



The Ecopolitics Podcast – Episode 2.8: Environmental Justice and the Anthropocene (TRANSCRIPT)

<https://www.ecopoliticspodcast.ca/episode-2-8-environmental-justice-and-the-anthropocene/>

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Guests: Kyle Whyte (University of Michigan)

Recorded: March 1, 2021

INTRO: In this episode we talk about Indigenous environmental justice with Dr. Kyle Whyte, George Willis Pack Professor of Environment and Sustainability at University of Michigan, and a citizen of the Potawatomi Nation. The conversation begins by outlining the difference between being Indigenous as a political identity and being from a specific Indigenous nation, and continues by expanding our notions of kinship networks and the ways these play a role in struggles for environmental justice. We end the conversation by getting Kyle's thoughts on how students can become better allies to the Indigenous environmental justice movement.

[00:00:00] **Kyle Whyte:** So many of these solutions to climate change focus on consumers, focus on people in terms of their individual identity, yet if we are going to make it through extreme weather events and an increased frequency, if we're going to make it through seasonal changes that are disruptive to our food system, to supply chains and any number of other climate change impacts we need to be more than isolated individuals. We actually need to be larger kinship groups that can support each other that can provide mutual aid.

[00:00:35] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** Hello everyone. Welcome to the Ecopolitics Podcast, season two Global Ecopolitics. This is a podcast for university students tackling some of the big questions in the field of global environmental politics. I'm Ryan Katz-Rosene from the University of Ottawa. My co-host for the show is Dr. Peter Andrée from Carleton University and our guest for today is Dr. Kyle Whyte. Our theme is environmental justice in the anthropocene. Kyle Whyte is George Willis Pack Professor of Environment and Sustainability at the University of Michigan, where he teaches in the Environmental Justice specialization. He is also an enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation.

[00:01:18] Kyle's research addresses moral and political issues concerning climate policy and indigenous peoples, the ethics of cooperative relationships between indigenous peoples and science organizations, and problems of indigenous justice in public and academic discussions of food sovereignty, environmental justice, and the anthropocene.

[00:01:38] And we hope to touch upon many of these themes in our conversation with Kyle today. Kyle is also the first American guest on our Global Ecopolitics Podcast for this season two. So we want to get his take on environmental policy under the Biden administration at this critical historical juncture in time.

[00:01:56] So without further ado, welcome to the Ecopolitics Podcast, Kyle.

[00:02:01] **Kyle Whyte**: Great and good to be in conversation with you, Ryan and Peter.

[00:02:05] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene**: Fantastic. So, given how much we want to cover, we're just going to turn it right over to Peter to get into the first question. So, Peter, what do you have for Kyle?

[00:02:13] **Peter Andrée**: Okay. Thanks, Ryan.

[00:02:15] Kyle, I'd like to begin by asking you a bit about your background. When we've interviewed indigenous scholars in the past, they often begin by talking about who they are, their nation, their tribe, sometimes a specific clan, as well as where they're from, their nation's home on this planet. And my sense is that this identity and the responsibilities that go with it are really important to how indigenous peoples understand themselves and their place in this world.

[00:02:41] I have to say, I'm also left with a feeling that this is something that those of us who don't identify as indigenous should probably be more self-consciously reflective about. We all have a history and identity and a place in this world, but we're not all equally good at recognizing the gifts as well as the burdens of our histories and the responsibilities that go with it.

[00:03:00] So, before our interview, I looked up the history of your people in the Potawatomi Nation. Less than 200 years ago, in 1838, your ancestors were forced at gunpoint to leave your traditional lands near the Great Lakes and march down to what was then called 'Indian Territory', now Oklahoma, to start anew. What does it mean to be of a place-based people in the context of such dispossession and how does this relate to the work you find yourself doing these days?

[00:03:28] **Kyle Whyte**: Thanks for your question to start us off. So a couple things just about my background and my understanding of indigeneity. So the first thing is, I think there's definitely a difference between, what someone means if they say, 'I'm Potawatomi' and when they say 'I'm indigenous', I think they refer to different aspects of someone's political, social, cultural identities.

