

## **The Henceforward Episode 6**

### **Movement Building Beyond the Moment**

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Eve: Aang aang. This is Eve Tuck, and this is The Henceforward, a podcast on settler colonialism and anti-blackness on Turtle Island. Here, we seek to build mutually respectful conversations about Indigenous and Black life in settler societies through attempting to talk, text, transit, and land.

Rebecca: In this episode of The Henceforward, we are honored to have Kelly Hayes here as our guest. Kelly is a member of the Menominee nation, and based out of Chicago. Kelly is a direct action trainer, and a co-founder of the Chicago Light Brigade and the direct action collective, Lifted Voices.

Stephanie: Kelly recently wrote an article for turthout.org called From #NoDAPL to #FreedomSquare: A Tale of Two Occupations. In this article, Kelly beautifully details the important time in history that we are currently witnessing, two simultaneous occupations that shed light on issues, Indigenous, and Black communities are facing.

Kelly travels from one occupation to the other, explores the relationship between them, and describes direct action tactics for liberation.

Sefanit: We just want to welcome you to The Henceforward, and thank you so much for chatting with us today.

Kelly: Thank you for having me.

Rebecca: You spent some time in Standing Rock Sioux territory where land and water protectors have been camped for months now in opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline. This gathering of many tribes and nations is about protecting life and it's truly historic. I'm just wondering if you could describe what it felt like to be there and what you saw when you were there.

Kelly: I would say that I mean a lot of things that a person would imagine in terms of being a native person going into such a historic space with a sense of solidarity and community and love, and folks figuring out what it's like to build a community like that in real time to sort of test our values and adapt our values, and our customs, and our beliefs.

But I was also experiencing it to a very specific lens as a person who does direct action training, I was invited in that capacity, very specifically. I met Wiyaka Eagleman, a young man who's been on the frontline since the early spring beginnings of this uprising.

We met in the spring and he asked me and a couple of other Indigenous trainers if we would be willing to come to the area this summer and help folks prepare for what was to come, and they were anticipating, and this was back in the spring that things were going to get very contentious, but there would moments such as the ones we see unfolding right now.

In June, three of us, myself, my friend, we're all part of a national group called The Indian Problem. The three of us went to Standing Rock, and I gave a blockades training. My group here in Chicago, Lifted Voices, we're a direct action collective, and blockades are one of the areas we specialize in. Our curriculum that's designed by Black and brown femmes and non-binary folks was something that I was able to bring to that space. For me, that was incredibly exciting.

It was like bringing a full circle, the work that I do here in Chicago every day to combat state violence and the techniques and the tactics that it was all here, bring those to my people for a great movement of our resistance, but is unlike anything that's happened in my lifetime or in my parents' lifetime conducting a direct action training that's attended by a whole native family. There's just nothing else that I've experienced quite like it or that I ever expect to experience quite like it.

Sefanit: Further in the article, you talk about going back home to Chicago to the #LetUsBreathe Collective has created a vibrant community in an encampment called Freedom Square. Can you also tell us a little bit about what's going on there and maybe your relationship to that space?

Kelly: Freedom Square was maintained by the #LetUsBreathe Collective for 41 days. It's now transitioned into a community controlled space that the people of community are sort of figuring out what they want to do with the space now for 41 days, #LetUsBreathe, around programming for community members.

There was political education around the distance issue of police brutality. There was a lot of community programming to improve the quality of life of people in North Lawndale, dance lessons, music lessons. Also, it's a cultural enrichment.

The idea was to create a vision of what the community should be provided with as opposed to what they are being provided with because Freedom Square existed in the shadow of the home and square police facility which is an internationally infamous police compound in Chicago that people have been disappeared into for days, that people have been tortured at.

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As part of the larger stand against police brutality in Chicago, the collective shares to hold space there in that space to basically hold up a vision in contrast to the oppression that the Black community experiences here, which is one form that direct action can take that I don't think people consider often enough, is simply

stating or arguing for what we're against, but presenting a vision of the way we think the world ought to be.

Rebecca: Yeah. I mean that's a really powerful way of describing it, and in describing both sites and both places, we really get a sense of in the mainstream media, the way that protests are usually covered. It's such a superficial picture that we see. The way that your article describes both of these places, that really shifts the narrative.

