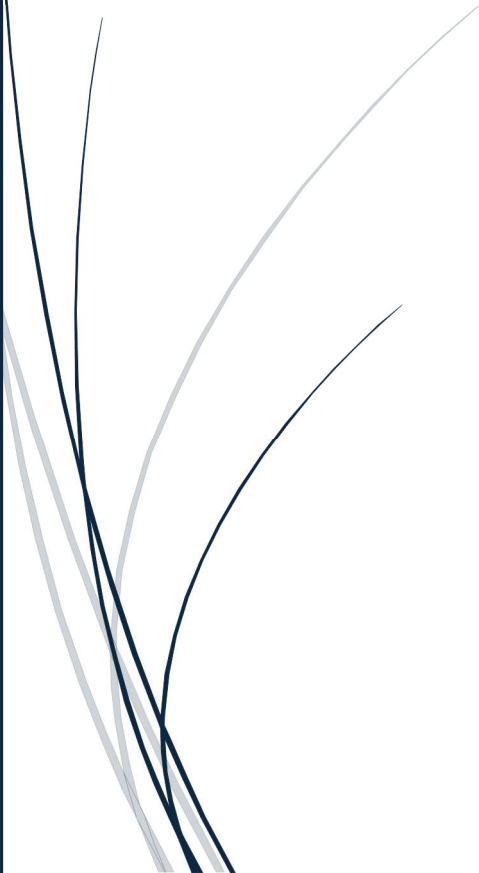




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# The Remembrance Papers, Volume V

The Doctrine of Discovery and the  
Theft of Divine Memory



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PERSPECTIVE METAPHYSICS PUBLISHING LLC

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## The Doctrine of Discovery and the Theft of Divine Memory

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### Abstract

Few policies have had such sweeping, multigenerational consequences as the Doctrine of Discovery<sup>1</sup>. Ostensibly a religious-legal justification for European expansion, this doctrine laid the groundwork for global colonization, land theft, and spiritual domination. But beneath its legalistic language lies a metaphysical violence—the attempted theft of memory itself. Volume V explores the implications of the Doctrine of Discovery not only on land ownership, but on the sacred identity, cosmology, and ancestral continuity of Black and Indigenous peoples in the Americas. This paper aims to reveal the deep layers of psychological, spiritual, and existential disinheritance—and the rising movement to reverse them.

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### Introduction: The Paper Crown of Empire

In 1493, **Pope Alexander VI** issued the papal bull *Inter Caetera*, granting Spain divine right to conquer non-Christian lands. This act, along with similar bulls such as *Dum Diversas* (1452) and *Romanus Pontifex* (1455), became the theological backbone of what is now known as the **Doctrine of Discovery**. According to this belief system:

- Christian explorers could claim any land not ruled by Christians
- Non-Christian inhabitants had no legal or spiritual title to the land
- The "discovery" of a place erased the sovereignty of its original peoples

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<sup>1</sup> Miller, Robert J. *Native America, Discovered and Conquered: Thomas Jefferson, Lewis & Clark, and Manifest Destiny*. Praeger, 2006. See also: Newcomb, Steven T. *Pagans in the Promised Land: Decoding the Doctrine of Christian Discovery*. Fulcrum Publishing, 2008.

Though presented as religious logic, the doctrine encoded white supremacy, Christian dominion, and the erasure of preexisting civilizations into law.<sup>2</sup>

## Section I: Discovery as a Weapon of Erasure

To "discover" is to imply no one was there. This semantic sleight of hand served as a powerful erasure tool:

- Lands filled with memory, ceremony, and culture were declared "new"
- Civilizations were rebranded as primitive, pagan, or nonexistent
- Sacred sites were seized and renamed to fit colonial mythologies

This form of epistemic violence disconnected people from their own histories and made space for new false narratives.

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## Section II: The Doctrine in American Law

The U.S. Supreme Court adopted the Doctrine of Discovery as precedent in *Johnson v. M'Intosh* (1823), establishing that land titles in America derived from European conquest.

This legal legacy has influenced:

- Tribal recognition policies
- Land claims and federal trust land laws
- The refusal to honor historical treaties
- Cultural preservation conflicts

The doctrine's presence is still active in legal systems, reinforcing colonial hierarchy.

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## Section III: The Theft of Spiritual Memory

Beyond material land, the Doctrine of Discovery also stripped peoples of their spiritual geography:

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), "Study on the Impact of the Doctrine of Discovery on Indigenous Peoples," E/C.19/2010/13. Accessible at: <https://undocs.org/en/E/C.19/2010/13>

- Sacred mountains, rivers, and burial grounds were seized or desecrated
- Traditional names for land, animals, and cosmological elements were erased
- Prophecies and ceremonial cycles were interrupted or criminalized

For Black Americans, forcibly renamed and dislocated through slavery, this doctrine compounded the loss of original memory—creating a spiritual disinheritance reinforced by systemic religion and education.

## Section IV: Remembering Is Resistance

In recent years, a movement has risen to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery. Churches, legal scholars, and Indigenous nations have begun:

- Formally denouncing the doctrine
- Reclaiming sacred land through lawsuits and land back initiatives
- Re-indigenizing ceremony, language, and spiritual practice
- Reframing "discovery" as invasion

For Black and Afro-Indigenous communities, this remembrance is both ancestral and prophetic. It reclaims not only land, but *identity as sacred ground*.

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## Conclusion: The Discovery Was Ours All Along

What colonizers claimed to "discover" were not just lands—but portals of memory. Each tree, river, mound, and star alignment held sacred teachings passed through ceremony, dream, and spoken lineage. To forget this is to abandon the soul map of our people. To reclaim it is to restore the cosmology that existed before conquest.

We were never lost. They simply renamed the trail.

The act of remembering—through name, place, language, and ceremony—is the beginning of true sovereignty. And this sovereignty is not a favor to be granted by nations, but a **birthright** acknowledged by international law.

According to the **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**, adopted in 2007 and affirmed by the U.S. in 2010:

- **Article 3** affirms that “*Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination.*” This includes the freedom to determine political status and pursue economic, social, and cultural development.
- **Article 4** guarantees the right to autonomy in internal and local affairs.
- **Article 26** recognizes the right to traditional lands, territories, and resources, stating that **States shall give legal recognition and protection** to these lands—with respect to the customs, traditions, and land tenure systems of the Indigenous peoples.

Yet, **no concrete mechanism** is given for how States are to enact this support, leaving recognition adrift in bureaucracy rather than embodied in action.

Still, the directive is there—etched in international conscience.

And so, we do not wait for permission. We **proceed by memory**, by truth, by ceremony, by decree.

**Remembrance is resistance.**

**Remembrance is restoration.**

**Remembrance is law.**

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## Suggested Readings

- Steven T. Newcomb, *Pagans in the Promised Land: Decoding the Doctrine of Christian Discovery*
- Vine Deloria Jr., *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion*
- Robert J. Miller, *Native America, Discovered and Conquered*
- Tink Tinker, *American Indian Liberation*
- Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Loaded: A Disarming History of the Second Amendment* (for its colonial roots)