November 2, 2016

Why understanding Native American religion is important for resolving the Dakota Access Pipeline crisis

By Rosalyn R. LaPier
The Conversation

In recent weeks, protests against the building of the Dakota Access Pipeline across North Dakota have escalated. Native American elders, families and children have set up tipis and tents on a campsite near the pipeline’s path in the hope of stopping the pipeline’s construction.

Dave Archambault Jr., the leader of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe that is leading the efforts to stop the pipeline, summed up what is at the heart of the issue. In a brief two-minute statement before the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland, he said,

“Oil companies are causing deliberate destruction of our sacred places.”

As a Native American scholar of environmental history and religious studies, I am often asked what Native American leaders mean when they say that certain landscapes are “sacred places” or “sacred sites.”

What makes a mountain, hill or prairie a “sacred” place?

Meaning of sacred spaces

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In my forthcoming book “Invisible Reality,” I contemplate those stories that my grandparents shared about Blackfeet religious concepts and the interconnectedness of the supernatural and natural realms.
My grandparents’ stories revealed that the Blackfeet believe in a universe where supernatural beings exist within the same time and space as humans and our natural world. The deities could simultaneously exist in both as visible and invisible reality. That is, they could live unseen, but known, within a physical place visible to humans.

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**A living text**

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For these Apache elders, places were not just names and stories – their landscape itself was a living sacred text. As these elders traveled from place to place speaking the names and stories of their sacred text, they told Basso that their minds became more “resilient,” more “smooth” and able to withstand adversity.

**The sacredness of the pipeline site**

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Not just Dakota

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Lack of understanding of sacredness

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The intimate connection between landscape and religion is at the center of Native American societies. It is the reason that thousands of Native Americans from across the United States and Indigenous peoples from around the world have traveled to the windswept prairies of North Dakota.

But, despite our 200-plus years of contact, the United States has yet to begin to understand the uniqueness of Native American religions and ties to the land. And until this happens, there will continue to be conflicts over religious ideas of land and landscape, and what makes a place sacred.

Rosalyn R. LaPier is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Women’s Studies, Environmental Studies and Native American Religion, Harvard University. Rosalyn R. LaPier receives funding from University of Montana. She is affiliated with Saokio Heritage.
November 3, 2016

Why understanding Native American religion is key to resolving Dakota Access Pipeline crisis

By Rosalyn R. LaPier, Religion News Service
National Catholic Reporter

In recent weeks, protests against the building of the Dakota Access Pipeline across North Dakota have escalated. Native American elders, families and children have set up tipis and tents on a campsite near the pipeline’s path in the hope of stopping the pipeline’s construction.

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https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/why-understanding-native-american-religion-key-resolving-dakota-access-pipeline

November 3, 2016

Image Gallery: 500 interfaith clergy and laity answered the call to stand with Standing Rock

By Lynette Wilson
Episcopal News Service
Cannon Ball, North Dakota - In a historic show of interfaith support and solidarity, more than 500 interfaith clergy and laity answered a call to come to North Dakota to stand in peaceful, prayerful and lawful solidarity Nov. 3; and to bear witness with the Standing Rock Sioux Nation as they continue to protect the tribe’s sacred land and water supply.

The interfaith group spent more than five hours on site, marching, singing hymns, sharing testimony and calling others to join them in standing with the more than 200 tribes who have committed their support to the Sioux Nation as they protest the route of the Dakota Access Pipeline.

Here are some images of the group’s visit:


November 4, 2016

A Prayer for People and Planet: 500 Clergy Hold 'Historic' Mass Gathering for Standing Rock

Roughly a hundred protesters and clergy members shut down the North Dakota state Capitol with a lawn prayer circle

By Lauren McCauley
Common Dreams

In a "historic" show of interfaith solidarity, 500 clergy members prayed along the banks of North Dakota's Cannonball River on Thursday where they "bore witness with the Standing Rock Sioux Nation," which has faced intimidation, violence, and arrests for protecting their sacred land and water supply from the threats of a massive oil pipeline.

According to the Episcopal News Service, "The interfaith group spent more than five hours on site, marching, singing hymns, sharing testimony, and calling others to join them in standing with the more than 200 tribes who have committed their support to the Sioux Nation as they protest the route of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL)."

Later, roughly a hundred protesters and clergy members held a prayer circle on the lawn of the North Dakota state Capitol in Bismarck, forcing the police to order a lock-down of the building. "Highway Patrol Lt. Tom Iverson said 14 people were arrested in the Capitol's judicial wing for refusing to leave the building. Iverson said the protesters, who were holding a sit-in and singing prayer hymns, faced disorderly conduct charges," AP reported.

The below video was taken by local news station KRYR-TV:

See video here:
Caro Gonzales, a Native American activist, told reporters that the water protectors had come to the Capitol to deliver a letter to Gov. Jack Dalrymple in support of the tribe and to ask "why he has ordered riot police to engage in police brutality at Standing Rock." Afterwards, a group of roughly 100 protesters marched from the Capitol to the governor's residence, where they were met by "dozens of riot police," Gonzales said.

Throughout the months-long standoff, Dalrymple, a Republican, has routinely sided with the pipeline company. After falsely declaring that the water protectors were risking public safety by engaging in "unlawful acts," he called a state of emergency, which paved the way for an increasingly aggressive and overblown police response to the peaceful protests.

