

## Transcript

### Upstream Podcast

Ep 13: Our Struggles are Your Struggles: Stories of Indigenous Resistance and Regeneration

### Featured Guests:

**Valentin Lopez:** Chairman of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band

**Eleanor Castro:** Amah Mutsun Elder

**Sleydo (Molly Wickham):** Member of the Wet'suwet'en Nation and spokesperson for the Gidimt'en Checkpoint

**Sungmanitu Bluebird:** Oglala Lakota activist, researcher, writer, member of the Red Nation and the host of the Bands of Turtle Island podcast for The Red Media

**Sheila (Siila) Watt-Cloutier:** Canadian Inuit activist, political representative for Inuit at the regional, national and international levels, International Chair for Inuit Circumpolar Council, and author of *The Right to be Cold*

**Beaska Niillas:** Northern Sámi traditional handicrafter, hunter and gatherer, activist, Sámi school kindergarten teacher, politician, and the host of the SuperSápmi Podcast

**Florian Carl:** Indigenous ally and member of the Cloudberry Collective

**Alberto Saldamando** — Indigenous Environmental Network's Counsel on Climate Change and Indigenous and Human Rights

**Della Duncan:** This episode was made possible with support from the Guerrilla Foundation and listeners like you. please visit [upstreampodcast.org](http://upstreampodcast.org), forward slash support to support us with a recurring monthly or one-time donation — it helps keep this podcast free and sustainable. So please do that, if you can.

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— it really helps Upstream get in front of more eyes and into more ears. Thank you. And now on with the show...

*[Upstream Theme Music - Lanterns]*

*[River sounds]*

**Della Duncan:** Imagine that you're standing on the bank of a river. All of a sudden you notice someone floating by who's drowning. You immediately jump in to save them, but as soon as you pull them to safety, you notice another person who's also drowning. You also pull them to safety, but pretty soon you notice that the river is full of drowning people floating towards you. You yell for help, you get people to jump in with you to save them. But at some point, when the drowning people keep coming, one of you has got to say, you know, I'm going to go Upstream to find out why all these people are falling in in the first place.

**Men's and Women's voices:** You are listening to Upstream.

**Della Duncan:** A podcast of documentaries and conversations that invites you to unlearn everything you thought you knew about economics. I'm Della Duncan.

**Robert Raymond:** And I'm Robert Raymond.

**Della Duncan:** Join us, as we journey upstream.

**Men's and Women's voices:** To the heart of our economic system and discover cutting edge stories of game-changing solutions based on connection, liberation, and prosperity for all.

*[Chumash Grandmother's Song]*

**Kanyon "Coyote Woman" Sayers-Roods:** So what land are you on? Mutsun! We are on Mutsun Ohlone territory. My name is Kanyon Coyote Woman Sayers-Roods. So welcome to Mutsun Ohlone territory, thank you for being in community with us...

**Della Duncan:** It's October 10th, Indigenous People's Day and we're gathered in a park plaza for a Rain Dance ceremony at Mission San Juan Bautista. The ceremony is being hosted by the Indian Canyon Mutsun and Amah Mutsun tribal bands of the Costanoan Ohlone — the native people of what's also known as California's Bay Area. The gathering is intended as a collective prayer for rain, something that California doesn't see too much of these days, being in the midst of an unprecedented, multi-year drought. But the ceremony is also meant to bring together community in defense of an ongoing battle that the Mutsun peoples have been part of, a battle to save their people's most sacred site, a place called Juristac...

*[Music: A. Paul Ortega and Joanne Shenandoah – Sweetheart]*

**Della Duncan:** From Juristac in California to the Wedzin Kwa River a thousand miles up the coast, and then deep into the Arctic, this episode of Upstream will share stories of social, cultural, and environmental harm committed against Indigenous peoples and their lands, their resistance efforts against these harms, and insights and invitations for paths forward committed to solidarity, healing, and ecological restoration.

**Valentin Lopez:** Today's walk was historic. When have the people of this area ever stood and walked with the Indigenous people of this area who have been here for this long...

**Della Duncan:** It's two years earlier, and we're at Juristac, or Sargent Ranch as it's known to the colonial majority, just a few miles south of Gilroy, in Santa Clara County. The Amah Mutsun are

holding another ceremony here, one which marks the end of a five mile march — a kind of pilgrimage — which began earlier in the day at Mission San Juan Bautista. For thousands of years, long before European settlers ever arrived in California, the Amah Mutsun held sacred gatherings on this site, a place which is now under threat of being destroyed and turned into a 320-acre open pit mine, where sand and gravel will be extracted and turned into concrete used to fuel the never-ending developments of strip malls and suburban sprawl that now define this region's landscape. This is why hundreds of people are gathered here, at the foot of the lowland slopes and iconic golden hills that roll through this part of California — to take a stand.

**Valentin Lopez:** I want to tell you today was historic. What you witnessed was many of our members coming together with the public...

**Valentin Lopez** My name's Valentin Lopez and I'm the chairman of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band. Our tribe is comprised of the descendants of the Indigenous peoples that were taken to Mission San Juan Batista and Santa Cruz.

Sergeant Ranch was known in our times as Juristac, and Juristac translates to "The place of the big head." And our big head dances were our most important and most sacred dances of our tribe. And so this right here is actually a sacred site. And the developers just plan on tearing down that site and just monetizing our most sacred site. We are fighting to stop that.

Our tribe has been here for ten, twelve, fifteen thousand years. And if you think of that in terms of generations, that's 800, 900, perhaps a thousand generations or more that our people have been here. And we've been holding ceremony on these lands here for a very long time. Because this is a sacred site, we had four villages in this vicinity. And those four villages, their job was

to ensure their sacredness and keep the lands prepared for sacred ceremony.

*[Music: Chris Zabriskie – Is That You or Are You You]*

**Della Duncan:** For the past hundred and fifty years or so, Juristac has changed hands several times. During California's Mexican period, the land was granted to two German brothers by the Governor of Alta California, José Castro. Later, it was purchased by a man named J.P. Sargent, who turned it into a 1,200-head cattle ranch. The land remained in the Sargent family until more recently, when a series of unsuccessful development projects — from casinos to golf courses — landed the property in bankruptcy court. It was then that the current owner, the Debt Acquisition Company of America — an investor group that specializes in purchasing and profiting off of foreclosed properties — bought the land at auction. It wasn't long after that they announced their plans to extract gravel and sand from mountains on the property, essentially turning them into giant pits in the ground.

