Nate Hagens (00:00:02):

You're listening to the Great Simplification with Nate Hagens. That's me. On this show we try to explore and simplify what's happening with energy, the economy, the environment, and our society. Together with scientists, experts, and leaders this show is about understanding the bird's eye view of how everything fits together. Where we go from here, and what we can do about it as a society and as individuals.

(00:00:33):

While this podcast is primarily dominated by a Western and U.S. point of view, as that's the culture I've lived in my whole life, there are many cultures with a different perspective and social explanation for what's going on. One example is the many different indigenous tribes within the North American continent. Today, Jodi Archambault, a member of the Hunkpapa and Oglala Lakota tribes joins me to share her experiences and cultural observations. Jodi currently serves as the director for Indigenous People's Initiatives for Wend Collective and a strategic advisor for the Bush Foundation. Prior to that Jodi worked in the Obama administration serving as the Special Assistant to the President for Native American Affairs. This topic is potent. Containing a lot of history that is still yet to be resolved. While there's still much to do to come to terms with the past, there's also much we can learn from the indigenous people with whom we co-inhabit the land. With that, I'm pleased to present Jodi Archambault.

(00:01:57):

Hello, Jodi. Good to see you.

Jodi Archambault (00:01:59):

Good to see you too.

Nate Hagens (00:02:00):

How are things today in North Dakota?

Jodi Archambault (00:02:03):

It's pretty cold and windy.

Nate Hagens (00:02:06):

Yeah, here too.

Jodi Archambault (00:02:07):

Better today than it was yesterday, but tonight it's supposed to get bad again.

Nate Hagens (00:02:12):

I have a lot of questions to ask you, and I'm really looking forward to this. Because this is not a topic that I often talk about. Because it's a topic I don't really know that much about. Maybe we could start by you just giving a little overview of your current work on what you're trying to accomplish.

Jodi Archambault (00:02:33):

Okay. I first have to introduce myself to the public. [Speaking Lakota]. I just said hello. I greet everybody with a Hello Relatives. I greet everybody with a warm handshake. I am Jodi Archambault and I'm from Standing Rock.

Nate Hagens (00:02:59):

And that was what language?

Jodi Archambault (00:03:00):

Lakota. I'm a Lakota citizen of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, but I'm a person who's always lived on the planes, always lived in North Dakota and weather like this. We went further south when it got this cold or in the river ravines, and this is home. This, regardless of how cold or windy it gets, this has always been home for us.

Nate Hagens (00:03:22):

As in always, as in always?

Jodi Archambault (00:03:26):

Always as in millennia. Even if we weren't here, we originated from the Black Hills. So we're always coming back here for millennia. When I say millennia for thousands and thousands and thousands. Since time, immemorial as people often translate, what our understanding of where we come from is.

Nate Hagens (00:03:49):

Getting back, what are you doing? What is your professional work? What are you trying to change in our culture, in our world?

Jodi Archambault (00:03:57):

My professional work, I work with a lot of different indigenous communities, indigenous people, some tribal nations. And I've been looking at ways that tribes are better for the land in ways that is not widely known by most people in the United States. And there's a lot of things that we know intuitively, I guess, or innately about the land and place that just is what we've always done. And for some reason that kind of deeper connection to place is something that goes completely unrecognized, unknown, not very widely even understood by not just the federal government, but by Americans writ large. A lot of that is the result of deliberate erasure of our people from the history of the land, I guess the American lore of not just yesterday but today as well. And that's just something that is a part of America as well. It's not just the violent past, but it's the continuous erasure that's problematic.

(00:05:22):

And something that I work on. But mostly I work on trying to help the land and the water, trying to help the relatives that live on that, not just the humans, but as a whole. There's a lot of species that don't have a human voice. And so that some of the undertakings that our ancestors have charged us with and take it very seriously.

Nate Hagens (00:05:45):

Well, among other reasons, that's probably one of the things that brought us together and that we both care about deeply. Is it true then that your culture views what I often refer to in my talks as our nieces, nephews, and cousins in nature, as your relatives, as family, because that is a non-anthropocentric viewpoint that is different than our modern Western culture?

Jodi Archambault (00:06:12):

That's correct. And whenever I talk about mine and our culture, I want to just clarify that there are 574 different nations in the United States that are federally recognized. There's more that are not federally recognized, and there's a ton of diversity in those nations. That probably would be about half of the nations that were here before the Europeans came. And everybody has a very distinct and unique way of living on what I call Turtle Island, I should say. What my people understand as Turtle Island.

Nate Hagens (00:06:49):

What's Turtle Island?

Jodi Archambault (00:06:52):

It's just, it's Unci Maka it's Mother Earth. It comes from kind of a common understanding. But I would say I think it's more Ojibwe based, that we're on the back of a turtle and that the earth is basically the back of a turtle. And we're on this island. That is how we look at the land. Another thing, we knew it was curved. We didn't think it was flat, but for my people, for Lakota we say Unci Maka, that means Grandmother Earth, not just Mother Earth, but Grandmother Earth. And I would say that the understanding of how we relate to, like I said before, place, goes a lot deeper than just human relationships. And that's because we've been here for a long time and we know the dependency, the interdependency that humans have on the land and the water. And we have just a different worldview, a different paradigm of how things work together.