[00:03:54] So, first of all, for me as a Potawatomi person, we're part of the Anishinaabe culture. And so while the particular, band or group or community that I'm from, we relocated from the Great Lakes region. Our homeland, as you said, along the trail of death and stopped at a number of places, to put it lightly.

[00:04:15] But now our home is in Oklahoma. We identify strongly both our Anishinaabe heritage as well as with Potawatomi people that still live in our homelands, there's Potawatomi people in both the US and Canada that, whether in the First Nations context or tribal context and we continue our connection and relationship with them.

[00:04:37] And many folks like myself, we actually work in our homelands and work with Potawatomi and Anishinaabe people today. So we're a big group, we're a big nation that

spans a lot different states and provinces and federal jurisdictions. I think that's an important part of what it means as both a local sense of your particular Potawatomi tribe that you're a part of, but also the broader context of our larger nation and our larger group identity. But in terms of like, indigenous - so whereas something like Potawatomi means that one inherits the history, the kinship, the relationship tied to that particular community, the culture, the language, the ancestors - being indigenous, I think more refers to a political identity that's particularly relevant today because for so many of our people, we've been just overrun by these colonial states, the various corporations that fall under the governance of those states and we're trying to exercise our political self-determination in a context that's pretty hostile to that.

[00:05:43] So to be indigenous is I think to participate and have a stake in that identity of struggling to maintain, to advance political self-determination in this context where it seems to be that so many people don't want to acknowledge that, we never gave up our right to self-govern and we never gave up our right to practice our own cultures and to have our own societies and to engage in our own diplomacy.

[00:06:07] So I think it's important sometimes and I don't think there are absolute answers to this, but it's important sometimes to distinguish between what it means to be claimed by a particular indigenous people like Potawatomi and what it means to be a certain indigenous political identity.

[00:06:24] **Peter Andrée:** That's really helpful, Kyle and just making that distinction between your nationhood and the political identity, as you understand it, of being indigenous today. We've talked a little bit about how the Potawatomi Nation was forced to move and I heard you make the case in other places where you've talked about this, about how this maybe gives you some insights into what we're all facing in the anthropocene, where a global environmental change is going to be coming fast and furious in the coming decades and this is an area that you work in. And I just wonder if you can talk a little bit about your people's experience moving environments and how that relates to how you see the challenges that we're all going to be facing in the coming decades.

[00:07:09] **Kyle Whyte:** Yeah, absolutely. So indigenous identities that are tied to migration and are tied to regional and continental cultures and groups and trading relations are not often recognized. So for example, colonization wasn't just a process of dispossessing people of one particular place, a part of colonization that isn't often recognized is that it also works to destroy regional and continental scale trade relations or even in some cases, I think for some tribes, sort of overseas trade relationships as well.

[00:07:50] And so colonization didn't only disrupt certain intimacies tied to particular places, but also disrupted people's regional identities and intercultural exchange and diplomacy and the creation of kinship relations across different languages and different cultures. And so I think it's important to recognize that in terms of the indigenous environmental justice movement, we're not just trying to protect places in a very local sense, but we're also trying to restore diplomatic relationships that are favorable and to restore our identities as people that might speak different indigenous languages and have different types of social and

political relationships across different tribes and different First Nations and different communities.

[00:08:43] And, I think for tribes that have gone through the hell of forced relocation, there's a lot of lessons that can be learned that I think other people may have to confront due to climate change. And, it's really important to remember that when we were forced to relocate, we were also forced to adopt a certain model of agriculture and private property. And one of the things that happened, I think in our history is that we actually learned that the type of private property that was forced upon us was one that eventually set us up to be vulnerable to economic exploitation, not in the least of which occurred at least for some families and individuals at the hands of the fossil fuel industry in Oklahoma, but to many other families, right. The sort of model of agriculture and so on was a threat to our kinship systems and to forms of relating to other people that demonstrated that there was value beyond just the nuclear family and that if you really want to be in a society where there's safety and you know, a preparation for future risks and where wellbeing, it can't just be a society where everything's located in the nuclear family and that the most important relationship is the marriage relationship just between two people. And so one of the things that I think really comes out of this experience is that, we learned that even if we had access to the private property system that was not necessarily something that would work in our favor and it was something that we could be exploited by, and that we needed to find strategies for how we could use the private property system to protect our communities and our collective relationships to land.

