

THE PSYCHIC LANDSCAPE OF CONTEMPORARY COLONIALISM

Adapted from a lecture delivered at the University
of Ottawa on November 9, 2011.

My goal in this speech was to share the deeper understanding of Indigenous Resurgence that I gained from my commitment to putting my ideas into practice in real community settings. In 2004 I started working for the Mohawks of Akwesasne in their struggle to hold major corporations accountable for their contamination of the natural environment. I was responsible for documenting the adverse impacts of contamination on Mohawk culture and working with the community to develop an approach to cultural restoration in the wake of environmental clean ups. Through this experience, I came to realize that the cure for the colonial disease is the restoration of land-based cultural practices and reconnecting the generations of our people to their homeland in cultural, spiritual, and physical ways. This is the learning I was excited about at the time, and it was the message I wanted to share with the young people who came to my talk that night looking to me for an antidote to Aboriginalism.



I'm very glad to be here; it's a real homecoming for me. A lot of what I've learned about the things that I write and speak about came from the experience that I had here in Ottawa, and with some of the people in this room. I want to acknowledge my teachers and friends and students in the room here and give a nod to the multigenerational aspect of learning and teaching.

I'm going to talk to you about the psychic landscape of contemporary colonialism. What I mean by the psychic aspect is how we think about and understand what the struggle is that our people are facing. How do we think about and process how it affects us as people, and how do we channel that into a program of political and cultural action? Over the years this has come to be the main thing that I grapple with in trying to put forward something new for the people to consider and perhaps use to survive and build up our strength again. And today, since many of us here know each other already, how can I say something that would be innovative, that wouldn't bore you, and yet still get to the heart of the matter, the key issues that we're facing right now?

I refer to it in psychic terms because I think that a big part of this is our understanding of who we are, my understanding of who *I* am. I think this reflects the transformations Indigenous communities have undergone in their political culture and to a certain extent the culture in general. There's people in the room that have been involved much longer than me, but ever since I got involved in politics in the mid-1980s, there have been two or three major transformations on that big question: What is the problem, and what are we doing about it? What is colonization, and what is decolonization?

Today I'm going to trace my own intellectual and to a certain extent personal development through the process of decolonizing and discuss how my books are artifacts of that process. The lesson that I was taught as a young person coming into this environment, working with some really dedicated people who were involved for years in struggles in our communities and who were doing really good work in the academy, was that scholarship reflects a lived experience: it's working through a living reality and contributing whatever insights and knowledge come out of that. I've always taken that to heart, and it's come to define my approach. I don't write about anything that I haven't experienced or lived myself. I'm not saying that in any way to project arrogance, I'm saying that because I honestly believe that is the true pathway to wisdom. You need self-knowledge in order to recognize your position in relation to colonialism and to find ways that you can transcend it and remake yourself in order to be something that reflects the best values of the Ancestors that are our reference as to what is a good way of life.

The Crown and the Nation

The first book that I wrote, *Heeding the Voices of Our Ancestors* (1995), was based on my PhD dissertation, which was the most intense period of learning for me intellectually: I was trying to come to grips with the question of what was Kahnawà:ke living? What was my community living? Why were we the way we were, subject to the colonial power of people who had no right to be imposing power on us? Why did we lose all our land? Why were our people behaving

toward each other in the way that they were? And so that was my instinct, getting into this academic project. The understanding that I had at that point reflected my own level of knowledge: self-knowledge, and knowledge of the larger context of colonization and Indigenous realities in Canada. Of course over time I have developed deeper levels of knowledge both about myself and about those larger realities.

