

## **Reflective Statement**

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### **Co-Colonizing: The Ecological Impact of Settler Colonialism in the American Supercontinent**

This project started out as an idea jotted down in a Marine Biology class I took with Dr. Thomas Pool during my junior year. We were discussing Invasion Ecology and I noticed that ecologists were employing the same language of Indigenous/Settler Colonial studies that combined Anthropology, Sociology, and History but did not have the same framework for understanding and situating the historical context of human (namely European and American) colonization of the continent today known as the Americas. I sought to explore the internal discourse within Invasion Ecology and conservation biology that discusses invasive species and their effects on native flora and fauna, as well as make explicit the link between invasive plants and animals to the human social structures and histories that have brought many of them here.

The original idea for this project was to be a dual-purpose synthesis, combining what I've learned in my studies as a Biology and Sociology major. Since I declared my second major of Biology, I have struggled to reconcile two very different disciplines, each with their own methodologies and frameworks for understanding the world. Both have given me insights that are unique to their disciplines, and this project was intended to address the question of ecology, restoration/conservation, and invasive species with both biological and sociological frameworks. It was not easy. Thankfully, I had the opportunity to work with Mark Jordan, a conservation biology professor who I worked with my first year and got to know doing research. We had often discussed politics and social issues while out in the field studying carnivores in Seattle's green spaces, and he was graciously open to my commentary about ecology, settler colonialism, and invasive species. He carefully read through my multiple drafts and helped me bring tough sociological concepts into my biology-focused paper.

In some senses, this became a transdisciplinary work since neither Biology nor Sociology contained the whole of what I was trying to study. I had to draw on historical scholarship, anthropological ethnography, Indigenous studies, and more to make a big-picture analysis of the ways that settler colonialism has informed the environmental degradation that we observe and even how we discuss/address it. I also consulted with other professors in other departments, as well as classmates and friends, who listened to me think through this research.

I also experienced the unique (and frustrating) challenge of developing my research and beginning on writing the core sections of it before finding a source that questioned many of the assumptions and conclusions I had come written. This meant that I had to reevaluate my main argument and, equally difficult, the methodologies and principles guiding my work. It was somewhat sad to redo some of the writing, but ultimately resulted in a better and more ethical discussion of the topic. It pushed me to think about how my own positionality as a student of both natural and social science (which are not as separate as most would think) affected

how I went about answering the question of how the natural environment had been changed by colonization, and how we might go about addressing its social and environmental harms.

Ultimately, I have done research that I think synthesizes well much of what I have learned in my time at Seattle University and particularly focuses on issues and topics that I am passionate about. I have also received constructive feedback about my writing, presented my ideas to peers in and out of my disciplines, and have been encouraged in combining my two intellectual interests. Many friends have shared that they are intrigued by my work and that they want to read my completed paper, which is a significant compliment and endeavor given that it is so long. My hope is that it contributes something needed and helpful to both the fields of ecology and sociology.