

STEALING CHILDREN TO STEAL THE LAND

Naomi Klein speaks to the legendary Manuel family about the uncovering of a mass grave of 215 Indigenous children.

Naomi Klein, [Intercepted](#)

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Children's shoes and a toy, part of a memorial honoring the recently discovered mass grave of 215 Indigenous children at the Kamloops Indian Residential School, are seen on May 30, 2021, in Toronto, Canada. Photo illustration: Elise Swain/The Intercept; Getty Images

Last month, the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation uncovered a mass grave of 215 children on the grounds of a former residential school in British Columbia, Canada.

This week on Intercepted: Naomi Klein speaks with residential school survivor Doreen Manuel and her niece Kanahus Manuel about the horrors of residential schools and the relationship between stolen children and stolen land. Doreen's father, George Manuel, was a survivor of the Kamloops Indian Residential School, where unmarked graves of children as young as 3 years old were found. Kanahus's father, Arthur Manuel, was also a survivor of the Kamloops residential school. This intergenerational conversation goes deep on how the evils of the Kamloops school, and others like it, have reverberated through a century of Manuels, an experience shared by so many Indigenous families, and the Manuel family's decadeslong fight to reclaim stolen land.

Warning: This episode contains highly distressing details about the killing, rape, and torture of children.

If you are a former residential school student in distress, or have been affected by the residential school system and need help, you can contact the 24-hour Indian Residential Schools Crisis Line: 1-866-925-4419

Additional mental-health support and resources for Indigenous people are available [here](#).

[Musical introduction.]

Naomi Klein: Welcome to Intercepted, I'm Naomi Klein, guest-hosting this special episode.

First, a warning. This episode contains highly distressing details about the killing, rape, and torture of children. If you are a survivor and need to talk, there is contact information in the show notes.

I am speaking to you from unceded Coast Salish territory in what is now known as British Columbia. The land where I live is the traditional territory of the Shíshálh Nation.

These kinds of land acknowledgements are so common in Canada that they have become a kind of bureaucratic formality. They are spoken at the start of pretty much every public gathering. They are the first words on the website of my son's elementary school. They are affixed to email signatures of public officials and university professors.

And often, these acknowledgements are heartfelt. But too rarely do we settlers think about what they actually mean.

If we are on Indigenous land, and those lands are unceded, that means they were never sold or surrendered under war or treaty. Which means that the underlying title of these lands is still held by their original inhabitants. Which begs the question: Why am I not acknowledging that with more than words? Why do I pay taxes to the municipal, provincial, and federal governments – instead of to the Shíshálh Nation?

An even more troubling question might be: Why was this land available to me and my family?

What cleared it of its original inhabitants, moved them onto reserve, and in too many cases, onto the streets? What was the precise mechanism of land dispossession?

There is no one answer to that question. A labyrinth of laws and ordinances did much of the work, unilaterally adopted and coercively enforced. But that's not all it took. And part of the answer to the question of how this land was cleared arrived almost exactly two weeks ago, when, a few hours' drive away, a mass grave was discovered.

CNN: The discovery is astounding, and so too the anguish, leaving the community members in much of Canada reeling. The remains of 215 children –

WBUR: – whose remains were found in a mass grave at a former residential school in British Columbia –

France24: – found at a mass grave in the Kamloops Indigenous school shocked and saddened the nation.

The unmarked grave, we learned, contains the remains of 215 children, some as young as 3 years old. It is on the grounds of a former school that was run by the Catholic Church, called the Kamloops Indian Residential School. It was a huge institution and Indigenous students were sent there from across the province and even beyond, including from where I live.

Two weeks have passed, but the revelation that there is a mass grave at a school that operated well into the 1970s is still incredibly raw and shocking. To be clear: It was not a shock that residential schools were violent, twisted, sinister places. Canadians knew this already because we have been told many times. A massive class action lawsuit against the government by 86,000 residential school survivors ended in a settlement agreement – a settlement that included the creation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2008. In 2015, the TRC issued its final report.

The findings were harrowing, and we heard all about it.

Sen. Murray Sinclair: Over the time of our mandate, the commission heard statements from survivors, gathered documents, and worked to create a number of calls to action aimed at addressing the damage that was done. The calls to action are centered around a core challenge in Canadian society: a broad lack of understanding of the unjust and violent circumstances from which modern Canada has emerged, and how the legacy of residential schools is part of that history, and of our country today.

NK: We heard about Indigenous children ripped from their parents, separated from siblings and relatives, beaten and whipped for speaking their language. We heard about priests and nuns who told children that their ceremonies, their art forms, their parents, their grandparents, their ways of knowing were not just wrong but satanic, a sure route to hell.

The TRC report told of young bodies, ravaged by starvation-level rations; of days filled with

forced manual labor; of braids of hair chopped off on arrival; of thin school uniforms wholly inadequate for frigid Canadian winters. It told of TB and other infectious diseases left to ram-page through the schools.

We heard about the systemic sexual violence – the rapes – by priests, Catholic brothers, and nuns. One school, St. Anne’s in Ontario, had a crank-operated electric chair.

Now this did not take place in a few dark corners where no one was looking. It took place on an industrial scale: 150,000 Indigenous children went through Canada’s residential school system over a century and half. And this was official state policy: enrollment in the schools became mandatory in 1920.