(00:07:53):

And I think it's been erased. I think a lot of people held a similar worldview centuries, maybe even millennia ago. But they've forgotten that relationship, that deep relationship that is now scientifically being proven. Scientifically, there's a lot of more understanding happening about how trees are related to each other and how fungi is related to trees and how animals play into that equation. And also humans. Humans actually have played into that equation as well, and not in a negative way. And that's the balance that we understand and that's hardwired into our culture and our belief system. Our values are about reaching that balance.

Nate Hagens (00:08:40):

I think not only is it scientifically proven, but I think it's starting to awaken in a lot of other people in our culture that they sense some missing, something lost in our daily lives. And we had this binge of fossil magic that allowed us to do all kinds of things. But now that rock is coming back down to earth, and that's scary in a way, but it's also exciting in a way because some people can maybe find some of those connections that were lost. Getting back to what you said about the land. In 1868 there was a treaty that gave the Sioux and the Arapaho peoples exclusive use over a large range of land. You mentioned the Black Hills, which is also called Pahá Sápa. And soon after that gold was found in the Black Hills.

(00:09:38):

And so the United States illegally took the Black Hills by force. And in 1980, which is now over 40 years ago, a court ruled that this was illegal and granted the Sioux Nation a $100 million in reparations, which has been kept in the U.S. Treasury and has since grown to over a billion dollars. So, the Sioux Nation has refused to touch this money. Can you unpack this story and why your people have rejected this large sum of dollars?

Jodi Archambault (00:10:10):

I always like to start with semantics. Because how we talk about something really matters, especially in the English language. And nobody gave the tribes anything. This is the whole entire continent, if you want to put it in terms of European understanding of title and land base, it was ours, it was our possession. And so there's a lot of people who will say, "Well, the United States gave the Sioux this land." But we have pre-constitutional sovereign rights that are still in place today. And nobody gave us any land. What we have is what we have left after treaty negotiations with the United States. And the reason that we had treaty negotiations with the United States, and this is well documented in U.S. Indian law, is that European nations were making treaties with Indian tribes on the Eastern Seaboard in the 1600s. That's England, Spain, the Dutch, the French. They were over here making treaties with us and recognizing us.

(00:11:26):

And that was at the beginning of the European international law. And so I just like to clarify that the way the United States gained its international status as a nation when it separated from Europe, and the way that the United States separate itself from Spain and the others is that it also began to negotiate and ratify treaties with Indian tribes.

Nate Hagens (00:11:54):

So before that, did anyone own the land or you just used the land and the flows, or was there ownership?

Jodi Archambault (00:12:02):

This is interesting. We have to do this sort of code switching. Because our understanding of the land, this is a very Eurocentric view. We have to say that we possessed it. We have to say that we had title to

it. Because we did. In the European's understanding, if we are human beings, if you and I, if you believe Nate, that I'm a human being, that this land was mine, all of it. If I'm not a human being, then no, I was just existing here. I was just inhabiting and kind of floating around a butterfly. There is a huge difference in the way that Europeans talk about our possession prior to Europe coming here. If we didn't possess it, if we didn't own it, then it was yours to take without just compensation, without fairness or treatment as human beings. So, the more people create this understanding of, so I say as a European in the United States, when you guys came, this land was ours and we were full human beings and we still are.

(00:13:16):

And because you have a different understanding of law and a title and relationship with land, we have to speak in your terms because it is absolute and it's the only thing that stands up when it comes to protecting it. If I own land, I have dominion over it and I get to say what happens and doesn't happen on it. I understand what your question is. Before the Europeans came, did we possess the land? We had a different kind of understanding of the land. It wasn't we didn't possess it. There's a lot of people that will say, "We belonged to the land." Everybody belongs to the land. It is not possible to possess air, it is not possible to possess the stars. It is not possible to possess water. But if you have to protect it, then you have to put it in the terms of how the colonizers think. Otherwise, they'll say, "Oh, the wolves lived here too." So did they possess it? The beavers. So, it becomes a very slippery slope to continuing the dehumanizing bias against Native Americans.

Nate Hagens (00:14:26):

Earlier this week I had a call with Vandana Shiva, I don't know if you know who that is. She lives in India and she's very active in anti-pesticides and in regenerative agriculture. And she told me that up to 1789 no one owned the land in India until the British came there. And then all of a sudden they had famines for the first time. Because the people had to pay in grain and crops their taxes and there wasn't enough for people. And the ownership structure that happened changed everything. I'm sure you know that story. So it's similar here. Yes?