So I'll start there: I'll take people back to what was colonization, what was the Indian problem from the Canadian perspective, and what was our problem from our perspective. It was basically a problem of governance. People thought that the problem we were facing was that we were governed by others. This is not something we've entirely transcended. It's certainly true that others govern us, that the imposition of laws, the imposition of land regimes, the imposition of the band council system and all this sort of stuff is wrong. But at that time, the work that I did here in Ottawa was related to the drive to free ourselves from the most direct forms of colonization and control in our communities and over ourselves. It's come to be known as self-government: defining ourselves in different ways and developing the capacity to govern ourselves. I always remember Andrew Delisle Sr., who's still around Kahnawà:ke, still vital and contributing, who has been on the scene since the 1960s.¹ I remember him telling me in the 1980s when I first approached him for knowledge about what the problem was and what we should be doing about it. By this time, we had a band council, we had elections, we basically ran our own community the way that we wanted to run it. He said,

Think about where we are now. It wasn't that long ago, probably only ten to fifteen years ago, when three of us couldn't get together without a priest or an Indian agent or an RCMP officer in the room. If three of us tried to gather, the RCMP would come and break it up. That's why bingo became so popular. We did it in the basement of the church, under the sponsorship of the church, and we all got together and we all did our politics, we strategized as how to fight the government – all under the cover of the priest!

He made me think about how far we had come in such a short period of time. The wider context of that era was the repatriation of the Constitution in 1982, which led to the idea of a Canada that was opening up to the possibility of a relationship with First Nations that was not colonial. If you think about those two things – the recent freedom of Indigenous Peoples to actually govern themselves and the legal possibilities that the Constitution presented for redefining the relationship on something other than hard colonialism – in theory at least, these things structured that phase of our political movement.

And so colonization became defined institutionally. Elders, teachers, political activists told me, what we need to do is fight hard to define and use section 35 of the Constitution – which hadn't been defined in courts or in policy at that point – as the bridge between the Canadian society, the Crown, and our Nations.² The Crown and the Nation. Whether you were Cree, Anishinaabe, West Coast, Dene, whatever, those were the terms that were used when talking about the issue – the Crown and the Nation. Most importantly, the Nation. When the Dene were fighting the Mackenzie Pipeline in the 1970s it was the Dene Nation.³ The

National Indian Brotherhood became the AFN, the Assembly of First Nations. That sense of Nationhood, of Nation, of autonomy and an existence that had been suppressed by colonization by Canadian society became very strong. There was an effort to break free and build a new relationship based on the principles that are reflected in our treaty visions. In our Haudenosaunee conception, it was the Two-Row Wampum, and I understand other Indigenous Peoples have similar concepts.⁴

That was the project at the time: the thrust of Indigenous action reflected that dynamic of the need to govern ourselves. It was institutionally defined. Over time there were varying degrees of success, there were communities that developed the ability to govern themselves, that convinced the Canadian government to hand over some power. First Nations actually began to govern ourselves: to make decisions, to move toward the conception of Nationhood that had been the one that was guiding our Ancestors and our people throughout the long period of colonization. Colonization and decolonization was thought of as simply a matter of structural reform: regaining control over institutions, over law and policymaking mechanisms, the levers of government, the managerial aspects, the capacities of delivering services, even the legal and constitutional aspects of Nationhood. That was self-government.

When I wrote my first book, that was my level of understanding. I would say now that it was kind of a limited understanding because when you look at colonization/ decolonization strictly in institutional or structural terms, you're forgetting significant parts of the experience of what colonization is and what it did to our people. I think people

became concerned with that aspect because they began to see that self-government was not delivering decolonization. When you think about things in terms of the life of your people, the lived experience, the health status, the ability for people to relate in a happy, healthy way, to be productive, to live their own laws on their land, to live out their culture, to have a culture that's resurgent in their community and informing the world view for the next generation, self-government was doing nothing for that, it was doing nothing. And people who are thinking about that began to think that decolonization can't just be about structural reform. It has to have other aspects to it.

