



A TRAIN, A PEOPLE, AND A JOURNEY FOR JUSTICE.



BreakPoint

The Untold Story of the Constitution Express



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◀◊◊ Film Information ◊◊▶

97 min | Feature Documentary | Mexico/Canada/USA | 2026

Genre: Documentary

Language: English / Spanish Subtitles

Country of Production: The United States

Aspect Ratio: 16.9

Sound: Stereo

Completion Date: January, 2026

Premiere Status: World / International / North American Premiere

LOGLINE

In 1980, as Canada moved to erase Indigenous rights from its new constitution, thousands of First Nations people boarded trains and traveled nearly 5000 kilometers to Ottawa. Told through the firsthand accounts of three participants in the movement and narrated by Peter Coyote, *BreakPoint: The Untold Story of the Constitution Express* uncovers the historic grassroots uprising whose legacy continues to shape the fight for Indigenous sovereignty today.

SYNOPSIS (SHORT)

BreakPoint: The Untold Story of the Constitution Express uncovers a pivotal yet overlooked chapter in Canadian history. In 1980, as the Canadian government sought to patriate the constitution while threatening Indigenous rights, First Nations communities organized a powerful national resistance. Thousands—elders, families, and youth—boarded trains bound for Ottawa in the historic Constitution Express movement. Guided by leaders like Grand Chief George Manuel and supported by activists and legal advocates, the movement brought Indigenous sovereignty to the global stage. Through intergenerational storytelling and narration by Peter Coyote, the film reveals how this moment reshaped the ongoing struggle for Indigenous self-determination.



SYNOPSIS

BreakPoint: The Untold Story of the Constitution Express reveals one of the most significant yet little-known Indigenous rights movements in modern Canadian history. In 1980, as the Canadian government moved to patriate its constitution and extinguish Indigenous rights, First Nations communities across the country mobilized in an unprecedented act of resistance.

From elders to children, thousands boarded trains bound for Ottawa, transforming a constitutional crisis into a nationwide movement for justice.

The film is rooted in Indigenous long-form storytelling traditions and is carried by Elders who once stood inside the story as young people. Forty-five years later, they speak across time. The narrative circles, as past and present form an intergenerational conversation, and lived experience stands as witness and wisdom.





Led by Grand Chief George Manuel, and sustained through the efforts of Chiefs, activists, and families from west to east, with strategic and legal support from Rudolph “Rudy” Rýser and Louise Mandell, the movement brought Indigenous resistance onto the global stage and forced the state to confront its colonial foundations.

BreakPoint also explores the shared mission and connection between George Manuel and Rudy Rýser, revealing how their distinct journeys—shaped by hardship and conviction—ignited a unified vision for sovereignty and helped propel the movement onto the global stage.

Narrated by Peter Coyote, **BreakPoint** traces how this extraordinary mobilization became a turning point in the centuries-long struggle for Indigenous self-determination, and why its legacy continues to shape the fight for sovereignty today.

