



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on May 29, 2025

Should Once-colonized Lands Thank God for Their Colonizers?

Years ago I had an African friend, from Zambia, who mentioned his participation in a school debate on colonialism. He took the position that it was a net *positive* for his land.

Then there was the Indian man I knew who despised Mohandas Gandhi (whose image is far different from [the reality](#)). He said, spewing a tad of venom, that Gandhi's expulsion of the British left India denuded of expertise.

Of course, these two individuals' views probably didn't represent consensus opinion in their countries. They might, however, represent something else: reality.

One man taking this position is commentator Bill Ponton. Ponton was inspired to address the matter by the news story involving President Donald Trump and the Afrikaner asylees. The link is that the Boers in South Africa arrived there as a result of colonial endeavors.

An Apologia for Colonialism

Ponton opens citing the 2023 book [The Case for Colonialism](#), by author Bruce Gilley. He points out that Gilley must be on to something. After all, his work has been denounced by leftists coast to coast, so he has made all the right enemies. Anyway, as Ponton [related](#) Monday:

Stated simply, Gilley argues colonialism brought order, development, and governance. The colonizer transferred modernity to people incapable of improving their own fortune.

Moreover, in their absence many former colonies have reverted to their former dysfunctional state and would benefit from renewed colonial oversight.

... What Gilley has said is preface to a discussion of Trump bringing to the world's attention the plight of the beleaguered Afrikaner population in South Africa. The Afrikaners, or Boers, are similar to the American pioneers who forged a path west in cover[ed] wagons through hostile Indian territory. In the case of the Boers, they trekked east from the Cape settlement into Transvaal and the Orange Free State, encountering Zulu warriors along the way who were expanding their empire from the opposite direction.

The last sentence warrants elaboration. Conquest and forcible land seizure have been the historical *norm*, not a European peculiarity. The only thing the Boers were guilty of was having better technology, which enabled them to defeat the expansionist Zulus.

Ponton then continued:



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Today, the beleaguered Boer population is all that remains of a colonial presence in Africa. The process of African independence that started in the Congo in the 1950s, erupting in South Rhodesia in the 1970s, is finally getting around to driving the Boers out of their ancestral homeland. If the recent past is any judge, South Africa will revert to a complete state of tribalism and kleptocracy, just as the Congo and South Rhodesia have done.

The Thread of Civilization

In reality, and as my African-friend anecdote illustrates, that colonization could be beneficial to the colonized is no new revelation. Why, even Obama agrees — that is, ex-president Barack Obama's half-brother George Obama. He [once said](#) it would've been better "if the whites had stayed longer" in Kenya. The British's premature expulsion, he explained, caused his nation's descent into poverty. Yet to truly illuminate this issue, we must go back to the time when Britain itself was a colony.

Britannia was conquered by the Roman Empire, as many European lands were. These colonized people surely weren't happy about being occupied, either. Yet, ultimately, they benefited long term because Rome brought them their time's version of modernity. For example, as Professor Thomas Sowell wrote in his 1998 book *Conquests and Cultures: An International History* (CaC):

The Romans brought with them a system of law, language, and infrastructure [roads, aqueducts, cities, etc.] that integrated disparate tribes into a broader, more advanced civilization, a benefit not extended to regions beyond their borders.

As an example of this, Sowell pointed out in *Wealth, Poverty and Politics: An International Perspective* (2015) that the Roman road network in Britain facilitated trade and military control, effects that endured long beyond Rome's collapse. In contrast, unconquered Scotland remained more isolated and backward. (This helps explain why England was later able to dominate Scotland.)

Sowell also informed in the latter book that, in a nutshell, the

cultural capital imparted by Rome — its language, its ideas, its legal and administrative systems — provided conquered lands with tools for advancement that regions outside the empire had to develop on their own, often at a slower rate.

The Transference Continued....

Not surprisingly, the modernity-spreading process was repeated with later colonization. As late economics professor, and Sowell's dear friend, Walter Williams [wrote](#) in 2011, it

turns out that countries like the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand were colonies; yet they are among the world's richest countries. Hong Kong was a colony of Great Britain until 1997, when China regained sovereignty, but it managed to become the second richest political jurisdiction in the Far East. On the other hand, Ethiopia, Liberia, Tibet, and Nepal were never colonies, or were so for only a few years, and they rank among the world's poorest and most backward countries.

Despite the many justified criticisms of colonialism and, I might add, multinationals, both



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served as a means of transferring Western technology and institutions, bringing backward peoples into greater contact with a more-developed Western world. A tragic fact is that many African countries have suffered significant decline since independence. In many of those countries the average citizen can boast that he ate more regularly and enjoyed greater human-rights protections under colonial rule. The colonial powers never perpetrated the unspeakable human rights abuses, including genocide, that we have seen in post-independence Burundi, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Central African [Republic], Somalia, and elsewhere.

Conclusion

This said, not all “colonization” is beneficial. Yet the operative principle is simple, as Sowell explained in CaC, writing that where

a technologically or organizationally more advanced people have conquered a people lagging behind in these respects [as with Western colonization], then conquest — like migration — has been a way of spreading the existing human capital of mankind and promoting the development of more human capital among more peoples.

Where, however, relatively primitive but militarily capable invaders have conquered a people more advanced in the above respects, the result has been human capital’s destruction. In other words, you wanted to be conquered by a Renaissance king and not a rapacious khan.

And what of today? Gilley apparently thinks an updated brand of colonization might be beneficial. When pondering this, though, note that, contrary to myth, colonization did *not* enrich [the Western powers](#). In fact, it was an expensive endeavor. In the run-up to WWI, for example, Germany consistently ran at a loss maintaining its colonies. Remember this the next time someone says the West “stole the Third World’s resources.”

Also remember this when an onus is put on the Afrikaners, who produce the majority of South Africa’s food. For you can chase out that remnant of colonization, [Malema](#) and Co., but, as is said, you’ll miss them when they’re gone.

Addendum: For those interested, the below video presents a thought-provoking African perspective on colonization.



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