When the TRC issued that final report, it described this deliberate attempt by church and state to destroy Indigenous peoples’ culture and group coherence as “cultural genocide.”

But Murray Sinclair, the respected Indigenous judge who chaired the TRC, insisted that he had not actually been able to do his job – that being to uncover the full truth. Indeed, he had only scratched the surface.

MS: The one aspect of residential schools that really proved to be quite shocking to me, personally, was the stories that we began to gather of the children who died in the schools – of the children who died, sometimes deliberately, at the hands of others who were there, and in such large numbers. Survivors talked about, during the time that they were there, about children who suddenly went missing. Some of the survivors talked about witnessing children being buried in large numbers into mass burial sites.

NK: The survivors kept saying it. The trouble was proving it. The TRC’s mandate was to document the abuses at the schools, and to chart a path towards reconciliation. It was not set up to investigate potential mass murder or negligent homicide of children, nor did it have the financial resources or legal powers for such an undertaking. Yet that is precisely where the testimonies of survivors were leading – to crimes against humanity under cover of education.

In 2009, one year into the Commission’s work, Sinclair and his colleagues requested \$1.5 million to follow the leads about the existence of mass burial sites on school grounds. The government of Canada, then headed by Prime Minister Stephen Harper, shut them down, actively choosing to keep the nation’s crimes buried.

Here is Murray Sinclair again:

MS: We had no expectation that this would be a part of the work that we were doing, so we asked the government to allow us to conduct a fuller inquiry into that part of the work of the TRC in order to explore that on behalf of the survivors and Canadian public. We submitted a proposal, because it was not within our mandate and we asked that it be funded by the government. And that request was denied. And so, largely, we did what we could, but it was not anywhere near what we needed to accomplish and what we needed to investigate.

NK: The fourth volume of the final TRC report is entitled “Missing Children and Unmarked Burials,” and it contains many more questions than answers. That’s because so many children died inside these institutions – at many times the rates outside of them – that the religious orders who ran them stopped keeping official count, the ultimate expression of their disdain for Indigenous life. The TRC was able to identify 4,100 children who died while attending the schools, but Sinclair now estimates that the true number could be 15,000 – or even more.

Unable to uncover the full truth – which is, after all, the purpose of a truth commission – the TRC called for a full investigation of potential burial sites, as well as efforts to identify remains. And it called on religious orders and all branches of governments to unseal their records relating to these deaths.

When he took office in 2015, Justin Trudeau, promised to make justice for First Nations his government’s top priority. And when he issued an apology to survivors of residential schools, he wept:

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau: On behalf of the Government of Canada and of all Canadians, that this burden is one that you no longer have to carry alone.

NK: And yet, in the six years since the TRC’s report – years the Trudeau liberals have been in continuous power – only 10 of its 94 calls to action have been completed, and virtually no actions have been taken to get at the truth of those missing children: how many, where they are, who they were, and how they died.

It was in that torturous context that some Indigenous communities took matters into their own hands. Tired of waiting, the tk’emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation hired experts in ground-penetrating radar to examine the land surrounding the former Kamloops Residential School. That’s how it found evidence of those 215 children’s remains. The search of the property is ongoing, which means there may well be more macabre discoveries in store.

And not only in this one community in British Columbia: With federal funding finally flowing, other First Nations have begun their own searches. The Kamloops school, after all, was just one of 139 residential schools investigated by the TRC, and Murray Sinclair says that there were actually 1,300 such institutions across the country, many of them privately run.

Here is Sinclair again:

MS: We know that there were probably lots of sites similar to Kamloops that are going to come to light in the future. And we need to begin to prepare ourselves for that. Those who are survivors of the residential schools, including the intergenerational survivors need to understand that this evidence is important to make available to Canada so that Canada can understand the magnitude of what it is that they did and what it is that they contributed to.

Since the revelation of what was discovered at Kamloops has come to light, I have been inundated with phone calls from survivors, by the dozens if not hundreds, now. They’ve called me

often just to cry, just to tell us, “I told you so. I told you that this had happened. And now we’re beginning to see it.” And in their voices I can hear not only the pain and the anguish, but also the anger that they were feeling about the fact that nobody believed them when they told those stories.

NK: That anguish is surfacing across Canada, this nation that sits atop so many First Nations. The anguish can be heard in ceremonies in cities, towns, and reserves [sounds of a mass drumming circle], in a mass drumming circle held on the Canada-U.S. border; [sounds of horns honking] in convoys honking as they drive past the Kamloops school. It can be seen in the mountains of teddy bears, flowers, and in rows of tiny shoes lined up in front of government houses and on the sites of former residential schools.

And there is plenty of rage. The Trudeau government is under fire and so is the Vatican.

Ahead of the July 1 holiday weekend, #CancelCanadaDay has been trending. And hundreds of professors at Toronto’s Ryerson University, named after a key architect of the residential school system, have begun referring to their institution as X University. Last week, protestors pulled a monument of Ryerson to the ground and the statue’s head showed up on a stick on an Indigenous blockade called 1492 Land Back Lane.

In short, Canada – the good, the benign, the smug – is having an identity crisis. As well it should.

