doctrine of Discovery, which allowed taking indigenous land 500 years ago, still underpins Indian law in the U.S.



Julian Brave NoiseCat
Native Issues Fellow, The Huffington Post

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MARIELLE OLENTINE | THE HUFFINGTON POST

Ahead of Pope Francis' arrival in Philadelphia, indigenous leaders from across the Americas -- from the Haudenosaunee Confederacy in upstate New York to the Qom Nation in Argentina and many places in between -- have gathered in the city to urge the pontiff to rescind the Doctrine of Discovery, a series of papal bulls from the 15th century that justified European colonization of newly "discovered" lands. One particular [papal bull](#), issued by Pope Nicholas V in 1455, authorized Christian nations "to invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all ... enemies of Christ," take their land and "reduce their persons to perpetual slavery."

The doctrine played a central role in centuries of colonization the world over and resulted in immense loss of land and life by indigenous peoples across the Americas.

"While our people were planting corn, they were planting flags," Oren Lyons, faithkeeper of the Onondaga Nation, said in an interview with The Huffington Post.

"The Doctrine of Discovery, from my point of view, from a religious point of view, is the

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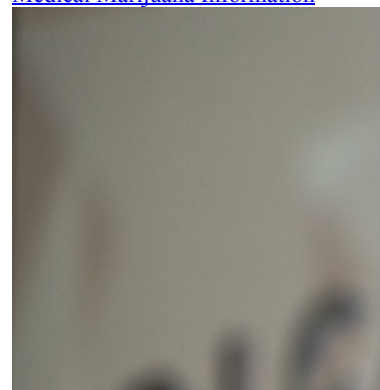
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justification for Christians taking the lands of non-Christian people," said Phil Arnold, a professor of religion at Syracuse University.

Long used as a religious backing by colonial powers, the doctrine became the centerpiece of property and Indian law in the United States following the 1823 Supreme Court case [Johnson v. M'Intosh](#), Arnold explained. In that case, Justice John Marshall used the doctrine to support the majority opinion of the court, which found that Indians had a right to occupy, but could not own, the ancestral homelands where their people had lived, loved, worshipped, married, mourned and died for millennia.

"Since that time, the Doctrine of Discovery has basically been the mechanism by which Native people are denied access to their own lands and denied their own rights to be in their own lands," Arnold said.

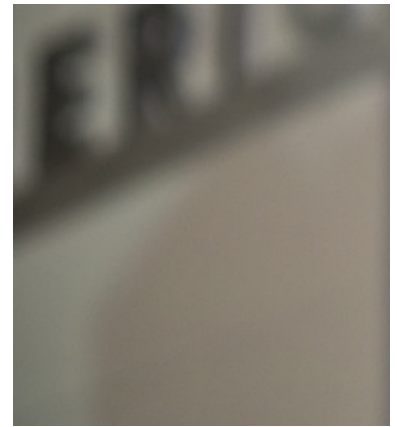
The doctrine has had a significant influence on Indian law and set a precedent that resonates even in modern decisions. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg -- widely considered the most liberal justice on the Supreme Court -- even cited cases based upon the doctrine as recently as 2005 to deny a [land claim](#) brought before the court by the Oneida Nation.

For many native leaders today, the doctrine is a fundamental impediment to the realization of indigenous rights to lands, resources and sovereignty. As they gather in Philadelphia for ceremonies and protests, indigenous leaders are hopeful that Pope Francis, who has established himself as a voice for social justice and equality, will listen.

Indeed, Francis has made multiple attempts during his papacy to atone for wrongs committed by the Church against indigenous peoples.

During his visit to Ecuador in July, Francis [apologized](#) for the "grave sins" committed "against the native peoples of America in the name of God." And he voiced his support for indigenous rights during his [speech to Congress](#) Thursday, stating, "Tragically, the rights of those who were here long before us were not always respected. For those peoples and their nations, from the heart of American democracy, I wish to reaffirm my highest esteem and appreciation."

But now, some indigenous leaders are insisting that words of solidarity and support are not enough. They are asking the pope to take actions to rescind and repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery, which would be a step towards implementing the Pope's statements and apologies to indigenous peoples.