Approval of the Sargent Quarry Project is contingent on a number of factors that are still pending. There's currently an ethnographic study taking place, along with an environmental impact report being compiled by the County of Santa Clara's Department of Planning and Development, which keeps getting delayed. For the time being, the fate of the Amah Mutsun's most sacred site remains unknown.

**Eleanor Castro:** Juristac is just a part of what has happened to our people.

**Della Duncan:** Eleanor Castro is an elder of the Amah Mutsun.

**Eleanor Castro:** They want to destroy our land, but, the more I see it, they want to destroy everything for money. Everything's about money.

*[Music: Chris Zabriskie – The Temperature of the Air On the Bow of the Kaleentan]*

**Della Duncan:** The quarry would also have obvious ecological impacts. According to the Project Juristac [website](#), the Sargent Quarry project would “eliminate approximately 248 acres of grassland habitat for the California tiger salamander and the California red-legged frog, both federally-listed threatened species, while also degrading their breeding habitat in the ponds adjacent to quarry operations. The loss of grasslands would also impact the American badger and birds of prey that forage in the area such as the Golden Eagle, the Northern Harrier, the Prairie Falcon and the Burrowing Owl. In addition, quarrying would destroy approximately 33 acres of California live oak woodland, an important roosting and foraging habitat for many native species.

**Eleanor Castro:** It's just so sad that people want to destroy everything for money. For not realizing that everything is sacred. The plants, the animals, the people, the insects — are all part of each other and are related to each other.

**Della Duncan:** If the quarry project goes through, it would be just one in a long line of many injustices wrought upon the California Indians by the colonial majority.

**Valentin Lopez:** The destruction and domination of California Indians never ended, it just evolved. And evolved today to what we see, and a lot of that is the destruction of our cultural and sacred sites. Mount Umunhum is a perfect example for that. Mount Umunhum is a place of our creation. And our creation story tells us that it was there that Creator made all lifeforms that we see today: the four legged, the birds, the fish, the plants, etc. It's a sacred place to us and it's a place where our people would go to pray. Whenever we pray we go to mountaintops so that we're

closer to Creator. But our most serious and most important prayers always all happened at Mt Umunhum, because that's when we were closest to Creator. Our people did that for thousands and thousands of years.

*[Music: Chris Zabriskie – John Stockton Slow Drag]*

**Della Duncan:** Mount Umunhum is one of the tallest peaks in the Santa Cruz Mountain range. It's got a large, white structure on top of it, which, from the valley below, looks like a weird white cube. Mount Umunhum towers over Silicon Valley, and the box that sits on top of it is actually a radar tower that was part of the Almaden Air Force Station that operated there from 1958 to 1980. They actually leveled off the top of the mountain — the mountain which is the center of the Amah Mutsun's cosmology — to build this military base, which was then abandoned by the military after the cold war ended and closed to the public because of the hazardous materials like asbestos, black mold and lead paint which was used on structures like the radar tower.

The summit of Mount Umunhum was cordoned off for decades after that, but in the last couple of years, the area was finally cleaned up and turned into a public park. Although there are some plaques there now which provide information on the Ohlone, the radar tower is still standing, a symbol of colonialism, of militarization — of the genocide of Indigenous peoples.

There was actually a big fight over whether the radar tower should stay up. But, despite the fact that it was actually more expensive to seal off and restore it than to demolish it, and despite the wishes of many of the Amah Mutsun, the Silicon Valley community, including entities like the Santa Clara County Historical Commission, the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors, and everyday citizens — lobbied and pushed to

preserve the radar tower, to keep it up there, atop Mount Umunhum, a salute to militarism, a nod to empire, a commemoration of colonialism — as an iconic part of Silicon Valley's history and skyline.

**Valentin Lopez:** Mount Umunhum, the place of our creation story, was just desecrated. That radar tower operated for less than twenty five years, I believe. Our history there goes back twelve, fourteen, fifteen thousand years. And yet, the county of Santa Clara recognized Mount Umunhum as an important county heritage site for the military. Totally ignored our twelve, fourteen, fifteen thousand year history there — completely ignored it. It wasn't important, it wasn't valued. Twenty-five years of military presence is more important than fifteen thousand years of Native American presence. That's what I mean when I said that we've been ignored, forgotten, have no value, and our history means nothing, means nothing.

**Della Duncan:** Of course, this kind of devaluation of Ohlone lives and culture is just part of a much longer legacy.

**Valentin Lopez:** Whenever the colonizers came, the Spanish in the Mission period, the Mexican period, and the early California-American period, they had no respect, no regard, no value for Native American culture, spirituality, environments, traditions, customs, ways, etc. It did not matter to them our history or our past. They just came in to take the land, take the resources. And here in California, actually, the governor of California, in the very first State of the Union, said that there will be a war of extermination against the California Indians. That is to be expected. And then one of the very first treasury bonds passed by the state of California was to pay for the extermination of California Indians. And with that money, they paid bounties and they paid military excursions up into the mountains, primarily, to hunt down the Indians and to kill them.



*[Music: G. I. Gurdjieff and Thomas De Harman, Seekers of Truth: Part 6, performed by Cecil Lytle]*

**Della Duncan:** The violence inflicted on the California Indians during the early California-American period was horrific. Men, women, and children were often hacked to death with hatchets, bounties were paid for not just scalps — but for entire heads. Vagrancy laws were passed during this period which allowed the services of “unemployed” Indians to be auctioned off to white settlers. Native children were often kidnapped and sold as apprentices. Not surprisingly, it’s estimated that the California Indian population went from [150,000 before 1849 to fewer than 30,000 in 1870](#) — an 80 percent loss in just 21 years.

**Eleanor Castro:** So, I know my history of my people now, and when the colonizers came here, they found natives here, and we were less than human. And continues today, you know, we're nothing to the government, really. But we are human. And we're still here after all these years, after the missions closed and they tried to destroy us. And our tribe was spread, we have no land left, we have no language left, we have no anything left. So we did the best we could, but yet they continue to try to enslave us.