Steve Paikin [The Agenda]: If Canada was able to look away about the tragic legacy of the Indigenous residential schools in this country, that’s clearly no longer true.

NK: The question is: How deep will it go?

During these weeks of hand-wringing, one topic that has received less attention is “Why?”

Why did the state and church collaborate in these machineries designed to break the spirit and unmake the identities of 150,000 children? What did that cruelty serve?

The surface answer is uncontested. In the infamous words of former Canadian Prime Minister John A. Macdonald, the role of the residential school was to “take the Indian out of the child.”

Father Carion, an early principal of the Kamloops Indian Residential School definitely got that memo. He wrote: “We keep constantly before the mind of the pupils the object which the government has in view ... which is to civilize the Indians and to make them good, useful, and law-abiding members of society.”

But is that the whole story? Did all of this violence really flow from the idea that Indigenous people needed to be “civilized” in order to save their souls? Or did that racism, that white supremacy, serve some other purpose as well?

There is one sentence in the multiple-volume Truth and Reconciliation Commission report

that provides an answer – an explanation for the deeper “why?” behind these sinister schools.

It says this: “The Canadian government pursued this policy of cultural genocide because it wished to divest itself of its legal and financial obligations to Aboriginal people and gain control over their land and resources.”

In other words, we are back where we started: with land.

This was not just about one culture thinking itself superior to another and imposing its ways through brutality – though it was certainly about that too. Underneath that supremacist logic, it was also all about land. About a fervent drive by European settlers to gain control over lands that were rich with precious metals they wanted to mine, and profitable trees they wanted to fell, and fertile soil they wanted to farm. Lands that, at least in British Columbia, had never been ceded. Lands that in other parts of the country, were covered by treaties that agreed to share the territory with settlers, not surrender it for limitless development and extraction.

And one way to gain control over land that is occupied by other people is to shatter the social and familial structures of those people – alienate them from their languages, cultures, and traditional knowledge, all of which are intimately land based. Oh, and another way – maybe the most effective way to get the job done – is through sexual violence. Because nothing spreads shame, trauma, and substance abuse more effectively. And these schools were rape mines, generation after generation.

Another way of thinking about it is this: The torture at the schools was not sadism for its own sake but sadism in service of a broader, highly profitable purpose – land theft on a grand scale. The schools cleared the land more effectively than any bulldozer could.

That is what I want to talk about for the rest of the show with two extraordinary guests: The relationship between stolen children and stolen land, between unmarked mass graves and the colonial lie of empty lands.

These are vast subjects, so to bring them to a human scale, we are going to look at them through the lens of a single Secwepemc family, the First Nation on whose territory the mass grave was found – a family whose members were abused, through multiple generations, by the Kamloops Indian Residential School. Yet, nevertheless, a family at the absolute forefront of the struggle for Indigenous self-determination and land defense, in Canada and internationally: the legendary Manuel family.

Some background: Before his death in 1989, George Manuel helped found the modern Indigenous rights movement, forging international alliances from Greenland to Guatemala. He was elected National Chief of the National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations), he was president of the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, and was the founding president of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples. He wrote the landmark book “The Fourth World,”

and was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize several times. George Manuel was also a survivor of the Kamloops residential school.

His son, Arthur Manuel, was a towering intellectual and strategist who wrote two key texts that function as roadmaps of decolonization: “Unsettling Canada,” published in 2015, and “The Reconciliation Manifesto: Recovering the Land, Rebuilding the Economy.” I was honored to write the foreword for both of those books and I reported on Arthur’s creative legal work on many occasions. Arthur died suddenly and prematurely in 2017. Like his father and two siblings, he was a survivor of the Kamloops residential school.

Though George and Arthur are the best known, they were part of a larger family of artists, writers, healers, and land defenders, all united by the core principle that Indigenous land title is non-negotiable – and that true justice will only come when settler states start returning large amounts of land to Indigenous jurisdiction.

Two of the carriers of that legacy are with me today: Doreen Manuel, George’s daughter, is an award-winning filmmaker, educator, and multi-talented artist, currently serving as director of the Bosa Centre for Film and Animation at Capilano University. She is also a survivor of the Port Alberni residential school.

Kanahus Manuel, Arthur’s daughter, is a Secwepemc land defender and co-founder of the Tiny House Warriors, a grassroots movement that has built solar power tiny homes on wheels and placed them in the path of the Trans Mountain oil pipeline expansion project. She is currently on trial for her land defense work, as are two of her sisters. Their trial is a reminder that even as politicians apologize for the crimes of residential schools, the underlying crime of Indigenous land theft is not history. It is very much a crime in progress.

To start us off, Doreen reads a passage about the Kamloops school from the biography of her father, “From Brotherhood to Nationhood.”

Doreen Manuel: For nine-year-old Manuel, the personal struggle with the outside world began a few months later when a cattle truck pulled up to the reserve and the Indian agent called out the list of names of children who were to be shipped off to the Kamloops residential school. George Manuel’s name was on the list. He was about to be thrown into what he later called “the laboratory and the production line of the colonial system.”

The arrival of the truck was a traumatic moment for the whole community. A Secwepemc woman who attended the school around the same time as Manuel recalled that many of the younger children viewed their forced departure as a punishment for something they had done wrong.