Jodi Archambault (00:15:08):

It is similar here. I would also say that tribes did have territories. We did not get along with each other. Much like Europe and the rest of the world we had territorial wars over hunting grounds and over waterways. And so that it wasn't like, oh, we're just out here kind of living in harmony, in perfect harmony. Human beings, we're across the globe. We have cultures and we all believe we're the center of the universe. And that's no different for my people. We do believe that everybody kind of is them. It is that us and them. But at the same time there's a lot of commonality with indigenous peoples worldwide that is different than the, I guess the colonizer mindset. And so when I talk about, did you own the land, I have to put it in a framework because otherwise it's very easy in just an everyday person's thinking that haven't gone beyond their own European paradigm to think that, "Well, you didn't really own it."

Nate Hagens (00:16:20):

Is there no language in traditional Lakota that like, "We own the land," it translates differently. Like we're part of the land or something?

Jodi Archambault (00:16:30):

I guess you could say that the language is just not translatable. So even Unci Maka, we don't call the land the land, it's not an object. It's a grandma. It's not like you asked the question earlier, do you think of things as relatives like I think of my … Yes, we absolutely do and we treat it as such. We know that the earth is where you go back to. We all come from the earth and we all go back there. And there's a lot of understandings that still exist today about how we treat our grandmother. And when we talk about the Black Hills, we had a lot of elders who stood up and they protested when that court decision came down. They were upset and they would put up signs. This is when I was a little girl. They would have their protest signs would say, "Never sell your grandmother. Never sell your grandmother. The land is sacred. The sacred is not for sale." And we just adhere to that. We're poor. We don't want that billion dollars.

Nate Hagens (00:17:38):

So, you've done something that the global economy is unable to do, because we're selling our grandmother as a global culture right now in very large ways, as you're aware. Is that discussed these days or is it a badge of pride that there is money that a poor area could access, but you're choosing to take the high ground and treat the Black Hills and the land as sacred?

Jodi Archambault (00:18:11):

It's a huge source of pride. It's as important today as it was 40 years ago. I would say that there are some people that would say, "We could do a lot with that money." And we're not monolithic like any people. We have people who will say, "We should probably take that money." And I would say that by and large, I don't know any of those people. Most of the people that I know say it's a cohesive understanding of what we're going to do and what we're going to pass on to our grandchildren to do. And that is to fight for the return of the lands and refuse the money.

(00:18:49):

If they want to give us the land, if they want to give back the land that they stole, they should also give us some kind of compensation for destroying it in so many ways. With the mining and the different kind of degradation, the water, the water's been really contaminated with mining and it's been very hurt. It's not destroyed, but it's been under assault for a long time, so mitigation is going to be necessary. But by and large people are pretty unified on refusing that funding. And I would say that it's not just about what the money could buy, it's about the land. We want the land back. We know that that's something that over and over our ancestors told the government that that part wasn't for sale. That was like a non-starter.

Nate Hagens (00:19:48):

And they agreed with that until they found gold?

Jodi Archambault (00:19:49):

Yes. And they agreed with it. And this is what often happens, and we talk about this, is that oftentimes we're the sacrifice zone. We become the sacrifice zone in the name of American prosperity. So, the Goldstake mine in the Black Hills is one of the biggest gold deposits found on the continental United States. And that supposedly was part of, we have to, it's the U.S. Treasury, it's national security, it's part of what we need to exist as a nation. And my brother talks about this, Dave Archambault, but he talks about how this has always been the case. So when they're coming to take something, it's always in the name of the national security. They did it with the gold in the Black Hills. They broke up our reservation for the gold in the Black Hills. And they took that land, even though the treaty said they needed three-fourths of all males to consent, they never got that.

(00:20:55):

And this was part of the way that we won the court case. But there's also the railroads, that was national security, that was in the interest of the good of the nation, the good of the order, utility lines and then oil pipelines. And surprisingly, our people have been able to fight oil pipelines for a long time, and we are still fighting the Dakota Access Pipeline. The EIS process is still pending. And the judge ordered them to do an EIS before they did a environmental assessment for the pipeline. Now they have to do an environmental impact statement. They meaning the United States government, Army Corp engineers. And we've been litigating that. We've been litigating and we've been somewhat victorious, but the oil is flowing because the judge wouldn't stop, the construction wouldn't stop the flow. And the thing that people will cite, the energy transfer partners and the Army Corps of Engineers is this national interest of having to have oil come out of the Bakken to the tune of 600,000 barrels a day.

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And then they're doubling the capacity without another environmental impact statement. They're doing all of this in the interest of the United States. And so it has a capacity for 1.2 million barrels a day. And now they're going to increase it to that. They're going to double it. Again, they didn't put it north of Bismarck, which is 80,000 people, the capital of the state. They put it right north of our reservation, less than a mile from our reservation border. And then said nobody would be impacted if it broke. Because the Army Corps and the company, and people know this story well, but it's the same thing. These infrastructure projects, the gold, United States always says it's for the national interests. The dams, they damned our Missouri River only where reservations are. Bismarck doesn't have inundation. They're not underwater. They have a Missouri River banks that have been there for a long time. They've only flooded Indian reservations. And so again, why? Because of commerce in downstream in Missouri on the Mississippi.