**Valentin Lopez:** There's been no regard for our spirituality and our culture. The destruction and domination of Native Americans never ended. It just evolved and it evolved to what we see today, where the destruction of our sacred sites, our cultural sites, our important sensitive cultural sites are being destroyed. And that's what's happening at Juristac. Juristac is being destroyed today and it's being sponsored by county government. If this happens it will show that the perpetrators who destroyed our territories, who committed genocide, collected bounties, kidnapped and murdered — those times still continue. Those were the perpetrators. Today, the perpetrators are the cities and the counties and the state of California and the federal government who allow the destruction

and domination of Native American culture, Native American spirituality, the destruction of our environment.

*[Music: Chris Zabriskie – I am a Man Who Will Fight for Your Honor]*

**Valentin Lopez:** The quest for money and profit and greed drives people to ignore and dehumanize and to look to wipe out and destroy people just so they can continue to profit. That happens for all tribes, all tribes.

*[Fade out music]*

**Sabina Dennis:** We are praying, we are in ceremony, you must wait. We have water protection ceremonies happening, this is a sacred waters that we are in ceremony with. What are your intentions...?

*[Sounds of Gidimt'en checkpoint Royal Canadian Mounted Police Raid on November 18th]*

**Della Duncan:** We're a thousand miles up the coast from Juristac, in the mountainous wilderness of Wet'suwet'en territory, also known as British Columbia, Canada.

On November 18th, dozens of heavily armed Royal Canadian Mounted Police, or RCMP officers, raided what's known as the Gidimt'en Checkpoint — the Gidimt'en being one of five clans of the Wet'suwet'en Nation. The Wet'suwet'en land defenders have been protecting their territory from TC Energy — a Canadian energy company — that wants to build the Coastal GasLink pipeline, a 400-mile, \$6.6 billion pipeline through their territory, transporting fracked gas to the Canadian coast where it will be shipped to Asia for market. Parts of the Coastal GasLink pipeline

would require drilling in Wet'suwet'en territory, specifically, drilling under the headwaters of the Wedzin Kwa river — or the “blue and green river” — a yearlong salmon spawning site that's sacred to the Wet'suwet'en.

*[Sounds of Gidimt'en checkpoint Royal Canadian Mounted Police Raid on November 18th]*

**Della Duncan:** Fifteen people were arrested in this particular invasion of the Gidimt'en land, which is just the latest of three heavily armed raids. Police, which include not just the RCMP, but also Community Industry Response Groups, which are specialized teams of police specifically designed to protect industry from Indigenous grassroots resistance to industrial projects, used K-9 units, helicopters, and assault rifles to violently arrest unarmed Indigenous water protectors on their own land.

**Sleydo:** It's quite a traumatic experience, I think that it's one thing to have a gun pointed at your head and to have attack dogs ready to attack you, to be hearing the dogs barking.

**Della Duncan:** This is Sleydo, whose English name is Molly Wickham. She's a member of the Grizzly Bear House, which is one of the houses of the Gidimt'en clan of Wet'suwet'en Nation. Sleydo is the spokesperson for the Gidimt'en Checkpoint.

**Sleydo:** In this last raid in November at Coyote Camp at the drill pad site, the police used axes and chainsaws to cut down the door of the tiny home that I was living in in order to arrest me and others that were with me. And so it was quite a traumatic experience. It's not something that that was surprising based on how they've interacted with us before, but it's quite another thing to be an Indigenous woman on my own territory where I belong, where my ancestors have been for thousands of years, and then to have that violence done against me and then to be removed in handcuffs, taken off of my territory and brought four and a half

hours away and spending five days in city cells before even seeing a judge. So the intimidation and the harassment and the violence is definitely increasing at the hands of the police because they are determined to push this project through and to do that by any means necessary.

**Della Duncan:** If it were to be constructed on their land, the Coastal GasLink pipeline would threaten the Wet'suwet'en in many ways. Aside from being an important source of water, the forests around the Wedzin Kwa have provided medical and herbal remedies for generations, the stones along the riverbanks are used in their sweat baths, and the coho, chinook, and steelhead salmon runs have been an integral part of the Wet'suwet'en diet and culture.

The liquified natural gas pipeline, which would cut right through the heart of this sacred land, has been in construction now for a couple of years, but TC Energy has never gained the consent of the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs.

**Sleydo:** When this pipeline first came about and was first proposed to our communities, we had a series of all clans meetings. So we have five clans in our nation. Each clan is responsible for different pieces of territory, different clan territories that are spread out throughout the 22,000 square kilometers, and each clan has the full jurisdiction and authority to make decisions on their territory.

We are aware of the health of the land and how it is doing on a regular basis. And so we can make those informed decisions. Trudeau has never stepped foot on our territories. Trudeau does not know, John Horgan does not know, none of the government officials actually know the territory that they're talking about and that they're making decisions about. We do because we're there and we live there and we see it on a daily basis. And so when we make decisions, it is based on information of actually knowing the

land and knowing what it could sustain and what it can't sustain. And so that's how our decisions were made about this pipeline. And that's how all of our decisions are made about our territories — is by having that intimate relationship with the land and with the animals and all of the other things that have to be sustained from that land and those waters.

And so we had a series of meetings over several years to discuss the benefits. We talked about the history of the land, the health of the land. We had hired our own scientists to come in and talk about what those lands could handle. These were informed decisions about our territories based on our traditional knowledge, based on the history of the land and based on the future, all of our future generations and thinking about those people as well. And so we made those decisions according to our clan governance system. And so we are upholding our law. It is in progress and it is working for us, and the only thing that is stopping us is militarized RCMP.

**Della Duncan:** Although the violence against the Wet'suwet'en is much more explicit, this is really the exact same colonial machine that destroyed Mount Uhmuhum and which threatens to destroy Juristac. In California's Bay Area, the forces of capital are relying more heavily on pens and paper — on pliant politicians — but here in the remote parts of British Columbia, in a region much less in the spotlight, the settler-colonial state has no qualms about leveraging the full force of militarized state-violence in the pursuit of profit.

**Sleydo:** There's such a huge intersection between colonization and capitalism and racism that it's okay to forcibly remove Indigenous peoples from their land if it's for profit — if people see that it's going to benefit them.

This project isn't going to benefit anybody in so-called Canada. Nobody is going to heat their homes from this fracked gas that would flow through these pipes. This is going to be exported. The government has already invested billions and billions of dollars into this project in tax cuts and loans. It's not benefiting our economy. It's not going to benefit people directly on the ground. And so people need to wake up and see that this is all for capitalist greed. And we're not going to let them get away with funding genocide against Indigenous people.