On Wednesday, about 100 police in riot gear fired mace, pepper spray, and rubber bullets at point-blank range at water protectors praying waist-deep in water. The group of roughly 300 protectors had attempted to cross the Cannonball River to pray for the threatened land on the opposite side.

The week prior, more than 140 water protectors were arrested after police conducted a military-style raid of their encampment. Armed with tanks, a sound cannon, an armored truck, and bulldozer, the scene was described as "all-out war...waged on Indigenous protectors."

During the day of prayer Thursday, the clergy members marched to the bridge that was the site of last week's attack and "ceremonially burned a copy of a 600-year-old document," AP reported. Known as the Doctrine of Discovery, "the document from the 1400s sanctioned the taking of land from Indigenous peoples."

"It was very moving to be there in solidarity," said Philadelphia-based Bishop Dwayne Royster. "I wanted to be present as an African-American clergy person to let the people at Standing Rock understand that we as African Americans need them to know that we stand with them in their fight."

Similar acts of solidarity, particularly by people of faith, have grown in recent days. On Wednesday, nine rabbis, rabbinical students, and Jewish community members were arrested in Philadelphia for staging a civil disobedience action at a downtown TD Bank, one of the biggest financiers of the pipeline project. Nearly 300 rabbis have signed a statement in opposition to Dakota Access.

As the pipeline's construction edges closer to the Missouri River, which the Standing Rock Sioux is hoping to protect, with little hope of abatement, pipeline opponents worldwide are planning a mass Day of Action on Nov. 15, asking the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the incoming U.S. president "stop the Dakota Access Pipeline—and all those after it."

The call to action reads:
The Army Corps fast-tracked the Dakota Access Pipeline without proper consultation, and as a result, bulldozers are approaching Standing Rock as we speak. But with coordinated, massive demonstrations across the country, we’ll make it clear that this powerful movement will not allow the Obama administration or the incoming President to sacrifice Indigenous rights, our water, or our climate—they must reject this pipeline.

*Episcopal News Service* photographer Lynette Wilson shared a number of moving photographs from the day of prayer.

See photos here:


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**November 4, 2016**

Here’s what no one understands about the Dakota Access Pipeline crisis

Understanding “sacred” sites.

By Rosalyn R. LaPier
The Washington Post

In recent weeks, protests against the building of the Dakota Access Pipeline across North Dakota have escalated. Native American elders, families and children have set up tepees and tents on a campsite near the pipeline’s path in the hope of stopping its construction.

Dave Archambault Jr., the chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe that is leading the efforts to stop the pipeline, summed up what is at the heart of the issue. In a two-minute statement before the United Nations’ Human Rights Council in Geneva, he said that “oil companies are causing deliberate destruction of our sacred places.”

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This article originally appeared on The Conversation.

Rosalyn R. LaPier is a visiting assistant professor at Harvard University.

November 5, 2016

The White Horse and the Humvees—Standing Rock Is Offering Us a Choice

Right here, between the barricades on a North Dakota highway, is a pivotal confrontation between two world views, two futures.

By Robin Wall Kimmerer and Kathleen Dean Moore
YES! Magazine

Two lines, facing each other on a North Dakota highway. On one side, concrete barriers protect a row of armored vehicles and helmeted police with assault rifles. On the other, a young man rides a white horse whose legs are stained with blood. A woman, wearing a scarf to protect her lungs from tear gas, wafts sage smoke over a boy to give him strength, wash away hate, and remind him of his sacred purpose.

Here, on a highway stretching across trampled prairie grass, the fundamental contest of our time is playing out.

It’s a confrontation not only between two groups of people, but between two world views. The space between the lines vibrates with tensions of race, historical trauma, broken treaties, money and politics, love and fear. But the underlying issue that charges the air, mixing with the smells of tear gas and sage, is the global contest between two deeply different ideas about the true meaning of land.

On one side is the unquestioned assumption that land is merely a warehouse of lifeless materials that have been given to (some of) us by God or conquest, to use without constraint. On this view, human happiness is best served by whatever economy most efficiently transforms water, soils, minerals, wild lives, and human yearning into corporate wealth. And so it is possible to love the bottom line on a quarterly report so fiercely that you will call out the National Guard to protect it.

On the other side of the concrete barriers is a story that is so ancient it seems revolutionary. On this view, the land is a great and nourishing gift to all beings. The fertile soil, the fresh water, the clear air, the creatures, swift or rooted: they require gratitude and veneration. These gifts are not commodities, like scrap iron and sneakers. The land is sacred, a living breathing entity, for whom we must care, as she cares for us. And so it is possible to love land and water so fiercely you will live in a tent in a North Dakota winter to protect them.

It may turn out that the cracks in that stretch of two-lane highway mark a giant crack in time, when one set of assumptions about reality snaps and is replaced by another. This, like all times of paradigm shift, is an unsettled time, a time of shouting and police truncheons, as privileged people defend the assumptions that have served them royally.
What are they so afraid of out there in North Dakota, that they arrest journalists, set dogs on women and children, send prayerful protectors to jail and align para-military force against indigenous people on their own homelands?