[00:10:40] And so I think this is a lesson in terms of some of the solutions we see out there regarding climate change that are just a recapitulation of the same types of capitalist relationships and that turn on a certain understanding private property that's really no different from the economic system that got us into this situation that we're in now.

[00:11:02] And so I think that creates a really good type of skepticism that just because somebody can create a solution to something that seems to fit within the status quo, that we should be very skeptical about buying into that. And another aspect of it tied more to kinship is that our educational system, our political system, our economic system, is not conducive to creating conditions for people to have expansive kinship networks. So these are some of the way that I think about the lessons of relocation and this is why for the Citizen Potawatomi Nation today, there's so much emphasis that's still paid to the idea that even though we have private property, we have a tribal sovereignty in the sense that it's recognized by the United States, that we still need to build and strengthen our kinship and our collective identities, and that we need to find ways that the tools of the United States can actually be used in ways where we can't be exploited, that we can support the growth of our culture and our way of life and our safety and our health as a community.

[00:12:11] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** Kyle, that's quite an amazing answer and a comprehensive answer to a very big question. So we do that a lot on this podcast, throw out very big questions, but all our guests do such a great job of bringing it back, so thank you for that. I was really struck by the idea of a kinship network. What do you really mean by a kinship network?

[00:12:32] **Kyle Whyte:** Yeah, absolutely. For me a kinship relationship refers to relationships that reflect really strong qualities of consent and reciprocity and accountability and other things, transparency, respect for privacy, trust. And so a kinship relationship, and there's different spheres of them, from that more intimate family relationships to your professional relationships, your political relationships. But there are ones in which you can really count on the other person - where you actually know that person really takes to heart your consent and that they wouldn't do anything without your consent and if they ever had to act quickly on your behalf, there's so much trust there that they would behave correctly.

[00:13:20] So kinship qualities are ones that really mark relationships that represent not only the very best of our friendships or our cousin relationships or our sibling relationships or professional relationships, but they're also the ones that we really need when we're trying to adapt to different risks that we face. If you have, good kinship relationships then, you're going to get people that if they find out that there's a health issue on the horizon, they'll tell all their kin, or if you have an emergency, who do you call you? You call your kin when you need help immediately.

[00:13:56] Now, the problem is that in our current formation in the United States, we're not really taught the importance of kinship. We're kind taught that our most important relationship is our immediate sort of, marital relationship. When you think about a kinship network where actually you would have extremely valuable relationships with aunts or uncles or cousins, or even in the workplace you'd cultivate relationships that were really based on consent and trust and so on. Then you'd have a stronger network of people which would mean that you wouldn't just have to rely on one or two of your very closest, most intimate friendships or marital or spousal type of relationships.

[00:14:39] And so for there to be a broad kinship, you need things like ceremonies, you need things like annual activities for people to renew and even establish or strengthen those kinship relationships. And we just don't have a lot of those, activities. I feel like so much of what we're pushed to do in the kind of a mainstream US context is look to entertainment, things that we watch or consume and appreciate for whatever their intellectual or artistic merits are. But those aren't really kinship building activities. The kinship activities instead are the ceremonies, the collective practices, the events where people expect to come together and renew the parts of their bonds that matter the most to them.

[00:15:25] And again, when you look at emergency situations, it's the people that you have those types of relationships with that can really come through for you and you can come through for them.

[00:15:36] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** So Kyle, I'm wondering if you can ground this for us back to global politics, a little bit. A lot of your work seems to be about bridging indigenous ways of knowing and Western science and between indigenous governments and settler governments, like those of the United States and Canada.

[00:15:52] And you also factor in work at the transnational level, for instance at the United Nations. So is this a window to ground what you're talking about in terms of kinship relationships?