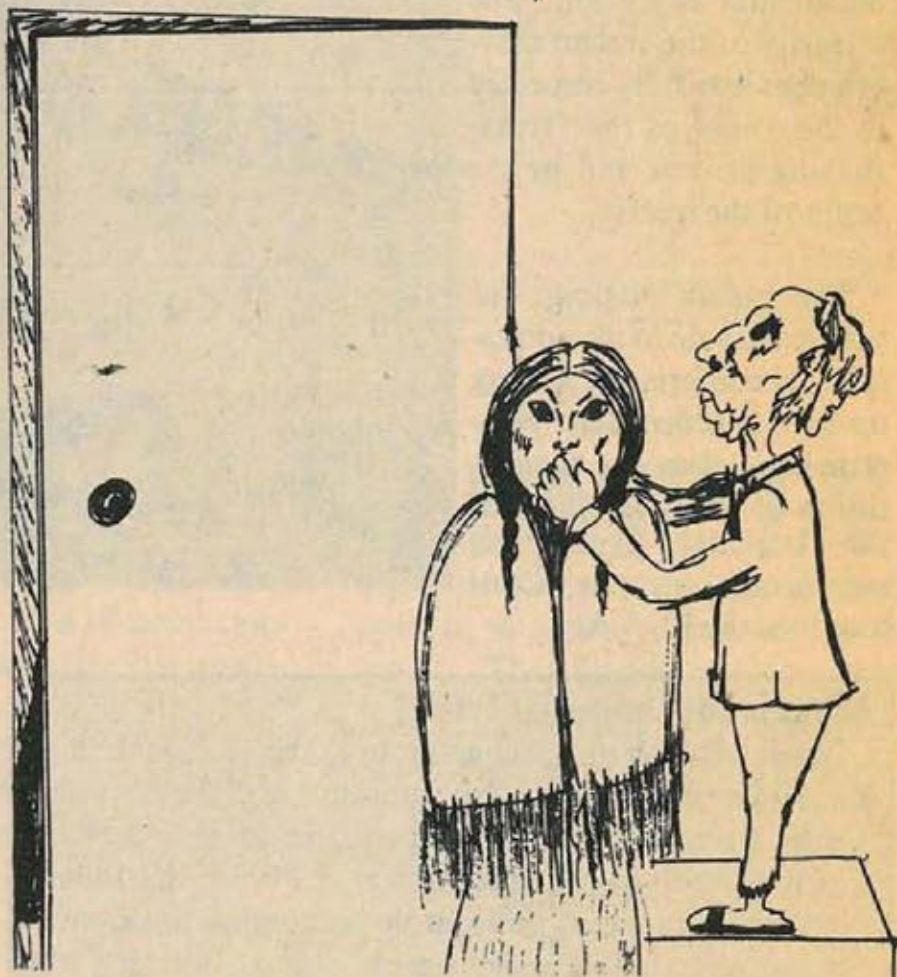
...national and international support
 Westminster for their stand against
 the Native Peoples press forward with
 if they succeed in gaining support and
 and, Canada's image will suffer consi-
 -derable Canada's Native Peoples live, as a
 -tions which are very different from
 -other Canadians, there would be serious
 -and about whether the Native Peoples
 -live in Canada."

...has no ears for what it will not

...government pleads ignorance as to what
 -are. Yet the Indian nations have pro-
 -posed with a clear and precise statement
 -of Rights Position Paper which was
 -first All Chiefs Conference. Over 100
 -witnessed the presentation to Trudeau.
 -has had this statement for a year and
 -and in any way, except to continue to
 -to our position.

...allowed Indian Nations to participate
 -and discussions as equal partners with
 -talks were held on re-distribution of the
 -lands between the federal and provincial
 -such of these resources belong to the
 -40% of the land in Canada is unceded
 -Our voice was not heard.

BUCKINGHAM PALACE



Assimilation policy goes underground

Prime Minister Trudeau has over the years become more sophisticated in what he says about the position of Indian people in Canada. Yet the underlying policies of

Director's Statement

BreakPoint: The Untold Story of the Constitution Express grew from our shared desire to listen closely to those who lived the Constitution Express — not as a historical episode, but as a formative experience that continues to shape lives, relationships, and responsibilities. While the uprising is often remembered for its public visibility, we were drawn to the stories that unfolded behind the scenes and remained largely untold — the negotiations, sacrifices, and lived experiences that sustain resistance over time. The film emerged from relationships developed over many years, grounded in trust and a commitment to ethical storytelling.

The film centers voices connected to the leadership of the Constitution Express and engages them across time. Rooted in Indigenous storytelling traditions, it creates space for long-form oral narrative within a contemporary landscape increasingly shaped by interruption.

By returning to these protagonists nearly forty-five years later, the film traces how personal histories and organizing experiences laid the groundwork for enduring activism, and how perspectives on the events have shifted through age, loss, and intergenerational responsibility.

Through firsthand accounts and rare archival material, the film reveals how experiences of trauma, exclusion, and struggle were transformed into organized collective action grounded in Indigenous values of reciprocity, generosity, and responsibility to the land. It follows the decisions, relationships, and political work that sustained the uprising, from its public protest to its lasting consequences.