*[Music: Chris Zabriskie – I am a Man Who Will Fight for Your Honor]*

**Sungmanitu:** Upon suffering, beyond suffering the Red Nation shall rise again, and it shall be a blessing for a sick world. A world filled with broken promises, selfishness and separations. A world longing for light again. I see a time in seven generations when all the colors of mankind will gather under the sacred tree of life and the whole of Earth will become one circle again. In that day, there will be those among the Lakota who will carry the knowledge and understanding of unity among all living things and the young white ones will come to those of my people and ask for this wisdom.

*[Music fades out]*

**Sungmanitu:** [Speaking Laktoa]. Hello, my relatives. I am Oglala Lakota. My name is Sungmanitu Bluebird. I'm a 23-year-old researcher, Indigenous archivist, as well as activist, researcher, writer. People call me a journalist — I think that's a stretch. But overall, you know, I'm just an Indigenous person trying to get our voice out there. I'm a member of the Red Nation and the host of the Bands of Turtle Island podcast for The Red Media, as well as co-host for the Yoted series on the Red Nation podcast. And I'm

also the author of “The We Will Remember” audio documentary that comes out in 2023.

**Della Duncan:** What you heard Sungmanitu reciting just a few seconds ago was the Seventh Generation prophecy, first spoken by the Lakota leader, Crazy Horse, which speaks of a time thought to be seven generations after first contact with Europeans, when Indigenous youth and allies from all races would come together to bring forth a new age of healing and rebirth for Indigenous peoples.

**Sungmanitu:** Standing Rock represented this prophecy coming true to us. You know, you had to kind of, you know, take a step back and ask, what is prophecy? We're not saying like this was destined to happen, but just the trajectory of history and what things were happening. Many of our elders during colonialism said things like, there will come a time where white men will have to choose between destruction and salvation, which is what the Red Nation is basically here to point out, is that we've come to a point in our history where we either reconcile the destructive nature of colonialism, which has only progressed and furthered contradictions to create capitalism, imperialism, patriarchy, white supremacy. These are all different like amalgamations of the same monster, you know, that represents just different ways a ruling class intends to maintain control over a population, I guess.

**Della Duncan:** [The Red Nation](#), which Sungmanitu is a member of, is a coalition of Native and non-Native activists, educators, students, and community organizers advocating for Native liberation through revolutionary socialism, anti-imperialism, and queer Indigenous feminism.

**Sungmanitu:** Capitalism is the root of a lot of these issues, and capitalism is built through colonialism. Colonialism serves as a means to export misery from the imperial core to Third World countries, and we're past a point of colonization and into the point

of imperialism where, we're at the highest stage of capitalism and that it's expanding into these markets in order to devour as much as it can in order to keep itself going.

It's important to conceptualize this in terms of, you know, 500 years ago there was no white man here. Colonialism wasn't a thing, and we had completely different systems of politics and different social relations. And so the Red Nation attempts to address imperialism, colonialism, capitalism through a Marxist analysis. But not one that falls prey to the hero worship and book worship that a lot of European Marxists tend towards or Orthodox Marxists, I should say. We instead introduce Indigenous praxis into the question because what we have is 500 years of experience in revolutionary resistance against colonization. We're continuing 500 years of Indigenous praxis. And we're informing it with 150 years of Marxist theory plus Indigenous theory.

**Della Duncan:** The Red Nation Manifesto has listed a [10-point program](#) that outlines their demands. The points include the end of disciplinary violence against all Native and oppressed peoples, access to appropriate education, healthcare, social services, employment, and housing, an end to colonialism and capitalism, and the reinstatement of treaty rights.

**Sungmanitu:** We're on the front lines because without the domination and like stealing of our land, none of this would really be going on. It's a long lasting domino effect that we're seeing the seeds that were sowed so long ago finally being reaped. And the reason we want a reinstatement of treaty rights is because 83 percent of biodiversity is protected by Indigenous people. And we only have control of 10 percent of the land on Earth, and most of that land is Bolivia, which is an Indigenous country. So a reinstatement of treaty rights represents a reinstatement of protections for the wildlife and ecosystems that are part of those treaties.



The Indigenous struggle isn't just about Indigenous people. You know, our struggles are your struggles. We want our lands to be protected. Those lands are the lands that feed you, those lands or the lands that give you water, those lands — the lands that your everything comes from. There is no people without a land. There's a million reasons why the repatriation of native lands and lives and the protection of nonhuman relatives is important. But a lot of it is that it's just restorative to the environment.

**Della Duncan:** The Red Nation has also put out a visionary platform and practical toolkit called *The Red Deal: Indigenous Action to Save Our Earth*, which is a call for climate action that goes beyond the scope of the U.S. colonial state, and, I'm reading from the book itself here, is "a program for Indigenous liberation, life, and land — an affirmation that colonialism and capitalism must be overturned for this planet to be habitable for humans and other-than-human relatives to live dignified lives. *The Red Deal* is not a response to the Green New Deal, or a "bargain" with the elite and powerful. It's a deal with the humble people of the earth; a pact that we shall strive for peace and justice and a declaration that movements for justice must come from below and to the left."

**Sungmanitu:** Politicians can't do what only the mass movements can do. We didn't get the Civil Rights Act because of a politician. You know, we got the Civil Rights Act because people all over the United States acted out in various ways in order to express that they need to change, they want to change. And it needed to happen today. Instead of, you know, a couple of big protests, a couple few riots, you know, this was stuff happening one after another after another. People don't realize how quickly these things were going and how organized people were and we need to get to that point again as the left. And the mass movements of like DAPL, it can't rely on these singular events. It needs to be a constant movement. It needs to be always going and always building and becoming stronger and stronger.

[Clip of Standing Rock from [Democracy Now!](#)]

**Della Duncan:** The water protectors at Standing Rock who were resisting the Dakota Access Pipeline, or DAPL, marked a defining moment of Indigenous resistance and land defense. 2016 has been called the Year of the Water Protector, but it was just part of a much broader movement of Indigenous Resistance efforts across North America, including Dooda Desert Rock, Unist'ot'en Camp, Keystone XL, Idle No More, Trans Mountain, Enbridge Line 3, Save Oak Flat, Bayou Bridge, Kumeyaay Defense Against the Wall, Winnemucca camp, among many more.