[00:16:04] **Kyle Whyte:** Yeah, absolutely. So I think there is a misunderstanding globally about what indigenous global governance really means and I think the misunderstanding is this mental model that when indigenous people engage at the level of the United Nations or at the level of the nation-state, that what they're doing is bringing local concerns for relief to an authority that could offer certain avenues for providing that relief or provide publicity or increase awareness or something like that.

[00:16:37] And while it's certainly true that that is something that the United Nations may expect that it is doing when a different indigenous people go to, say a permanent forum or expert mechanism. But on the other hand it's important to recall that if we think about the history of our ancestors, we were already people that had local and global identities. We were already involved in advanced trade networks and indigenous people were multilingual and had multicultural families. And the more we learn about the history, the more it opens up some things that are not taught that widely in school about just how broad our identities were and not just through trade, but through other intercultural types of relationships.

[00:17:25] And this is why some historians talk about, Michael Witkin being one of them, talk about the fact that indigenous societies when faced with the onslaught of colonialism were able to expand and contract and to switch regions and locations and to be quite flexible in terms of dealing with the threats that they were facing.

[00:17:47] And that's precisely because we had those local and extended kinship networks and they were ones that were so strong that it allowed us to be able to respond to the horrors of colonialism in ways that protected our communities and made it possible for at least some of our communities to be able to continue to this day and we will continue into the future.

[00:18:14] And so in terms of global governance I think the indigenous environmental justice movement, and many other environmental justice movements, is that we're actually trying to restore and recover those regional, continental and global relationships. We're not just trying to seek relief at higher and higher global levels, but we're trying to create a system where we can also model what does it mean to exercise kinship when we're talking about groups that are thousands and thousands of miles from each other. And so, I've been part of efforts to build diplomacy, for example, between Anishinaabe and Maori people, and to find ways to create those global connections so that we can empower our movements, but not just in a sense of like, interest-based politics, like we have the same interests.

[00:19:03] But actually in terms of genuine intercultural understanding and genuine reliance on each other and the development of trust and consent and reciprocity. So in this way, I think that, indigenous global governance, really has to do with restoring intercultural, interpolitical relationships across indigenous people that can model a very different way of thinking about how diverse groups can relate to each other beyond the most basic elements of their political or economic interests.

[00:19:37] **Peter André:** Kyle, this is really interesting and a whole different way about thinking about global environmental justice than I have to admit that I've thought about to

date. And I wonder if you could just, you know, for some of the students for whom this is a new way of thinking about it as well, how do you define environmental justice?

[00:19:56] **Kyle Whyte:** Yeah. Thanks for your question. Know, I've thought long and hard about the best ways to think about the meaning of environmental justice in thinking through, not only indigenous perspectives, but the situations that indigenous people face and the way that I've approached it is that, for any individual, our sustenance, and by sustenance I don't just mean our basic nutrition and health care, our cultural meaning and our wellness, whether that's a psychological type of wellness or a physical type of wellness. But regardless whether we have or enjoy any of those things, has to do with the different collectives that we're plugged into. Whether collective is our tribe or nation, or depending on the culture it could be one's gender or could be a particular cultural identity, but all of us are mixtures of different identities that are collective and that what we rely on for some of those good things that I was talking about earlier really have to do with what these other people that we're connected with through these collectives do and how they're behaving and how they're related to us systematically.

[00:21:14] And for a lot of indigenous people, these collectives are not only human collectives, but are actual ecosystems in a certain sense, so different human and more than human agencies and spiritualities and personalities. And, obviously it depends on the culture, right? But there's this idea that what it means to benefit from being a member of a collective has to do with the landed relationships. If you live in an environment where your culture is reflected in how the ecosystem is and when you practice your culture, you can learn more about the ecosystem and how to protect it, and that the ecosystem provides reciprocal benefits, right? I mean my cultural activities strengthen the cleanliness water then the cleanliness of water is going to affect me directly, but might also affect plants or animals or others that also benefit me. And so anyways, you know, Anishinaabe scholars, but many other indigenous scholars, focus so much on reciprocity and responsibility across humans and non-humans. But I think part of the point that they're making is that these collectives are environmental and there are ecological systems that you really can't disentangle from our social relationships. And so environmental injustice is basically what happens when some other collective or some other society or individuals within another collective or society, when they really want something from whatever collective relationships that you have.

