Indigenismo in Mexico

The codification of slave laws across North America from the 1660s through the 1720s effectively erased the Indian identity of large numbers of Indians who were living as slaves or servants. Though Indians were mentioned in colonial slave laws, the rise of a black majority (combined with binary ideas of race as black and white) doomed Indians who were enslaved to become effectively "black" in the eyes of most colonists. Nonetheless, Indian slaves maintained their own cultural identities. Their impact on slave cultures and slave religions has yet to be fully appreciated.

SEE ALSO Racial Slave Labor in the Americas; Slavery, Racial; Slavery and Race.

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INDIGENISMO IN MEXICO

The concept of race in Mexico is deeply rooted in the xenophobic tendencies of the Spanish colonization. It has been recorded that Hernán Cortés (c.1485–1547), the famous Spanish conquistador responsible for the downfall of the Aztec empire, once stated: "We Spaniards suffer from a disease of the heart which only gold can cure." Cortés therefore brought an exploitative political philosophy to the New World and its indigenous peoples. Since then Mexico has struggled to come to grips with its history and to define its nationalistic identity and place in the world. The historical periods of Mexico’s development and public policies can be broken down into the following: colonization, independence, revolution, modernization, and neoliberalization. Each is marked by its own particular set of institutionalized and informal racist policies.

ROOTS OF INDIGENISMO: COLONIZATION, CONVERSION, AND CORRUPTION

Policies regarding race began with allegations of ideological superiority by the Spanish at the time of contact. Cortez’s actions are deeply criticized to this day by the indigenous peoples of the Americas, and “Columbus Day” has been reformulated by Native peoples as “Indigenous Peoples’ Day.”

The imperialistic approach of the Spanish toward the New World was conditioned in large part by the earlier Christian Reconquest of Spain, during which Spanish soldiers battled the Moorish population from 711 to 1492 for control of the Iberian Peninsula. Viewing the Reconquest as a “holy war,” a religious-military complex took shape in Spain. Freedom from Islamic rule was equated with Christian identity, and the religious conversion of Muslims and Jews was a critical ideological driving force behind the Reconquest. Using xenophobia (fear of the Other) as grounds to conquer new lands for god and country, the Spanish carried these ideas to their “New World” colonizations, beginning with Christopher Columbus’s arrival in 1492.

The arrival of the Spanish in Mexico in 1519 marked the end of indigenous control over the region and the collapse of the Aztec empire. Those indigenous peoples not killed by the sword were subjected to a wealth of
foreign illnesses from smallpox to influenza, which reduced
the population of native peoples from an estimated 27.1
million to as few as 1.2 million shortly after Spanish arrival
(Carmack 1996, p. 128). In 1552, the Dominican priest
Bartolomé de las Casas (1474–1566) related the devastat-
tion that followed the arrival of the encomenderos, Spanish
arrivals who earned land grants that included economic and
political control over indigenous populations. Upon
returning to Spain, Las Casas wrote about Spanish brutality
under the encomenderos and about his doubts that the
indigenous populations would ever truly be Christianized
or fully integrated into Hispanic society.

Indigenismo is “public policy and institutions that
address the educational, economic, health, and social needs
of the Indian population, with the underlying goal of assim-
ilating Indians into the mainstream culture” (Carmack
1996, p. 478). On the surface such policies appear beneficial
to the well-being of the colonial empire, yet they also served
to further marginalize the indigenous peoples into resettled
communities known as congregaciones (or reducciones).
These resettlements were close to towns where labor pools
(obrajes) could come from the native communities to aid
public work projects that developed the internal infrastructure
of the towns (municipios), yet they did little for the rural
countryside. Where indigenous labor was not accessible,
such as along the coast, African slaves were imported. In
the ideal, indigenismo would bring the indigenous people
onto an equal footing with their European colonizers. It
would, in essence, “civilize” them. Colonization, however,
had quite the opposite effect. Chief among the bad conse-
quences of this process was the imposition of a caste system
based on a series of status rankings. This became known as
the doctrine of limpieza de sangre (purity of blood).