While this may seem obvious in retrospect, it's only through reflecting on those experiences that it became clear. People who are involved in political projects can get totally involved in them because in order to be successful, you have to be all in. So when people get obsessed with taking back power, they begin to structure their personality, their understandings of the world and the way they relate to others, all for the purpose of getting that power. People that knew me in the early 1990s here in Ottawa, you probably knew a different kind of person because, as any person who is hoping to be successful, I was the same way. I was totally oriented toward doing what was necessary: structuring my personality, my way of being, my skill set, my capacities to engage with that opponent in order to gain the victory. I struggled, and I think that our communities came to reflect that. The types of leaders that we have in our community coming out of that era, the type of politics that we have among ourselves, the cultures that emerged, reflect the fact that when you engage in that kind of struggle, you become

like your enemy. The people that were dissatisfied with that began to think about it as a negative thing. If our goal was to have a better life as Onkwehónweh and pass it on to the next generation, we were not succeeding.

Selling Us Out

In the early 1990s people began questioning the whole self-government project. For me personally, the next level or different type of understanding I came to came from that, and also through my experience with the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. I came to Ottawa for self-government negotiations in the '80s, and for a long period of time in the early and mid-'90s for the Royal Commission. I'm sure there's people in this room that had some affiliation and did some work there – actually, I'd be surprised that anyone who was politically active or could read or write and was Native at the time *wasn't* involved. That's how wide the net they threw was to try to co-opt us all! My second book, *Peace, Power, Righteousness* (1999), reflected this experience. It was fairly critical, reflecting my conception of where we were at that point. I think it's consistent with what a lot of the people in our communities at the time were thinking – questioning where we were going.

In hindsight, the instinct we had was that we need to repeat the whole thing, not just self-government. Colonization is also a cultural process, an economic process, a spiritual process. Colonization is all of this. And the Royal Commission was an attempt to gather all of that knowledge, put it in a box, put it under the table, and move forward. That's what Royal Commissions do. We didn't know that at the time. We

hoped that it would create another opportunity to engage with Canadian society. Just like after 1982, when the Constitution seemed to be an opportunity to redefine and engage with Canadian society, so too was Royal Commission. In the context of Nationhood, it became this massive enterprise of laying out knowledge, laying out the reality for our Peoples, thinking through it and coming up with a different sense of what Canada could be and what kind of relationship we could have with Canada. My second book came out of that expansion of my understanding of ways to be Native. I was exposed to different perspectives from other Native people all over the world, and I also deepened my understanding through the interactions I had with teachers from my own Nation about what it is to be a person, what my responsibilities were, and what the dangers were of engaging in politics in the way that we were. People were bluntly saying, "What good is taking back power if all you're going to do is act like a White Man with that power? I get confused when I look at this guy: he knows the talk, he comes from the same place as me, but yet he's doing the same thing to me as the Indian agent."

There had to be a substantive change, and that's what we were hoping for. There was a move toward a cultural resurgence, although there's not a strict chronology, these things overlap and blend into each other. But in the Haudenosaunee communities in the late '80s and early '90s there was a very strong push and a widening of the scope of what traditionalism was. It became the defining feature of our movement, and many people were involved with it. It became the alternative to the assimilation process, to the band council, the alternative psychic place to Catholicism

and to all of the other identities that had been put on us by the colonizer. Traditionalism and a critique of the established order in our communities became a very big issue.

My book reflects this. It was a response to the frustrations of those in the community who were committed to the vision that our Ancestors had in fighting colonization. Our Ancestors were fighting for the right to live on their land, according to their laws, worshiping their gods, and to pass that on to the next generations without being impinged on and without restriction. People who were still committed to this found that the self-government project was very limited and unacceptable. *Peace Power Righteousness* is basically a long essay that criticizes our leaders who were co-opted and selling out. I wanted it to reflect these frustrations, but it wasn't a rant. It was grounded in the way of our being that has come to us as our heritage, through our ceremonies, through our teaching, through our songs, through the oral histories, and through the established consensus in the community as to what is a good way of life.

