

Reflection on 200 Years of *Johnson v. McIntosh*: Indigenous Responses to the Religious Foundations of Racism

The December 2023 “The Religious Origins of White Supremacy: *Johnson v. McIntosh* and the Doctrine of Christian Discovery” Conference has been crucial to my research, writing, and pedagogy. I am an academic working at the intersections of antiracist feminism and religious studies. This conference solidified my ability to identify and articulate the Doctrine of Christian Discovery (DoCD) as the genocidal linchpin upon which the violence of majority religion (Christianity) and the colonial nation state unite. This diabolical union continues the sad legacy of settler colonialism and perpetrates white supremacy and sex and gender injustice on a global scale.

First, the conference enabled all attendees and readers of the published conference presentations to identify and clearly articulate the connection between white supremacy, the colonial nation state, and religion. White supremacy is illustrated through the attempted genocide of the Indigenous people of Turtle Island, and subsequent concerted and coordinated efforts to steal their land and children (through so-called residential schools) as well as eliminate their persons and nations. The colonial nation state is exemplified through the lawsuit of the colonial construct of the United States called *Johnson v. McIntosh*. Religion is represented through the Christian religio-political documents of the Doctrine of Christian Discovery. Many of these documents are religiously “legal” mandates such as Papal Bulls, which gave and continue to give religio-political empowerment to colonizers such as Christopher Columbus and the United States government. Other documents uniquely presented at this conference granted religio-political power to kill “witches” (women) and legal documents showing that global Indigenous peoples have not, in fact, ceded their land, rendering the current settler colonial occupiers illegal trespassers. The breath of the conference presentations taught us over and over again how to identify the clearly documented but well-hidden interconnected roots of religious racism.

Second, after teaching us to identify and articulate the primal connection between white supremacy, the colonial nation state, and religion, the conference enabled us to analyze cases and locations of the DoCD and white supremacy on a global scale. Each workshop identified the roots of religious racism and provided analysis and action steps in how to move forward for an antiracist world. “The Religious Origins of White Supremacy: *Johnson v. McIntosh* and the Doctrine of Christian Discovery” was a unique privilege to participate in because it united Indigenous Peoples and their allies from around the globe to build coalitions for scholar activist work. The in-person aspect of the conference helped form deep relationships in a short time and gave us a basis of shared experiences such as a trip to the Skä•noñh Great Law of Peace

Center on sacred Onondaga Lake. I had the honor of really connecting with Māori people, Haudenosaunee people, and African Americans in the diaspora.

As the DoCD is sadly grounded in legal, national, and religious documents that give license for genocide and theft, the way forward is very clear: rescind, renounce, revoke these documents and provide restitution for the survivors of this attempted genocide. Survivors include Indigenous Peoples, Africans in the diaspora, People of Color, women, and the Earth herself. Often the roots of religious colonialism and genocide are obfuscated by majority retorics, capitalism, greed, and religion; this conference lifted the veil of this obfuscation by providing clearly documented evidence of the roots of white supremacy.

I am currently writing a paper on my work from the conference titled “The Doctrine of Discovery and the Doctrine of Male Dominion: Remembering Sally Roesch Wagner.” It is taking me a long time to write this paper because a key panelist, Dr. Sally Roesch Wagner, died in June 2025. I am struggling to revise the paper that I gave at the Conference to honor Sally’s legacy. My “Religious Roots of White Supremacy” panel consisted of myself, Sandy Bigtree and Sally Roesch Wagner. Sandy Bigtree has been my teacher and mentor for many years, teaching me about the catastrophic consequences of the DoCD. Sally was presenting on her recent article “The Christian Control of Women and Mother Earth: The Doctrine of Discovery and The Doctrine of Male Dominion.” This panel amplified a unique and critical insight: that dominion of Mother Earth is connected to the dominion of women, and this dominion, prejudice, and artificial supremacy originates in fifteenth century Catholic papal bulls. I will continue to make this connection in my future writing, and it would not be possible without the Conference.

While the Conference is over, its power to fuel antiracist feminism and religious action and reparation lives on in many ways. The edited volumes of Conference proceedings are rich archives of anticolonial knowledge and practices. The relationships formed continue to build coalitions of antiracist activism. The Indigenous Values Podcasts are invaluable resources for research, writing, and teaching. I teach at The College of Wooster in rural Ohio, as Ohio was on the trail of death there are few people Indigenous to this land nearby, and no federally recognized tribes (while a federally recognized tribe is not the paradigm of an identifiable indigenous nation, the fact that there are no federally recognized tribes in Ohio is an indicator of how few Indigenous people live here). Indigenous knowledge is hard to come by and often contested due to ignorance. I listen faithfully to the Indigenous Values podcasts to grow my own knowledge, values, and connections, and I also assign them to students in my World Religions, Religion and Resistance, Religion(s) and Bioethics (the health of the Earth affects all of our health), and Introduction to Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Classes. I am extremely grateful for these resources and the support that enabled them, with particular gratitude to Sandy Bigtree, Phil Arnold, and Adam Brett.

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