Maybe they are afraid of the truth-telling power of the people at Standing Rock and their busloads of allies, who are making clear that we live in an era of profound error that we mistakenly believe is the only way we can live, an era of insanity that we believe is the only way we can think. But once people accept with heart and mind that land is our teacher, our mother, our garden, our pharmacy, our church, our cradle and our grave, it becomes unthinkable to destroy it. This vision threatens the industrial worldview more than anything else.

Indigenous people are saying, there are honorable and enduring lifeways that beckon to people who are weary of destruction.

Everyone can join the people of Standing Rock and say No. No more wrecked land. No more oil spills. No more poisoned wells. We don’t have to surrender the well-being of communities to the profit of a few. We can say Yes. Yes, we are all in this together. Yes, we can all stand on moral ground. Yes, we can all be protectors of the water and protectors of the silently watching future. The blockade on the highway is an invitation to remember and reclaim who we might be — just and joyous humans on a bountiful Earth. Right here, between the barricades, we are offered a choice.

On the highway, a warrior steps around the concrete barrier, offering a sage bundle that trails white smoke. Approaching a figure in riot gear, he extends the blessing to the officer, letting the smoke wash over him. To give him strength. To wash away hate. To remind him of his purpose.

Robin Wall Kimmerer, citizen Potawatomi Nation, is director of the Center for Native Peoples and the Environment and Distinguished Teaching Professor at the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry. Her most recent book is Braiding Sweetgrass.

Kathleen Dean Moore, the author of Great Tide Rising: Toward Clarity and Moral Courage in a Time of Planetary Change and co-editor of Moral Ground, is Oregon State University Distinguished Professor of Philosophy, Emerita.

http://www.yesmagazine.org/people-power/the-humvees-and-the-white-horse2014two-futures-20161105

November 5, 2016

The Standing Rock victory you didn’t hear about

The day 40 to 50 Native water protectors kept 250 militarized police from attacking camp.

By Desiree Kane
Nation of Change

Last week, the world watched in horror as a massive militarized police force attacked prayerful indigenous water protectors fighting for the water of 18 million people. Over and over, people were brutalized, pulled out of sweat lodges while in ceremony wearing only their underwear. Medics and journalists were arrested alongside water protectors. Cars were searched and impounded, personal possessions were taken by police.

Everyone by now has seen the videos of the assault last Thursday. Here at Standing Rock, the age-old story of government forces raising arms against Native people is being repeated in real time through social media.

But lost in that day, in the horrific stories of degradation, is a small story of victory, of how 40 to 50 Native people stood against more than 250 police on a bridge on County Road 134 in rural North Dakota.

Word-of-mouth announcements went out to the Oceti Sakowin camp that there was going to be a police raid of the front-line camp that had been set up in the way of the pipeline. A raid means people are in imminent danger, and that is widely understood here. Over Labor Day, campers were attacked by dogs and pepper sprayed by Dakota Access security. And since then, we’ve seen increased militarization. It has been apparent that the government, specifically Morton County Sheriff’s office, is the security force protecting the pipeline, so no one doubted that this time the police would be the ones to desecrate bodies and lifeways.

My original plan was to take County Road 134 to photograph the pipeline being forced into the earth.

Instead, I found a blockade of wood logs and hay bales set up in an area where water divided the back country road. No one there was armed with anything other than prayer. It was a strategic juncture because police vehicles couldn’t cross the narrow embankments on their way to the raid. If they were stopped at this bridge from the east, they could only come from the north.

In the morning, police did come, and from both sides. When I arrived, this blockade had already stopped an LRAD—a sonic weapon often called “sound cannon,” which can cause permanent hearing loss—from making it to the camp. Even as police numbers grew, eventually well beyond 200, the water protectors held their ground, fearless.

Then the dancing began.

People began dancing to a hand drum, entranced by the power of prayer. A single elder, a veteran, repeatedly walked out and yelled: “Send one unarmed like I am out here to negotiate. Please. We are protecting the water for our children and yours. Send one out here to negotiate. Let’s talk! Please!”

He was met with no negotiation.
But the water protectors held the bridge. For hours and hours, police advanced and retreated.

This was an unforgettable moment unfolding. With the dancing going on and the veteran trying to negotiate out front, a young woman stepped up and began moving her body to the beat of the drum. She was power incarnate. Her arms were wide open, her pink fingernail polish glistening. She was crying. Just waiting to be pepper sprayed, she wore a painter’s mask, one which would have done nothing much for protection.

That standoff’s foundation was ceremony and song, the truest essence of religious freedom.

This is what colonial violence looks like: 250 police—some of them snipers, some with guns drawn on the crowd—in a standoff with 40 to 50 unarmed indigenous people who just want to be allowed to live.

The untold story of this day was that those troops never made it from the east to join the others in raiding the camp, dehumanizing the friends and families of those on that bridge. There were 250 fewer officers able to show up to brutalize people and pervert prayer ceremonies on October 27. History rarely teaches us about when Natives win against the state. And that’s how injustice flourishes: in the shadows.

So let me be clear. On October 27, when a colonial force armed with military weapons faced off on a bridge against veterans armed with only prayer, the Natives won.

http://www.nationofchange.org/2016/11/05/the-standing-rock-victory-you-didnt-hear-about/

November 5, 2016

"This is a good day!" News from Standing Rock (and Hoquiam!)

By SeattleTammy
Daily Kos

There has been a lot of Standing Rock news happening late Friday, and I don't see it being posted here. Let me know if someone else has covered this.