[00:22:55] And instead of engaging in diplomacy, instead of establishing kinship, what they do is just try to steal it from you. And so they essentially steal, they take those aspects of the landed relationships that you have that you need for those benefits from those collective identities.

[00:23:14] And they use those as resources and they use those resources in ways that make sense to them in terms of their goals and aspirations. And they don't care about what you need or they don't care about doing so in a way that is fair or that is mutually beneficial or that's reciprocal, right?

[00:23:34] They're not establishing kinship. And so in this way, environmental injustice is often a fairly parasitic type of relationship and its ultimate goal, at least for the perpetrators of injustice, is to weaken the society that is experiencing the injustice to the point where it can no longer adapt to the threats of the society that's committing the injustice.

[00:24:04] And so environmental injustice is not only a delivery of harms and violence, but it's also an attempt to weaken the capacity of the afflicted party to respond. And so in this way to say that one can create environmental justice by financial compensation or by just stopping the amount of pollution that another group is experiencing or telling people in that group just not to be exposed anymore to engage in activities of refraining from being exposed, and a number of other of false types of solutions don't actually address the underlying aspect that the perpetrators of injustice are undermining the political capacities, the economic capacities, the social capacities. So for example, if I'm told not to exercise my traditional diet, because it's polluted, you know, this is the saying that comes out of the experience of many indigenous people, including Anishinaabe people, the Haudenosaunee people and others.

[00:25:12] If you're told you can't eat your traditional diet because it's contaminated from an industrial facility, then what diet do you have to fall back on? And is it a diet that's healthier than the polluted traditional diet? And if you go to that diet eating industrial processed foods, you don't get in a traditional way, do you get the family benefits? Do you get the societal benefits of that? Do you get the environmental stewardship that went into that? No, you don't. And so in that way, it's not really a solution and can set people up for other types of risks and other types of trauma.

[00:25:49] And no different from other types of issues. I mean, look at the problems with narrow definitions of the environment. So the indigenous climate justice movement has pointed out, and you see this with one of the key issues raised with the Keystone XL, is that it wasn't just about the fact that, the tar sands is a source of dirty energy.

[00:26:07] That's one aspect of it, but it's tied to human trafficking and the sexual violence and to a lack of a consultation that reflects indigenous consent - it's tied to all these other issues. It's not an issue where you can just narrow in on a few environmental impacts so that to actually address the true injustice you have to address, patriarchy and you have to address exploitation, you have to address the lack of respect for indigenous consent. It's not just about stopping the dirty energy industries. And a society where people live in fear that they're going to be abused, when they live in fear that they're going to be severely economically exploited, if they live in fear that they are not going to be consulted, that's not a society that is in a position where it can adapt to and respond to risks that are coming its way and it can fend off colonial violence.

[00:27:05] **Peter Andrée:** So Kyle the way you're talking about collectives, reciprocity, kinship, and how central that is to indigenous culture and to indigenous ways of understanding the world, and then tying that into environmental injustices and how these are collective attacks that undermine the resilience of collectives and communities and cultures, or seek to undermine. But I think you've also pointed out, certainly in terms of

indigenous cultures, there's an enormous amount of resilience there. And we've seen really in the last number of years a real resurgence, and one of the places that we see indigenous activism so strongly is around the environment.

[00:27:45] And so I want to ask you a question. There was an article that I shared with you and that my students recently read on indigenous blockades. It was written by non-indigenous author. It was published in the International Indigenous Policy Journal. It's called "I Could Turn You to Stone: Indigenous Blockades in an Age of Climate Change".

[00:28:03] And in this piece, Patrick Canning of Vancouver Island University, basically argues that non-indigenous people in governments need to start taking seriously, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People making rapid headway to protect both indigenous rights and the environment in the face of the climate crisis and other environmental crises, or else they risk a never ending series of blockades as indigenous people stand up against the destruction of the human and the more than human worlds by capitalism and all the forces that are up against the world right now. My take on this, I appreciate the argument being made by a settler to settler governments, but I also wonder if this is putting a lot of onus on people often most marginalized within Western culture to now stand up against it.