In fact, according to a report titled [Indigenous Resistance Against Carbon](#), published by the [Indigenous Environmental Network](#) and [Oil Change International](#), Indigenous resistance alone has stopped or delayed significant levels of greenhouse gas pollution.

**Alberto Saldamando:** Indigenous resistance and their victories against fossil fuels kept 6.56 billion metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere, which is one quarter of the emissions for the U.S. and Canada combined.

**Della Duncan:** Alberto Saldamando is the Indigenous Environmental Network's Counsel on Climate Change and Indigenous and Human Rights. He's also a co-author, along with Dallas Goldtooth, of the *Indigenous Resistance Against Carbon* report.

**Alberto Saldamando:** Indigenous resistance to — and victories — against oil pipelines, against coal mines, against extraction actually kept carbon out of the atmosphere. So that our victories really contributed to the struggle against climate change.

**Della Duncan:** The report that Alberto co-authored examines 26 Indigenous frontline struggles against a variety of fossil fuel

projects across all stages of the fossil fuel infrastructure development chain over the past decade. The authors of the report, quote, cherish these struggles, not only for their accomplishments, but for the hope they instill in the next seven generations of life; a hope that is based on spiritual practice and deep relationship with the sacredness of Mother Earth.”

**Alberto Saldamando:** Indigenous peoples, they have a connection to the land, they have a spiritual as well as a material connection to the land. The land provides for them. And they make sure that the land continues to provide for them by seeking an equilibrium with their environment so that their activity does not affect negatively the environment that sustains them.

**Alberto Saldamando:** When we talk about natural laws, it's not like Creator came down and said, here you've got to do this or – it's not like this biblical kind of law, but it's nature's feedback. You're harming me. Stop what you're doing, you know, or you're helping me. When you restore the salmon and the game starts coming back, and the forest regenerates really in relation to the salmon, it's nature's response to us. It is a response. It may not be carved in stone. But it's a response nonetheless that we listen to. And I think more and more people are listening to what nature is telling them — that they live in the world, in the world with other beings, with other biodiversity, plants as well. And that in order to sustain ourselves, we have to sustain nature, I think we have to listen to nature and we have to listen to the Earth. It's the voice of the Earth that teaches us. That's really where those values lie, where that faith lies.

So by taking on these new perspectives, this new paradigm of sustainability and abandoning the neoliberal view of development, we don't want development, we want sustainability. And that's what we're shooting for, I think, in helping frontline communities in their struggle, we're also contributing to their sustainability, their

food security, food sovereignty, their environments, their biodiversity, it's just woven together. All of these things affect each other. And so we're out there trying to raise to uplift the frontline communities and create an international movement.

*[Music: A. Paul Ortega and Joanne Shenandoah – After the 49]*

*[Music: Qilaut (Sylvia Cloutier) – Dancing the Land (Et Danse La)]*

**Sheila Watt-Cloutier:** Having lived very traditionally, you know, there was a very strong bond and connection to the land and to the ice and to a way of life. The ice is our life force.

I was born in a little Hudson's Bay Company post when the traders were up in the Arctic, into a very small knit, small community small family, which was basically empty, except for the Hudson's Bay Company [. Most of my community when I was born were still living out in outpost camps. And that's my humble beginnings, traveling only by dog team in the winter and canoe in the summer. And we were very traditional in our ways, hunting and fishing and gathering. And then at the age of 10, I was sent away for school. I was one of those kids that were sent away very young to be deprogrammed and reprogrammed, so to speak. And that was quite traumatic and spent two years away with the family and then three years at residential school and three years at a high school in Ottawa, Ontario, for a total of eight years away from home.

*[Fade out music]*

**Sheila Watt-Cloutier:** This is Sheila, Sheila Watt-Cloutier. Back home in the North, because my language does not have the "sh" sound, I am known as Siila, and I am an advocate for

environment, cultural rights and human rights for Inuit of the Arctic — but for all of us, really. I do a lot of the work on issues of environmental degradation of the Arctic and climate change as it relates to the rest of us and how interconnected we all are.

**Della Duncan:** The little Hudson's Bay Company town that Sheila was born in is located in Nunavut, a massive, sparsely populated territory in the far north of Canada, marked by vast expanses of tundra, craggy mountains, and remote villages, accessible only by plane or boat. This territory was formally given back to the Inuit for independent governance by the Canadian government in 1999.

Sheila is a fierce advocate for the rights of the Inuit of the Arctic. She's an elected representative of her people, a Right Livelihood award Laureate, an influential force behind the adoption of the Stockholm Convention to ban persistent organic pollutants, which accumulate heavily in Arctic food chains, and is the author of the book *The Right to Be Cold*, which is about her life and the effects of climate change on Inuit communities.

**Sheila Watt-Cloutier:** We thrive in the cold. Our wildlife thrives in the cold, their fur becomes very thick and rich. And, you know, like, it's all of those things that we thrive in. We're not just, you know, surviving in it — we're thriving in it. And so, you know, once the ice starts to form, it becomes our highways to our environment and our hunting grounds. And so it really is about transportation and mobility for us as well. And when that starts to become precarious because of the thinning ice and the inability sometimes to read the conditions of that ice now or the thickness of it, then it becomes an issue of safety and security, first and foremost. And so we've got seasoned hunters falling through the ice who would have been normally be able to read those conditions. But because it's forming so differently underneath where you can't see it, then it really starts to minimize the remarkable ingenuity of Inuit culture.

When we go out to hunt, there is that whole technical aspect that our young people learn, of course, in terms of reading the conditions of the ice, the conditions of the weather, how to be productive in terms of a hunter, to be a proficient provider and become a natural conservationist. But you're also being taught your character, your character of being able to be bold under pressure, how to become patient, how to not be impulsive, how to be very focused and meticulous and determined. Oftentimes women in silence are in meditation almost — cleaning the animals and the skins. The men waiting for seals in a yogic position for hours is a meditative state.

All of those skills that lead to a sound judgment and wisdom — what we call Silatuniq in my language — is the hallmark of Inuit culture, is to be Silatuniq: wise in all that you do. So we're losing all of that as the ice goes as well and the inability to count on the decades and millennia of incredible traditional knowledge is being lost in that process. So it isn't just about the ice that's leaving. It's the wisdom that goes with it that we are really fighting for and defending.