It's really, really good news!
Kandi Mossett (@mhwaea) posted a FaceBook Live video earlier today. She took it down, and has posted an update to clarify the news items.

Watch this video for the good news!
She explains so many of the various new articles, and what our actions should be.

How the Army Corps will halt future constructions for 60 days, and perhaps these delays will cost the Dakota Access too much to continue.

How the implications of a re-route are also financially harmful to the project, and that was an important statement from President Obama.

How there is still a fight ahead.
We have to stay on target, we have to contact the DC office of the Corps and demand a full Environmental Impact Statement. "There could be further delays"
All delays are good delays.

**Activists Say Dakota Access Pipeline Could Be Put on Hold for 30 Days**
"It's the first glimmer of hope, of good news, that we've had out here for weeks—months."

*Mother Jones* is first in reporting:
The company has not yet received an easement permit to dig under the river. According to Kandi Mossett, an organizer with the Indigenous Environmental Network, and others at yesterday’s meeting, Henderson said he would wait at least 30 days until granting such an easement. If the Corps' Washington, DC, office grants the easement, Henderson reportedly said he would not sign it for 30 days.

In her video statement, Mossett said any discussion of rerouting the pipeline away from Native American land could stop the project. "A reroute, to this company, effectively kills the project because they won't be able to afford it. It will make it obsolete," she said. The 1,172-mile pipeline, set to run between North Dakota and Illinois, was planned to be completed by the end of this year.

Recounting the latest meeting between the Standing Rock Sioux and the Army Corps of Engineers, Mossett was visibly excited. "**The feeling is like, oh my god, are we gonna win?**"

**Public Servants or Corporate Security?: An Open Letter to Law Enforcement and National Guard in ND**
Winona LaDuke, Col. Ann Wright (Ret.), and Zoltan Grossman

So you joined law enforcement or the National Guard because you wanted to uphold the law, protect innocent civilians against the bad guys, and help your community in times of need. Instead, they’re having you blockade unarmed people who are trying to hold a prayer vigil, chasing them with armored vehicles and ATVs, raiding their tipis and sweat lodges at gunpoint, and shooting them (and their horses) with pepper spray, concussion grenades, tasers, and rubber bullets. You thought you’d be the cop on the beat or the citizen soldier, and they’ve made you into the cavalry riding in with Custer.

**Two Police Officers Turn In Badges In Support Of Standing Rock Water Protectors**

Earlier today it was reported by Redhawk at Standing Rock in North Dakota that two police officers have turned in their badges in support of the water protectors.

“**There have been at least 2 reports of police officers turning in their badges acknowledging that this battle is not what they signed up for. You can see it in some of them, that they do not support the police actions. We must keep reminding them they are welcome to put down their weapons and badge and take a stand against this pipeline as well. Some are waking up.”**

-Redhawk
Army Corp of Engineers Ordered Police to Arrest Standing Rock Water Protectors, via Earth Island Journal

On Wednesday, the US Army Corp of Engineers sent a letter instructing police to clear the Water Protectors.

*Update: this letter has been rescinded.*

The US army corps of engineers ordered North Dakota police to arrest Native American protesters and destroy a bridge that activists built over a creek...

Morton County sheriff Kyle Kirchmeier, who has faced criticisms for his department’s treatment of protesters, said he was pleased the army corps authorized police to take action.

“This simple message gave a clear-cut order to execute a plan to remove unlawful actors and prevent further unlawful actions,” he said in a statement. [Terrorism charges have been dropped](http://www.earthislandjournal.org/2016/11/02/terrorism-charges-have-been-dropped-standing-rock-water-protectors/) against Water Protectors.

How to Contact the People Who Sent Militarized Police to Standing Rock

Jackson Browne, Bonnie Raitt Hosting Standing Rock Benefit

No DAPL Day of Action Nov 15 Join a near-by action, or start your own.

I have a personal connection to this. In Grays Harbor, we have been fighting three proposed Crude Oil Terminals, to be serviced by mile and a half long unit trains of Bakken Crude hauling DOT-111s. (Earlier diary by [delonix](http://delonix.com), [Remote Washington Shore Awash in Participants](http://delonix.com/2016/11/02/remote-washington-shore-awash-in-participants/))

*Bill Graham’s (delonix) song as sang by Donna Albert at GH 2016 Pride Festival*

We've killed two of the three terminals, and are now in the comment period for the first Substantial Shorelines permit that needs issuing.

We would very much appreciate your sending a comment to Brian Shay, City Administrator, Hoquiam. You can personalize this letter at our website, [Citizens for a Clean Harbor](http://citizensforacleanharbor.org/).

We have until November 19th to stop this first domino of permits.

Turn the page for more...

We are honored to work with the [Quinault Indian Nation](http://www.quinault.org/) to protect our [Shared Waters, Shared Values](http://quinault.org/)

The Quinault Indian Nation has released a press release: [Standing with Standing Rock](http://www.quinault.org/)

**Quinault president speaks against oil terminal projects**

Fawn Sharp explains why — and how — Hoquiam City Council could halt planned oil terminal projects
Tribal rights are being taken into consideration on these fossil fuel fights at long last.

Yesterday, the County Commissioners in Mosier, OR denied the second Siding Track proposed to run through the town, which “almost blew up last year”.