[00:28:51] So I wonder what your thought is on the role that indigenous people are increasingly being asked to play, it seems by environmentalists, in these kinds of conflicts, often putting their lives and their own livelihoods on the line?

[00:29:06] **Kyle Whyte:** Yeah. The issue you raised in the question is one that I definitely have to deal with in a lot of different ways.

[00:29:14] I feel that, and I don't necessarily know in its most recent form, know when it started, but there's been this emphasis that like the main kind of vehicle of indigenous resistance is the blockade. And, there's a couple of reasons I think, to be skeptical about, I don't know, I guess a certain way of talking about that.

[00:29:37] So for example, if somebody visits an indigenous blockade, it's probably the case that the indigenous people that are from the effected communities probably don't refer to what they're doing as a blockade. And if you ask them what they're doing, obviously in the case of Standing Rock against the Dakota Access Pipeline, famously referring to themselves as Water Protectors and that also had a gender dimension to it as well in terms of the activists being women, two-spirit people and other aspects of gender, as well as it's connected to a human relationships with water and protectorship of water.

[00:30:18] And I get that all of those speak to origin stories, to numerous cultural traditions and ceremonies and memories that people have. And then if you ask individuals that are at a blockade, 'Is all that you do is blockade?'. They would say 'no'. I mean, and they'd unpack whole histories of work that they do at the cultural level, at the policy level, at the legal level, at the educational level at the level of the arts, and so a blockade is one piece among, entire life histories where individuals have pursued change and transformation in a colonially hostile environment. And so in this way, know, I think it's important that even

though blockades seem to invoke a certain type of awareness of indigenous power and resistance, that there are so many other - legal reforms, social reforms, educational reforms - that indigenous people have advocated for.

[00:31:14] And that actually all of those reforms need to keep going if something like consent is even going to be possible because, consent is, and especially if we are thinking about it in a kinship model, it's one thing to be forced to respect somebody's consent, it's another thing to actually be in a society where consent is valued.

[00:31:36] And so we know that there are certain struggles with getting nationstates to truly honor at the regulatory level, the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People. But we're even further away from actually having societies where bureaucrats, policy makers, scientists, and others, where they actually value consent so much that they don't just see it as a requirement that messes up the timeline of the different permitting projects or research projects or policy projects that they're part of. And so I think that really people need to look at the blockades as one aspect of indigenous organizing that is related already to a number of other aspects of organizing that have gone on for some time.

[00:32:25] And I think people also just need to be more aware of the history of blockades. I mean, it seems to me that people have forgot about, just in the say in the Canadian context, all the different grassroots indigenous activism, whether it's the Nuu-Chah-Nulth people and the logging issues they face or, you know, holding the Sonia people and at Oka, right.

[00:32:48] I mean, these weren't even that long ago, but it already seems like they're gone from the collective memory of certain settler populations.

[00:32:57] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** So I'm going to turn the discussion a little bit towards a slightly different direction because we did say at the outset, Kyle, that we were going to ask you about the political shifts in the US.

[00:33:09] And so for listeners wondering where we're recording this at the beginning of March in 2021, and one of the biggest changes in terms of global environmental politics relates to the election of Joe Biden not too many months ago. And, as an example we've talked about this with some of our guests, on his first day in office as the new President of the United States, Biden formally canned the Keystone XL pipeline, he rejoined the Paris Agreement and in the ensuing days instituted a whole range of pro climate policies and programs. So clearly, compared to Trump, things are changing a lot at the political level in terms of its approach to climate change governance.

[00:33:48] But of course, democratic presidents are not always environmentally progressive. And I guess I'm curious to hear your thoughts as someone who, touching on what you were just talking about in the context of environmental justice movements and indigenous environmental movements in the United States, where do you see this going?

[00:34:06] What are your hopes and also your concerns for the Biden Presidency?