**Della Duncan:** By demonstrating how unchecked greenhouse gas emissions don't just impact the ecology of the Arctic, but also violate the human rights of the Inuit, Sheila's work is an important contribution to climate change discourse by highlighting how those who are contributing the least to climate change are those who are the most at risk. The contours of climate change are often shaped along class and race lines: people of color, people with lower incomes, and Indigenous peoples are being most impacted by its effects.

**Sheila Watt-Cloutier:** As a people who have been so colonized and so oppressed and suppressed, where our dignity and self-worth have been eroded and leading to the addictions and all of the things that happen, you know, with the consequences of

trauma, we are now turning to our culture, which is an important piece for us to be able to stand back on our feet on solid ice, pun-intended and be able to find the ways you know, to combat the violence, the abuse, the suicides – the highest suicides in North America comes from our my own community, the Inuit community of the world.

And so all of these things are really interrelated and interconnected. And so I always come from that place and space within my own spirit to say, you know, this isn't just about the ice and polar bears. These are about us trying to defend not just our way of life, to be able to continue to hunt and provide the nutritional, highly nutritional food for our communities, but also the skills that are required for our children to be able to combat not just the stressors of the land when you're a hunter, but those skills are very transferable to the modern world.

And so those are the clear connections that exist in our world that we are fighting to maintain and to bring that back. And so I say culture is the medicine that we seek in our world to bring us back to those places of strength and dignity and self-worth. But it's also the fact that I say that I think it's Indigenous wisdom that is also the medicine the world seeks in terms of gaining back that sense of how to deal with these unsustainable businesses and activities that we have been in for so long that is at the root cause of climate change to begin with.

*[Music: Qilaut (Sylvia Cloutier) – Dancing the Land (Et Danse La)]*

**Della Duncan:** The impacts of climate change are being observed earlier in the Arctic and with more severe consequences than in the rest of the world. According to the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#), the Arctic is warming at a rate more than twice the global average. The average surface air

temperature over the Arctic last year was the 7th warmest on record — and the 8th consecutive year that temperatures were at least 1°C above the long-term average. The warming of the arctic, and the resulting decline in Arctic sea ice over the last 40 years, is one of the most iconic indicators of climate change.

*[Music: Qilaut (Sylvia Cloutier) – Dancing the Land (Et Danse La)]*

**Sheila Watt-Cloutier:** Our future, the future of Inuit is tied to the future to the rest of the world. And our home is a barometer for what is happening to our entire planet. If we cannot save the frozen Arctic, can we really hope to save the forests, the rivers, the farmlands of other regions? And a frozen Arctic allows us to continue to choose our own future, determine for ourselves how our economy and culture will develop. And a frozen Arctic also allows the same opportunity to the rest of the world. Instead of spending trillions of dollars simply to offset the impacts of a melting Arctic.

What happens in the Arctic doesn't stay in the Arctic. The Arctic is the cooling system for the entire planet. It is the air conditioner, if you will. And because that's breaking down, it's causing all of these disruptive behaviors all over the world.

*[Fade out music]*

**Beaska Niillas:** [Introducing himself in Northern Sámi]. So that would be the way I introduce myself. That was Northern Sámi. I just said, where I'm from, I'm from Sápmi — Norwegian side of Sápmi from a place called Hillágurra. And my name is Beaska Niillas.

*[Music: Chris Zabriskie – Divider]*



**Della Duncan:** Beaska is a traditional Sámi handicrafter, hunter and gatherer, activist, Sámi school kindergarten teacher, and politician. He is also the host of the SuperSápmi Podcast committed to decolonization, reclaiming Sámi ways, and advocating for Sámi self-determination.

The Sámi are an Indigenous people who have inhabited Sápmi, which today encompasses large parts of northern Norway, Sweden, Finland, and parts of Russia, for thousands of years. A substantial number of their population lives in villages in the high arctic. Beginning in the 18th and 19th centuries, the governments of Norway and Sweden started to assert their authority more aggressively in the north, and targeted the Sámi with Scandinavization policies aimed at forced assimilation, regarding the Sámi as a "backward" and "primitive" people in need of being "civilized", and imposing the Scandinavian languages as the only valid languages of the kingdoms — effectively banning Sámi language and culture in many contexts — particularly in schools.

Traditionally, the Sámi have pursued a variety of livelihoods, including coastal fishing, fur trapping, and sheep herding — but their best-known means of livelihood is reindeer herding.

**Beaska Niillas:** Basically the Sámi culture is built around and upon the relationship with reindeer. Because of the Arctic climate, the cold and how far north we are, reindeer has always been here helping us survive. And the reindeer has by that shaped our culture in a fundamental way. Without the reindeer, there wouldn't have been Sámis. It's a deep, deep and old, old relationship. Without the reindeer — if the reindeer goes away — our foundation for our culture will go away. And when a foundation of a culture goes away, well, then you don't have any ground anymore. And probably that culture will go extinct.

**Della Duncan:** We asked Beaska how climate change is impacting the Sámi.

**Beaska Niillas:** Climate change is very much affecting especially Indigenous peoples, it seems. In Sápmi we have very changing winters, and the biggest impact right now it's that it rains in the winter. Before, historically, there have always been some bad winters, but those are events that people talk about for a century — that bad winter back then that almost killed a whole reindeer stock. And what happens is when it rains in the winter and then it freezes again, then you get this ice layer and the animals and reindeer, because of the numbers, basically starves to death. The land has always provided for the reindeer, but not anymore because of climate change. So that's maybe the biggest impact or the most visible impact right now, because now those winters come year after year after year after year, and it takes a heavy, heavy toll on both the herders, the reindeers and also the Sámi economics of this.

**Florian Carl:** It's not strange that people haven't heard about the Sámi because it's part of the colonial project to render Indigenous communities invisible.

**Della Duncan:** Florian Carl is Germany-based Indigenous ally and member of the [Cloudberry Collective](#) which works on climate justice issues by supporting marginalized frontline communities — such as the Sámi.

**Florian Carl:** One of the kind of biggest issues that I learned about from reindeer protectors is that in winter, the temperature changes so much that whilst, for example, this year they measured one of the coldest temperatures ever in history, like in recent decades, at least, -43 degrees, if I remember correctly, and there's also some days like in the middle of the winter, that it starts raining. And this is something that should not be the case, that's unheard of, basically.

