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T00732936

Summary of an Article on “Settler Responsibility for Decolonization”

The authors, Christine Woods, Billie Lythberg, and Susan Nemec (2023), analyzed settlers' strategies in dismantling colonial structures within their work, “Settler Responsibility for Decolonization.” The authors emphasized that decolonization is not a symbolic gesture but requires effort and action to dismantle colonial structures. The essays highlighted in the article focus on various approaches towards acknowledging settler complicity and assessing ways in which settlers can take part in the decolonization process without causing more harm to the Indigenous peoples of the land.

This article highlights one key theme: the ‘need’ for settlers to understand their place within the colonial matrix. According to the authors of this article, settler narratives tend to erase or understate their position and power within the colonial structure. A very active area of concern in this discussion is performative allyship, when settlers purport as allies through symbolic acts and movements with little or no intention of following up with the necessary policies for dismantling the existing structure. Instead, the text encourages an inward-looking process of critical self-engagement that seeks the Indigenous experience and gives primacy to Indigenous voices and concerns. It also stresses the importance of long-term commitments over short-term activism, as true decolonization requires an altered approach to societal change that sustains accountability.

Here, the authors shed light on how settlers solved some problems and broadened their arguments. They include support for Indigenous self-government, advocacy for land repatriation, and contesting colonialism in the educational framework.

The authors point out the logic behind why decolonization should not just limit reform within the institution but also try to reach out to other spheres of life. This changes how settlers relate to Indigenous pasts, cultures, and contemporary issues by building relationships grounded in long-term responsibility and respect. More importantly, the authors suggest that settlers need to have the willingness to question their own privileges, and dismantle the colonial structures that have historically worked in their favor.

The dialogue covers the economic aspects of decolonization. It considers the colonial exploitation of Indigenous peoples and the systemic advantages settlers enjoy due to the dispossession of Indigenous land and resources. The authors note that economic decolonization, which includes reparations and the reallocation of wealth, is a non-negotiable component of decolonization. They point out neoliberal tendencies to treat decolonization as just a means of achieving greater diversity and inclusion as one of the most blatant power abuses. Addressing the quote-unquote 'negative impact' of colonialism should not be the sole marker of measuring decolonization efforts. The authors support the policies that are respectful of Indigenous capitalism like restoring the land, resource distribution, and supporting enterprises owned by Indigenous people.

Education is one of the most powerful and important tools to create change in communities and settler societies.

The writers explain how academia has sometimes exacerbated colonial practices and how those institutions can pivot towards Indigenous-led knowledge systems. They

advocate for curricula that are not only centered around Indigenous knowledge but also Indigenous ways of knowing themselves. At the same time, they challenge non-Indigenous students and scholars to examine their own biases and preconceived notions regarding colonialism and Indigenous self-determination. The article puts forth the argument that real decolonization in education requires the eradication of all Eurocentric structures which still control the academic dialogue and the active incorporation of Indigenous knowledge systems as first class citizens in academia. Achieving that would require fundamental changes in how academics are hired, how research funding is distributed, and how decisions are made in academic institutions.

The authors also raise questions about the legal aspects of settler responsibility. The authors have argued about how the legal frameworks in settler colonial states, generally, have facilitated the Indigenous people's dispossession and obstruction. They take the position that to attain proper decolonization, there should be accompanying legal changes that appreciate and affirm sovereignty of the Indigenous people. These include implementing treaties on Indigenous peoples in a manner that respects the spirit of those treaties instead of using them to control Indigenous people.

Additionally, the writers suggest that settlers should undertake lobbying to further support the land claims and governance rights of the Indigenous people, making sure that the law is an instrument of justice and not oppression. The examples of how Indigenous people have won legal battles, which has enabled them to self-govern, were discussed along with the importance of paying attention to legal and policy processes for reforms that incorporate and reflect the needs of the Indigenous people.

In closing, the article offers thoughts on the problems settlers encounter in undertaking decolonization processes. As the article points out, debilitating guilt and defensiveness is the norm, but rather than being self-sabotaging, it is better transcended into action. Instead of being stuck in discomfort, settlers should consider more proactive approaches to decolonization by engaging with Indigenous people, contesting mainstream colonialism within their society, and working towards policy changes. During my time working on the paper I came to the understanding that decolonization is not a singular act of remembrance and reparation, but rather an act that is ongoing. The settler does not have the luxury of looking for forgiveness; instead, they have the responsibility to assist in the elimination of colonial structures and systems and the building of a society where the Indigenous people would fully enjoy their rights for sovereignty and self-governance.

Discussion Question:

What does it mean to take responsibility for historical and ongoing injustices, and how can individuals and institutions move beyond symbolic gestures to engage in meaningful decolonization efforts?

Citation:

Woods, C., Lythberg, B., & Nemec, S. (Eds.). (2023). *Settler Responsibility for Decolonisation*. Routledge.