



UNTEXTBOOKED – 408 - Lily Sones
ACCESSIBILITY TRANSCRIPT

EPISODE TITLE: How Does The Legacy of Settler Expansion & Industrialization Destroy Indigenous Livelihood?

EPISODE DESCRIPTION: Thousands of protestors joined Indigenous activists at Standing Rock to fight for clean drinking water. At its core, this fight echoes the legacy of broken treaties and settler industrialization. Producer Lily Sones talks with Dina Gilio-Whitaker (Colville Confederated Tribes) about how industrialization halted traditional indigenous food ways and how extractive industries cause health effects across today's indigenous communities.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker is an award-winning journalist and columnist. She is a lecturer of American Indian Studies at California State University San Marcos, and independent consultant and educator on environmental justice and other Indigenous policy-related issues. She is the author of "As Long As Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice from Colonization to Standing Rock" and co-author with Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz of "'All the Real Indians Died Off' and 20 Other Myths About Native Americans." She lives in San Clemente, California.

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Show Notes:

- (00:00) - Standing Rock Protests
- (2:47) - Legacy of Broken Treaties
- (6:06) - Settler Agricultural Complex & Eradication of Buffalo
- (7:55) - Consequences of Industrialization



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(12:14) - European vs Indigenous Ideas of Wilderness
(14:48) - The Modern Environmental Movement & Indigenous Activism
(16:52) - Uranium Mining on Indigenous Lands
(21:22) - Women of All Red Nations
(23:51) - 'Green Colonialism,' Lithium Production, And What's Changed Since Standing Rock?
(26:19) - Extractive Industry & Future of Society
(28:11) - Outro

AIR DATE: Thu 12/14

EPISODE #: 408

TRANSCRIPT:

Gabe Hostin, Host:

You're listening to UnTextbooked. This is a history podcast for the future that gives young people like us agency and voice in our education. I'm your host, Gabe Hostin.

Lily Sones, Host:

I'm producer, Lily Sones.

Gabe Hostin:

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News Clip from Standing Rock Protests:

(singing).

Protestors:

Water is a right. We are unarmed.

Protestors:

We are peaceful, we are unarmed. We are unarmed.



UNTEXTBOOKED – 408 - Lily Sones ACCESSIBILITY TRANSCRIPT

Lily Sones:

This week's episode begins at Standing Rock.

Protestors:

Hey, we're moving peacefully.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker, Guest:

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe was targeted for an oil pipeline.

Lily Sones:

In 2016, thousands of Indigenous and environmental activists gathered in North Dakota to protest the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline.

Protestors:

We're not leaving, we're not leaving, we're not leaving, we're not leaving-

Dina Gilio-Whitaker:

The conflict was the tribe said that they didn't consent to the pipeline because the pipeline was scheduled to go underneath the lake, Lake Oahe, which is the main source of water for not just their community, but the communities of 17 million other people down river.

Lily Sones:

Videos show protestors riding horses, beating drums, and walking along this rugged landscape.

Gabe Hostin:

They're literally spraying them with pepper spray, for what, holding signs? It's disheartening to see this injustice.

Lily Sones:

Some Indigenous activists carry signs that say water protectors. If you look out across the plains, you see construction vehicles and digging.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker:

Pretty soon people were coming from all over the world to join the protest camps.

Lily Sones:

The protest lasted for almost a year through the cold, harsh Dakota winters and violent clashes with security and police officers.

Speaker 3:

There's a guy just maced in the face right now.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker:

Especially after the company, Energy Transfer Partners, hired a private security firm to break up the protest, and so it got violent.

Lily Sones:

At its core, the Dakota Access Pipeline fights echo back to a legacy of broken treaties.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker:

The issue was really with the federal government and the tribe.

Lily Sones:

We've been hearing the voice of Dina Gilio-Whitaker. She was there in 2016 protesting the pipeline. She's part of the Colville Confederated Tribes in the Pacific Northwest.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker:

Because that's treaty territory, meaning that it's land that was protected by earlier treaties that the tribe made with the United States government, it was subject to regime of laws that mandated consultation with the tribe.