When I was there in 2020 for a collaboration that we did during the Jokkmokk winter market at some point we had like minus 26 degrees or so. And then the next day I was driving into town and suddenly it was plus 6 degrees and it was raining. And as I was driving there, it just hit me like, I had to stop and I turned the car over to the side because this was just catching me off guard. Or, I don't know, it was probably also an intense time already and kind of very demanding, but realizing and feeling this in my body that this is the climate crisis happening right now here in this place. Yeah, it really makes you realize that we are not talking about a climate crisis as something that will happen in the future, but that is actually already here.

So Sámi elders — and knowledge holders — don't know how to address this, and nobody knows really what to do about this. Because what happens is that the rain kind of — it rains on the snow and then it builds this thick layer of ice basically when it gets cold again. And so the reindeer who are at this time of the year, mostly in the forests, they can't find the food anymore. And then in the end starve. And this is a massive problem next to, of course, a huge variety of problems that they have to face due to the colonization like forests are clearcut, mines, infrastructure and all these kind of things.

*[Music: Chris Zabriskie – The Temperature of the Air on the Bow of the Kaleetan]*

**Della Duncan:** One of the most recent fights for the Sámi has been against — just like with Juristac — a mining project. This time an iron mine being proposed in a region known as Gállok in northern Sweden. The mine would threaten the reindeer who graze in this region while also threatening the Lilla Lule river — an important water source for a hundred thousand people in this

region. As Florian mentioned, this is just one of many assaults on the Sámi being waged by the forces of capitalism and colonialism.

*[Fade out music: Chris Zabriskie – The Temperature of the Air on the Bow of the Kaleetan]*

**Della Duncan:** Another important aspect of the Cloudberry Collective's work comes through their recognition of the responsibility for those of us who are part of colonial majority society to work with our communities to decolonize internally. This work includes critical whiteness work, anti-racist work, and anti-colonial work.

**Florian Carl:** It's a lifelong process to engage in de-colonial, anti-colonial work in that regard, because these are structures that have been set up centuries ago, and these are categories that we are born into that none of us have chosen like this, but that we need to both individually and collectively address. And I think as part of that, thinking from a more, like, decolonial, anti-colonial perspective means to recognize also the privileged positions that some of us have.

And so within the Cloudberry Collective, for example, next to the work that we do internally and within our communities, but also in collaboration, we actually also have started a mutual aid fund, for example. And this is one way for us where we are trying to give back stolen resources in a broader sense or return resources, as you could say, to marginalized communities that have been accumulated under our privileged positionality like and the structures that come with this for centuries already.

**Della Duncan:** The Cloudberry Collective's mutual aid fund is one example of the rematriation or reparations movement to restore sovereignty and cultural legacies for Indigenous communities around the world. Other examples include [landback](#) initiatives to

return land to Indigenous hands and paying rent or a land tax to the Indigenous communities whose land people work and live. In one example, Seattlites in Washington State make monthly “rent” payments to the Duwamish tribe in a project called the [“Real Rent Duwamish.”](#) Just outside of Seattle is also the home of another repatriation initiative, the Puyallup Tribe recently launched an effort to rename the towering Mount Rainier and give it back its original name — [Mount Tacoma](#), from the Native language Twulshootseed.

Repatriation encourages those with access to land and wealth to recognize their place in the lineage of land theft and genocide, to repair the harm colonialism has done and continues to inflict on Indigenous peoples, and to contribute to social, cultural, and ecological healing.

**Florian Carl:** I mean, I think that with as part of colonization, there is this really intrinsic mode of denial in colonial majority societies to recognize the dystopias that we are living in today and that these are basically the utopian fantasies of our ancestors come alive today. And that's something that — although it's around us everywhere, in the houses that we built and the cars that we drive with, it's very material — it's nothing abstract or so, but it's very hard to somehow connect the dots in the end of the day for us to recognize some of these underlying values or so that come with very anthropocentric and believing in the idea of modernity or progress of the superiority of the Western people, basically.

**Beaska Niillas:** We need to dismantle the value system that capitalism is built upon.

**Della Duncan:** Here's Beaska again.

**Beaska Niillas:** We need to have a new set of values that guide us through this world, through this life, that don't require this

forever climbing, forever trying to achieve something. But to understand that you have all you need on the land, from the land, with the land, if you only take care of the land and take care of the relationships you have with the beings on the land, both those you see and those you don't see.

And I believe the problem is when it becomes this grotesque hyper capitalism that we have today with the one percent in the world basically eating the rest of the world. I can't get it why it's necessary to be so greedy — how it's possible to be so greedy that those people are. And they are killing people, they are killing cultures, they are killing the land, but they don't care. This is so problematic on many, many levels, on a human level or on a personal level. People growing up are learned from this machine, this capitalistic machine with commercials, with values, through the school system, through every second of their day that you can get whatever you want if you just work hard enough for it. And then it makes this mindset for humankind that, okay, we also want to be the one percent and they become these ants for those on the top.

So I live day to day or from hope moment to hope moment that we are able to turn this around. Because, I think — and I have seen people that don't have any hope left, and that's, yeah, maybe that's the most heartbreaking when people give up and just lay down and think that the fight is not worth fighting anymore because it's of no use.

*[Chris Zabriskie – That Kid in the Fourth Grade Who Really Liked the Denver Broncos]*

**Beaska Niillas:** We are fighting so hard to reclaim and bring back our languages, our practices, our culture, our traditions. We also run a kindergarten, a Sámi kindergarten, and every time one child

turns from Norwegian and starts to speak Sámi, that's really, really — that's great. Whenever we manage to take those small steps that the colonial states have been using hundreds of years to erase from us, when we manage to take it back, tiny bits by bits, then it's all worth it.

*[Fade out music]*

**Valentin Lopez:** The way you say father is *appa*, the way you say Godparent is *niiwis*, the way you say Grandson is *apapa*, mother is *anaa*, and son is *innis*...

**Della Duncan:** Here's Valentin Lopez again, chairman of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band.

**Valentin Lopez:** Where we are today as we are at Cascade Ranch, which is about 25 miles north of Santa Cruz on Highway 1.