There were many reasons to deny this project, and the violation of (Yakama Nation) tribal treaty rights is the most salient.

I met Kandi at a Oil/Coal Conference hosted at Evergreen University a few years back. She has been an inspiration and a great activist leader.

At our Draft Environmental Impact Statement hearing last October, Joelle read the first half of a letter Kandi sent and I read the second half.

Robinson, Joelle

"Hi. My name is Joelle Robinson and I'm from Seattle. I am here as my own concerned citizen, but I'm reading today on behalf of Candy Monsette (sic), who is a member of Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation in North Dakota. And she is with the Native Energy and Climate Campaign and also the Indigenous Environmental Network. This is a public comment on the DEIS for Westway and Imperium. In my home town of New Town, North Dakota, life has changed forever because of fracking and the lust for oil. The horrible thing is that it's changed for the worst. This is no modern day (inaudible). This oil booming, as in fracking, has become devastating for us and no amount of money can ever give us back what has been lost. Many in our own communities have died because of accidents. With the hundreds of tracks that are taking over the roads, our land is being sterilized, our water poisoned, and our air tainted imperatively. Our culture has taken a back seat to strangers populating the land, many with our contentions. Rape of both men and women is on the rise, along with things we've never dealt with before such as sex trafficking of young teenagers. Heroine abuse runs rampant as the big city drug cartels move in and our once quiet town of 1500 is now a dangerous and scary place to be, let alone to raise a child. My daughter is 15 months old and my heart aches that I do not even want her to be at home for fear of what she would be exposed to. Murder is not a word we came across in our town before the oil boom. Now we will just wait for the next and the next as many have been murdered -- yes, murdered in our little communities --

I can finish the sentence and then hand it to my colleague?

MR. KEILLOR: Yeah, we'll have to have you wrap up immediately, and we'll get to the next speaker.

In our little communities much of it is associated with drugs and the gangs that follow the money."

"about how this perception can adversely affect values.

Damike(sic), Tammy Continuing with Candy(sic)’s letter.
Our own people are becoming addicts and need treatment but they continue to be arrested and sent to jail while the two perpetrators of the crimes keep slipping away, only to bring more drugs, guns, and crime. I can’t even begin to describe to you the heaviness in my heart, having buried my brother’s beautiful 28-year-old step-daughter just a few weeks ago who could not stop using heroine, which destroyed her body so much we had to have a closed casket. We found my little cousin’s body in the lake this spring. He disappeared last fall after last being seen with two known MS-13 gang members. His death was ruled an accidental drowning and the case was open and shut. Just this past week two armed robberies occurred at two separate downtown businesses on our little main street. Take these words that have been read here today and quadruple the horrors and maybe then you might be able to begin to get a sense of what’s happening to us in our communities on Fort Berthold in North Dakota as a direct result of our country’s addiction to fossil fuels and fracking. It’s sick and it’s sad, and I would never in my life wish this kind of horror on anyone else, if you have a choice to do what you can do now to help us stop this kind of devastation from spreading. We need help. Will you help us? Do not support fracking. The social and environmental impacts from it are negatively life altering, and those impacts are spreading across this country like a disease. Please, from one compassionate human being to another, help us and do not support fracking. (Speaking Indian). Thank you."

*emphasis mine:*

Yes, WA Dept of Ecology actually wrote *(Speaking Indian).*


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**November 7, 2016**

Larger faith community comes to Standing Rock in solidarity

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

In silence they processed. In a circle they prayed. With Standing Rock they stood.

More than 500 clergy and people of faith across religious denominations joined the Standing Rock Sioux Nation and its supporters in their stand against the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline.

The gathering Nov. 3, described as "a day of protective witness in solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux Nation and with the water protectors," brought the interfaith group to the main Oceti Sakowin camp on tribal land in south-central North Dakota that has served as the base for the pipeline resistance.
Among them were Mercy Srs. Kathleen Erickson and Aine O'Connor, and Mike Poulin, a member of the Sisters of Mercy justice team in Omaha. The three spoke to NCR following the conclusion of the prayerful witness.

The role of the faith community at Standing Rock, O'Connor said, was "to decry the injustice that is happening to the Native American peoples here."

The demonstration against the Dakota Access Pipeline began in April, and has since brought more than 200 Native American tribes together, in what has been called the largest such gathering in modern times. Support has also come from other corners, including numerous environmental organizations, to the Oceti Sakowin camp near the mouth of the Cannonball and Missouri rivers.

The Standing Rock Sioux have filed a federal lawsuit alleging that the pipeline will cross land viewed as sacred, including burial sites, and is protected by existing treaties, and also pose a threat to the tribe's primary water source. The proposed path would take the pipeline underneath Lake Oahe and the Missouri River a half mile upstream of the tribe's reservation boundary. The tribe and supports have noted an earlier route had the pipeline passing near Bismarck, but was rejected early in the planning to protect municipal water supplies.

If completed, the 1,172-mile Dakota Access Pipeline would carry daily as much as 570,000 barrels of crude oil from western North Dakota to Illinois, where it would meet with an already operational pipeline. Energy Transfer Partners, the Dallas-based company constructing the pipeline, says it provides a safer, cheaper and more environmentally responsible way of transporting the oil than by rail or truck.