As a younger person at that time, to stand up and say, "No! You're taking us down the wrong path; and many of you are doing it for the wrong reasons; and a minority of you are corrupt; and I want everybody to know that," it was an intimidating thing to do. I needed the back-up of our tradition, our knowledge, everything that our culture could afford me. I didn't feel comfortable as an individual with the level of experience and knowledge that I had at that time to just say, "I'm frustrated with you all, stop selling us out." I had to have more power behind me. So the structure of the book drew on the condolence ceremony, which hadn't been done in our community. There was no real direct experience

with it, at least on my part, and I was worried about getting it right, I grappled with the ethics around using it. But in the end I was satisfied that it was the appropriate wisdom and knowledge to use to stand up and bring forward a critique to those leaders who were taking our people into the future. These are powerful people, both politically and personally. To criticize them isn't to deny the fact that they're very skilled, that a lot of them have integrity, that they believe in what they're doing, that they have long years of experience and commitment to the struggle, and that they are convinced that they are right. But I drew on the wisdom of Elders and others, and I believe that the critique still stands. There's people who read this book today and say, "Oh, he's saying exactly what's going on in my community, he's talking about my Chief." Or people will say, "You're talking about me. I had to put that book down five times because I was so angry and frustrated because you were actually talking about me." And well, I'm good with that because I was talking about me too: this book came from a personal journey.

The answer to these criticisms coming out of our communities was, to put it succinctly, traditionalism: the effort to restore the ancient ways of governance, the ancient cultural way, the ancient ways of relating to each other, the community that we understood was the community of our ancestry. So there were Longhouse movements and the revival of traditional cultures all across the land. But to cut a long story short, people became frustrated with that endeavor as well. I think instincts bring you and drive you forward in a movement. But when you're living in it, you get to see that it's not that simple. In hindsight, the traditionalist endeavor was based on people, based on women, men, kids,

and Elders, these were the people that were doing the ceremonies, running the Longhouse, engaged in language revitalization. And over time people came to see that it wasn't simply enough to say, get the Indian Act off our back, bring back the Longhouse, let's all move in there, let's all do our thing and then we'll all be Onkwehónweh again. I think that I'm not giving away any secrets here to our non-Native brothers and sisters, but the practice of traditionalism and the ceremonial culture is also ridden with problems. There's great power and strength, and don't misunderstand me, I still believe it is the foundation of our culture and our society. I am totally committed to its revitalization and survival. But there's abuse, there's neglect, there's co-optation, manipulation, there's monetization – people began to see that it's not that simple. All of this is founded on people. And people began to question: "Who is that person running that ceremony? Why is he doing these things? Where did he come from? What is the effect? What am I getting out of it? What's happening from here?" All questions that naturally will occur as people begin to relate on that basis and use that culture as the way of living their lives.

So decolonization was even more complex. It wasn't simply capacity building, self-government. It wasn't the revitalization and revival of traditional culture. And here's where the younger generation really came in, evaluating these things from their perspective: self-government, community governance, band governance, on the one hand, and traditional culture and practices, on the other. They wanted to know, "How is it helping me become more Indigenous? How is it helping me move through the world as an Indigenous person? How is it helping me carry out

my responsibility in the culture for my Ancestors?" A lot of people found it wanting. They found it didn't have the transformative power that they knew deep inside was at the core of their own decolonization.

My experience reflected that, and I began to look for answers in ways and in places other than those that had been established as the decolonizing sites. I began to just talk to people in the community who were experiencing the sense of frustration, again, at how their lives were still not together. They didn't feel together. They didn't feel like they had decolonized. They may be participating in the Longhouse, learning a language, experiencing a community resurgence in terms of power. In Kahnawà:ke you've got self-government, big funding, very strong political identity, language revitalization, and all that. But there was still a gap in many people's souls, psyches, bodies, whatever you want to call it. This process of decolonization was not complete.

