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Instructor Name

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Reflection Paper

The central concern of these readings was that the creation of international borders have significantly affected the lives of the indigenous communities living in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. The creation of borders has led to dislocation, colonization, the loss of traditional homesteads, contacts, and mobility, alongside the inability to traverse or have control over their own lands. Moreover, the laws of these North American countries create restrictions and barriers between their indigenous populations and the clans, families, or groups that predate the colonial times. The readings emphasize that immigration laws and other regulations continue to pose danger for indigenous lives and well-beings. It is oppressive in the sense that when these borders were enacted, none of the tribal members were consulted or asked to sign any particular agreement or treaty, even as international borders broke their traditional affiliations.

Another concern raised by the readings is that there are no formal tribal or federal criterions that characterize indigenous identity; consequently, the definition of whom to include as Native American varied across censuses. Such discrepancies in the census are akin to vanishing entire groups of people, who are also often denied rights which were earlier recognized in treaties. In addition, the readings discuss the various avenues at disposal of the indigenous nations to pursue their rights. The historical background of previous struggles and the need to assert rights in a legal and formalized manner is emphasized. Among these rights, the critical issue is to prevent the denial of access to traditional sites regardless of which side of the border they reside on.

I was surprised to learn that the Indigenous populations of Mexico had lead sustained efforts to preserve their cultural and political autonomy. In particular, the Zapatista movement strove hard to press the Mexican government to honor its commitments to indigenous populations and to not disrupt any cultural, communal, or economic activities of the people. I realized that such movements serve as a reminder that colonial governments often attempt to downplay the rights of the Indigenous populations of the land in their attempts to control and maintain the political power structure. However, the strong sense of ethnic identity among the native populations has led to the frequently challenged such assertions.

As an American citizen, I am still wondering whether I can truly claim the land and the city, I currently reside in, as my own if I were to recognize the right of the indigenous populations of this region. It also makes me wonder whether I possess the right to prevent other groups or migrants from settling in this place knowing that I too live here as a result of settler colonialism.

I have been challenged to rethink the issue of immigration and border security by the readings. I realize that even those on the left, that support lax immigration policies, do so on the basis of a premise that U.S. citizens have an unchallenged and natural right to this land. Moreover, who is allowed to reside in or be expelled from American territory rests solely on the discretion of the federal government, who often base their conclusions on faulty census data. It makes me realize the need to grow out of the debate of undocumented vs documented migrants and rethink our position as settlers of the land. Respecting the sovereignty of the indigenous populations and their struggle to preserve their traditional and cultural identity means that we challenge the exclusionary policies that have broken the traditional affiliations of the native inhabitants of this land. It also requires that we establish newer frameworks that enable us to think of ourselves as settlers and immigrants co-existing with the native inhabitants of these lands.