We see how the work that these communities are doing by coming together is grounded in love, and it's about celebrating and protecting life and it's about the future, so thinking about how you know, from the youngest children to the oldest granny that they'd be doing this direct action training at the same time as just thinking about the videos that we see from Standing Rock and just the celebration of life, it's like protecting as opposed to protesting.

I wanted to ask why do you think it's important to understand these movements in that way, not just as resisting something, but as creating something new, and also to see them kind of alongside each other in this way.

Kelly: Well, in my direct action collective Lifted Voices, we call this idea transformative direct action. Direct action is when we get into these theories and tactics and we get into advanced trainings, all that sort of thing. We talk about direct action occurring at multiple points of intervention, things like the point of production, where things get made or the point of consumption where things are purchased.

One of the points is the point of assumption, what allows people to believe the things that they have to believe in order to continue letting injustice go unchecked. Things like the myth of hard work, people believing that if they work hard enough that they will be provided for, and therefore if you're struggling, it's your own fault.

In addition to undermining these moments and preventing these moments of injustice, is we are not also undermining the assumptions that allowed people to sit still for them in the first place, we really are only building moments and not movements. Moments are the product of building energy, of building action. Movements are the product of building action, community, and culture.

That has to involve a vision of what next and what instead. In all of our direct actions from street theatre to street blockades, we really do try to manifest an idea of what's the transformation look like, what does it mean not simply to have this harm, but yeah, what does freedom look like? What does it mean to heal and to build forward?

If we're not embodying those ideas in the work itself, then we're not really telling a story that we want to tell. I think there's something really special happening at both Standing Rock and then the folks who organized Freedom Square, really, really understood in that work which is that we are modelling transformation in

addition to trying to put an immediate helping arm, because helping arm is only the first step to making a true transition.

Rebecca: Yeah. Thank you for that. We are trying to yeah, engage transformation at the same time as ending harm. That's really, really powerful.

Sefanit: Black and Indigenous solidarity has a long history, and it's really building up right now between movements.

It is something that we are really interested in looking closely at in this podcast, and we're wondering if you can share a little bit about your experience living and seeing the solidarity between Black and Indigenous people, what the potential there is, and knowing that these groups are not the same, yet still very much like what can happen when we support each other in this way?

Kelly: Well, I have seen a great deal of progress in this area. Lifted Voices, our collective, which is my family and my home, the source of most of the work here that I do in Chicago, the grounding of what I believe in terms of what it means to try to get free.

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We are all Black and brown femmes and non-binary folks who believe in a practice of action that is oriented around the political, personal, and cultural descent of women and non-binary people of color. We are sort of forged from this notion that Black and brown solidarity is what we'll get us free, that the leadership of those most impacted by all these terrible isms that kind of govern our lives is the leadership that can upend that system.

I mean there's nothing revolutionary about me as the Cree Native woman taking top-down orders from some white men. We need that leadership out front. But in order for Black and brown folks to be able to work in concert, we have a lot to overcome. I mean we have a long history of not only showing up for each other in crucial times, but actually betraying one another for the benefits of white supremacy.

We see this today in the fact that there's a whole lot of anti-blackness to dismantle in our brown communities. We see this in history with everything from the fact that a small percentage of native folks own slaves to the fact that a lot of Black folks were involved in the Buffalo soldiers writing down our people in order to help the western expansion, that that was actually a point of pride for some Black people in those days.

I think naming those histories, knowing those histories, learning to forgive and heal because we understand that none of us are the ones that created these systems.

These systems were created to exploit back people under pain of torturing death and to annihilate native peoples.

Overcoming the walls they've built between us, the ways in which they've turned us against each other or set us so deeply upon our own survival that we don't always see each other like that is the messy work of building solidarity. When we defend ourselves, when we defend each other in real-time, I think we make the progress that we need towards getting free together.

Rebecca: Miigwech for that. I think that just what your article does is it puts that front and center, and you do that work for us to show us how that solidarity is happening in real-time, and thank you for describing that so powerfully.

