



“Dark Matters” Deep Dive

**Historical Context for Alicia
Elliott’s *A Mind Spread Out on the
Ground***



“Perhaps we don’t see dark matter because we don’t know what to look for. Perhaps we can’t see it because we don’t know how to look” (Elliott 67).

Settler Colonialism

*A type of colonialism in which the objective is the acquisition of indigenous territories and resources, which means the original peoples must be **eliminated** by whatever means necessary and replaced with colonial settlers. (based in part on definitions by Dina Gilio-Whitaker and Patrick Wolfe)*



Erasure

- **Settler colonialism** attempts to erase indigenous people through
 - Violence
 - Taking lands/resources
 - Assimilation (“Civilization”)
 - Education
 - Controlling narratives in dominant group (twistory)
 - Removing access to traditional knowledge
 - Removing children

Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack of Settler Colonial Privilege

Click on the knapsack and read the article.

In the Pear Deck, share your own reaction/reflection.



Students, write your response!

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Do you feel comfortable sharing your thoughts out loud right now?



Students choose an option

Doctrine of Discovery

"To say dark matter was **"discovered"** is disingenuous since, theoretically dark matter has always been here" (Elliott 58).



In 1452, Pope Nicholas V became aware that Portugal had begun a slave trade along the west coast of Africa. Pope Nicholas really liked this. To make it look as though he had come up with the idea himself, Pope Nicholas V issued to King Alfonso V of Portugal, the bull Romanus Pontifex.

... [W]e bestow suitable favors and special graces on those Catholic kings and princes, ... athletes and intrepid champions of the Christian faith ... to invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens and pagans whatsoever, and other enemies of Christ wheresoever placed, and ... to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery, and to apply and appropriate ... possessions, and goods, and to convert them to ... their use and profit ...

This was a basic declaration of war against all non-Christians throughout the earth, specifically sanctioning and promoting the conquest, colonization, and exploitation of non-Christian nations and their territories. In today's rhetoric, this papal bull would be called a mandate for terrorism. Non-Christians were considered enemies of the Catholic faith. As such, they were considered less than human, in effect, non-persons. [Robert Francis, "Two Kinds of Beings: The Doctrine of Discovery" \(4\)](#)

Doctrine of Discovery

When Columbus sailed toward this hemisphere in 1492, it was with the understanding that he was to "take possession" of any lands he "discovered" so long as they were "not under the dominion of any Christian rulers." As soon as he set foot on the beach of Guanahani Island, Columbus performed a ceremony to "take possession" of the land for the king and queen of Spain, in accordance with the bull Romanus Potifex.

[Robert Francis, "Two Kinds of Beings: The Doctrine of Discovery" \(4\)](#)

Captain John Smith was an admirer of Columbus and the Conquistadores, as were the Puritans of Massachusetts and the Founding Fathers of the United States. Just as the Spanish before them, these English immigrants to North America imagined themselves as the "chosen" people of Israel and the Indian inhabitants of the land as the Canaanites, doomed to destruction or subjection. In this country, a pre-contact population of from 12 to 20 million indigenous human beings was reduced to 200 thousand by 1920. The present American Indian population of the United States is around four million, most of which are of mixed ancestry. [Robert Francis, "Two Kinds of Beings: The Doctrine of Discovery" \(6\)](#)



Doctrine of Discovery

In 1823, writing for the Court who had unanimously sided with Johnson, Chief Justice John Marshall observed that European nations had assumed "ultimate dominion" over the lands of America during the Age of Discovery, and that upon "discovery" the Indians lost "their rights to complete sovereignty, as independent nations," and retained only a right of "occupancy" in their lands. Marshall went on to write that the United States, upon winning independence, became successor nation to the right of "discovery" acquiring the power of "dominion" from Great Britain. "As early as 1496," Marshall continued, "her (England's) monarch granted a commission to the Cabots, to discover countries then unknown to Christian people, and to take possession of them in the name of the king of England." Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story wrote, "As infidels, heathens, and savages, they (the Indians) were not allowed to possess the prerogatives belonging to absolute, sovereign and independent nations." [Robert Francis, "Two Kinds of Beings: The Doctrine of Discovery" \(3\)](#)



“Unceded Musqueam, Squamish, and Tesleil-Waututh territory” (59-60)

- ▶ What does Elliott indicate about place when she describes it this way?
- ▶ What does unceded mean?