Limpieza de sangre policies brought day-to-day real-
ity to the caste situation in Mesoamerica. It was originally
dictated in Spain to allow only those of “demonstratable
Christian stock” to be allowed to attain noble status or to
hold public office. The extension of the limpieza de sangre
led to racial castes based on skin color, heritage, and
Indian ancestry. The most prominent among these rank-
ings (from highest to lowest) were the following:

- **Peninsulares**: Those born in Spain of Spanish descent
  (immigrants and dignitaries).
- **Criollos**: Those of Spanish descent born in the New
  World.
- **Mestizos**: Offspring of a Spanish man and an Indian
  woman.
- **Mulattos (Sambos)** and Free Blacks: Offspring of a
  Spanish man and an African woman.
- **Indios**: Indians of pure descent.
- **African Slaves**: Those brought from Africa to work
  on coastal plantations or in the mines (Carmack

The caste status of Indians and African slaves varied
from one region to another. Frequently, an Indian death
from excessive labor was of no concern to encomenderos,
yet the loss of a slave meant a loss of paid property. This
justified, at times, the higher status of slaves over Indians.

As can be seen from the categories above, even though
both criollos and peninsulares had the same skin color,
they were separate castes. A constant struggle between peninsu-
lares and their lesser criollo elites led to the eventual uprising
of criollos against the peninsulares, contributing to Mexican
independence from Spain in 1810. The Indians were a
prominent part of the uprising because of their resistance
to colonial taxation of obrajes and their objection to dom-
inant views of the indigenous populations as “passive,
dependent, docile, stupid, incapable of higher civilization,
lacking in emotions and sensitivity, impervious to pain and
suffering, [and] unable to improve their miserable condi-
tions of living” (Stavenhagen 1998, p. 16).

The prevailing attitude at this time was that the indig-
eneous people needed to be “cared for” by missionaries.
During this time, religious confraternities (cofradías) were
formed by the missionaries, allowing indigenous peoples
some degree of religious self-control over the practice of
Christian ceremonies. This led to religious syncretism, or a
blending of traditional native beliefs with those of Chris-
tianity. In the minds of rural friars, the Indians’ inherent
inferiorities kept them low on the caste scale and out of
clergy positions. The derogatory nature of the word indio
was created through the caste system and resulted in
increasing levels of legal discrimination. The missionaries
viewed the caste system as a way of interacting with the
Indians in similar fashion as they had interacted with the
uneducated peasantry of Europe.

This marginalization of the native peoples was met
with resistance. In western Mexico, according to Beatriz
Rojas (1993), missionaries did not make inroads into the
isolated indigenous mountain communities until the
1550s. Thereafter, they met with varying levels of resist-
ance. For example, from 1617 to 1618, the Tepuán
Indians revolted against the Spanish and the Cora were
forcibly resettled into villages. In 1712 the Tzeltal
revolted against the Spanish in Chiapas.

Mexican independence from Spain did little for the
rights of indigenous peoples. Criollo elites simply replaced
the peninsulares in positions of power. Mestizos, those
of mixed Indian and Spanish ancestry, however, gained
prominence as the dominant working class on the ranches
(haciendas) of the criollos and as local authorities in the
cities. In essence, they filled gaps in the social structure
that the elites were unable or unwilling to fill. The
indigenous peoples continued to be marginalized, and indigenismo returned in the guise of what was viewed as “the native problem” (el problema indígena).

EMERGENCE OF THE MIDDLE CLASS MESTIZO

The Mexican Revolution of 1910–1917 marked the rise of the mestizo. Although nationalistic sentiments were important for the independence movement, a new mestizo caste consciousness was also apparent in the years leading up to and during the Mexican Revolution. The denial of infrastructural development in the rural areas had led much of Mexico’s population to continue to live in poverty and servitude to hacienda owners. In general, the period between independence from Spain and the Mexican Revolution encouraged the advancement of the mestizo as the dominant caste and racial classification.

Mexico’s growing mestizo population was not without its problems. Although mestizos were more Indian in their ancestry than their political opponents, they nonetheless found it necessary ideologically to reject the significance of their Indian past to become a dominant political power in Mexico. This meant the denial of their indigenous heritage in an attempt to be more like their elite neighbors, the criollos. Being Christianized, rejecting the use of one’s indigenous language in favor of Spanish, and changes in one’s style of dress and place of residence were all critical to becoming mestizo.

When he became President, Benito Juárez (1806–1872), who was half Zapotec Indian and is considered the “founder of modern Mexico,” instituted a series of seemingly liberal social policies that led to the breaking up of the large landholdings of the Church and others, but with the goal of privatizing the lands rather than restoring them to rural communities. This was known as the Ley Lerdo of 1856. Juárez viewed the destruction of collective lands as vital to the emergence of Mexico into a new age of progressivism that would require destruction of two communities—the Church and the indigenous peoples. As a result of his agenda, only the wealthy could afford to purchase the lands taken away by the state.