And so I took up the responsibility of starting to think about it again, a kind of luxury I have as a professor whose job is to read and think and talk to people and really engage on these problems full time. But it wasn't as straightforward as the previous phases: in the first phase I could count on Chiefs and the Elders who were involved in the self-government struggle to inform and advise me and give me the context. With the second phase I could go to the Longhouse Elders and traditional Chiefs. But this time, the question was, "Well, who do we go to now?" Those are only part of the answer. And that was the real struggle: to find people and to develop relationships in terms of learning and teaching to address the question of "How do we get at this basic problem of the psyche?"

Fighting False Notions of Indigeneity

I came to an understanding of this phase through reading some important works on colonization/decolonization, and I was deeply influenced by Frantz Fanon, to the extent that the Indigenous governance program that I run is basically founded on the process that he describes in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon argued you have to understand your psychic closeness to the colonizer. You have to understand yourself, your obsessions, and your desires in order to be decolonized. And then you have to channel that into a political project that makes sense in terms of a break from the power of the colonizer to define who you are and what your future is.

If you think about where we are right now, where has the movement led us so far? I think we get to the psychic landscape of contemporary colonialism. Where has self-government taken us? How many leaders are operating on a basis of autonomous Nationhood in contention with the Canadian state? There are very few, if any, leaders on the national or provincial scene who are advocating goals and structuring their actions consistent with that struggle for the revitalization of our Nations. In our Haudenosaunee communities the Two-Row Wampum is the guiding premise, and while there is a rhetorical deference paid to it, looking at our politics, I don't know how many people are really acting in a way that's consistent with it.

And so in *Wasáse*, my third book, I critique Aboriginal politics. The idea of being an Aboriginal in Canada to me seems like a betrayal of the heritage of struggle that our Ancestors put into our survival. In the '80s and '90s, the

whole notion of “Aboriginal” was defined in terms of the jurisprudence and policy on section 35 that came out of the Department of Justice, the Department of Indian Affairs, and various other ministries and adjudicated by Canadian courts. Aboriginal politics today is really about being consistent with the false notions and instrumentalist notions of Indigeneity that are created by judges, lawyers, consultants, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics in order to facilitate the removal of our people from the land.

Removing us from our land has been the project from the beginning. People didn’t come here 500 years ago to be friends. They came to escape their own lives in other parts of the world and to exploit. When they found that we were on the land and in the way to the extent we didn’t cooperate, they devised means, governmental, military, medical, and otherwise, to remove us from the land. Nothing’s changed. It’s still that. Apply that dynamic I’ve described to Denedeh or up north or in Northern BC or anywhere where the Native opposes the development of the land for exploitative purposes: that Native is defined out of existence or pushed out of existence. For us to defer to this notion of Aboriginal and try to structure ourselves and conceptualize our processes and goals accordingly is the end game of colonization.

The political survival of Canada depends on us accepting this Aboriginalism, defined in Canadian terms of citizenship, where we all get some share of what’s going on, but our rights and needs are balanced against those of the larger population. For us, the only way to survive is either to move out of the way or face destruction, or redefine ourselves so that we don’t have a psychic conflict between who we think we are and what we do. A lot of people are caught

in this dynamic. Being an Aboriginal today is really a crazy complicated hypocrisy. This Aboriginal is not who we are as Onkwehóneweh, Dene, Saanich. This Aboriginal is defined in terms that are coming down from Canadian courts and Canadian policy, the media, popular culture, CanLit, all of these things, and they help to define us in ways which create a sense of ourselves as inauthentic. By authenticity all I mean is coming from ourselves: these other things, they're impositions.

It's a crazy complicated thing to resolve on a personal level. On one hand, the reason I am being focused on and I have the attention of this society is because I'm part of a First Nation. I am an Indigenous person. I was here first. We have a long heritage. We have a culture. But at the same time, I'm a Canadian, an Aboriginal Canadian, and Canadians defer to democratic institutions within the society. Canadians are citizens that have an ethnic heritage that is respected, and in no way, no how do Aboriginal Canadians have a right to trump the rights of other Canadians. The jurisprudence in the Supreme Court is very clear: it's about balancing the overwhelming need of the Canadian society to continue to progress against the remnant Aboriginal rights that are a "burden" on Crown title, in the language of Aboriginal title law. I don't think this is something that we can square.