As Indigenous communities continue to confront dispossession, resource extraction, and exclusion, the legacy of the Constitution Express remains deeply relevant. *BreakPoint* looks to the past not for closure, but for guidance, offering younger generations a lived example of how resistance is sustained, adapted, and carried forward.





NO INDIANS
ALLOWED IN PARK

By returning to these stories decades later, **BreakPoint** invites audiences into the role of witness across time, where personal memory and political history converge, revealing how the consequences of collective action continue to inform the present.



Spanning four years of production across three countries—Canada, Mexico, and the United States—the filmmaking team set out to revisit and deepen a decades-long conversation.

Reconnecting with several of the original participants, the crew invited them to reflect on their experiences in 1980 and to share how their perspectives have evolved over the past 45 years.

Now, after a lifetime dedicated to activism and the ongoing struggle for Indigenous sovereignty, these voices offer powerful, lived insight into both history and the present moment.

Director Biographies



Leslie Korn and **Max Montalbán** are filmmakers whose work is rooted in long-term engagement with Indigenous communities and movements.

They have worked at the Center for World Indigenous Studies (CWIS) since 1994 and 2018, respectively.

Their collaborative short films—*Salal, Cedar and Spruce*, *Searching for Capomo*, and *Cradling the Heart*—have received recognition at festivals including the Latin American Native Film Festival (LANFF) and the Quetzalcóatl Indigenous International Film Festival. Their work has also aired on First Nations Experience.

Break Point: The Untold Story of the Constitution Express is their first feature documentary as directors. Together, their work reflects a shared commitment to Indigenous sovereignty, cultural continuity, and collective responsibility

Drawing on her Ashkenazi diasporic roots, Korn began her work in film through feminist activism in the 1970s and later founded a pro bono health clinic in rural Indigenous Mexico, where she has worked for over five decades. Montalban, who is of Zapotec heritage, has worked in film as a cinematographer and editor for over 10 years.

Production Companies

The Center for World Indigenous Studies (CWIS) is an Indigenous-directed nonprofit founded in 1979 at the request of Pacific Northwest tribal governments and staffed by Indigenous, Latine, and settler activist-scholars and creatives.

Singing Burro Productions produces documentary films about personal courage, healing, and social justice.

Creative Team



Steve Scalfati

Steve Scalfati is a composer/producer, co-founder, and Creative Director at boutique music library Big Idea Music. He performed weeknights on the CBS television network as keyboardist and saxophone player in the band for The Late Late Show with James Corden.



Jon Ryser

Jon Ryser is a musician composer, arranger and producer who plays alto and baritone saxophone.



Nadine Brown

Nadine Brown has produced several films, including Bones Brigade, Oxyana, Old Tricks, and Rhino Guardians.



Samuel Stoker

Samuel Stoker is a Chicano/Yaqui freelance journalist and documentarian living in Mexico City. He is a writer and editor at CWIS and is producing The Build and Fight Formula, an interactive web documentary about Cooperation Jackson, workers collectives, and the solidarity economy.

Narrator



Peter Coyote

Peter Coyote is a double Emmy-Award winning narrator of over 160 documentary films, including Ken Burns' acclaimed *The Roosevelts*, for which he received his second Emmy nomination in July 2015. Peter has been a lifelong activist and for over five decades, Peter Coyote has supported Indigenous-led struggles for land protection, cultural survival, and tribal sovereignty, amplifying Native environmental justice movements through public advocacy and education.



Key protagonists

Rudolph Rýser

Veteran political strategist Rudolph C. Ryser, a key international architect of the Constitution Express, reveals the vision and strategy behind the movement—examining the fight against the “colonized mind,” the asymmetrical struggle between First Nations and the Canadian government, and the global alliances that helped ignite a Fourth World movement.