The Ley Lerdo had devastating effects on the indigenous lands, and indigenous-controlled communities, already outlawed for fear of their ability to influence local municipal governments, were subject to outside electoral control (i.e., mestizo). Indigenous collective lands were either absorbed into the nonindigenous-controlled municipalities to pay off state debts or they were auctioned off. This law affected indigenous communities from the Yucatán to Oaxaca and the Sierra Madre region in the northwest.

Arriving on the heels of Benito Juárez was Porfirio Díaz (1830–1915), who was driven by the need for foreign capital to modernize Mexico. A railroad infrastructure was built, and European arts, music, and literature were promoted. Intellectualism was equated with Europeanism and the wealthy middle and upper classes gained prominence, ushering in a new period of Mexican development in which the population doubled and the infrastructure expanded.

By 1910, 85 percent of mining companies were North American. Many of these companies favored hiring their own nationals instead of Mexicans. The situation became so bad that “only 2 percent of the population held title to land and 3 percent of the properties covered 58 percent of Mexico” (Foster 2004, p. 154). Seventy percent of the Mexican citizenry, however, continued to be farmers. Hunger was prevalent due to poor pay or displaced peasants. By 1910, only 10 percent of Indian communities held collective land (Foster 2004, p. 155).

A subsequent economic decline during the early 1900s resulted in foreign debt and infrastructural collapse. It was during this time that the rural areas began to rebel against the policies effected by the Porfiriato regime, leading to the rebellion of Pancho Villa’s forces in the north and Emiliano Zapata’s forces of the south. The success of the rebellion was achieved in 1917, though at the loss of as many as 2 million lives.

BUILDING A MODERN MEXICO: LAND REFORM

The Mexican Revolution and the expansion of the mestizo race did little for the indigenous populations of Mexico. A nationalistic image of Mexico was created, which aimed to shroud the pluralistic nature of the country in a romantic image of the past, known as Mexico profundo (Bonfil Batalla 1996). In the world of the Mexico profundo, the de-Indianized peoples were reclassified as part of the rural peasantry. Stripped of their sense of identity, a romantic notion of the past was created and perpetuated by the mestizo. In this image, the indigenous peoples no longer existed except as part of the past Mexico—a modern Mexico required a unified nation-state, and indigenous identity represented a threat to that unity.

The Mexican Constitution of 1917 institutionalized the destruction of collectively owned lands (ejidos), even though one of the major goals put forth in the constitution was the restoration of communal lands that had been lost to wealthy owners and foreign companies. This ruling was known as the Agrarian Reform Law (La Reforma Agraria), or Constitutional Article 27, and its intended purpose was to restore power to the rural proletariat through land redistribution and certification.

With the passage of the Agrarian Reform Law and the rise of President Lázaro Cárdenas (1895–1970) in 1934, foreign control was to be reduced, if not eliminated all together. Lands were to be restored to rural
village communities in collective fashion. In principle, the Agrarian Reform Law had great potential not only for the mestizo, but for indigenous peoples as well. The government failed to fully implement the ruling in all affected areas, however. In general, lands in indigenous areas that were determined to have worth to the now federalized resource associations were never restored. Chief among these government-controlled, nationalized industries was Petroleos Mexicanos (PEMEX), which came to control much of the oil rich lands of southern Mexico.

NEOLIBERALISM: CHALLENGES TO A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

Neoliberalism is a term that was often used by indigenous peoples in the 1990s to refer to the renewed policies of governmental reforms, economic justice, and political ideology that benefited the elites and commercial centers at the expense of indigenous peoples and the poor. According to George Collier and Elizabeth Quaratiello, neoliberalism “looks to the marketplace to solve all of society’s problems and meet all its needs. Neoliberalism has changed society, both for the better by contributing to dramatic growth of civil institutions independent of the government, and for the worse by leading the government to militarization and repression to hold onto power” (1999, p. 157). It is the belief of the native peoples of Mexico that neoliberalism is directly responsible for the continued violation of indigenous rights, economic justice, and sovereignty observed in the early twenty-first century.

In 1975 the first National Congress of Indian Peoples was held, organized in part by the Mexican anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla. The goals of the congress were the same as those to be later mentioned by the Zapatistas in their 1994 uprising in southern Mexico. These issues included:

- Much of the land was considered infertile or lacking in amount to prove useful.
- The lack of public health care facilities and services.
- The lack of basic human services, such as running water or electricity, despite tax payments.
- The prevalence of malnutrition and poverty brought about by the lack of arable land.
- The poor availability and quality of education, and educational institutions that did not benefit indigenous communities.
- Low salaries and unfair labor conditions.
- Exploitation of peasant and native industries by wealthy middlemen (Collier and Quaratiello 1999, p. 63–64).