That's the argument I make in *Wasáse*. The reason we have this big gap in our souls, that we feel empty, that we feel like a bunch of hypocrites is because we've accepted another person's definition of ourselves, and we're living out someone else's notion of what it is to be an Indigenous person in our land. When we're think about our struggle now, it has nothing to do with taking back land, reimposing our laws in

our communities and the maintenance of an identity for our people that is rooted in our area, our language, our world. If we are true to our own original visions, the teachings that come through the ceremonies and through our Ancestors, if we know our own history, look at the way our Ancestors talked and acted, we wouldn't be doing any of this politically or culturally. *Wasáse* is an attempt to draw very clear lines between the pathways that have integrity from Indigenous perspectives and the pathways that are Aboriginalist co-optations oriented toward the assimilation and the eventual destruction of our people.

Wasáse works through a lot of different perspectives and with very, very clear guidance from people that I spoke with about their insights and experiences. The conclusion I reached is that this Aboriginal framework leads to the notion of reconciliation as surrender. It basically defines us as victims of progress, people who are unable to keep up, who need help, people who need to be brought up to speed and into the mainstream, people who need to be taught how to live in this world. In societies all over the world people become integrated and over time generationally lose the original sense of themselves. I guess the argument can be made that that is natural and even good. That's progress, people coming from the forest into the city. My point in *Wasáse* is, if you accept that, you might as well just be a Canadian, you might as well join the project. You might as well just stop talking about the idea of Mohawk Nation, Cree Nation, because this approach is the dissolution of any independent basis for existence in this land. If you're going to do this, don't call yourself a First Nations activist. Don't call yourself an Indigenous person – the Indigenous person

only exists in the context of the heritage and elements of an Indigenous identity that were handed down to us by our Ancestors, one or two or three generations removed. These things are very clear in every Nation, in every part of the country. You don't have to make an extensive effort to dig up or uncover what those teachings are, what those defining features of what it is to be an Indigenous person are. All you need to do is talk to an Elder or participate in some ceremonies or participate in community life as it's oriented toward cultural practice on the land and these things become very, very evident. If you then go and try to relate it to the existence that you have in law, politics, economics, and academia, you will see a great disjuncture.

Disconnection from the Land: Learning from Akwesasne

The real struggle we face right now is, How do we continue to confront colonization? If we understand all of this, what do we do? What's next? The answer that has come to me has come through the work that I've done in Akwesasne over the last seven years. Akwesasne is a Mohawk community on the St. Lawrence with a long history of activism and leadership in the Indigenous world. The community asked me to think through the effects of the loss of their connection to the natural environment, and it brought me to an understanding of what colonization is at the core. Not that the journey of knowledge has ended for me in any way, but I'm starting to get at a core understanding in my own life. I think that in dialogue with the people that I've worked with in Akwesasne and having written and talked about it in other communities, I'm starting to really get at the heart of what

colonization did: it separated us from our land. When we say we're dispossessed, that's a legal term and we understand what it means. But what does it mean to us in terms of the way we live our life, the way we experience our life? I didn't really understand that well enough intellectually to be able to process it, to talk about it, until I worked in Akwesasne on this question of what has been the effect.