Lily Sones:

This is just one instance of a long history of broken treaties. Dina wrote the incredible book *As Long as Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice, from Colonization to Standing Rock*. The name of this book is inspired by this legacy of deserted treaties. President James Madison gave a speech to the Cherokee nations in 1817.

Gabe Hostin:

You are now in a country where you can be happy. The white man shall never again encroach upon you. As long as the grass grows and waters run on the earth, so long you shall be protected from your present habitations.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker:

That phrase, as long as the grass grows and the waters run, it was used in different iterations in several treaties, in several speeches. It became a phrase that Native people, they clung onto. They believed the promises that they were being given as they were being pressured into the treaties for land cessions. In other words, for them to give up their lands to the new governments, the new country that was inserting itself on top of their own homelands. These treaties were never requested by tribal communities. They were imposed, and as time went on through the 19th

century, those treaties became more aggressive. So, when tribes entered into those treaties, they were at an inherent disadvantage. But at the same time, they strove to hold the federal government of the United States accountable for the promises that it had made. So that phrase, as long as grass grows and waters run, really captures not just how the federal government made those promises, but how Native people held them to those promises and still do to this day.

Lily Sones:

The United States and Native Nations have nearly 400 treaties protecting Native lands, but settlers did not respect these treaties or Native communities' stakes in the land.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker:

So as settlers are making their way from the East Coast where earliest settlements occurred across the continent to the West, they are bringing with them their European technologies, their farming techniques, their railroads, their wagons, their farming implements, all of these things that we think of as technologies that built the United States and including dams, like dam building technology to harness water. This industrialism, while it's bringing life and the possibilities for expansion to settler populations, it's bringing death and destruction to Native populations.

Lily Sones:

The settler agricultural complex eradicated many Indigenous food systems and traditional ways of sustaining themselves.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker:

This thing that we celebrate in the United States that we call the Industrial Revolution was really the destruction of tribal lifeways. Massive scale farming to feed large populations, especially in the Midwest, required the eradication, I would call it ethnic cleansing, of the land to move Native people off the lands to free up the lands for settlement. And also, buffalo populations were part of the natural environment of the Great Plains and eradicating the buffalo population as a food source for those tribes was part of all of that process.

Gabe Hostin:

30 to 60 million buffalo used to roam North America when the first European settlers arrived. When Europeans came West, they slaughtered these animals which fed Native peoples. Now only a few thousand buffalo survive.

Lily Sones:

This was not an accident. Settlers targeted buffalo for the purpose of Indigenous genocide.

Gabe Hostin:

In 1873, the Secretary of the Interior had this to say, "The civilization of the Indian is impossible while the buffalo remains upon the plains. I would not seriously regret the total disappearance of the buffalo from our Western prairies."

Lily Sones:

This is just one example, but there's plenty of others. Industrial infrastructure like dams have a devastating effect on Native people and their land.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker:

For example, I come from a tribe that was the site of at the time, the largest dam in the world, what's called the Grand Coulee Dam that's on the Colville Indian Reservation, which is where my ancestors are from. And in the early 1930s, the federal government proposed, through the Army Corps of Engineers started a project to build this dam, which was considered an engineering marvel at the time. People celebrated this amazing, huge dam that was going to create all this water storage for massive scale farming.

Gabe Hostin:

The Grand Coulee Dam is the largest power station based on capacity in the United States.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker:

Well, when you build a dam, it changes ecosystems. It created a huge lake, which meant that it flooded homes, it flooded village sites, and most significant for us was that it flooded a salmon fishery on the Columbia River. There was a place that is today called Kettle Falls, that's the settler name for it. And it was a huge area where salmon swim up this major falls in order to spawn, and it was a place of abundant food for the tribes in the region. And studies show that the tribes in the region gathered at this area for literally thousands of years to gather food for the coming year. So it was a major, major cultural site, a major place for food gathering and social gathering. And the building of the dam, which created the lake, flooded the falls.