In the twenty years after the First Indigenous Congress, it was apparent that the government was doing little, if anything, to address these basic human needs in Chiapas. In the 1970s, a number of indigenous organizations were begun in response to government inaction, among them the Emiliano Zapata Peasant Organization (OCEZ), the Independent Confederation of Agricultural Workers and Indians (CIOAC), and Popular Politics (PP). These organizations aided indigenous peoples with land reform and with organizing workers. The CIOAC enabled farmworkers to “sue ranchers under federal labor laws for back wages and improved working conditions,” while PP was a Maoist-Marxist student organization that engaged university students to work with impoverished communities in eastern Chiapas (Collier and Quaratiello 1999, p. 71).

Indigenous organization largely failed amid a booming development phase of the Mexican economy in the 1970s, dominated by oil. Oil exports reached new heights until the market’s decline in 1981, displacing thousands of indigenous farmworkers from their land and resulting in a two-class system of extreme wealth for the few and impoverishment for the majority.

While the population was booming in the highland region, there was increasingly little arable land available in the low-lying areas. This especially impacted the Tzotzil Indians of the region. Much land had been turned over to cattle ranching, was lost in the construction of hydroelectric dams to supply power to the cities, or was to be used for oil drilling by PEMEX. Industry, it was argued, could not lose these lands because of the wealth they provided.

By 1982, oil exports became 80 percent of the Mexican export economy, to the detriment of agriculture and other internal industries. The export market crashed in 1982, however, and left many with nowhere to go. The living situation had become untenable in the highland region. Pesticides and herbicides used to increase production on small plots of land had not only damaged much of the soil, but the debts incurred by farmers through loans to acquire these chemicals resulted in further land losses by the many who could not afford to repay their debts.

The succeeding events of the 1980s were no better for the Zincanteco peasantry and Tzotzil Maya. Basic government services were limited and budgets were slashed. Moreover, the indigenous Maya peoples were monolingual Tzotzil speakers and illiterate. These factors resulted in deep divisions between the indigenous and the literate Spanish-speaking peoples (ladinos) of the region. Not only did educational barriers prevent the ladinoization of the indigenous Maya, but political affiliation became a factor. Loyalty to the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which had held power since the
revolution, determined whether or not one had access to certain governmental programs and services. Indigenous and ladino communities alike became divided. Native communities that had remained loyal to the PRI since the reforms of President Cardenas became angry with the cuts in agricultural subsidies that aided the poor. Only those regions where elections were being held or contested received government support, and affiliation with competing political parties, especially the growing Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) grew.

The 1988 Mexican national election resulted in the continued dominance of the PRI. Carlos Salinas de Gortari (b. 1948) became president amid allegations of corruption and ballot-box stuffing. Salinas continued to support free-trade policies, which led to inflated prices for foods such as the tortilla, a staple of the Mexican diet, yet eliminated farm subsidies. Assistance was supposed to be received regardless of one’s political affiliation, but this was not the case. Forty-eight percent of the population lived below the official poverty level, and the distribution of funds to indigenous communities in Chiapas and elsewhere did not occur as planned. PRI officials continued to use literacy and legalism to take advantage of indigenous peoples. Salinas’s worst mistake, perhaps, was the amendment of Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution in 1992 in order to again allow privatization of ejido lands. Fifty-four percent of Mexican lands were held as ejidos, including indigenous territories (Stephen 2002). In order for ejidos to remain as collectives, ejidalatarios had to enroll through a complicated certification process. In addition, women could not vote under these rules, nor did the necessary electoral structure exist. Frustrated with the political impasse, the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) took matters into their own hands. In 1994 an army composed mostly of Zapotec and Tzotzil Indians revolted, timing their revolt to coincide with the implementation of the U.S.-led North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). In the revolt, the Zapatistas took over government offices throughout Chiapas. An Internet posting called international attention to the event and detailed the 34-point agenda of the Zapatistas. Chief among these demands were the return of privatized lands to native communities, hospitals and medicine for indigenous communities, housing and basic services (e.g., water, plumbing, electricity), an end to illiteracy, fair prices for their farm products, and an end to hunger and malnutrition. Very few of these demands differed from those listed twenty years previously by the 1974 Indigenous World Congress, or those called for in the International Labor Organization’s (ILO) Conventions 107 and 169, which had been ratified into the Mexican constitution in 1990. These ILO resolutions were specifically designed to protect indigenous collective rights on

religious, political, labor, and land freedom issues. They were viewed by many merely as symbolic gestures, however, in order to show that Mexico was making progress in its commitment to a “plural-ethnic” state.