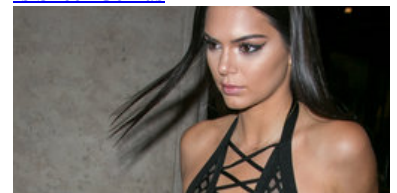
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They have pointed out that many other Christian denominations and organizations have [already done so](#), including the Episcopal Church, the United Methodist Church, the Unitarian Universalists, the World Council of Churches, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the New York Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends -- just to name a few.

The Vatican has [yet to publicly address](#) the doctrine, and while it is unlikely that Pope Francis will do so, indigenous leaders are still pushing for what they believe is right.

"It would relieve a great deal of suffering," Lyons said.

It might also be a revolutionary act -- for a rather revolutionary pope.

"The pope repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery might have the effect of pulling the rug out from these legal frameworks that are all built on top of that religious or theological perspective," Arnold said. "And then there might be a future for further conversations -- in churches or in a variety of parishes -- that might spark a conversation about what justice would mean for indigenous peoples around the world."

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CONVERSATIONS

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P Lee Donaldson · Brand Ambassador at Direction Tour Marketing

They owe the native people for taking their land and destroying their culture.

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Robert Templeton · QC Inspector at Manes Machine and Engineering

We...

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Kevin Schmidt
Robert Templeton

You...

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Robert Templeton · QC Inspector at Manes Machine and Engineering

Kevin Schmidt : Not me. My grandparents' parents were immigrants. You should be talking to the people whose families have lived here a bit longer.

Like · Reply · 1 · Sep 26, 2015 4:04pm

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Derek Dy · Seattle, Washington

Those who came to US from across the Atlantic have no more claim to this country than those who crossed the border from Mexico.

Like · Reply · 16 · Sep 25, 2015 5:33pm



Jenny Thompson Glass · RN Supervisor at Nursing and Therapy Services of Colorado

htey had "Manifest Destiny" on their side

Like · Reply · Sep 25, 2015 5:40pm



Derek Dy · Seattle, Washington

Jenny Thompson Glass they have God and moral ascendancy on theirs.

Like · Reply · 3 · Sep 25, 2015 5:59pm



Not Liam Neeson

Derek Dy There's no such thing as "indigenous" people, since humans all originate from Africa. So-called "Native Americans" crossed over the then-frozen Bering Straight during the last ice age. The various tribes that accumulated fought each other for territory. The colonists' victory over the natives by force is no less valid a claim for this land than prior subjugations by native tribe over native tribe.

Like · Reply · 11 · Sep 26, 2015 3:03am · Edited

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Julie Bannowitz

If a corporation (illegally) excluded women from all key management positions, the Huffington Post would be up in arms writing about the evil therein. The Pope smiles and waves his hands as CEO of such a company that (legally) excludes women from being priests, bishops, cardinals, and popes... and the Huffington Post treats the Pope like a celebrity.

The Pope just sainted a person (missionary) who contributed to the genocide of West Coast Native Americans. We applaud this man?

The Catholic church along with other churches, this Pope along with other religious leaders, are why some women in ... [See More](#)

Like · Reply · 10 · Sep 26, 2015 9:43am



Jeff Cross · Harvard University

And that makes you, what, the ankle-biting chihuahua in <http://imgs.sfgate.com/.../david-horsey-cartoon20100915.jpg> ?

Like · Reply · Sep 27, 2015 8:21am



Jenny Thompson Glass · RN Supervisor at Nursing and Therapy Services of Colorado

perhaps we could start by simply enforcing the treaties that have been ignored?

Like · Reply · 10 · Sep 25, 2015 5:39pm



Robert Templeton · QC Inspector at Manes Machine and Engineering

Okay. Let's start by giving them back all of the territory west of the Mississippi River (?). Ouch.

Like · Reply · 3 · Sep 26, 2015 7:14am



Thomas Peters · Santa Clarita, California

Robert Templeton I'd give them back Oklahoma tomorrow. White people should never have been allowed to enter, since that treaty was broken long after we should have known better.

Like · Reply · 2 · Sep 26, 2015 5:02pm



Terri Schroeder Cook

Robert Templeton I think that is a great idea. Bet they would heal that land and govern the people better than anywhere else. I also be they would have one rule. No whites

Like · Reply · 1 · Sep 27, 2015 3:48am

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J Matthew Phipps · Owner at Grey Falcon Co.