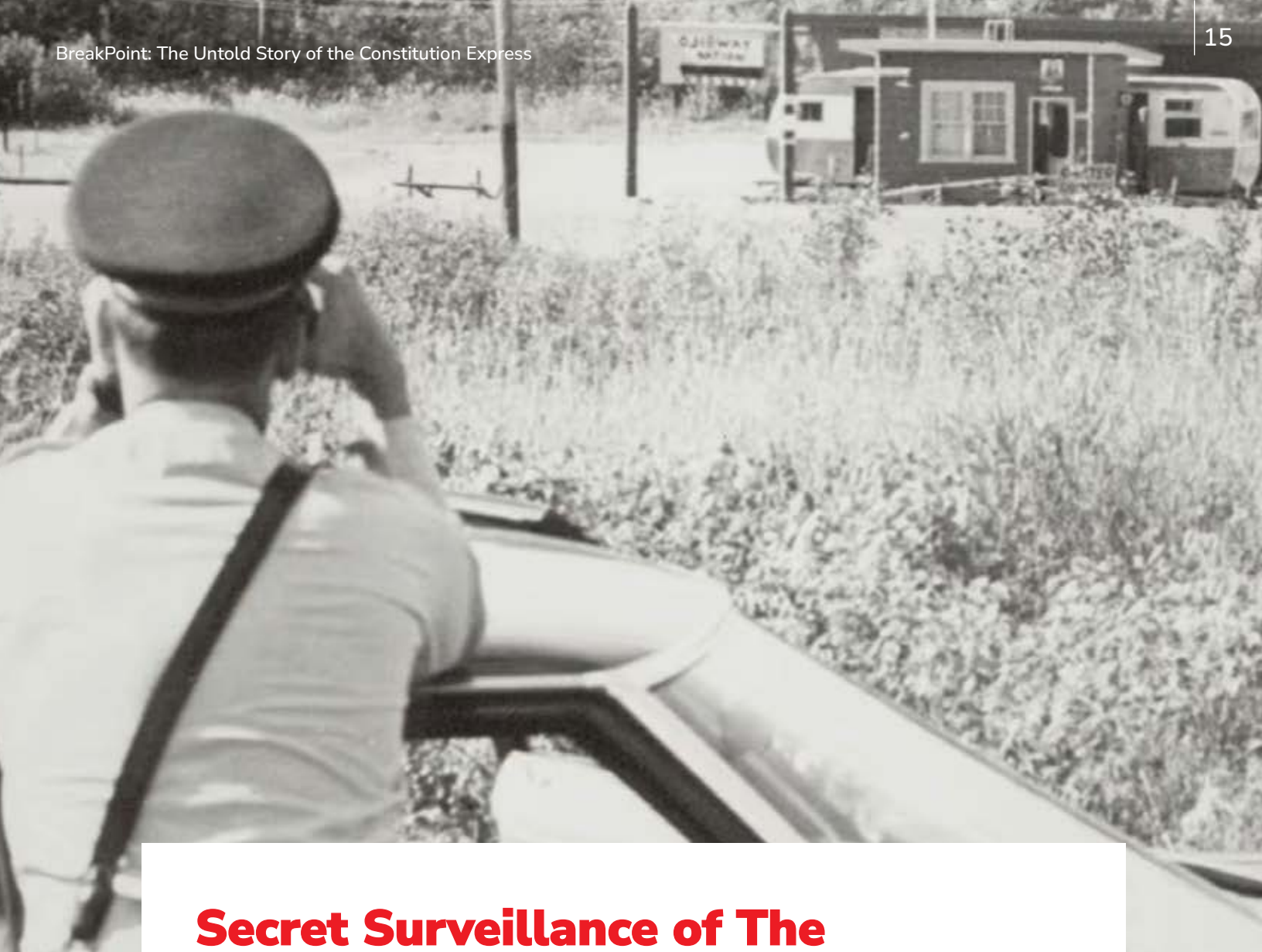
Doreen Manuel

Organizer and witness Doreen Manuel offers a powerful firsthand account of the Constitution Express through the lens of women’s organizing and protest. She reflects on the enduring legacy of boarding school trauma and shares intimate insights into her father, Chief George Manuel, and the leadership that inspired a movement.

Louise Mandell

Distinguished Indigenous rights lawyer Louise Mandell, who began working with George Manuel before the Constitution Express, reflects on the movement’s transformative impact—drawing connections between that pivotal moment and the ongoing struggle for Indigenous rights and sovereignty today.