The Kamloops school was run by the Catholic oblate order who were assisted on the girls’ side by the Sisters of St. Anne. Their monopoly over the Secwepemc would last until the 1960s and it was, as Manuel saw it, the greatest gift the Dominion of Canada made to the church.

In later years, he would suggest that Native people should launch a class action suit against the Vatican for the abuse generations of Indian children suffered at the hands of the priests, Catholic brothers, and nuns. That abuse included poor diet, a prescription of Indian language, forced labor, and a military-style discipline that was enforced by beatings.

One student of the Kamloops school recalls that the whole purpose of the institution seemed to be to crush the pride in themselves as Indians. Manuel recalled that there was so little time spent in actual learning that after two years at the school, he could only barely write his own name. What he and most other students remember most clearly and painfully about the school was not the hard work which, at times, was spurred on by beatings, but the hunger. As Manuel put it, "Hunger is both the first and last thing I can remember about that school. Not just me. Every Indian student smelled of hunger."

Doreen Manuel and Kanahus Manuel on the Horrors of the Kamloops Indian Residential School and Others Like It, and the Relationship Between Stolen Children and Stolen Land

NK: Thank you, Doreen.

Doreen Manuel, Kanahus Manuel, welcome to Intercepted and thank you for agreeing to speak to me during such a difficult time.

Doreen, I'd like to start by asking you to share whatever feels appropriate about the Kamloops school and the space it occupied in your life while you were growing up.

DM: My first memory of that school was visiting my older brothers and sister in that school with my mom.

It's important to understand that in my dad's time, he got taken there against his will and against the will of his family, and in my older brothers' and sister's time, and in my time, we were taken there because of assimilation that had already happened. You know, my mom and dad were both tortured in the schools they were in. And they knew how bad they were. And yet they took us there.

Partly it was because we were starving. There wasn't enough food at home. I remember eating chicken feed, that was all I had to eat, all day long, for days. And it was because there was no food. We had eaten the chickens and there was nothing else to eat. And so that starvation came from all of the laws that the colonizers were placing on us. We weren't allowed to hunt or fish. So there was just no food to be had, even though the food was in the bushes and we could have gone and gotten it at any time if we were allowed to. Otherwise, if we tried, my parents would wind up in prison and we would wind up in residential school anyway.

So I remember visiting my brothers and sisters in there, and it was like visiting somebody in prison, the way my mom and I were treated as they brought us in there, and the visit was supervised. And then we left. And when they came out of there, they were different than when they went in. And in my experience, when I went, my brother Arthur actually taught me how to fight. He taught me how to punch and kick and I was 8 years old. And he was giving me fighting lessons. And really, it's one of the things that helped me survive in there because one of the first encounters I had was I was jumped by one of the girls. And it was because of his teachings that I was able to fend for myself as an 8-year-old child.

You know, we've always talked about graves. In fact, that's the basis of one of my first films, "These Walls." I had a vision that I thought was an actual real experience, but the more I thought about it, I realized it wasn't. I was walking up the hallway at the residential school, that residential school with an elder, and she came up to a wall, and she touched it, and she said, "I think this is the wall they're buried in." And she meant the babies, children and babies of the school.

So I went to the school and I walked the hallways looking for that exact same hallway, and I found the hallway but I couldn't find the wall, so I didn't understand it. But then I had a nightmare that was so real. I turned the two things into a short film called "These Walls" and it's about murdered and missing babies.

Grace Dove as Mary [from "These Walls"]: I saw the babies.

Andrea Menard as Claire [from "These Walls"]: What? What did you say?

GD: I saw the babies. In the walls. [Crying hysterically.]

NK: Doreen, I watched that film recently. It's so harrowing. And, of course, Murray Sinclair, the chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in his statement recently talked about how they had heard about infants.

MS: Some of the survivors talked about infants who were born to young girls at the residential schools who had been fathered by priests, having those infants taken away from them and deliberately killed, sometimes by being thrown into furnaces, they told us.

NK: I'm wondering if you believe that we haven't heard the worst yet?

DM: No, no, you haven't heard the worst yet. My mom went to the residential school in Cranbrook. And she witnessed firsthand her close friend being murdered by a nun. The nun just threw that little girl down the stairs like a rag doll and her neck snapped.

In that same school, the girls didn't ever want to go into the infirmary, they never wanted to be sick. Because if you were sick, and you went in there, that's where you got raped. The priests would go one by one to the girls every night and rape every one of them. My mother got raped in there, and she watched her friends getting raped in there. And one of those

women got pregnant. And then they threw her out of the school, they called her a whore.

I was waterboarded in there. I was held under the water till I passed out. I was 8 years old. Well, the reason they did that to me was because I wet my bed. I wet my bed because I was scared. I had to fight for my life. I was just a little kid, I was frightened, I had no idea what was going on. I didn't know why dad left me in there; I didn't know where mom was. So I wet my bed every single night.

Things went on in the bathroom that I heard about, like girls were raped in there, different things were happening to girls, if you got up at the middle of the night to go to the bathroom. So I didn't want to go in there. And I didn't. And they started strapping me for wetting my bed. And when that didn't work, it moved on to harsher and harsher punishments, until it got to that – just sheer frustration because they thought they could beat it out of me, beat a different behavior out of me.

