



# Reflections on Land Defense as a Settler in Mi'kma'ki

by **CAMPBELL MCCLINTOCK** /// EAC Volunteer

My name is Campbell and I'm a settler of English, Scottish, and French descent living in rural Mi'kma'ki.

This is how I currently introduce myself in spaces committed to land defense and Indigenous solidarity. The exact words have transformed over time, as has their significance to me. What originated as a sense of duty fuelled by “whiteness,” privilege and guilt eventually reached its limits. Recognizing the absence of a genuine spirituality in my activism, I asked myself, what is my relationship to the beautiful Wabanaki lands that nourish me, and why do I want to protect them? This question beckoned me to develop a true intimacy with the watershed I call home, and to reflect both on my blood ancestors and on the lineages of anti-colonialism that guide my politics, so that I may act as not merely an ally to Mi'kmaw land defenders, but as an accomplice.

I was born on this continent because, over the past four centuries, my ancestors imposed themselves upon a land that was not theirs. Their reasons for leaving their homelands included perceived opportunities of greater wealth and religious freedom, though in settling across the Atlantic Ocean, they actively participated in the displacement and genocide of Indigenous nations throughout Turtle Island. Today I have the opportunity to scrutinize and attempt to disentangle myself

from the illegitimate, inherited spoils of colonialism. Turtle Island has seen over 500 years of Indigenous-led resistance to the violence of colonialism, and by learning from this rich history, I steer my lineage nearer to decolonization and intergenerational stewardship.

Take Chiapas, where, in 1994, the Zapatistas resisted the encroaching Mexican government and newly-signed NAFTA through militant self-defence and established an autonomously governed society in their ancestral homeland – including their own schools, economy and healthcare system. These efforts catalyzed the anti-globalization movement, emboldening communities worldwide to reject the supposed inevitability of capitalist expansion. In that same decade, a contingent of Haudenosaunee, who have one of the oldest and longest-running models of participatory democracy, protected each other, their land and their culture against a federally militarized effort to establish a golf course (a case that is all too familiar to those of us who call Mi'kamki home). This conflict is known as the Oka Crisis. In our own region, Mi'kmaw folks and allies have long engaged in land defense against industry and colonialism, including five decades of resistance to the devastating Pictou County pulp mill and a successful defense of the Shubenacadie River against the Alton Gas project.

These are just a few examples of the many communities who, in the face of unrelenting greed, bigotry and military power, did whatever it took to protect the land and water that materially and spiritually sustained them. Each of these Indigenous nations (and the individuals within them) had their own motivations to combat

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colonialism. Their efforts compel me to consider what I would be willing to sacrifice for this land, as so many generations of Mi'kmaq have and will, so that subsequent generations may have abundant sources of fresh air, food and water.

We all benefit from Indigenous land defense. With the insatiability of capitalist resource extraction, Indigenous-led, anti-colonial land defense is one of the last bastions of hope for our planet's health and integrity. So, for those of settler descent, how can we cultivate our own spiritual relationship to Mi'kma'ki, so that we, alongside Mi'kmaw folks and allies, may defang and diminish climate-degrading capitalist greed in service of a collective future?

When we have discovered our own reasons to live and act in solidarity with Indigenous land defenders, we must then identify and scrutinize the political actors whose power and profit depend upon poisoning our lands and water. Houston's government is increasingly unabashed in these efforts, using Canada- and Nova Scotia-First rhetoric to strong-man cushy contracts to his cronies, all without Mi'kmaw consultation. In the past year, he has lifted hard-won bans on fracking and uranium exploration, criminalized peaceful land defense, overseen raids of Mi'kmaw truckhouses, threatened to revive a defeated golf course project in West Mabou Beach Provincial Park (I'm sensing a trend, Canada!) and slated the sacred lands at Hunter's Mountain in Unama'ki for clearcutting.

Houston's feverish power-grabbing is not merely a spinoff of Trumpian authoritarianism. He is behaving exactly as colonial governments are designed to: to accumulate power for elites by stealing Indigenous land and resources, systematically disintegrating their ability to subsist, survive and self-govern, if not extinguishing them outright. These strategies are numerous and must be rigorously studied to be effectively opposed.