Beyond environmental and treaty concerns, the faith community was alarmed by treatment of the Water Protectors (the pipeline opponents' preferred term) by local law enforcement, which in recent weeks has used pepper spray and rubber bullets in confrontations and has made more than 100 arrests.

"Our duty as people of faith and clergy could not be clearer: to stand on the side of the oppressed and to pray for God's mercy in these challenging times," said the Rev. John Floberg, an Episcopal priest who organized the gathering and has served the Standing Rock reservation for two decades.

The solidarity witness began shortly after dawn in the Oceti Sakowin camp, where the 524 clergy and laity from 20 faith backgrounds met with the elders of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe. There, they gathered around the camp's continuously burning sacred fire. Several spoke against the Doctrine of Discovery, the term for a series of 15th-century papal bulls that gave Christian explorers authority to claim lands they encountered. A copy of the doctrine was given to the elders, who then proceeded to burn it.

After a traditional Native American smudging ceremony, in which smoke from burning various plants was fanned toward them to purify the body and drive out negative energy, the faith contingent processed in silence onto Highway 1806. They set up their prayer service near the
Backwater Bridge — where local law enforcement erected a barrier following a clash between
the two sides on Oct. 27 that resulted in 141 arrests after police attempted to break up a camp on
private property in the pipeline's path.

The spot placed the faith community — Episcopalians, Lutherans, Baptists, and Unitarians, but
only a few Catholics, including peace activist Fr. John Dear — near the pipeline's construction
but also in the midst of sites the Standing Rock Sioux consider sacred, O'Connor said.

"We were not only standing with the people in that place, but we were standing on holy ground,
where the burials, the tradition have been very important to the people," she said.

The service continued for nearly five hours, and included numerous speakers and songs, along
with the formation of a Niobrara Circle, where participants offer peace to the person to their left
and continue to do so until everyone exchanges peace with all.

Erickson, who grew up in North Dakota, said she felt compelled to participate because of her
concern for the environmental threats the pipeline presents, but also with the racism toward
Native Americans.

"It reminds us of taking of land or spoiling of land in places like Honduras and other countries,
where indigenous people just do not have a voice that we of privilege have always had and taken
for granted," she told NCR.

The situation has reminded the Sisters of Mercy of challenges indigenous peoples have faced
elsewhere, such as in Peru with mining industries and in Australia with companies engaged in
fracking, O'Connor added.

"We hear the cries of the peoples on Earth, but it's not just a cry from being oppressed, but an
incredible cry of strength," she said, adding that these instances raise questions of justice as to
why corporate interests appear to receive precedence over the needs of the people.

Pope Francis has regularly decried efforts to restrict or remove indigenous communities from
lands they hold sacred and central to their culture. In his encyclical "Laudato Sí, on Care for Our
Common Home," he stated:

They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners,
especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed. For them, land is not a
commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space
with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values. When they
remain on their land, they themselves care for it best.

One of the goals of the prayer witnesses was to raise awareness, not only of their actions that
day, but to bring the conversation back to their respective communities.

For much of the morning, the faith group was circled by a helicopter and a couple of planes,
Poulin said. Along with two dozen or so police officers camped on the other side of the bridge,
he said he saw police cars parked on most hills in the distance. The scene reminded Erickson of the militarized natured of the U.S.-Mexico border.

"It was kind of surprising to see just how many police were there," Poulin said. He added that organizers had contacted local law enforcement ahead of time to stress their intention was a "peaceful, prayerful, lawful demonstration" and they did not plan to attempt to cross the contested bridge.

The location of the prayer service was symbolic, O'Connor said, in that it served as a public witness "to reinforce what the water protectors have continually maintained, that they have been there as water protectors, not protestors. It was being done nonviolently."

The arrival of religious men and women came a day after a confrontation near the Cannonball River. Videos and photos on social media showed the use of pepper spray and tear gas on protestors standing in the river during a prayer ceremony; there were also reports of police firing rubber bullets at them.

A letter signed by many of the clergy and laity that came to Standing Rock urged President Barack Obama to investigate the Morton County Sheriff's Department regarding allegations of inhibited free speech, wrongful arrest, excessive use of violence and harassment of the Native Americans.

The letter also requested the Army Corps of Engineers to deny the construction permit for the pipeline, citing the danger it poses to drinking water, as well as the climate, and that it violates the 1851 Fort Laramie Treaty.

Acknowledging the issues raised by the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, the U.S. government on Sept. 9 suspended construction of the pipeline on federal lands near or under Lake Oahe. The order came shortly after a federal D.C. district court declined the Standing Rock Sioux tribe's request for an injunction to halt the project while their lawsuit proceeds.

Obama on Tuesday said during an interview with Now This news that the Army Corps is exploring alternative routes for the pipeline.

"We're monitoring this closely. I think as a general rule, my view is that there is a way for us to accommodate sacred lands of Native Americans," the president said.

As for the conflicts between the water protectors and law enforcement, Obama said "it is a challenging situation … There's an obligation for protestors to be peaceful, and there's an obligation for authorities to show restraint."

His response drew uproar from those supporting Standing Rock on social media, urging the president not only to intervene to prevent further violent encounters, but also to stop the pipeline altogether.
The religious demonstration is the latest show of support for Standing Rock. Earlier in the week millions of people "checked in" on Facebook to the camp as a way to show unity with the cause but also after reports came that local law enforcement were monitoring Facebook to track activists. The Morton County Sheriff's Department called the report "absolutely false."