While it's a historical tragedy, it won't change one thing, anywhere. The simple fact of the matter was that the native peoples of this land were conquered in an age where land was won by Right of Conquest. Even had the Papal Bull not existed, it would have still happened.

This is the world we have now. You don't progress by going back, you move forward by informing your future decisions by the lessons from the past.

Like · Reply · 10 · Sep 25, 2015 5:31pm · Edited



Roderick McNeese

Those are the facts; harsh facts, but facts nevertheless J. However, the Catholic Church did play a role in this regard. It might be a symbolic gesture, but religion by and large is a symbolic medium ment to convey the eternal to temporal. The church can't ask forgiveness without removing the symbols of their transgressions.

Like · Reply · 14 · Sep 25, 2015 5:59pm · Edited



Cindy Johnston · Kalamazoo, Michigan

If all it takes to soothe the souls of Native Peoples is the retraction of a papal


It takes to secure the souls of Native Peoples is the rescission of a papal bull, then they are selling themselves cheaply.

Like · Reply ·  1 · Sep 25, 2015 6:43pm



Bob Nelson

Paul Moschetta Just curious. Since you bring up parties, what's your party's stance on restitution in the former Soviet Republics and, perhaps more pertinently, Cuba? I'm very certain you'll take the opposite approach you advocate above, so you might save some time just stating the expiration date of your concern: 30 years? 50 years? 100 years? 200 years?

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B Mis Lee · Emperor at Steelmailboxusa.com

Over a hundred years ago Black Elk, Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux 1863-1950 had a vision of the time when Indian people would heal from the devastating effects of European migration.

In his vision the Sacred Hoop which had been broken, would be mended in seven generations.


The children born into this decade will be the seventh generation.

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Terri Schroeder Cook

that is really great news. My Grand Daughter might see a real like, one focused on what matters instead of this consumerism that consumes us.

Like · Reply ·  1 · Sep 27, 2015 3:50am



Phil Olson


Terri Schroeder Cook Like the computer you are posting on?

Like · Reply · Sep 27, 2015 5:04pm



Ronald Bruce Robinson

How ironic that the term "enemies of *Christ" seems best fit for today's Christians-In-Name-Only of the GOP


Like · Reply ·  7 · Sep 26, 2015 1:34pm



Kendall Rhodes · Denver, Colorado

"One particular papal bull, issued by Pope Nicholas V in 1455, authorized Christian nations "to invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all ... enemies of Christ," take their land and "reduce their persons to perpetual slavery.""


The fact that the Catholic Church sanctioned this behaviour and still stands by it today is the reason I will never, ever bow to a Catholic anything, Pope or otherwise.

Like · Reply ·  6 · Sep 26, 2015 9:11am



Tre Free

It's not just Catholics.....


Like · Reply ·  1 · Sep 26, 2015 2:07pm



Thomas Peters · Santa Clarita, California

So, let's start unraveling the fabric of history to right all the wrongs of the past. Trouble is, once we start, where does it stop? Who are the rightful owners of the British Isles? Not the Normans, who have ruled it for 1000 years. Not the Angles or Saxons, either, they were invaders too. Should Israel go back to the people who lived there before Joshua and the Israelites genocided the place? Should the Huns be thrown out of Hungary, the Slavs out of Russia, the Turkmen out of Turkey?


Practically every modern place on earth is now occupied and ruled by people who didn't come from there originally. So, where do we stop?

Like · Reply ·  4 · Sep 26, 2015 5:33pm



Diane Gaffney · Works at Retired

When a person who comes onto your land and your home, robs you by the use of violence, isn't that what the "white man's" law calls armed robbery?

Like · Reply ·  4 · Sep 25, 2015 6:51pm



Jeff Cross · Harvard University

Said the willing recipient of stolen property.

Like · Reply · Sep 27, 2015 8:22am



Stanley Epstein · USC

We good, honest, law abiding Americans have sugar coated the concept of the rapacious stealing of land and lives by calling it 'Manifest Destiny'.

But stealing by force of arms is still stealing.

Like · Reply · 1 · Sep 27, 2015 11:46am

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