Secret Surveillance of The Constitution Express Exposed

Recent revelations that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) surveilled Indigenous sovereignty movements—including the Constitution Express—reframe this historic mobilization as one carried out under state scrutiny.

As battles over land and sovereignty continue across Canada, the issues that fueled the movement remain unresolved. The film carries a renewed urgency, connecting past and present through the voices of those who lived it—and revealing that the struggle for Indigenous sovereignty is ongoing.

As battles over land and sovereignty continue across Canada, The United States and the world, the issues that fueled the movement remain unresolved. The film carries a renewed urgency, connecting past and present through the voices of those who lived it—and revealing that the struggle for Indigenous sovereignty is ongoing.

FILM STILLS







George Manuel first president

The historical first international conference of indigenous peoples ended at night in Port Alberni October 31 with the unanimous approval of a charter for a new World Council of Indigenous Peoples.

National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) president George Manuel was named by acclamation as president of the council, which now inherits the NIB's non-governmental status as a sub-commissional member of the United Nations.

Elected with Mr. Manuel is a two-year term on the five-member executive committee were Clemente Alcon, Bolivia, representing the Latin American area of concern; Julio Dixon, Mexico, Central America; Bill Watene, New Zealand, Pacific Ocean; and Aslak Sara, Norway, Europe-Scandinavia.

Named as secretary-general and UN representative for the council was Sam Deloria from the United

States. Many delegates were of the opinion that this report will not result in an accurate picture of the treatment of indigenous peoples and will not contain recommendations which could lead to the adequate protection of inherent aboriginal rights.

Because of the council's deep concern about how indigenous peoples are treated by non-indigenous populations throughout the world, the council's first official move was to pass a resolution bringing to world attention the conditions of native people in Brazil.

The resolution reads: "Considering that within Brazil overt practices of genocide and ethnocide are being carried out against the indigenous nations that live within that territory, and that the Brazilian indigenous delegates could not come to this International Conference of Indigenous Peoples since they could not leave the country without the permission of the National Foundation of Indigenous



with credibility to try to persuade change in a non-violent manner.

Secretary-general Sam Deloria commented, "No group here has an army, but many are being physically oppressed. If some indigenous person defends himself it shouldn't be taken as a world takeover. If the delegates here are an army then unfortunately the federal governments are very secure!

"The National Indian Brotherhood had the lowest status in the United Nations — below the International Federation of Bee-Keepers, and also the Federation of Pedestrians. The new organization will do everything it can to be sure indigenous peoples' problems are brought to world attention.

"There is more concern over whales, seals and whooping cranes than over the Indian people of Brazil who are being literally murdered by the government the way you cut down a tree to

UNANIMOUSLY SELECTED as first president of the World





“The Indian Constitution Express brought about an inner transformation for our people. This is what George wanted... for members of every tribe who took the Express to return home changed. And they did.”