For example, the elites may pit working-class parties against one another, as was attempted in the 2020 Saulnierville treaty lobster disputes, where conflicts were fuelled between settler and Mi'kmaw fisherfolk while the bosses and buyers continued to rake in profits. Or the elites may weaponize a public health crisis, such as Houston's blatant lies about Mi'kmaw truckhouses selling fentanyl-tainted cannabis, in absence of any credible proof and despite the legality of these businesses under the 1752 Peace and Friendship Treaties. Though the colonizer is persistent and well-resourced in their repression of the Mi'kmaq, of African-Nova Scotians and of poor folks across all cultures, they are hardly imaginative. By studying history, we can see how clumsily the colonizer recycles their tactics.

But just beyond the garish spotlight hogged by self-important colonial governments, there have been and always will be models of governance far more democratic and intergenerationally-minded. We will not always do it perfectly, but if we commit to each other, to the land, and to future generations, then we abolish and replace the need for colonial structures. Just this past October, the Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaw chiefs released a statement declaring their unity against Houston's speed of business and lack of respect in violating Mi'kmaw treaty and land rights, reminding the public that the Province is not the arbiter of these lands. Like the

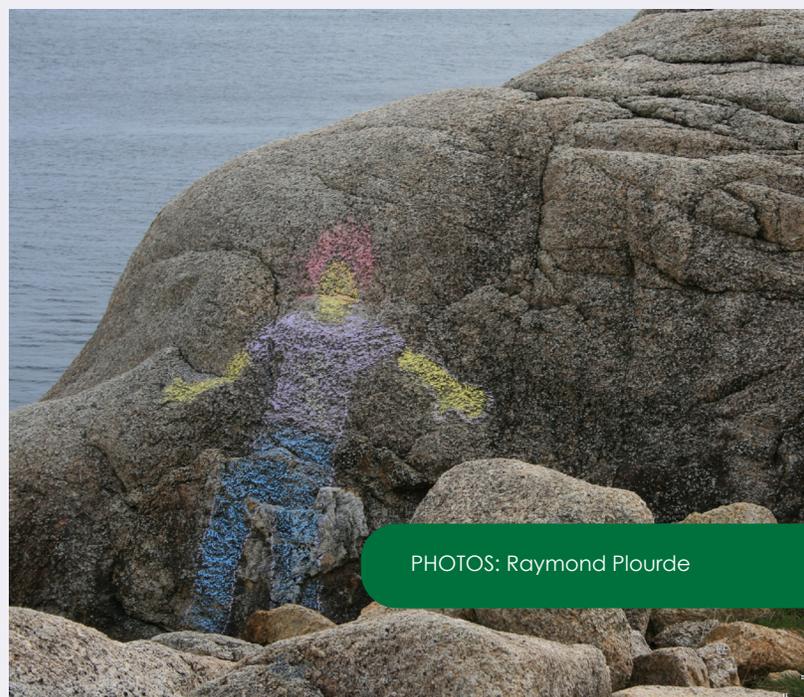
## TAKE ACTION

In the face of environmental, economic, and political volatility, we need strong communities more than ever. Try introducing yourself to neighbours and see what issues you have in common. By building relationships with the people around us, we can be more interdependent, and therefore more prepared for the coming changes in the world.

autonomy fought for and achieved by the Zapatistas, we can work toward a model of Indigenous-led self-governance in Mi'kma'ki.

Though I am a settler here, I do not have to bend a knee to colonial powers that blatantly ravage the land I love. This land has so much more to offer the more I embrace it as a free, expansive, and indomitable entity. In my desire to be an effective accomplice alongside Mi'kmaw land defenders, I have begun my own process of creating a true relationship with this land.

From my chosen home on the North Mountain of Kespuktwik, I am becoming better acquainted with the seasonal rhythms. Each morning of the winter I walk toward the waterfall to discover the snowprints of my hare, squirrel, and coyote neighbours. I have watched the brook run full and dry and full again on its rocky descent toward the Bay of Fundy. I have bathed and gasped ecstatically in icy lakes when I start to stink from my haggard off-grid life. I have stepped gently around wild onions and lady slippers and plucked wild blueberries and strawberries. I have searched for black ash trees – favoured for their bark by Mi'kmaw basket weavers – and aspire to support their propagation. I have learned the English names of many plants and trees and perhaps soon their Mi'kmaw names as well. Because of this relationship to the land I am nurturing, when there are frontlines to support, I know what I am there to protect, and what futures we are making possible.



PHOTOS: Raymond Plourde