And this is my history. And that's just one experience of my own that I endured. And, you know, the things that my mom and dad talked about, the stories I've heard ... I interviewed a man in Vancouver here and he told me that he was one of the kids that buried the children, him and two other boys, that when a child died in that school, at nighttime, when everyone else was asleep, he had to go and wrap the body. And these two other boys, they were young teenagers, had to carry the body out, dig the grave, and put them in the grave. And he carries that memory, how many kids he had to do that for that they killed.

And there was starvation. My mom told me she was on cook duty. And she'd go down extra early in the morning to try to pick as much mouse shit out of the oatmeal as possible before cooking it. Even when I went, it was like that. They didn't take the greatest care. There were mice and rats in those buildings and they were shitting all over, in the food, and that's the food we'd get. And if we didn't eat our porridge, our one scoop of porridge every morning, they'd save it for lunch. And that we'd have to eat at lunch. If we didn't finish it all at lunch, we'd eat it for dinner. And it would go on and on like that. So, you know, what are your choices? Eat that or starve.

NK: Kanahus, I want to bring you into this conversation.

This huge red brick building was on your territory, on Secwepemc territory, and I was hoping you could just maybe describe about how it reverberated down to your generation and the space that building occupied in your life and imagination, knowing what it did to your father, and grandfather, and so many others.

Kanahus Manuel: This brick building is a massive brick building that in current day takes up a lot of space in the City of Kamloops. So as a child growing up, we always frequented the closest town, which was Kamloops, and we always saw that brick building, and we knew that was the Kamloops Indian Residential School. We knew our father attended Kamloops Indian Residential School. And we knew our grandparents also attended that. And that wasn't the

only school. But that was the one that we saw every day, or almost every day, or every time we frequented that area.

And the school, when it was formed, it wasn't just Secwepemc, it wasn't just the Indigenous people from from our area, it was the Okanagan, it was the Stelat'en, it was the Tsilhqot'in, it was the Dine'. It was all the surrounding nations and even other places across Canada where children were forced to go. So it's affected us a lot, and just the visual of having to see it every day impacts us on a daily basis.

I raised four of my children out of that system and not putting them into any type of public school system because I felt that every single public school system ties to the residential school because it was a way to indoctrinate the colonial ways, and values, and education into the children, and I never wanted to push my children into that.

DM: So those schools, they did a number of different things, like even without the abuse, the institutionalization of entire generations of a nation of people. It means the breaking and elimination of our family system. And, you know, you can compare our family system to any other family system, it was the same. It's where we learned how to care for one another, how to be a parent, how to love, how to build healthy boundaries, how to understand the world, and then they removed our culture and our language and replaced it with cultural shame. And all of the negative things that were told to us in the school like we're stupid, whores, no good for nothing, lazy. Those are the everyday messages we received, instead of, "You are loved, you are kind, you are wonderful, you can do anything that you want in this world." The messages that white kids were getting were completely opposite to the messages we were getting.

And when you raise children like that, they come out of the school and you see the effects of it. You know, I myself, many of us in the family, struggled with substance abuse. And we went through a period in our younger life where we really, really struggled hard just to try to break that messaging. And then what happens is then you turn into a workaholic perfectionist, and you work yourselves to death. So in our family nobody lives past 67. That's pretty young to die. Nobody lives past 67.

NK: Kanahus, do you feel comfortable talking about some of the intergenerational trauma that gets passed on? We hear that phrase all the time. But sometimes this kind of clinical language drains the words of meaning. What does it actually mean to be in a community where so many of the adults went to those schools, and grew up with that abuse, and grew up with those systems of shaming and separation?

KM: One of the things that is very important for us, just as our Manuel family, too, is to talk about that trauma that comes out of that school, the sexual trauma, the abuse, like my auntie Doreen was just talking about. But a lot of the children that went to the schools were sexually abused: the boys were raped, the girls were raped, and those are the things that we really need to talk about in order for us to heal. We need to talk about the abuse, we need to expose the abusers in order for these same things to not happen to our family.

[Words in Secwepemc.] I can't speak my language, I can say words, but that's the impact that drives so deep in my soul that I want to speak my language so bad and I'm speaking the language of our colonizers, of the enemy that is still committing genocide on us. And our songs and dances, one of the things that they ripped from us, they didn't want us to sing. They didn't want us to dance, and even now, to this day, when we're reviving our Secwepemc songs and dances, and we're calling the women, "Come, dance with us! We know these dances and songs now," [a Secwepemc song plays quietly], even some of the women that went to residential school or those men that went to residential school, it's still so hard. They want to dance so hard, but they can't. It's that fear. And it's what they beat into our people.

And this generation, and my generation, and as being a daughter of someone who was a residential school survivor, but became a strong, powerful Indigenous leader for our nation – for our land – and always connecting it back to the land, and I think that's the biggest part that has helped heal me and my generation, is just hearing the words of my grandfather.

George Manuel: Expand the powers that you have. Show us we can control our fishing rights, show us we can control our hunting rights, show us we can control education, show us we can control our whole destiny through our own political institution.

KM: And my father:

Arthur Manuel: We cannot say we're part of Canada when we're systematically made poor because they do not recognize that we own our own land, our own territory.