Lily Sones:

The dam flooded more than 21,000 acres of land Native Americans call home and disturbed vital salmon habitats.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker:

The salmon couldn't swim past the dam up into the upper reaches of that part of the Columbia River. The completion of the dam happens in 1940 or 1941. And so, I become the first generation of Colville people to not have access to salmon and to the cultural practices that have animated our life ways for all these countless generations.

Gabe Hostin:

This example shows how settler industrialization not only cuts off cultural ways of life, but the varied nutrients in food which have sustained people for generations.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker:

So, it's compounding problems. Not only does it cut us off from our cultural practices, but it cuts us off from a very important food source. With colonization came the change in diets, so we go from our very healthy, traditional diets to diets based on government food rations. In the early part of the reservation days, those food rations were always insufficient. So, there was conditions of starvation. So, you had people starving and being malnourished up until the middle of the 20th century, and then you have a new food program that comes in with the war on poverty of the Johnson administration. The new problem is because of the focus on just calories and the highly processed nature of much of these foods, it leads within one generation to the conditions associated with obesity, heart problems, and other kinds of dietary related problems like cancers and cholesterol and diabetes.

Gabe Hostin:

According to the US Department of Health and Human Services, Native people are 50% more likely to be diagnosed with heart disease.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker:

So, these become some of the new issues that these change in land use patterns bring upon tribal people.

Lily Sones:

We can see these effects of settler industrialization, the loss of traditional food sources and cultural sites, and the introduction of new diseases and health problems. At a fundamental level, settlers and Indigenous people view the role of nature and wilderness from very different perspectives.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker:

But here's where it gets really strange is that this idea of wilderness is a very European idea, and wilderness is often in that framework associated with a place where there's no people, but from an Indigenous perspective, that was not something that they would ever have recognized because there was always people on the land. There were millions of people on this continent when the Europeans came here in the 16th century, and even though they didn't see huge cities like they were used to in Europe, huge populations of cities, they were still nonetheless areas of populations where land was highly used by them. There was not one square inch of this continent that wasn't used by Native peoples, but they just didn't recognize it because Native people didn't develop land in the same ways that Europeans did. Europeans thought that they were uncivilized and primitive. They could not recognize that Native people had different kinds of societies that used lands in very sophisticated ways that preserved it.

They understood about what sustainability was through what we call the seventh generation principle. They used land by thinking about whatever happens, how it would impact seven generations into the future. And so because they understood the use of land in that regard, they would have no need to develop the kinds of technologies that Europeans brought with them, which was always all about what we call the utilitarian use of land, how land can benefit and grow human societies and make human life easier. For Native people, they weren't looking at that, they were looking at, how do we live in harmony with the environment to ensure our continued existence. These are two very, very different ways of looking at how land is used.

Lily Sones:

I want to talk a little bit about the environmental movement and some Indigenous resistance. So, the Indigenous community has historically had a somewhat ambivalent relationship with the environmental movement from the national parks conservations to the 1960s environmental movement. How has Indigeneity clashed with the mainstream idea of preservation and environmentalism in the US and how has the Indigenous community resisted some of these one dimensional dialogues?

Dina Gilio-Whitaker:

So, the beginning of what we think of as the modern environmental movement has its roots in 19th century United States, and often the beginning point is with the establishment of the National Park Service in 1872. In 1872, the US was engaged in very aggressive wars of containment to Native people. This is that time period when they are aggressively pursuing treaties, they are becoming militarily defeated by the federal government, and there's this growing sort of anxiety in the United States about land protection.

The moniker, of course, is our national parks are the best idea America's ever come up with. Well, that leads to the question of the best idea for who. The wilderness has to be created first because there's still people living on those lands. And so, the national parks get all bound up with the processes of pushing the Indigenous people off the lands in order to create these wilderness parks. So, this is the beginning of the conservation movement, which then evolves into the modern environmental movement in the mid 20th century. So, we can't think of the environmental movement without understanding it in the context of the forced removal of Indigenous peoples from their lands.