Students, write your response!

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Scalp Bounties

“[Stanley] deserved not only his freedom, but a bounty” (Elliott 61).



“This Land is Their Land and Why It Matters

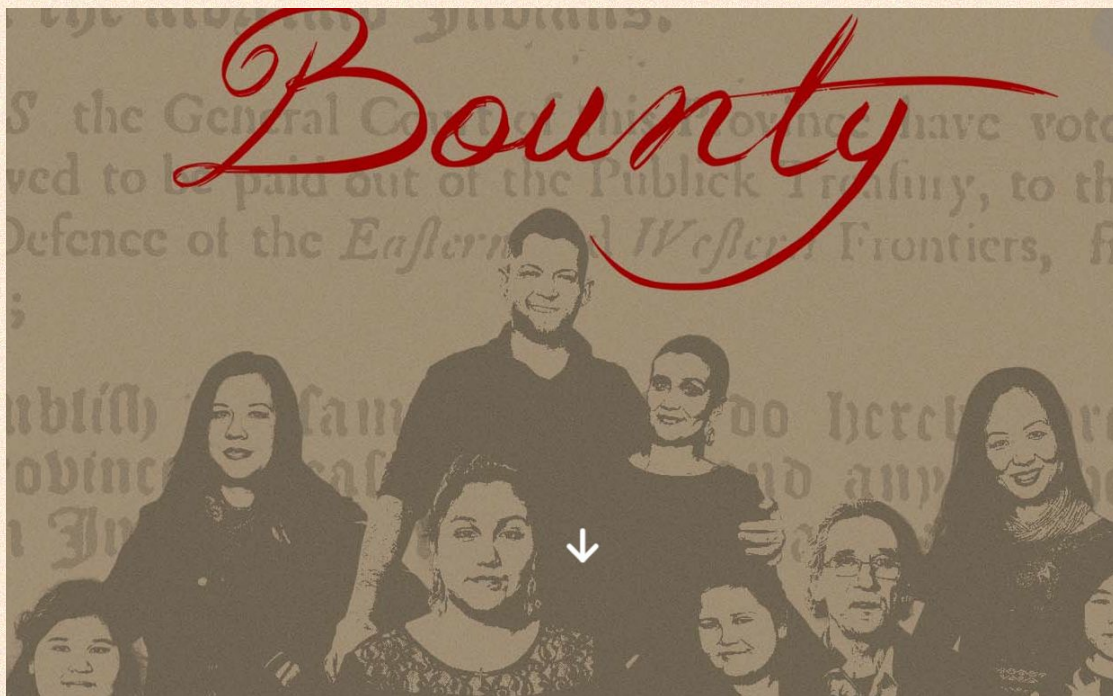
Understanding the connection between people and land is essential to answering the compelling question ...: What is the relationship between the taking of the land and the taking of the scalps?

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as colonists flooded into North America and coveted more Indigenous homelands, tensions spiked between the original inhabitants of the land and Europeans, who used a variety of means to occupy and gain possession of the land. The issuance by Europeans of scalp bounties that promised significant payment for the bodies and body parts of Indigenous peoples was one tactic among many they used to realize the goal of taking and keeping someone else’s land.

“Scalp proclamations were issued in an estimated 79 instances across the American colonies in the Dawnland (present-day New England) over the course of 85 years.” [Bounty Teachers Guide](#)



Bounty



[Phips Proclamation](#)

Answer any of these questions:

What stood out for you? Why?

What surprised you?

Were any of your beliefs or assumptions challenged, and if so, which ones?

Were any of your beliefs or assumptions affirmed, and if so, which ones?

What ideas or information will stay with you?

What message do you think the filmmakers are trying to convey? How would you describe their point of view?

Was anything left out of this film that you think should have been included?

What questions remain for you?

[Bounty Teachers Guide](#)



Students, write your response!

Do you feel comfortable sharing your thoughts out loud right now?



Students choose an option

- ▶ “Did [Stanley] think of himself as some modern day cowboy keeping the **savage Indians** at bay?” (Elliott 66).

Declaration of Independence

- “He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the **merciless Indian Savages**, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.”

US Foundational Documents like the Declaration of Independence codify damaging stereotypes.