Nate Hagens (00:23:28):

How is the fight for civil rights of indigenous people different from other social activism issues? And what can anyone trying to make systemic change learn from the difference?

Jodi Archambault (00:23:41):

I think there's one fundamental difference that really sticks out. And that's that legally Indian tribes have a different kind of status than all Americans. We're minorities, but we're not only minorities. We have political status in the United States. So our tribes, our reservations, our citizenship with our nations is one that is political in nature. Meaning that the federal government deals with us in a nation to nation context. And so the Indian tribes have, they have sovereignty that's unique and different and preexists state, city and county sovereignty, and even federal sovereignty. And this has been recognized by the courts. So we have, and they call it a political status, not meaning politically charged. Political means we don't have to deal with the strict scrutiny around race because we're politically tied to our own tribes. And that nation to nation relationship is what sets us apart from other minorities.

(00:24:58):

So, in the context of civil rights, there is a difference, because rebuilding our nations within the United States. And we're also not trying to be equal to other people. We're not trying to achieve the American dream. And the reason that I say that is not because we do want to have the same access and we want to be treated. We have some of the same difficulties with the law enforcement and education attainment and all of that. So we do stand in solidarity with a lot of the other minorities, women, LGBTQ, a lot of other communities that are locked out of opportunity. However, culturally the idea of us assimilating and becoming full-on American bourgeoisie, middle class with a big house, fancy car and a bunch of money in the bank is not exactly possible with the resources.

(00:26:08):

There's a common sense thing. Like, "Oh, everybody has to live lavishly." That's not possible with the resources constraints. And we have our own culture, we have our own language, we have our own belief systems, so we're not trying to be equal to anybody. We're trying to have equal access to opportunity for ... I went to school at an Ivy League. I'm glad that I had equal access to that Ivy League institution. Because it gave me a type of education that opens doors. And I used that door opening for the good of my people, not to advance myself. There's a very different, there's a communal collective that when we're talking about gaining access and equal opportunity, we're trying to do it to better our people so that we can all be better off, not just my family or my kids. It's about everybody in our extended family, our community, our tribal network, and some people do go.

(00:27:17):

The American dream has been attained by a lot of Native Americans who were forcibly removed from the reservation, either through boarding schools or government policies, and pushed into the urban mainstream and they've had to survive. But just like any other population it's few and far between. And most of our people are living with disparities in housing, employment income, education attainment. And so there's a great need for civil rights. But I think what is different about, when we talk about civil rights and social justice, we're talking about it from the standpoint of a collective understanding of we want to be here in another 150, 200 years as Lakota people collectively, not as somebody who has a bunch of houses. Or we're not like capitalism is not something that is the goal. The goal is to serve our people and to make things better and ease the suffering that's been here for a while. But at the end of the day there are similar problems and we do stand in solidarity. It's nuanced though. It's different. But I was just going to say that, I worked in the United States government.

Nate Hagens (00:28:34):

You were in the Obama administration?

Jodi Archambault (00:28:36):

I worked in the White House for five years and I worked in the Department of Interior for one, and I was in the Domestic Policy Council when I left and I was in charge of the president's relationship policy-wise. First it was engagement, and then I got promoted and became the policy lead for President Obama. So, the stuff that I'm talking about are things that a lot of Indian law experts would know, a lot of tribes know. But outside of that it's pretty complex and complicated and not widely known. But yes, it's distinct relationships that there isn't a national sort of like, "Oh, we're going to go to this group." And there is a national org that's like that. But the federal government is obligated to work with each tribe differently or uniquely. I mean, you can't say one-size-fits-all, even though that's how a lot of the policy is written. There's usually the provisions where tribes can opt in. Tribes can decide how they're going to relate with the United States government not beholden to any other nation and any other tribal nation.

Nate Hagens (00:29:53):

One of the reasons I invited you to talk today is I want your thoughts on The Great Simplification and what's coming and leverage points there. But before we move into that, looking back at your time in the federal government in the Obama administration, what did you learn?

Jodi Archambault (00:30:13):

In terms of what kinds of things need to be changed? I mean, I think there are a number of issues that are sort of parsed and pulled apart and made very difficult. One of the things that tribes have asked for is to have parody with other governments. And so an example of that is being able to protect our women when somebody from the outside is abusing them. And from the outside meaning tribes have the powers, they've retained the powers to deal with domestic violence and domestic disputes among tribal members of all tribes. They have jurisdiction over domestic disputes. And there's been a series of court cases that have whittled away at non-tribal members, non-Indians. And so non-Indians, there's this weird thing that non-Indians could abuse their native partner on reservation and it would take the federal government, the FBI, the U.S. Attorney to prosecute for a simple domestic violence issue.

(00:31:31):

And those would escalate and eventually some people would get shot or perished. So that's one place where it's like, "Well, if we put all of these requirements in place, if we reach these legal requirements for a jury trial, competent legal counsel on prosecution and defendants, if we put all these things in place, can we hold and prosecute non-natives?" And that was something that was returned by when I was in the White House as we did get that restored. It was there before, we did it during the treaty times or after the treaties, but it was something that was whittled away by Congress and Supreme Courts. And that's how many of these things are. The people get a lot of funding. States, cities, counties get funding. We don't get any money to do conservation, but we do a ton of it.