Lily Sones:

Throughout history, the United States pushed Native people to live on what was considered to be unproductive land.

Gabe Hostin:

This land was considered worthless to settlers, a wasteland.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker:

Well, it turns out that much of this land, especially in the Southwest and in other parts of the Western United States exists with huge deposits of uranium.

Gabe Hostin:

During World War II, the United States pursued the development of nuclear and hydrogen bombs.

Lily Sones:

But what do you need for nuclear weapons? Uranium.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker:

So, that's what becomes the new extractive industry, especially in the state of New Mexico. Most of that extraction happens on Navajo lands, but also within the vicinity of the Pueblos.

Lily Sones:

Two-thirds of uranium exists in tribal lands.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker:

So, the extraction of uranium, who's going to do all of that labor? Well, it's the Indigenous populations, the Kerr-McGee company comes in to mine all this uranium. They hire Indian communities to come in and do all the labor, and especially in those early years, there's absolutely no safety gear given to them. So, they're going into these mines with no protection whatsoever, digging up uranium, being exposed to all this radioactive toxins. Within a couple of decades, if not sooner, they start exhibiting these illnesses that are high rates of cancers, respiratory illnesses.

Gabe Hostin:

That's shocking. Being told to go into radioactive minds with no safety gear? I would be suing them for every last dime.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker:

And so, that leads to studies and eventually lawsuits and legislation to make up for that history, and nothing's really ever made up for it because there's hundreds, if not thousands of them that are still not cleaned up. Almost none of them were cleaned up. The leftovers of the mining process that are still highly radioactive, often they're just exposed to the elements. They're being stored in pools or they are just exposed on the land where the wind picks up these radioactive particles circulates in the community. People are breathing this, they're exposed to these elements and still experiencing these high rates of cancers and other health problems to this day.

Lily Sones:

In the book, you mentioned how there are over 2,000 or so mines in the US and only about 50 of them are under EPA regulations or something, and that was just kind of mind-blowing to me that even today we're still looking at all of those mines still affecting people in these communities.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker:

Well, they were not mandated to be cleaned up. I'm not aware of any kind of regulations where they were required to clean up. And so, now you have these Superfund sites. There's no telling how long it'll take. And I even wonder to what extent can you even clean up a radioactive mine?

Lily Sones:

I have no idea.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker:

And I've had experience where it's even hard to get the studies done to understand these processes. This is especially true up at the Hanford Site. The Hanford processing plant in Washington, that's probably the most toxic site in the United States for radioactive waste, and it's still leaking waste out into the atmosphere, into the river. The tribal communities and non-Native communities experience the impact of that, and I worked on a small project to try to get a research study to understand how that radioactivity is still playing out. It was almost impossible for us to get any kind of engagement from the federal government, so that we can even get funds or a process established to do that kind of study. The federal government does not have an investment in cleaning up a place like the Hanford facility.

Lily Sones:

Women and children around uranium mines were experiencing reproductive problems and birth defects. Activists sought to understand what the cause could be.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker:

And this brings up the organization, Women of All Red Nations, so warn what was happening in these communities was there were reproductive issues that women were seeing. They were having high rates of miscarriages, high rates of birth defects in their babies, and they decided to figure out why this was happening, so they're testing the water in their area and found out that there was high rates of contamination of radioactivity due to uranium mining near their communities. So, it leads to them just taking control, taking leadership of talking about these problems, so that the problems could be addressed. And so, this is about the connection between reproductive rights that Native women were experiencing.

Lily Sones:

The effects of radiation on birth rates plays into a larger legacy of forced sterilization.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker:

It also tied to Native women were being targeted for sterilization processes. So in the Indian Health Service, Native women were unconsentingly being sterilized in order to stop the births. So, this is a eugenics process that was happening to Native people without their consent. At the same time, Native children had been targeted for the taking and placing in foster care and adoption. So, all of these problems are all connected to the ways that the environmental problems were having these impacts on their reproductive issues and reproductive rights. So, it's a really interesting study and I think there needs to be more study of it, but that's what my research showed, the connection between the taking of children and sterilization with the environmental impacts of contamination.