The New York Times editorial board joined on Thursday with those calling for the pipeline's rerouting, and also raised questions about its overall worth.

In addition, GreenFaith has organized an interfaith letter addressed to U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch, North Dakota Gov. Jack Dalrymple and Energy Transfer CEO Kelcy Warren stating their opposition, "in the strongest terms possible," to the pipeline on both spiritual and environmental grounds, as well as the treatment of the Sioux community and other demonstrators. It calls for the protection of sacred lands and also the pipeline project to be abandoned.

A coalition of activist groups have planned national day of solidarity actions for Nov. 15, many to be held at Army Corps offices, in an effort to demand either Obama or the incoming president to reject the Dakota Access Pipeline.

"We'll continue to fight until native sovereignty is honored, indigenous rights are protected, and our communities, water, and climate matter more than fossil fuel profits," organizers said a statement.


November 7, 2016

Taking a Stand at Standing Rock

By Rev. John Dear
Common Dreams

Like millions of other concerned people, I’ve followed the standoff at the Standing Rock Sioux Nation in North Dakota for months. The good people of Standing Rock—including the Dakota, the Lakota and the Sioux—have stood their ground since April to block the evil 1,170 mile, $3.7 billion Dakota Access Oil Pipeline which will dig beneath the three-mile-wide Missouri River, potentially poisoning the water for hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of people, and desecrating the sacred land of Indigenous people. They’ve built several large camps and a permanent campaign that has gained the support of 200 other tribes.

Thousands have made the journey to the Standing Rock to stand in solidarity. The Obama administration has told the Army Corps not to issue the permit for drilling under the river but the preparations continue. Hundreds of unarmed peaceful people have been arrested in acts of nonviolent civil disobedience. State police and brutal pipeline security guards have attacked the
nonviolent people with dogs, mace, tear gas and rubber bullets and consistently lied to the media, blaming the peaceful people for their violence.

Through it all, the Native American people have stood and walked in a steadfast spirit of prayer and nonviolence. Before our eyes, they have demonstrated that rare kind of satyagraha reached by Mahatma Gandhi, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the finest nonviolent movements in history. In doing so, they have exposed for all the world to see the centuries old racist war on Native Americans and the equally centuries old war on the earth itself, as well as the power of creative nonviolence when wielded properly.

Last week, a national call to clergy went out. Clergy were summoned to drop everything and get to Standing Rock for a day of prayer and repentance, and a march from the main camp to the bridge where the police and pipeline security officials block the road to the notorious pipeline construction site.

And so I went. Over six hundred women and men priests and ministers from various Christian denominations made the journey, along with hundreds of other activists. It was one of the greatest experiences of my life.

Looking out from the plane over the barren prairies of North Dakota, I was startled by the massive bright blue Missouri River. It is much bigger than I realized. From the air, it was so clear to see that, indeed, “Water Is Life,” as the Standing Rock saying teaches. Our plane was packed with church folk and young activists, and so was the Bismarck airport. There was excitement and hope in the air. Solidarity seemed alive and well.

As I drove south under the big blue sky across the rolling brown prairies to the village of Cannon Ball near the Standing Rock camp, the orange sun began to set and the sacred landscape radiated beauty, energy and life. I walked into the packed gymnasium for the evening orientation and nonviolence training, and found a hushed standing room only crowd listening attentively to Father John, the local Episcopal priest who has served here for 25 years, as he explained the scenario for the next day. Several Standing Rock leaders spoke before food and refreshments were offered. It was clear from the get-go that nonviolence was the order of the day.

They call themselves “protectors” not protesters, “pray-ers not disrupters, “peacemakers” not “troublemakers.” It’s that creative nonviolence that has attracted the interest and sympathy of people around the country and the world.

The next morning, I drove to the Oceti Sakowin camp as the sun rose over the mysterious North Dakota landscape. From the hills above the camp, it looked like a sea of tents with the striking exception of the scores of large white tee pees sprinkled throughout the camp. It was a sight to behold. The Cannon Ball River ran along one side of the camp and large brown rolling hills circled the entire area in the distance. Here, for the past months, thousands of people have maintained a nonviolent satyagraha campaign to protect the land, the water, and the dignity of the Standing Rock people.
At 7 am, as I approached the main gathering place for worship, I noticed the large billboard with the camp rules: “We are protectors. We are peaceful and prayerful. We are nonviolent. ISMS have no place here. We respect the locals. We do not carry weapons. We keep each other accountable.”

There, around the Sacred Fire, several dozen Native women offered morning prayers and then set off for the daily walk to bless the water. Over the next two hours, hundreds of clergy, mainly women and men Episcopal priests, arrived and greeted one another. Over the course of the day, we exchanged stories, shared our feelings and plotted strategies for future solidarity. I was happy to see friends Ann Wright of Voices for Creative Nonviolence, Rev. Lennox Yearwood of the Hip Hop Caucus, and Bill McKibben of 350.org.

At 9am, Father John began a liturgy of prayer and repentance, where we formally denounced the ancient “Doctrine of Discovery,” the church document from the 1490s which empowered European authorities to steal the land and resources of indigenous peoples. After silence and prayers, it was burned in the Sacred Fire. Then the march began.