(00:32:24):

There's a land and water conservation fund that is funded at $900 million a year. We don't have access to that, except through states, and states, over the 40 years that thing has been in place, they've given tribes less than a half a percent of that funding. And so we're doing the work of restoring waterways, fish habitat, we're in repair mode a lot of times with the lands and we don't get hardly any resources.

Nate Hagens (00:32:55):

How does that work? People sit around and they notice the ecological damages and they're like, "Well, we're not getting paid for this, but we're going to go out and help repair it anyways."

Jodi Archambault (00:33:07):

I don't think-

Nate Hagens (00:33:07):

Is that, how that-

Jodi Archambault (00:33:09):

We never got paid for it before the United States was in existence? So that's a really Western thing to say, "Oh, I need to get paid if I'm going to do something." It's a very Western thing I just was a part of, in my own community there's a red willow that we use for our prayers. We use it for our tobacco. We don't use tobacco, we use this bark from this willow. And it was getting depleted. And so elders came together with some younger people, and I was only a part of it because I helped with some of the resources and I helped with some of the connections. But they just went out and replanted it. They started replanting it in some of the slews that are on the land, Army Corps land, not even our own land.

(00:33:58):

So people sit around and say, "Let's go do this. Let's go pick up the trash." But when you have an Army Corps project, that is the worst thing for the landscape. It kills, destroys on high water, everything in a watershed, and then on a drought year it turns into a sand dune. There's a mile wide of sand that has been deposited there from that. So we're like, "Okay, how do we do this? How do we do that? We don't get any money." We didn't even know that there was this money. Most people, if you talk to tribes and say, "Did you know states get this much money?" They'll say, "Really?" We don't even know people get money for that kind of thing. We always think that people are just doing it. And what if we had machines? What if we were able to do some of the things like a government in the United States does? But I know there's a movement to do land-based education with indigenous peoples. And I listened to one of your podcasts, I think it was with the founder of 360.

Nate Hagens (00:35:05):

Yeah. Betsy Taylor.

Jodi Archambault (00:35:06):

Betsy Taylor. She was talking about regenerative ag. We call it regenerative ag because we know that's what other people call it, but it's really just taking care of the land. This, it's just doing what we always have done for millennia. It's the term that you can use as part of your outward strategy, but this is how we're going to orient. And it's interesting that, I do think that it happens a lot. So this regenerative ag, we work with Gabe Brown, and Gabe Brown is a huge proponent of regenerative agriculture. He lives 10 miles from Bismarck. He's local. He's so good to us. He helps us so much. And he always says, "This is your people's approach to ag. We're just trying to follow your lead."

(00:35:53):

But I never hear anybody say that. I never hear anybody but Gabe say that. A lot of regenerative ag and the principles at least are drawn from native people. And how did we learn it? Did we have soil samples and water and that? No, we had to live, we had to grow food to live. And so there's a trial and error that you find in a certain place with a certain amount of rainfall and water. And there's certain things that you learn after millennia. And this is Chaco Canyon, there's evidence of farming practices all over the United States, Southeast, and this is very indigenous to think about natural systems as being the way, look at the Inca, the Inca irrigation and the terracing, like wow.

Nate Hagens (00:36:48):

Well, you know my work, Jodi, that we're going to have to, as fossil fuels deplete, we're going to have to do different non-fossil fuel intensive agricultural processes in coming decades and centuries. We're going to have to. I mean, not only did European descendants take your land, but also the living arrangements. When you and I first met I was giving a presentation about The Great Simplification, and you asked some questions and you offered that Native peoples already had a story in this regard. And when you said that I thought you meant that when Europeans came to North America there was some sort of collapse happened to Native Americans. But in talking to you afterwards, I think you meant that there is a similar story about a collapse or a great human transition exists in your culture. Can you tell me that?

Jodi Archambault (00:37:46):

There's a lot of stories and a lot of nations have different stories. They're very unique from each other, so I don't want to say that I'm speaking for other tribes or anything like that. But definitely I'm just going to talk about the first statement you made that you thought I was talking about the collapse of our cultures when Europeans came. And that did happen. It was an attempted genocide, and I'm not going to mince words about it. There was a plan that we would be eradicated, the Indian problem would cease to exist by physical erasure, not just the one that existed. And I think that when we sit back and look at what collapse looks like, when COVID happened, what we said was, "This isn't the first pandemic we've been through. Most of our people perished from disease." There was disease and there was also warfare. But by and large, most Native Americans perish. And I think the numbers, maybe you don't, but Russell Thornton has the best analysis of how many people were here before Europeans actually showed up. We were reduced by a power of 10.

Nate Hagens (00:38:57):

90% gone.