[00:34:11] **Kyle Whyte:** It can be challenging to talk about the Democrats as an organizer myself, it does get fairly frustrating that many of us actually participate quite heavily in

efforts to increase votes for the Democrats given some of their environmental policies and other types of agenda items that we feel are certainly better than some of the alternatives. But then once you get a successful democratic election, the actual communities that were there put in the effort to win the vote, they just don't benefit in a way that's fair given how important their votes have been.

[00:34:50] And so the Democrats, I mean, obviously a lot of native people were really pleased about the effort by the Biden administration to stop the Keystone XL. But we need to be watching about whether the Democrats are actually going to make reforms at the level of what tribes were asking for with respect to that issue.

[00:35:14] If you look for example, at the lawsuit that included several tribes, including the Rosebud Sioux tribe that the Native American Rights Fund stewarded. I mean, if you look at the issues that were brought up in that they go way beyond just dirty energy. I mean, they involved issues of the labor and sexual exploitation of the man camps and the labor camps that kind of invade native and other communities with the construction of these pipelines.

[00:35:38] They were talking about the lack of consultation, the lack of fairness in environmental reviews, and that continued bureaucratic inability to I understand that tribal values are not associated with just the place where the shovel hits the dirt, but refer to the integrity of entire landscapes and, the Democrats they need to make change at that level.

[00:36:01] I mean, it's not just about stopping the pipeline. There needs to be serious, bureaucratic regulatory change that occurs. And I don't know that I can say that the Democrats are necessarily moving in that direction. Currently, absolutely its their legislation, their policy that's beginning to boil up where I've at least been part of conversations and dialogue and listening sessions and others where certain democratic leaders have said that they want that and are seeking input on how to do it. But we don't know yet whether that's going to happen. And I think one of the first tests of that is going to be if infrastructure legislation moves forward, which I think in the next couple of months might become something that is in the public eye.

[00:36:46] And will that infrastructure build back better legislation to actually create opportunities for tribes to be consulted, to exercise self-determination and emerge as leaders in the energy transition, to emerge as leaders in the changes to infrastructure that will be funded through that legislation.

[00:37:07] And that's very different from just being beneficiaries of something through a little bit of an increase in dollars, but actually will it create a condition where tribal self-determination is more central to how the United States moves forward? And I think if you can do that then that means that there would be strong tribal consultation; tribes would be able to exercise their own legal orders, tribes would be able to determine at a much greater level of residency what their values are in the land. And anyways, I could go on, but I do not think that we yet know whether the Democrats are getting engaged in that level of deep change, or whether they're continuing to operate at the surface. And they may continue to get native votes in the future, given how problematic some of the alternatives are but I am

holding out that the Biden Harris administration may yet do something different than previous democratic administrations.

[00:38:10] **Peter Andrée:** Thanks Kyle. Yes, we're all holding a crystal ball here, but it's really great to get your sense of what indigenous people and what self-determination requires of the US government moving forward.

[00:38:22] And hopefully the Biden Harris administration will at least go as far down that path as it can go. And it'll be interesting to follow in the coming months and years. I want to ask you one last question. The question of justice and environmental justice is increasingly on the radar in the kind of environmental politics courses that Ryan and I teach.

[00:38:44] And many of our students both undergraduate and graduate are really interested in questions of how environmental injustices affect indigenous people and now indigenous peoples are responding to that. When non-indigenous students approach these questions, what's the guidance that you might give about how to do it respectfully and maybe what not to do either in primary research worth working with indigenous students, or even in general, writing on indigenous cases in their papers and so on, what should students be paying attention to you?

[00:39:16] **Kyle Whyte:** Yeah. As a professor, it's certainly part of the work that I do with students. And one thing I think is important is that a lot of times, students enter into understanding of indigenous environmental justice issues solely as environmental issues.