KM: How our family feels and thinks when they stand up for the land, it empowers us. It gives us the power. What gives us more power than the next people that are dealing with that abuse and that intergenerational trauma and effects, it's when we're able to stand up and fight back.

And we know that Canada is the abuser. It's the biggest abuser out there to even force our families into these schools. Let's expose it. Let's point the finger at them and say, "No, these policies, these laws, these are all very illegal, they're outdated, these are human rights violations. And what is the solution? Well, you ripped us off the land to put us in those schools. That's why. You ripped us off our land; that's where our culture comes from. You ripped us off our land; that's where our language comes from, our family systems comes from."

And so it's the land that we need to continue to focus on, that's going to be what's going to heal all the atrocities that came from that residential school, is by going back to the land, by fighting for the land, because the land is what's going to revive everything for us. Once we have our land, we have enough land base to practice our culture and our language.

NK: There's a huge amount of anger being directed at the Catholic Church, especially after the Pope expressed his sorrow about the mass grave in Kamloops, but stopped well short of issuing an actual apology.

Kanahus, your father wanted an apology and a renunciation from this Pope, but not only for

residential schools. Before he died, Arthur wrote this very powerful open letter to Pope Francis. Can you read a part of it for us?

KM: “I’m a member of the Secwepemc Nation from the Interior of British Columbia, Canada, Canada’s most Western province, and we are still fighting against the bitter legacy of European colonialism that has been given a legal basis by one of your predecessors Pope Nicholas IV. Pope Nicholas IV charters gave the Church’s blessings to the slave trade and legitimized genocide against what he described as “pagans and Saracens,” which included everyone in the world other than the European Christians. This began the organized, international, European assault, with the goal of stripping the world of its wealth and reducing its people to servitude. The goal of raw theft and enslavement remained the same, and they are still the ultimate legal justification for European colonialism in the Americas as well as the ultimate constitutional basis for settler colonialism. That is why my people – and Indigenous peoples around the world – have asked you to publicly renounce the Doctrine of Discovery and the papal bulls of Pope Nicholas IV. You alone in the world have the power to do this, and such an act would help to restore the faith of many of my people and the justice of the church. It will also, in no small measure, assist us in winning justice here in Canada, because those church doctrines remain, more than 500 years later, the core legal justification for the confiscation of our land and subjugation of our peoples.

NK: So there’s finally a national discussion happening about residential schools. Some cities are even canceling Canada Day this year, which I think Arthur probably would have approved of. But Kanahus, you’ve been saying on social media that the discussion still isn’t going far enough. And you wrote the other day, and I’ll quote here, “They took our kids to take land. Now, no one wants to remember that it was about the land.”

Doreen, what is still being missed, do you think, about the economic interests that the schools served, about the “why” behind these monstrous institutions?

DM: Back then, with the residential schools, it was to break generations of children down, inflict cultural shame on them, make them not want to be Indigenous, take away the language, so any tie to the land. You remove the language, you remove this strong bond with the land, and then the culture, take that away. So you’ve got people not even wanting to look Indigenous.

Look at how many billions, and billions, and billions of dollars the government steals off of our land and resources, and in usage, every single year. Of course it’s about the land. You can’t walk outdoors and not be taken care of by us. It’s our resources and our land that pays for every single street, every single highway, every single lamppost, every single service that’s offered to every single citizen, that’s ours. And they’re making use of it and then have the audacity to be racist against us, when they are living off of us. Their survival – every day – is because of us. Because of the theft that is still going on.

KM: When all this news came out, even saying that this is the largest of all the residential

schools in Canada, it's not a coincidence that the largest residential school in Canada is actually built and operated in the largest unceded lands in Canada. Secwepemc is 180,000 square kilometers of territory. This is unceded land: no treaty, no purchase, no land agreement, no cede or surrender with Great Britain, not with Canada, not with British Columbia. This land remains unceded and unsurrendered to this day, Secwepemc lands.

And everything that Canada has done to usurp our lands, to commandeer our trade routes, all of this – to take control of our lands is to take control of our wealth. They built these schools to get access to the land, and to assimilate. And it was very important for them to assimilate and to indoctrinate, because we are warriors, we are land defenders, we are healers. It made us depend on that land. We depended on that land so much for our basic survival, for who we are. But they wanted to get to that land, and they wanted to log, and they wanted to mine, and they wanted to build all their highways, and their railways because those were all built while those kids were in that school, while the families were broken, because of the theft of their children.

All types of industry, that was their foot in the door, because they removed any type of resistance from that land. And that's when we first saw the first murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls, is when all of that came in, the gold mining, those were the first man camps that came in with those highways and railways; and then the laws, with the Indian Act, and forcing the reservation system and into these residential schools, it was all a part of a big policy to remove us off the territory.

And my father was very clear when he told the world that we only live on 0.2 percent of our Indigenous territories.

Arthur Manuel: When you add up all the Indian reserves in Canada, all of them, we have 0.2 percent. That's how come we're poor. That means Canada and the province under the Queen owns 99.8 percent. That's why Ontario is rich, that's how come B.C.'s rich, is because those governments claim that.