Jodi Archambault (00:38:59):

And that was mostly by disease. There's a few people that talk about it. Popular books, Guns, Germs and Ammo. That's one of them. But there's the academic books talk about the clearing, this is massive, for our medicines, for our understandings, all of our knowledge, we lost a lot of people. And so when we talk about our prophecies and what has been passed down generation to generation, we don't have what we had back then. But we definitely still have stories about another time that's coming. And they're called prophecies. And some of these prophecies have come recently, haven't been passed down. So what people think is the static Native American that's mystical, that exists in the past, and then we all have to get our knowledge from them. But actually we're constantly still dreaming. We're constantly still in touch with our ancestors, and we're constantly in a spiritual state that when we do what we're supposed to take care of the earth, then we get messages back.

(00:40:06):

And our message in the past couple of decades is that a hard time is coming for all of humans, and then they give us instructions on what we should do. And those hard times are tied to the confusion that's out there. And I keep saying confusion, that's from John Trudell, I talk about him a lot with you on offline here, but if people want to know more about this virus that's entered human ways of being, he speaks very eloquently about that. He's a poet and one of the best intellectuals I know. But these prophecies have been here for a while, that we are going to face even greater suffering than we've ever seen before and that we should get ready.

Nate Hagens (00:40:56):

So, indigenous people have been through apocalypse before, as you point out, they've been through collapse before. How do you think native people built resiliency and community in the face of that, not only in the last 150 years, but now? And what are some lessons or takeaways from the past you could maybe share that you think might help carry us to a future that holds potential for a greater simplification for everyone everywhere?

Jodi Archambault (00:41:28):

Well, I think what I haven't talked a lot about are the values that, when I say I've been talking about them in terms of an abstractness, very abstract. When I say value-based, place-based decision making, an example of value-based decision making is the idea around generosity. So, in an abundant mindset you can give it all away and it doesn't matter, because it'll come back to you. And yet, and if everything's in a circle and your mind's in a circle and you're not just depleted until you can't walk anymore. There's actually, and I don't know where this comes from, I'm not sure, somebody could probably tell me where it comes from. But I've heard people say, "You give until it hurts." You give and you give.

(00:42:22):

That level of generosity that I witnessed in my lifetime, the generosity that I see across Lakota people and how they take care of each other. And that comes from a very long line of understanding of when warriors would bring back buffalo. And so the distribution of that buffalo would not be, "I want this and I'm going to hoard it." The idea would be, "Okay, we're going to sit in a circle and the headsman is going to decide how much each family or each person gets." And they would go around and give different parts of the buffalo to the families. And everybody felt good about it. Because if it was a good leader then they would always take care of everybody. That is really what abundance is. That is knowing that I'm not going to be starving because I know that what I'm getting is going to be enough, and it's good. And that they also did this thing where they would rotate the parts of the buffalo.

(00:43:38):

So they'd sit around a circle and they'd say, "You got this part last time, so you'll get a different part." And if you have a favorite part of the buffalo, then that would eventually come to you. You don't have to try to fight for it or scheme or manipulate, all of that, that's abundance. That's patience. Survival was based on that patience and that generosity. You give your best, you give best away. Nothing, you can't take anything on this earth with you to the grave, so you give your best, you give your favorite. And that's the opposite of mainstream America. Even the rich people act like they're living in scarcity.

Nate Hagens (00:44:21):

In modern culture and in the media and our discourse, conventional American discourse, we define wealth and poverty using material boundaries. But one could argue in comparison to other humans and social structures that many less materially rich groups of people could actually be much richer in other aspects of life. And the inverse also holds true that materially rich humans are often poor in terms of community, social connection, time and nature. What do you think about that?

Jodi Archambault (00:45:00):

I totally agree, completely. I used to say that, when I was at Dartmouth I would say that I might have not have gone to the best school in the United States, but I couldn't be happier to be raised in any place else other than the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, the community of [Lakota], which means medicine root district. Because there's so much culture, there's so much richness, vitality around human beings that are just incredible. And they're not wealthy, but they're such good people. They're such like, I'm really proud of the way that our people treat each other.

(00:45:44):

And no, it's not perfect now, it's further away than when I grew up, but it's definitely the case. And I've been in the other side too. I've been in these elite institutions like the White House and Dartmouth. I work for a philanthropist now. And I don't think that there's that understanding of when we talk about community, and really in the non-Indian context it all seems very surface. In native community there's such a bond, and it's not a trauma bond either. It's a beautiful thing. It's a beautiful tie we have to each other in the land, and it's indescribable.

Nate Hagens (00:46:29):

What can those maybe listening to this program who are currently materially rich learn from people and communities who the great simplification has already occurred. What are some teachings that have made your people more resilient and more community and that beautiful bond you just described, can you give us some advice on how to start that in other communities?

Jodi Archambault (00:46:56):

I think that people should be giving to native-led organizations that invest in really cool things, tribes are doing with the land and the animals, and we shouldn't be the last ones to get on the regenerative ag train. When Betsy was talking, I was like, "That's what we're trying to do, but we're poor." Oh, we'll get that in 25, 30 years, because we don't have any funding. Fund us for the dreams that we have that are tied to the land. You get both. You get environmental feel good and you get social impact. I mean, people can donate to those causes and they can learn. We can't help other people figure themselves out if we're hurting, we can't. We have to repair. And our cultures are thousands of years old. This American one is super young. It's super, super young. It's very immature. Invest in the cultures, and I say cultures with the plural, because like biodiversity, cultural diversity is just as important.