Lily Sones:

Circling back to Standing Rock, you state that although the Dakota Access Pipeline ultimately finished construction, many Indigenous activists saw the movement as a success due to the record-breaking size of protests and alliances formed between various Indigenous nations. How do you think the environmental justice movement and its Indigenous alliances have changed since Standing Rock and what still needs to be accomplished and how do we get there?

Dina Gilio-Whitaker:

How has it changed since then? Well, I would say that it's definitely grown. There's definitely more attention being paid. There are more incidents of protest camps like Standing Rock. Right now we have one in Nevada, some protest camps against the proposed lithium mine at Thacker Pass. So, this points to a change that I'm seeing. The Thacker Mine, it's being protested by Paiute and Shoshone people in partnership with some of the ranching communities in that area, but the Thacker Pass is different because this is about what sometimes is called green colonialism, green energy, or clean renewable energy. Lithium is a key ingredient in battery technology.

And so, with the proliferation of renewable energy sources that need battery storage, lithium is now one of the new highly sought after elements in this new industry, and it's the same problem of extraction. So, it's an extractive industry that has all kinds of environmental problems associated with it, not to mention rights violations for Native people. And as long as we continue to have an energy intensive, highly industrial society that's going to rely on extractive industries, the problems are going to be the same. They're just going to have a different name and a different element associated with it, and it's not just in the United States. This is a problem that's playing out in many different ways all over the world with Indigenous communities in the name of nature-based solutions to climate change.

Lily Sones:

Definitely. Considering the 600-year expanse of time that your book covers, we regretfully cannot discuss everything that *As Long as Grass Grows* covers. But before we finish, is there anything we haven't talked about yet that you think is important for our listeners to know or that you would like to share.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker:

As we think about what does the future look like for human societies, is it sustainable for us to think about sustain having these highly technological intensive societies based on the endless extraction of resources from the earth? What about the seventh generation principle? What does it look like if we live in a society where we ask different questions about what the future looks like instead of questions that assume the unmitigated expansion of technologically based society? What if we ask questions about, what does it look like to live in a society seven generations in the future? How does that change our relationship to technology? How does it change our relationships to the environment?

And we're not really allowed to ask these questions in society. This is taboo territory, but I think ultimately these are the questions that need to be asked if there is to be a human future. So, I'm daring to ask the unthinkable, but I think these are inevitable questions. And so, I would encourage your listeners to have the bravery to ask those kinds of questions as they move forward in their own lives, in their own research as students and as citizens of the world.

Lily Sones:

Thank you so much for joining us today. I've really loved this conversation. I loved reading your book. It was really enlightening. Thank you so much.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker:

Well, thank you. I'm glad you enjoyed it. I'm glad it's helping you in your own thinking.

Lily Sones:

Dina Gilio-Whitaker is from the Colville Confederate Tribes. She's an award-winning journalist and lectures on American Indian studies at California State University San Marcos. Her most recent book is *As Long as Grass Grows*.

Gabe Hostin:

Dina also co-authored a book with season two guest, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz. That book is called *"All the Real Indians Died Off": And 20 Other Myths About Native Americans*. You can find that episode in our podcast feed. So Lily, you're super interested in environmental policy. How has this book and talking with Dina affected your viewpoint on environmental activism?

Lily Sones:

Reading this book, Dina focuses a lot on how the system of settler industrialism has affected a lot of the ways that we think about nature and how we interact with the people around us and how we use the resources that we have going forward, especially as we look towards a green transition and divestment away from fossil fuels. And we really need to consider how we're thinking about our resources, especially since a green transition will require extractive industries. As Dina shows in this book, extractive industries can have lasting effects on Indigenous populations and the people that are doing this mining and who live around these mines.



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Gabe Hostin:

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