When the Zapatistas finally voluntarily withdrew from the government centers, an international conference was held between the Zapatistas and the government’s Commission of Agreement and Peacemaking (COCOPA) officials to reach a consensus over demands. This agreement, known as the San Andreas Accords, was later signed by President Ernesto Zedillo, who later refused to implement any of the resolutions. However, the idea that indigenous people could organize themselves began to spread to other indigenous peoples.

The end of the rebellion and subsequent meetings resulted in several self-proclaimed autonomous communities by the Zapatistas, which continued to face armed vigilance from the Mexican military in 2005. The autonomous Zapatista communities reflect a socialistic model of social welfare by engaging the Indians themselves to construct and promote schools and bring basic services into their communities as well as to form artisan cooperatives to bring in funds to the autonomous communities.

THE NEW WAVE OF ZAPATISMO: GLOBALIZATION AND THE FUTURE

In the early twenty-first century, the term Zapatismo stands for the new indigenous rights movement. Reorganized as the Fuerza Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (FZLN) to emphasize nonviolence, Zapatismo is a pan-Indian consciousness that includes the indigenous peoples of Mexico and nonnative sympathizers around the world. The Mexican military’s acts of social injustice have come to be closely watched by such organizations as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.

Mexico continues to deny the implementation of any plural-ethnic model of Mexican society, though outwardly promoting it, and the Mexican authorities continue to vigilantly police the indigenous areas of Mexico for fear of uprisings. The military and state police closely watch native gatherings and migrations, and human rights abuses against the indigenous peoples of Mexico continue, including the illegal detention of Huichol religious pilgrims on their way back from collecting peyote for use in community religious festivities (Valadex 1998) and military vigilance (searches and questioning) toward individuals coming into and out of the Huichol Indian communities. In addition, the Jaliscan State Police have appeared at biannual community meetings where natives were searched, questioned, and religious artifacts seized (Biglow 2001, p. 158–159). These events occurred despite protection for native religious practices expressly...
being covered in the ratification of the ILO conventions into the Mexican constitution in 1990.

The idea of indigenous communities as “closed corporate communities” (Wolf 1957) is no longer a viable model to describe the changing peasantry. Indigenous identities blend interchangeably with regional identities, resulting in a sort of polybian, a person who can exist in two or more worlds (Kearney 1996, p. 141). These polybians are part of regional identities that are difficult to separate from other native or nonnative populations. Whereas ethnic identity and affiliation were previously based on appearance (dress and/or phenotype) and language, these can no longer be the sole criteria for ethnic classification. Self-identification has become the chief factor for this determination. This change was reflected in the 2000 Mexican national census, where 30 percent of the population now identify themselves as indigenous and descended from sixty-two different recognized ethnic groups (Foster 2004, p. 257).

Ongoing confrontations with missionaries further complicate the situation of indigenous rights. Despite the fact that many indigenous communities have passed local resolutions forbidding missionaries from residing in native areas, missionary activity continues due to support from both domestic and foreign missionary organizations. While some measures employed by missionaries are clearly clandestine and dishonest, other less blatant practices also seem to violate native conceptions of sovereignty, including the repeated aerial dropping of radios that receive evangelical shortwave stations, onto native lands where missionaries are forbidden (National Public Radio 2001b).

Injustices against native peoples have continued in the twenty-first century. The 2000 election of Vicente Fox as the first non-PRI party president in seventy-one years has done little to benefit the indigenous communities. The National Action Party (NAP) promised new economic growth in the indigenous areas, and President Fox maintained that NAFTA would both stabilize Mexico’s economy and bring it firmly into status as a First World nation. This has not occurred, however, as maize imports continue to come from the United States,
Indigenismo in Mexico

undercutting Mexican prices for the grain. Rural and indigenous farmers, particularly Zapotec farmers of Oaxaca, have been forced to turn to bio-engineered crops (transgenics) to increase production (Enciso 2001, National Public Radio 2001a). This was done despite a long-standing indigenous connection with corn production as the chief crop in their diet and the religious connection of corn fertility to human life (Sandstrom 1991; Biglow 2002).