Our last question for you is really about that transformation that you're talking about. So much of this is about ending the immediate harm that our communities are experiencing, but also creating something new. It's long-term thinking. But also, it's being created in our day-to-day actions through these movements that you're talking about.

Can you describe for us the future that you want to see or the future that you think is being built through these movements?

Kelly: Well, that's a tricky question. Honestly, I've been involved in this network for a very long time, and I feel that I'm going to hit 35, I feel like only within the last few years have I started to gain any sense of what freedom looks like.

I don't think I have the imagination or capacity until then to really start to dream forward in that way because even as I waivered against these systems, I was so broken in so many places, and so I guide them that I couldn't see a world beyond them. I was satisfied with this notion of carrying it all down in the hopes that there had to be something better than this, right?

Trying to come to a place of understanding and believing and transformation, I think that it starts by dismantling some of these structures, but also in real-time, figuring out what is the alternative like it's easy, ask the police, which I enjoy doing, but what does it mean for us to build safety in our own communities? What does it mean to take action in that way? It's easy to say dismantle the present system, which I say often, but what does it mean to create a transformative justice framework that we use to solve problems in our own communities?

I think we need tools to organize our life by and not just our direct action and our campaigns by, how are we helping people model and live these values and not simply express them in the streets as slogans or as an academic-y jargon.

In Lifted Voices, we talk about the defense of folks who are marginalized that we have weekly self-defense classes. Obviously, we don't want a world where people

have to violently defend themselves, but we want a world where women and non-binaries folks are safe. We're providing a means for people to defend themselves against the violence of patriarchy in real-time, and it is working. Multiple people have saved themselves from violent situations based on what they've learned in these classes.

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We have a number of folks who do transformative justice circles and trainings here in Chicago that help people solve their problems without involving the state. I think in living these values and giving people concrete tools to live in a way that is consistent with their values and their political aims, we culture those, and I think that we're learning what freedom looks like by building that culture.

What is a world without prisons look like? I don't know completely. But I know that with all of our collective imaginations, like we can see our way through to something more just than this, and I can see pieces of it. I see snapshots of it every time people come together in common cause around something transformative. I have a lot of hope for where that can go. I truly believe that on a long enough timeline, we will win.

Rebecca: The images that keep coming back in my mind is just of the children and then the old people, and everyone in between at Standing Rock, and the way that they talk about the water and the people doing ceremony, and this message that's coming out so strongly is that everybody needs to drink the water so everybody has a stake in this freedom that's being talked about.

This is a future for all people here, and that there's like an urgency to that, and what's being protected is life, so that that's really what's at stake. Do you have anything else that you'd like to share with us? Anything else you'd like to add for our listeners?

Kelly: Just that there is an urgency that people may not appreciate, and since it's getting people to talk about what's happening in North Dakota to talk about what's happening and standing up, I mean, Andrea Smith taught us that white supremacy has three pillars. One is anti-blackness, one is colonialism, and one is orientalism, which we can understand to mean in the modern context, but colonialism is about erasure.

Anti-blackness is about exploitation, it's about violence where it keeps people then in a state of exploitation. Annihilation is the end-goal for us, total erasure of native people. We don't fit in with the mythology of American exceptionalism and greatness, and the great ideals this country was supposedly be founded on. We don't serve an economic utility the way that Black folks do.

We have to be erased. When people participate in silencing and not amplifying these stories, when people fail to lift up when something they know unjust is happening to native people, they are being complicit in the ongoing genocide, in the ongoing erasure, we need people to actively, actively betray these systems if they benefit from them.

We need white people to be traitors to white supremacy. We need non-Black allies and accomplices of all stripes talking about this, demanding that the mainstream media cover it. Visibility is safety for these folks right now, and they are unsafe. If I had one last comment, it would be just a plea to everyone. If you care about this, talk about this. We need you right now.

Rebecca: Miigwech. That's a powerful message as well. Visibility is safety. These people are not safe right now. Chi-miigwech for this conversation. There's so much here that we have to work with and think about and keep talking about. Thank you so much.

Kelly: Well, thank you so much for having me. I really appreciate it.

Eve: The Henceforward, Indigenous and Black life on Turtle Island.

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