[00:39:33] And if there were more courses that provided greater context for students and actually understand that if you're going to be an advocate of indigenous environmental justice, you also need to be an advocate of indigenous economic justice, indigenous gender justice, indigenous justice for future generations for children, healthcare justice, and that these distinctions, like health versus the environment, or the economy versus the environment, are not indigenous ones. And that students need to think carefully about what story are they following and the story that I would encourage people to follow is the larger story that indigenous people for generations have been working to recover and advance our governance at a lot of different levels - the cultural level, the social level economic level, the political level - and that students need to realize that they need to be part of that long haul and need to think about what they're doing at different levels and not simply focus on the particular media that they initially got their information from environment or economics.

[00:40:36] Another thing that's important is that oftentimes, I think students think that the main way that they can, if they're non-indigenous, they think that the main way that they can support indigenous struggles is by somehow being a part of those exact struggles.

[00:40:51] And then they wonder about ethical questions of their involvement or whether they have a savior complex. And I would actually encourage folks to - and I guess this is a kinship way of thinking about it - is that in a lot of indigenous struggles, you have indigenous community members that are trying to protect their families, their societies, their cultures, and so on, they're taking great risks to do so. But if you're not indigenous, who's your family and what's the society that you come from? And if they're not people that are needing

protection, maybe they are people that are part of the problem and what can you actually do with an understanding of what indigenous people are saying and what they're communicating, but what can you do to change your own politics back home?

[00:41:36] For students it's really important to think, is your interest in participating in indigenous struggle really an evasion of what might be responsibilities that one is better placed to do because it could be working with your own people? And I'll also say that for native folks we've had to learn a foreign system to survive and to sustain ourselves. Nobody taught us how the Indian Act worked or how the US treaty system would work. Nobody taught us that, we had to learn from the bottom up and, that's why a lot of native folks but also a lot of people of color in the US and Canada, get frustrated when students ask about 'how can I be a good ally?' Because one, we're still trying to work out, obviously what success looks like and what the solutions are. And there certainly aren't answers, like: 'This is what you do and if we all did it, we'd be fine'. It's also the case that in our learning process we're starting from the bottom where we have to figure out creatively how to survive and sustain our communities. And I think for someone to say that they are an ally, like genuinely, they have to be part of that struggle and they have to take up the challenges, they have to take up the burdens and they need to do it in a way that shows that they have that grit.

[00:42:51] And so this is why I think sometimes students are too quick to say that they're an ally. I think, like I said earlier, first people need to interrogate who they really are and who their community ties are and what's preventing them from operating on those particular relationships.

[00:43:08] And if people don't feel that they are kinship relationships, then what would it take to make them into kinship relations, where there is consent and reciprocity? And so I think those types of things would go a long way towards supporting indigenous causes and to supporting indigenous wellbeing.

[00:43:25] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** Kyle, I think that last point about thinking about who we really are and where we come from is a good point to end and it brings us back to the beginning where you shared a little bit about your own background and where you're coming from and how that shapes your respective. So you've been extremely generous with us and sharing your expertise.

[00:43:46] You started off by talking about the difference between being indigenous as sort of a political identity and being a member of a given indigenous nation. And I thought that was really interesting and I appreciated your discussion about colonization as this fundamentally disruptive force, not just in terms of territorial disruption, but also disrupting cultural and political economic forms of inter-regional relationships.

[00:44:13] And you also talked at length about kinship networks, which seems really essential and really was formative for me, learning about that and hearing about that from you. And the model that I think kinship networks might offer in terms of confronting looming global environmental challenges.

[00:44:30] So I really appreciated this discussion. Of course that wasn't all, we talked about environmental justice and also how students and settler allies might engage with some of these issues in their own research, and of course your hopes and concerns for a new democratic president.

[00:44:45] So there was a lot there, but Kyle, thank you so much for joining us in this conversation.

[00:44:51] **Kyle Whyte:** Great and thanks for hosting me, Ryan and Peter. I appreciate the chance to connect with you all and the students and others in your community.

[00:45:00] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** It was our pleasure. So I'm going to close out here with a reminder that the podcast is made available under a Creative Commons License, 2.0. So we just ask that you provide appropriate attribution if you use the podcast, but please do use it. Follow us on Twitter @EcoPoliticsP, with a capital 'P' and get in touch. Our website is [ecopoliticspodcast.ca](https://www.ecopoliticspodcast.ca).

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