In Akwesasne it's a very specific problem: the effect of industrial contamination, mainly PCBs, in the river and on the land. What has been the effect culturally on the people there? I came to realize that the disconnection from the land has had the most profound effect on our people in terms of our ability to sustain ourselves psychically, culturally, and physically as Indigenous Peoples. The health effects are very obvious. People talk about the traditional diet and its replacement with junk food and a sedentary lifestyle, and the loss or forgetting or inaccessibility of a lifestyle that maintained our bodies in a healthy way. But culturally, the loss of the land also meant the loss of actual collective activity on the land, which meant the loss of the transmission of knowledge. The land is the way our people taught and learned, where the way to understanding our world view, our relationship to other elements of creation, and our language were transmitted. You stop doing that and you sit in front of the TV and it can't happen. My job was very depressing, I basically traced the decline of the Mohawk Nation in Akwesasne over time. As we went along I learned some positive things, but I also learned a lot of negative things. The most important part for me was the psychological effect of being disconnected from your land because all of this – the health effects, the language loss, the loss of kinship relationship,

the transmission of knowledge – had the effect of creating a deep sense of alienation in the people that breeds a sense of distrust in each other, in oneself, in the future.

I think you see where I'm going with this: the most profound effect the dispossession of Native Peoples through colonization has is the creation of the sense of alienation. This in turn creates the context for most of the social ills and psychological ills that play out in our communities. Attempting to address this with economic or political structural changes, or in any way other than finding a way to reconnect the people to the sources of their existence and their power, is futile. In Akwesasne, it's not to say that all of a sudden with that realization everything changed and everybody's happy and healthy and 100 per cent Mohawk again. But I think at the heart of it, understanding this on an individual and collective basis is key to addressing colonization.

I'm not saying that in order to be truly Native and to live a Native life today you have to wear buckskin and feathers and beads. What I'm saying is, your Ancestors, would they recognize you? If you're ever going to survive as an Indigenous person in an overwhelmingly colonial society and maintain yourself into the future and transmit something of what it means to be a Mohawk or a Cree or an Algonquin, you have to have a sense of yourself that comes from that place. This is what our normal needs to be – not this crazy life that most of us live either in the city or on a reserve somewhere. If that's the normal, then what are we giving as a legacy to our kids? At best it's mainstream middle-class capitalist consumer values – but in Mohawk. The central point I've come to in all this intellectual work, all this political work,

all of this journeying and trying to find teachers is that the answer has always been the same as at the Royal Commission: it's about the land. It's all about the land. You need to understand, at a deeper level, that we need to get our land back, and have a relationship with the land.

When it comes down to it, we don't have a strong relationship with our land anymore. I think that our existence, our sense of Indigeneity, our politics reflects this. My preoccupation is our survival. People who are involved in all these other aspects, they think they're doing a good thing; they're committed to this program. But think about it in these terms: If success is the ability for me to live as a Mohawk in my territory and to go about in the world with a Mohawk world view, with a sense of connection to my Ancestors, to the spirit world, and to carry myself in a way that honors our Ancestors, well, I can't get that from the outside. That has to come from my culture, and my culture is land-based. If the criteria for success lie beyond the individual, to have a community that fosters this in its youth and teaches it to its children multi-generationally, and to give the next generations the opportunity to be more Native than we are in all of these different ways, that's successful.

We're coming from a very colonized existence. Every single one of us. And the criteria for success shouldn't be us having more money in exchange for being even less Native. We're already starting from an extremely precarious position. I'm arguing for a criteria of success where my four-year-old and the kids coming forward can honestly have the opportunity, if they so choose, to live on their land, to live up to their teachings, to believe in themselves and to see themselves and relate to others as Onkwehónweh. To me,

that's what we should be shooting for. Not any other criteria defined in legal terms, economic terms, or cultural or intellectual terms coming from someone else whose society has always been and remains oriented toward the removal of us from any authentic sense of ourselves on the land.

My analysis is that most of our understanding of colonization and decolonization still comes from other people. So I would say to our Indigenous leaders, what are you doing to advance the ability of our younger generations to live an authentic Onkwehónweh life? What are you sacrificing in order to achieve it? We remain oriented toward satisfying the demands, imperatives, and preferences of others, as opposed to the profound need in our communities for a reorientation away from those understandings and toward giving hope and chance and opportunity to future generations to live as Onkwehónweh on their own terms.