**Della Duncan:** Cascade Ranch is inhabited by members of the Amah Mutsun tribal band as part of a land stewardship project. There are post-it notes peppered all over the interior of the house on objects like doorknobs or the fridge — with words from the Mutsun language written on them. It's a little trick they're using to help themselves — and other Amah Mutsun members staying at the house — to relearn their ancestral language.

**Robert Raymond:** ...how like, proficient would you say you've both gotten at this point — or, Val, your point about...

**Val Lopez:** There's really — there's no fluent speaker. We have one person now who may be a fluent speaker, who's close, you know, but we went almost 90 years without a fluent speaker. And when there's no fluent speaker it's hard to learn, you know? We have the words on paper but how do you do that? So we've

worked with linguists from UC Berkeley, University of Arizona, UC Davis, and other universities as well, and we've put a dictionary together — took us nineteen and a half years to put a dictionary together. And we have a decent grammar book — a very good grammar book actually. So we're working on language and it won't be long before we have fluent speakers brought back to our tribe.

**Della Duncan:** The Amah Mutsun land stewards are part of the Amah Mutsun Land Trust. While defending attacks against their sacred cultural and spiritual sites like Juristac and Mount Umunhum, the Amah Mutsun are also focused on cultural and ecological restoration efforts, taking proactive steps towards building a sense of tribal identity through teaching their history, practicing their culture, and staying connected to the land. Programs range from cultural relearning efforts, such as storytelling and ceremonial practices — to conservation and environmental education — things like archeological and fire research.

**Valentin Lopez:** Well, Amah Mutsun Land Trust was established in 2012 and the goals of our land trust are to preserve and protect our cultural and spiritual and sensitive sites. It is to do research to help us restore the Indigenous knowledge of our ancestors. There's an education component to allow us to teach our tribal members of our traditional knowledge of tending, caring for the plants and the environment. And then the fourth component is to have an actual stewardship core where we have our tribal members out on the lands actually working to help us restore the landscapes back to the conditions that were before first contact.

**Della Duncan:** There are many ways that returning land stewardship to Indigenous communities is helping to restore ecosystems. For example, The Amah Mutsun Land Trust is helping to research and restore traditional Native burning



methods, which could help the state reduce the risk of extreme wildfires. They're also leading native plant restoration efforts.

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**Valentin Lopez:** Now, whenever people talk about climate change, they always talk about loss of biodiversity. And we are actively working here to restore biodiversity. So our land trust is recognized as kind of changing the way that these lands are steward — for stewardship meant, you know, put a fence around it, put a path there and call it stewardship, you know, but our people, they actively managed and take care of their lands, the plants, the animals, and they develop a lot of techniques and strategies, including the prayers and the ceremonies and the understanding that it's important, intimate, loving relationship with all living things that we had. And we need to get back to that if we're going to save Mother Earth.

*[Music: Douglas Spotted Eagle – Arrival]*

**Sheila Watt-Cloutier:** And I think what better people than Inuit themselves, who are already natural conservationists, to be out there on the land and ice being the guardians, the sentinels. How deeply affirming that would be for our hunters whose remarkable, ingenious knowledge is so undervalued. And what better way to reclaim what was taken from us, our pride or dignity, our resourcefulness, our wisdom.

We are, after all, the inventors of the kayak, you know that boat that is replicated worldwide. You know, we can build homes of snow warm enough for babies to sleep in and for mothers to birth in. This is ingenuity. This is incredible architecture and ingenuity and engineering at its best. So we don't want to just be victims of globalization and climate change. We have much to offer in terms of leadership, in terms of our knowledge, our traditional wisdom

and our ability to still live in this world that is so challenging for us, but yet still be able to be out there just protecting what we love.

**Sungmanitu:** I see these many struggles for Indigenous resistance, and I just realize how big of a renaissance Indigenous activism is going through. I think it's undeniable that the world needs to change and people aren't sure how to change it. So they're looking for wisdom that can't be found in our policymakers. This wisdom is something that's learned and it's not learned from books, it's learned from struggle, it's learned from living it.

**Sleydo:** Our laws come from the land. Our laws are inherently self-sustainable. They are sustainable for all life, not just humans. And so if we want to combat this climate crisis, we don't need to reinvent the wheel. We need to get behind the systems that have proven for thousands of years that we can live in a sustainable way in harmony with all living things on this planet.

**Sungmanitu:** When you sit cozily in your beach house in your climate-controlled setting while the rest of the world burns outside — these people don't have wisdom. They're not even aware of what's actually going on. They live in their own world. And I think that's really why people are looking towards Indigenous people now is that we've always lived in a different reality.

The caretakers are going to be the people who are the ones preaching the truth. They're going to be the ones who have been living the truth. And that's the Indigenous people who haven't denied that these atrocities have happened. We've been saying the truth for years, and it's only now people are listening. We've said that our children were being killed in boarding schools — and it's only now that people listened. We have to look for different eyes, different wisdom keepers. You know, and that's why you have to look toward, well, I look towards my elders, but I think people are looking towards Indigenous people. And that gives me a lot of hope.

**Valentin Lopez:** With climate change coming, I ask people to try and understand that the way our people took care of Mother Earth, for all those thousands of years and hundreds of generations, that is what we need to return to to develop a sustainable, healthy environment. If we're going to survive the issues related to climate change, that effort and those actions must be indigenous-led. It's our native plants, it's our traditions of tending, it's understanding the sacredness of the land, the importance of relationships with all living things, and recognizing that the water and the air and the plants, etc. are all living things. We need to take care of them. It is indigenous ways, and Indigenous understanding of Mother Earth that will allow us to deal with climate change.

**Della Duncan:** Thank you to all of our guests for being a part of this documentary.

Thank you also to Sylvia Cloutier, A. Paul Ortega, Joanne Shenandoah, Chris Zabriskie, G. I. Gurdjieff and Thomas De Hartmann as performed by Cecil Lytle, and Douglas Spotted Eagle for the music in this episode, and thank you to Kanyon "Coyote Woman" Sayers-Roods for the Chumash Grandmother's song you heard at the beginning of the show. Upstream theme music was composed by Robert.

Thank you also to Wulf from the Gidimt'en Checkpoint, Florian Carl of the Cloudberry Collective, and Lou Chiaramonte, Jr. from South Bay Indigenous Solidarity for their support.

And thank you to [Cerberus Star](#) for the cover art for this episode.

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