Child Removal--Indian Boarding Schools and forced adoption

“Kill the Indian...save the man.” Richard Henry Pratt

“[Pratt] wanted the same thing that Canada has wanted for centuries: assimilation. He even advocated for Indian boarding schools...ultimately creating the infamous Carlisle Indian Industrial School....Indigenous children were taken from their homes and forced to speak English, wear Western clothing, cut their hair, forsake their ceremonies and traditions. They were told to be ashamed of being Indigenous....Many were abused. Many were malnourished. Many got sick. Many died. (Elliott 73).





FIRST LIGHT

Cultural Genocide



“I wonder if [Pratt] would feel remorse. If he would see that what he did to Indigenous families was another form of the segregation and racism he claimed to denounce. I wonder if, upon hearing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada refer to residential schools as **“cultural genocide,”** he’d realize that he was responsible for that exact thing in America and apologize until his vocal cords stopped working. (Elliott 72).



In the Pear Deck, share your own reaction/reflection.



Students, write your response!

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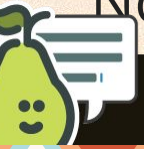
Students choose an option

Genocide

“Stanley and his son shouldn’t have grown up in a society where Indians are portrayed as the biggest threat to life in the prairies, where cowboys killing Indians is viewed as heroic and worthy of hundreds of films, where the success of this country was dependent upon how close Canada was to enacting ‘the **final solution** of our Indian problem’” (Elliott 66-67).

UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide December 9, 1948

Read article II, and respond in the Pear Deck about whether and how you think Indigenous People have experienced genocide in North America.



Students, write your response!

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Do you feel comfortable sharing your thoughts out loud right now?



Students choose an option

ICWA

At the 1974 Senate hearings related to the [Indian Child Welfare Act \(ICWA\)](#),

“advocates ... documented the abuses and injustices Indian families had suffered as a result of the unwarranted removal of children and their placement in non-Indian families. Many Indian women testified to the intense pressure they had experienced from social workers and missionaries to give up their newborns. Other Indian witnesses claimed that social workers had unfairly removed their children, while still others reported on the veritable kidnapping of their children.”^[1]

In 1977 at the U.S. Senate Hearing of the Select Committee on Indian Affairs leading up to the passage of the Indian Child Welfare Act, Chairman James Abourezk of South Dakota stated:

Officials seemingly would rather place Indian children in non-Indian settings where their Indian culture, their Indian traditions and, in general, their entire Indian way of life is smothered. The Federal Government for its part has been conspicuous by its lack of action.... This course can only weaken rather than strengthen the Indian child, the family, and the community. This, at a time when the Federal Government purports to be working to help strengthen Indian communities. It has been called **cultural genocide**. [Upstander Project First Light Learning Resources ICWA](#)

“



ICWA

“Although HEW [Department of Health, Education, and Welfare] and the Departments of Justice and the Interior all opposed [ICWA], President Jimmy Carter signed it into law on November 8, 1978.... A long battle spanning at least ten years came to fruition through a well-designed campaign....”[2]

ICWA passage was the result of years of legislative hearings, research, meetings, conferences, and pressure by Native peoples, especially mothers, grandmothers, and social workers who were alarmed by the high number of Native children taken from their homes and tribes. The new law’s aim was to keep Native children in Native families. It guaranteed the right for Native children to grow up in their community but its lack of enforcement led to decades more of abuse and suffering. [Upstander Project First Light Learning Resources ICWA](#)



Students, write your response!

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ICWA/ Tina Fontaine (Elliott 74-75)

Reread Tina's story on pages 74-75.

Can you draw connections between practices of removing children from Indigenous families and her story? How is erasure involved? What is being erased?

Can you draw connections with the [UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide](#)? (Article II)



Students, write your response!

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ICWA Supreme Court Decision 2023

The Supreme Court leaves Indian Child Welfare Act intact

Updated June 15, 2023 · 6:34 PM ET

Heard on All Things Considered

By Nina Totenberg, Meghanlata Gupta



4-Minute Listen

+ PLAYLIST



After we listen, share your thoughts in the Pear Deck.

Click on image to read.



Students, write your response!

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Do you feel comfortable sharing your thoughts out loud right now?



Students choose an option