(00:48:07):

We do care about the whole ecosystem. It's led mostly by the medicines, mostly by the understandings of what we have to do in our ceremonies and what we're supposed to eat and what we're supposed to gather at different times. And there's a really awesome person who I think everybody should watch, and it's Lyla June. She talks about, "Every human can get back to that. It's not just for indigenous people to do these things. Every human has the potential to live with these values about land." And just because you don't have them or you haven't had them in the past a 100 years or a 1,000 years, does it mean that you don't still have the genetic understanding of what's supposed to be there? And people feel it and they see it, but there's no English words. A lot of that stuff's been erased by the hegemony in futile monarchies and churches.

Nate Hagens (00:49:06):

Well, and the massive energy surplus caused a great forgetting of who we … I mean, all humans used to be closely tethered to the land and the soil. And I think we're going to not directly, though possibly directly, we're going to gradually go back there as fossil fuels deplete. So in many ways, the way that, as hard as it is, the way that many native people and many people in the global south are living now today is an example of where a lot more people are heading. So, the resiliency that you've somehow managed over these decades and century is pretty impressive and important.

Jodi Archambault (00:49:52):

Yeah, I think when COVID hit, it's funny because I kept saying it's an opportunity for us to become more indigenous than ever. People were talking about gardens and language, our language was being spoken more because kids weren't having to go to school. But when I talk about the suffering part, that's something that Dr. Michael Yellow Bird discusses, and that is in a lot of our ceremonies that it talked about it being about fasting and a lot of physical endurance. And I don't know that it's similar to the Buddhist culture or the Buddhist teachings. I don't know that it is, because I don't know those

teachings very well. But what they're finding is, what Michael talks about in his research is that, and I've never seen it published, so I just heard him talk about it. But when you go through ceremonies that we've been doing for thousands of years, going through fasting is it teaches, it actually grows the part of your brain that has compassion and empathy.

(00:51:05):

When you're suffering and you're willfully going without food and water, it's easier for you to have compassion. That part of our brain is really developed, so I think the generosity part and being able to understand other people that might not be doing so, that's pretty well-developed over years. And I think that's something I think about that we're, just because we suffered through a lot of this colonialism doesn't make us pitiful. It's actually, I see it as resiliency. I see it as a source of strength. And it takes a lot, I mean, it really does take a lot to pull us down.

Nate Hagens (00:51:51):

No, I agree. Which is the whole purpose of my podcast is I think we are much more behaviorally plastic and adaptive than we fear, but we're not thinking about the real future that's coming. I may have to have you back in the future, because your answers to my questions made me have a lot more questions that I don't know and I think would be important to share and discuss. But in interest of time, I hope you're okay with me asking some personal questions that I close each interview with. Given your lifetime of work on these issues, Jodi, do you have any personal advice to the watchers and listeners of this program at this time of global ecological crisis and systemic change?

Jodi Archambault (00:52:44):

I think, I wish, this is my wish. This is my aspiration for America, is that people know where their water comes from. People really should understand it doesn't come from a faucet. That would be great. That would be great is if people would follow the pipelines, the water canals. Most people live in cities, but if they don't live in cities, if they live in towns, if they live ... The only people that really get the whole water thing are people who work the land, like the farmers and the ranchers. They really get the water. And that's where I feel like, I feel very aligned with farmers and ranchers of North Dakota, because they get it. They get the water thing, and it's very important. But that's an anomaly.

(00:53:35):

And so I wish people would understand their water and I wish that they would adopt it like it's their relative. I wish that they would. That's what, the Missouri is here in Bismarck, and she's my auntie. She's very powerful. And I have to go and take her tobacco and make sure that she knows I remember our relationship together, and I wish that everybody could do that and do it in a way that they would do it with their own aunt or their own loved one.

Nate Hagens (00:54:08):

Do you think it's possible that 50 years from now, 200 years from now, that humans, whatever race, color, or nation that they're living in, would universally look at the world that way? Maybe from learning

through the chaos that we're enduring right now that they, lots more humans would view the river as their auntie and the animals as their cousins?

Jodi Archambault (00:54:36):

Everything's possible. I wouldn't talk about it if I didn't think it was possible, because when I say that, people do get it, people are like, "Yeah, that makes sense. We should know where our water comes from." And when you know where your water comes from, you might learn where your food comes from. If you know where your food comes from, you might think about your grandchildren. Nobody's thinking about their grandchildren. Nobody's making decisions. I talk about the ancestors a lot, but I'm also thinking about my grandchildren and my great-grandchildren and their grandchildren. What if people started thinking about their grandchildren? What kind of lives are they going to have? What kind of earth are they going to have? People say this, like other tribes, I don't know where this is from, but they say the, "We're just borrowing everything from our grandchildren. It's not ours." Everything meaning the Earth, the waters.