KM: You look at our territory and you look at that Kamloops Indian Residential School, they removed all of our people to that 0.2 percent because that Kamloops Indian Residential School was also located on the Kamloops Indian Reserve at that time. And what those schools did was they really tore down and tore apart the way that we governed ourselves, because as Indigenous people – and the majority of Indigenous people – we really follow our matrilineal line, where it's the females, it's the grandmothers, and the mothers, and the aunties, and the ones that really care for their nation and the health of their children and nation, that are really the decision makers when we talked about our governance. And now with this indoctrination with the residential school, we see a lot of that has switched, where it has really become this indoctrinated patriarchy that has affected our Indigenous communities as well. And that comes from decision-makings when it comes to our lands.

DM: One of the most difficult things that I personally endured as an Indigenous woman, that

the residential school inflicted on Indigenous women, is that it reconditioned the way that men understood the woman's relationship to the family as leaders, and to the community as leaders. And I had gotten so stone cold in the residential school that I stopped crying at one point and I never shed another tear for a great deal of my life.

And of all crazy things, that's what my dad liked the most about me. He always said I wasn't like the other women in the family. And so he trained me in leadership. But he trained me to be an organizer, and a planner, and a fundraiser, and because I followed him around everywhere, I learned how to speak. And I did learn all the other things my brothers learned, but I didn't learn it because he was teaching it to me, I learned it because he was role-modeling it to me. That was a different way than my brothers.

And I always remember this thing my dad told me. Him and I were kind of arguing about something – something ridiculous – and I turned to him and I said, "What are you trading me for? What position are you thinking I'll hold in leadership?" And he turned to me, and he said, "Oh, I'm not training you to be a leader. I'm training you to support a leader. I'm training you to marry a leader and support that person and build and turn them into a leader." And I got really offended. And he said, "I don't mean to offend you," he said, "but look at how many women chiefs there are." And at that time, there was next to none. And he said, "I don't know how fast our men are changing to accept a woman leader. And I don't want to train you for something that won't exist, maybe even in your lifetime."

But I think more women have to push themselves into that role, the role that they were born to serve in, and not allow this colonial way of thinking to seep in. We see things clearly. We see what we fight for, it's always in front of us, our children. And that reminds us of the children that will come.

And some men are capable of doing that. But many are not. And that is the key to get us out of this trouble, is the fierce fight that has to take place and the focus that has to happen.

KM: If we're talking about revival of our cultural ways and practices, if we're talking about people wanting to support Indigenous people, and solutions, and healing that comes apart with these residential schools, we have to talk about the land and we have to talk about the governance. We will remain connected to our lands forever and always – Secwepemc [words in Secwepemc]. My aunties, they made sure I know how to say that, "Secwepemc territory forever and ever." And we know that by speaking our language, and all of these things that they tried to take from us, along with our lands, but the more that we fight for it, the more that we empower ourselves, and the more that we lead as an example, because some families aren't strong enough, because they've been abused so much by the system and by the state, by these residential schools, but we are strong enough, so we can lead, so we can help our people see it's our land, and I'm here dedicating my life to the land, here with my children on the front-lines fighting the Trans Mountain Pipeline because I believe so deep in my soul, that my family did the right thing by coming out of those residential schools and saying, "No, we're gonna

fight for our lands. And this is our contribution to our nation.”

NK: Kanahus, as you mentioned, being on the front lines of this huge struggle against a major pipeline expansion that would carry bitumen from the Alberta tar sands to the coast and go through many, many waterways in Secwepemc territory.

The last time I was in your territory, there was a huge gathering of people on the banks of the Thompson River, singing, and lighting a fire, and vowing to resist this pipeline. But the Canadian government has been pushing through since then; it has nationalized the pipeline, bought it from the American company, which backed out of the project, in part because of the economic uncertainty posed by the exercise of Indigenous title and rights.

And so one of the cruelest I feel ironies of this moment is that on the day that the news came of the discovery of this mass grave in Kamloops, Kanahus, two of your sisters were in court in Kamloops defending themselves on charges related to their resistance to this pipeline, and you yourself are in court on other charges. The last time I saw you, your wrist had been broken by the police as part of a very rough arrest. What does it say that three Manuel daughters are in court on charges resisting this pipeline and what these schools were all about in the first place, which was dispossession from land?

KM: As Indigenous people, we have a right to say no to these pipelines and these projects and to federal consultation meetings that they’re trying to get Indigenous consent, but when we say no, we are criminalized. And it shows that these policies and laws, to silence Indigenous people are still systemic, it’s still there in every fabric of Canadian society.

The RCMP played a big role in the removal of Indigenous children from their families. They’re the ones that went to the communities and they actually physically removed the children from their communities and families and forced them onto the cattle trucks, however they were transporting the children. But still, to this day, the RCMP are still playing a really crucial role in the genocide of Indigenous peoples, because it’s the colonization that is the act of war. And the colonization is the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from our lands.

Even to this day, when we’re talking about injunctions, the RCMP are the ones that are used to actually physically remove and arrest Indigenous peoples from the land, and put them in jail, and give them charges for obstruction of justice if they refuse to leave areas where injunctions are. I’m millimeters outside of the injunction zone. And these are illegal in that they are violating our international, Indigenous human rights, that we have rights to land and self determination.