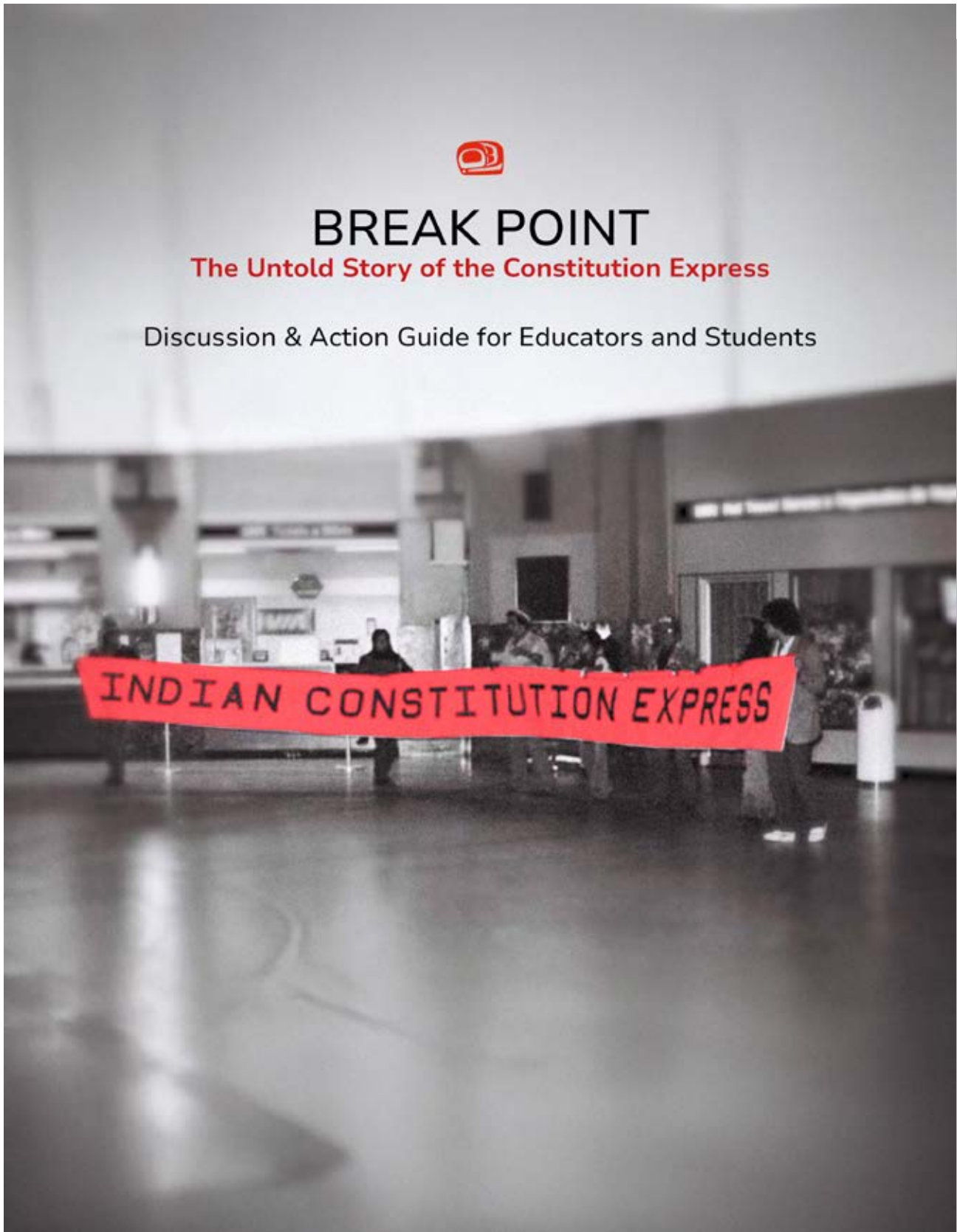
— Mildred C. Poplar



Curriculum Guides for Teachers and Students

Two curriculum guides support in integrating Break Point: The Untold Story of the Constitution Express into their Social Studies, Indigenous Studies, and Law courses for Grades 11–12. It provides a framework for engaging students with Indigenous rights, sovereignty, and legislative change through the lens of the documentary, aligning with Canada and US curriculum competencies of fostering understanding, respect, and active citizenship.

This resource helps students critically analyze historical and contemporary Indigenous issues, fostering understanding, respect, and active citizenship.



Cover - Discussion & Action Guide for Educators and Students

Awards & Nominations



International Sound and Film Music Festival
Croatia, 2026



Accolade Global Film Competition
Award of Excellence: Native Peoples /
Aboriginal Theme
US, 2026



Documentaries Without Borders
International Film Festival
Award winner Exceptional Merit
Winter 2026



Contact Information

Directors: Leslie Korn, Max Montalban

Producer: Leslie Korn, Nadine Brown

Email: lekorn@cwis.org

Website: <https://cwis.org/constitution-express-film/>

USA Phone/Text: +1- 206- 557- 9992

WhatsApp Mexico: 52-322 274 3988

Social Media:

www.Instagram.com/the.cwis/

www.Facebook.com/TheCWIS/

Credits

Directed by: Leslie Korn and Max Montalban

Produced by: Leslie Korn and Nadine Brown

Written by: Sam Stoker and Leslie Korn

Based on the story by Rudolph R yser:

Break Point: Fourth World Nation's International Resistance to Canada during Patriation, BC Studies, special issue on the Constitution Express.