Nate Hagens (00:55:32):

The climate, the biosphere?

Jodi Archambault (00:55:34):

Everything.

Nate Hagens (00:55:35):

Yeah. So, what specific recommendations do you have, Jodi, for young humans, either native peoples or any peoples who become aware of the economic, ecological constraints of our current path?

Jodi Archambault (00:55:49):

I would say for young people, I would say that it's pretty important to learn what would be important to invest in. And that is the food, water, and that kind of thing. Learning those basic skills. There's a lot of skills. You can say we're going to become self-sufficient, but there's a lot of things like carpentry, plumbing, and I don't even know if solar's going to make it, but how are you going to get your energy? Windmills will. How are you going to get your energy? How are you going to continue to live?

(00:56:24):

And I think picking up that stuff, you can do your higher education degrees, but picking up a lot of those trades is going to be important. I also think that rejecting new materialism is going to be important. There's plenty of used and there's plenty of stuff out there. There's lots of things that have been produced and can be refashioned. And I just hope that the new malls, the new Amazon packages, the new, new, that's a pretty big order. I mean, I'm guilty, I'm not living that way. But my hope is that younger people will start to reject that, because you really actually don't need most of that stuff. You actually don't.

Nate Hagens (00:57:09):

Yep, I agree. What do you care most about in the world, Jodi?

Jodi Archambault (00:57:18):

I guess what I care most about in the world is community. And I think that community is everything. You make your community. In this world, in this time you can make your own community. But I see a lot of this stuff online because I'm still in social media. I'm probably going to quit pretty soon. But it's really pushing towards me and capitalism in big ways where you can just cut people off, and that's toxic and I don't want to do that anymore. And that kind of self-empowerment, healing kind of culture that's out there is very separating and it's conflict avoidant.

(00:58:00):

And so I'm not saying people should bend over backwards for their family member that might be addicted to drugs. I'm not saying, stay in an abusive relationship. I'm not saying that at all. But I'm saying, how in a community are we going to work through these conflicts in a way that brings us greater balance? And understanding that every single human being is not perfect and right all the time. But that's kind of where I feel like we're really falling down as a society. We're really moving more and more, me, me, me, I'm right, I'm right. And then it's easy to say, "I deserve this. I'm going to just buy from Amazon. I get this. This makes me feel good."

Nate Hagens (00:58:47):

Personally, what issue in the next decade or so worries you the most or gives you the most anxiety and trepidation about the future?

Jodi Archambault (00:58:56):

This is going to sound weird, but it's loss of language, Lakota language, that gives me the most trepidation. Climate change does as well. But I think given the levers that we have at our disposal, I think tribes are going to continue to do what we do. And in the places where we do have dominion control, ownership, we'll keep doing that. And I think by increasing tribe's control over land, that will increase other people's understanding of how they can also be doing it. But I just don't know that people are going to choose things like regenerative ag, or I don't know that people are going to choose biodiversity. If it comes to biodiversity over market, it's not going to happen.

Nate Hagens (00:59:51):

Well, that's a microcosm of the whole planet right now, as you know. Do you have any story or personal experience that's happened to you that gives you hope about the coming decade or so?

Jodi Archambault (01:00:05):

Yeah, I just think young people are amazing. I think young people are far more open to the imagination, the imagination and the dreaming than what I was open to or what was available to me when I was young. I think people are more willing to buck precedence and do what's right and not be

afraid of saying it, not be afraid of doing it. And I think that's really hopeful for the planet. I think older people sit in their ways and they don't even know where those ways came from. Maybe they had dreams, or hopes, or a wild streak back in the day. But I mean, all of that is good for the possibilities for change, for changing behavior. If we don't change behavior then there's a great saying by John Trudell and he says, "What species would destroy their own life support system? An entire species is trying to destroy their own life support system. Who does that? That's an insane being. That's an insane species." And that's where he talks about the confusion.

Nate Hagens (01:01:31):

Last question, Jodi. If you were benevolent dictator or had the ability to act as one and there was no personal recourse to your decision, what is one thing you would do to improve human and planetary futures?

Jodi Archambault (01:01:48):

Give full human rights to species, waterways, mountains, and sacred places.

Nate Hagens (01:01:59):

Okay. You have my vote. This has been a very long conversation and I've learned a lot. Thank you for your continued work and grace on these issues. Do you have any closing words for those people listening?

Jodi Archambault (01:02:19):

I guess I would just say that there's a lot of people like me. I'm very ordinary and I think people are, in Minnesota people are in all different parts of the U.S., indigenous people, and I just don't think that people know what they have. There's a lot of knowledge out there, and there's a lot of ways that we could be leading on. We are leading on solutions. We just don't get credit for them.

Nate Hagens (01:02:48):

Thank you. And to be continued and stay warm, my friend.

Jodi Archambault (01:02:53):

Yep, you too. Take care, Nate. Thank you for having me.

Nate Hagens (01:02:56):

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