This pipeline is tearing up the homes of Indigenous peoples up around the Alberta tar sands. They’re dying of cancers at a rate no other Canadian will ever know, unless they live around the Alberta tar sands. This is how they want to kill the Indian, now, is destroy their land. They took them from the schools to destroy the Indian. Now they’re taking the land from us, destroying as much as they can through their industries.

NK: Do you feel something is shifting? Do you see more people making the connections between the schools, and the land, and the RCMP as you see these statues falling and these ceremonies happening? Are we in a true reckoning?

DM: I think a lot of people are still fairly early in their wellness, because it was not that long ago that the apology came and a lot of people saw the apology from the government to us over residential school as just a farce.

But to me what I saw was that: OK, sure, it was a farce. Yeah, sure, it was a well-worded, very carefully, meticulously worded document that had a purpose from the government's point of view. From my point of view, it made it more known. People know what a residential school is now.

For instance, I went into the dentist's office over a year ago. Something about being in the dentist chair spurred a memory of being hurt at a dentist chair at residential school, and I started crying and I couldn't stop, but I didn't want the residential school to take another day from me, I didn't want to be ashamed of my grief and run out of there and then have to come back at another time. So when the dentist came in, I asked him, "Do you know what a residential school is?" And he said, "Yes." And I said, "I was abused in a residential school and part of the abuse took place in a dentist chair, and I'm sitting in this dentist chair having a memory, but I still want you to fix my teeth. Can you do it?" And he said, "Yes." And he was so gentle and kind through the whole process. He helped my healing process.

See, before the apology, I'm not sure that would have happened. Before all of the testimonies that were taken all across Canada were done, I'm not sure that would have happened. But that just happened not that long ago, where people were giving testimony. And, you know, this uncovering of these graves at the Kamloops residential school was actually supposed to happen a long time ago. I remember. I was living around there at that time when it was supposed to happen, and I was anticipating it. But it didn't happen then. So it's like it's waves that we're going through, and healing that we're going through.

I don't think our fight is getting exactly easier. I think we're getting better at fighting. And with every time we get better at fighting, we teach the younger people how to get better at fighting. So I wouldn't say we're losing any ground, but it's a slow move forward.

NK: Your family has been in the struggle through many generations, through so much terror and trauma. What is the through-line? What connects all these years of organizing and activism?

DM: The common thread to me, of all of the work that my father and brothers have done, is working to create a future for the future generations. I mean, those are all strategies. But every strategy is put in place thinking about those future generations. How are we going to make sure that we don't lose more of our Aboriginal title of rights, lose more control over our education or lose more ground? To me, decision-making in the Indigenous community is simple:

Hang on to the land and Aboriginal title and rights for the future generations. Arthur talked about it all the time. He wasn't doing that work for himself; he was doing it for his grandchildren that were yet to come.

KM: I feel that Indigenous peoples have a big job to do. We can take all this time, a whole lifetime of healing. But I take what radical freedom-fighters teach me. And they say: No, what happens in 10 years, in revolutionary years should happen in two years. That's the type of speed that we need to be starting to work on if we're going to really see change in our generation. That's the revolutionary time that we are working in because the 500 years that they took from us, we gotta make that back. And it's work. It's every waking minute of your day that you are reversing what the Canadian government tried to do. And the way that we are reversing it is we're bringing back our ways and replacing it with our ways again.

And so we have a lot of work. And this is urgent, crucial work that needs to be done, or else Canada will have accomplished its goal in eliminating us and assimilating us, exterminating us and disappearing us and making us Canadians. But we'll never ever, ever be a Canadian. Because as long as we're here, and as long as our blood continues to flow, and these creeks continue, and these rivers continue to flow, there will always be Secwepemc.

With these remains and this mass grave they're uncovering this for everybody to see. They wanted to cover us up, like my sister said. But we're the seeds, and we're growing, and there's nothing that they're going to do to stop this from happening.

NK: That was land defender Kanahus Manuel and award-winning filmmaker, Doreen Manuel. Our thanks to them for speaking to us.

[Credits music.]

NK: And that does it for this episode of Intercepted.

We have links to our guests' work in the show notes, as well as contacts if you need help and want to talk.

You can follow us on Twitter @Intercepted and on Instagram @InterceptedPodcast. Intercepted is a production of First Look Media and The Intercept. I'm Naomi Klein, senior correspondent at The Intercept. Our lead producer is Jack D'Isidoro. Supervising producer is Laura Flynn. Betsy Reed is editor in chief of The Intercept. Rick Kwan mixed our show. Our theme music, as always, was composed by DJ Spooky.

Until next time.

Show notes:

Doreen Manuel can be found @DoreenManuel1 and www.runningwolf.ca

Kanahus can be found at [@kanahusfreedom](#) and www.tinyhousewarriors.com

“Unsettling Canada: A National Wake Up Call,” by Arthur Manuel

“The Reconciliation Manifesto: Recovering the Land, Rebuilding the Economy,” by Arthur Manuel

“From Brotherhood to Nationhood: George Manuel and the Making of the Modern Indian Movement,” by Peter McFarlane with Doreen Manuel, afterword by Kanahus Manuel

“The Fourth World: An Indian Reality,” by George Manuel and Michael Posluns

“These Walls” directed by Doreen Manuel