The increase of services to some indigenous areas, such as the Huichol Indians of western Mexico, has brought about a rapid Mestizization of the population. Traditional village politics are turning from an egalitarian socialistic model, with status based on age-prestige social rankings, to a class-based stratification whereby personal wealth and political affiliation largely determine one’s place in society (Biglow 2001). This has been compounded by the downfall of cheap labor factories (maquiladoras) along the U.S.-Mexico border in 2002, in favor of cheaper labor in Asia.

Not only has lack of employment become a problem for Mexicans in general, but by 2002, nearly one in three Mexicans had been to work in the United States, either legally or illegally (Foster 2004, p. 251). Few realize, however, that the majority of the illegal immigrants are indigenous Mexicans who have become landless in Mexico and are forced to seek out agricultural jobs in the United States. It is therefore important to note the presence of indigenous peoples living in diaspora in the United States and Canada.

Mexican racial politics continue to play a large role as the nation struggles with the ideas of unity and nationalism in the early twenty-first century. A number of recurrent themes have come about, including: (1) the denial of an indigenous past and ethnic diversity, (2) the failure to recognize indigenous sovereignty and constitutional protections for their diverse peoples, and (3) a continued attention to the demands of industry over the will of its the people. While there are no easy solutions to these policies, Héctor Díaz-Polanco (1997), a prominent Mexican anthropologist, argues that at least some degree of indigenous self-determination or autonomy appear crucial if Mexico is to survive as a unified nation-state. Adding to this argument, the Mexican national Consultation of 1999 showed overwhelming support by the populace for Zapatista demands. The World Trade Center bombings in September 2001 and subsequent attention to border security and illegal immigration appear to have halted these initiatives but they will continue to dominate the political scene in the coming years.

SEE ALSO Mexicans; Zapatista Rebellion.

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The terms used to identify indigenous peoples vary depending on the colonial history and region, as well as historical period. For example, in Latin America, they are the Indigenas in Japan, the Ainu people are the indigenous minority; and in Sweden, Norway, and Iceland, they are the Sami. In the United States, Indigenous peoples include American Indians (made up of hundreds of tribal nations), Alaska Natives (including Inuits, Aleutians, and American Indians), Native Hawaiians, American Samoans, and Chamorros from Guam and the Northern Marianas Islands. In addition, there are Taino-identified people in Puerto Rico.

In the 1986 report of United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur José Martinez Cobo titled *Study of the Problem of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations*, indigenous peoples are defined as "those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that have developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them." Cobo goes on to assert that "they form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethic traditional medicines and health practices, including the right to protection of vital medicinal plants, animals and minerals."

A key issue for indigenous peoples worldwide is the question of the right to self-determination under international law. Because the basic criteria defining colonies under international law includes foreign domination and geographical separation from the colonizer, indigenous peoples remain at a disadvantage in terms of the application of decolonization protocols to indigenous nations, an issue heatedly debated within the world community. UN General Assembly Resolution 1514 declares: "all peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right, they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development." However, there is no consensus that indigenous peoples have the right to full self-determination, an option that would allow for the development of nation-states independent from their former colonizers. In addition, it is not clear if such rights should be limited to internal self-determination within the existing nation-states in which indigenous peoples live. A key element in this debate is the use of the term *peoples* (plural), which signifies legal rights under international law, over and above the singular *people*, which is grammatically and legally different.

Indigenous peoples worldwide have worked for decades to ensure that their preexisting human rights are recognized and upheld by global nation-states, especially because the domestic laws in most settler states have not protected their ability to assert their self-determination. Key issues of struggle include the right of ownership and control of lands and resources, self-governance, and decision-making authority vis-à-vis the dominant population. As a result of indigenous global activism since the 1970s, a Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is currently being considered in the UN Human Rights Council, and a vote by the UN General Assembly is possible at some time in the future. In its draft form, the declaration is currently being promoted as part of customary international law, and indigenous leaders are endeavoring to have states adopt this document in order to make it enforceable and legally binding. There is broad resistance to adopting the declaration, however, especially by the United States.

Histories of racism have varied across different global contexts, but histories of genocide are pervasive, as settler states have typically expanded their territory by waging wars against indigenous peoples. European nations, and later the United States and other nation-states, used the "Doctrine of Discovery," which rationalized the conquest of indigenous lands, to perpetuate the legal fiction of land possession, and these nations continue to impose this principle as a mechanism of control in their negotiations with indigenous peoples’ legal status and land rights. One of the most common forms of racism against indigenous peoples in modern times is the