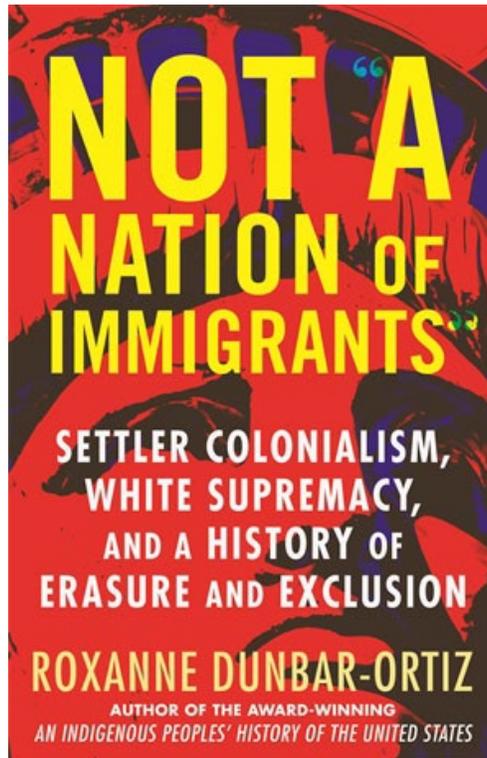


*Not “a Nation of Immigrants”:
Settler Colonialism, White Supremacy, and a History of Erasure and Exclusion*
by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz

Readers’ Guide Discussion Questions



1. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz claims that John F. Kennedy, Lin-Manuel Miranda, and countless others referenced in this book have contributed to the mass “whitewashing” of US history. Reflect on other instances of historical whitewashing. Where do you see the lasting effects of this process? How, if at all, can the harm of this process be redressed?
2. In the chapter “Settler Colonialism,” Dunbar-Ortiz points to the misuses of the term “genocide”—just one of many examples that point to the power of language in historical documentation. What other terms, both included in and left out of this text, can you think of that are misused or wrongfully appropriated in a settler-colonial context? How does language play a central role in the perpetuation of harm? Where have you seen harmful language revised, and where have you seen it upheld?
3. What parallels do you see in the histories of the various immigrant populations Dunbar-Ortiz writes about? What struggles, victories, desires, and processes seem to overlap, and where do they differ? How have these parallels or disparities impacted interracial solidarity in the United States, and what does this look like in the current day?

4. Dunbar-Ortiz writes critically about the false symbolism of the Statue of Liberty. What other memorials, museums, or cultural practices can you identify that promote similarly harmful mythologies about the United States? How do you envision “justice” when it comes to a modern-day treatment of these sites of cultural mythology?
5. Reflect on the origins of the term “white” as a “definitive way to signify a settler superordination squarely opposed to ‘Negroes’ and ‘Indians’” (54). In what ways does this term uphold the same meaning, and how has “white” taken on new meaning since the development of the “Black” codes? How has “white” evolved, and what does it mean to various immigrant populations?
6. Dunbar-Ortiz notes that the process of “self-indigenizing” “appears as a requirement for citizenship acceptance” in the United States (177). How does this process tangibly impact those who are indigenous to the United States? How does it skew popular conceptions of Indigenous history? What does this claim reflect about the importance of the narratives we construct around immigration?
7. “Trouillot is concerned that for white liberals, feeling guilt about the past can be comfortable ‘inasmuch as it protects *them* from a racist present” (81). How can historical narratives of oppression be reframed in order to prevent the perpetuation of this “protection” from a racist present?
8. Dunbar-Ortiz writes about the fact that “Western historical narratives about colonialism and slavery are filled with silences” (81). Given the existing archival silences and given that immigration stories, by nature of the processes of immigration, are, too, often left from the record, reflect on the processes by which history is made, recorded, and remembered. How can we combat these silences?
9. Consider the stories of Irish and Jewish immigrant populations, for example, who have now been afforded the privilege of “white”ness in the United States. How do you hold the real challenges of these immigrant histories in conversation with the ways in which the process of Americanization “sucks [immigrants] into complicity with white supremacy and erasure of the Indigenous peoples” (281)?
10. Dunbar-Ortiz makes the claim that dismantling the “nation of immigrants” myth central to this text “will require that all oppressed people and educators take history into their own hands” (283). What makes this myth particularly powerful, and why can’t its dismantling be left to professional US historians? What are other widely adopted myths that contribute to violent erasures? What other agents of harm do you believe require a grassroots, rather than top-down, redress? What efforts have you seen in reimagining society’s vision of justice and how can you, on the individual level, work toward this vision?