Cinematography: Max Montalban

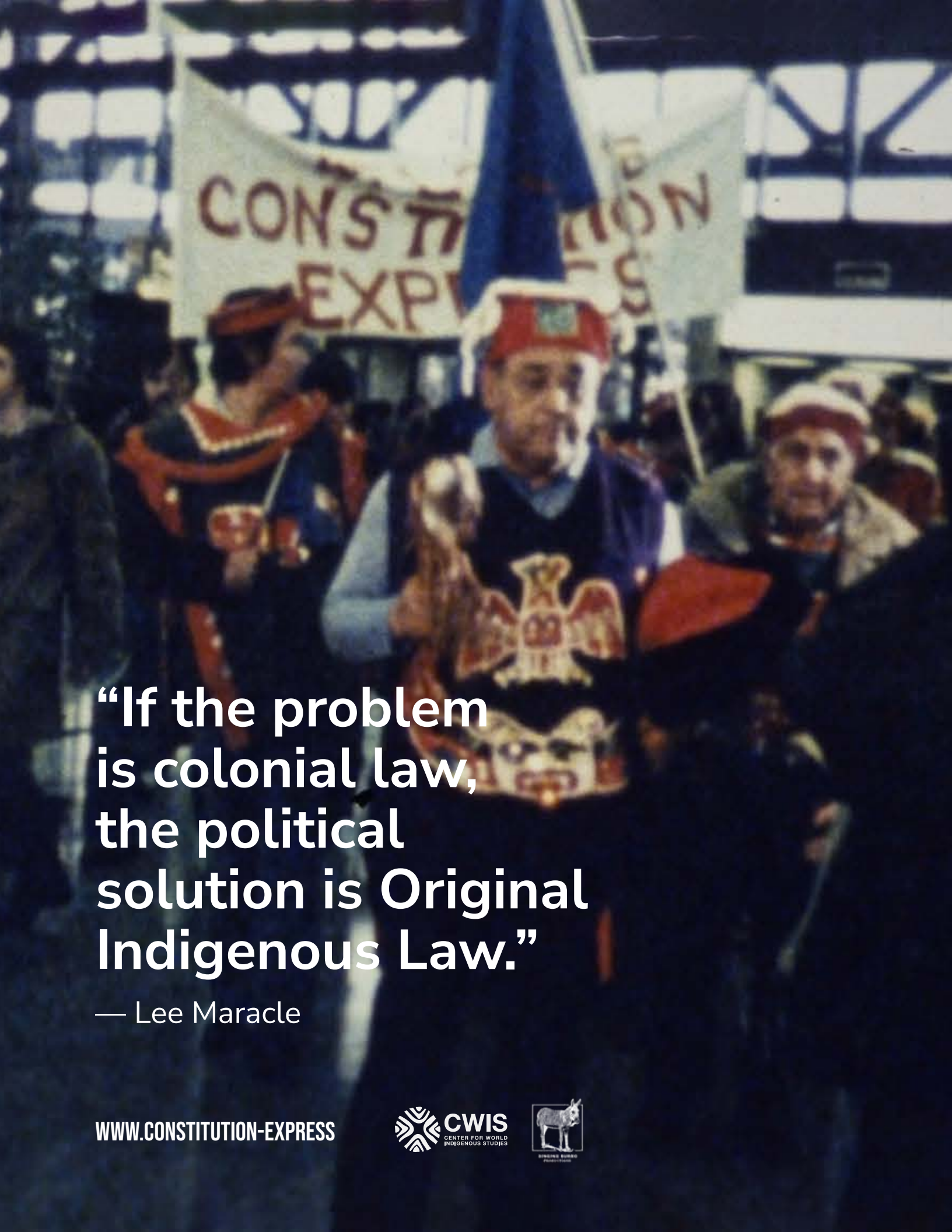
Edited by: Max Montalban

Music by: Steve Scalfati and Jon R yser

Narrated by: Peter Coyote

Production Companies: Center for World Indigenous Studies and Singing Burro Productions.





**“If the problem
is colonial law,
the political
solution is Original
Indigenous Law.”**

— Lee Maracle