We set out from the camp, by now a thousand of us, well over half in various clerical church attire, with black robes, white collars, and colorful stoles. Most of us carried bright posters that read “Clergy Stand with Standing Rock.”

We walked slowly, mindfully, peacefully down the main road, over the hill, and down toward the bridge, where the police have barricaded the road to prevent people from approaching the actual drilling and construction site of the pipeline. We sang as we walked—“Amazing Grace,” “This Little Light of mine,” “We Are Marching in the Light of God.” It was one of the greatest, most peaceful marches I have ever experienced in a lifetime of marching for justice and peace.

When we reached the bridge, we gathered together for songs and speeches. A wonderful African American woman minister led us in “The Water Is Wide.” A group of Jewish women sang an inspiring prayer in Hebrew. A young Quaker activist read her congregation’s statement of solidarity. Another Native elder and minister prayed for the pipeline workers, police and security guards, and the coming day when they would join our circle and together we could celebrate creation and the Creator.

In my speech, I thanked the Standing Rock people for their steadfast resistance and exemplary nonviolence, and reflected on Jesus’ connection between nonviolence and oneness with the earth. I recalled his teaching in the Beatitudes, “Blessed are the meek; they shall inherit the earth,” and noted that meekness is the biblical word for nonviolence.

Long ago, Jesus connected nonviolence with oneness with the earth, I said. We have forgotten that connection, rejected nonviolence as a way of life, supported the culture of violence, and now are faced with the consequences of systemic violence—the destructive pipeline and catastrophic climate change. But the Standing Rock people are calling us back, I continued. They urge us not just to reject the pipeline, honor their land, and protect our water, but to reclaim our common nonviolence and shared oneness with the earth. They are showing us the way forward, and it’s time for more and more of us to follow their lead.
More songs, speeches and prayers followed, and then everyone exchanged the sign of peace. Bag lunches were offered and people sat down on the tall brown grass to eat, talk and rest after the day’s march.

Later that afternoon, a hundred clergy drove north to Bismarck for another protest at the State Capitol. Fourteen were arrested inside during a sit in, calling for an end to the pipeline and for respect for the native lands and water.

But I stayed back and spent the rest of the day walking through the main camp, meeting and listening to hundreds of people. It was a powerful experience, to encounter so many people who were coming together in this difficult but beautiful campaign.

One young Standing Rock couple with two little children showed me their video from the demonstration the day before, when police and pipeline security officials sprayed the people with tear gas and shot them with rubber bullets. Others told me about the military-style raid on another camp the previous week, which led to the removal of everyone’s meager possessions and the arrest of 140 protectors. The pictures could be from our military maneuvers in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Palestine, Libya and Pakistan. More, this war against the indigenous people and North Dakota landscape is not new: for one thing, hundreds of nuclear weapons have been planted in this sacred ground, ready for take off and global destruction.

One Native elder, who was also an ordained UCC minister, reflected with me on the possible outcomes that lay ahead, including the Obama administration’s effort to move the pipeline many miles north. In the medic tent, one young Native physician’s assistant told me stories of previous demonstrations, their care for the marchers and their basic mission—“to keep people alive.”

I visited the artist collective, various kitchens, tents where extra clothes were being collected and given away as needed, and the media tent. In another tent, I came upon the daily nonviolent direct action training, required of every newcomer on the day of their arrival. Some 150 people were being trained in the basics of nonviolence. It was the Civil Rights movement all over again.

Right now, everyone is digging in for the long, cold winter. But as I stood and watched a group building the geodesic dome in the center of the camp, it was clear: they may be cold, but they are on fire.

The next day, I read an editorial in the New York Times calling for the pipeline to be moved far away from Standing Rock. It said in part:

A pipeline may well be the most profitable and efficient way to move a half-million barrels of crude oil a day across the Plains. But in a time of oil gluts and plummeting oil prices, is it worth it? Is it worth the degradation of the environment, the danger to the water, the insult to the heritage of the Sioux?

The law-enforcement response to the largely peaceful Standing Rock impasse has led to grim clashes at protest camps between hundreds of civilians and officers in riot gear. The confrontation cannot help summoning a wretched history. Not far from Standing Rock, in the
Black Hills of South Dakota, sacred land was stolen from the Sioux, plundered for gold and other minerals, and then carved into four monumental presidential heads: an American shrine built from a brazen act of defacement.

The Sioux know as well as any of America’s native peoples that justice is a shifting concept, that treaties, laws and promises can wilt under the implacable pressure for mineral extraction. But without relitigating the history of the North American conquest, perhaps the protesters can achieve their aim to stop or reroute the pipeline.

Perhaps. If the Standing Rock campaign is able to stop or reroute the pipeline, it will do so because of their steadfast nonviolence and the strong movement that has grown up around them. But like every grassroots movement of nonviolence, they need help and are asking for it. Everyone can get involved to help build this movement, support their nonviolence, and reach that good outcome and transformation.

As we continue our solidarity with Standing Rock, we are being summoned to take a new stand in our own lives, to give ourselves to the growing grassroots global movement to stop the destruction of our common sacred land, the poisoning of our shared water and the oppression of the indigenous peoples. One immediate next step is to get involved in the Nov. 15th National Day of Action. Another would be to join the group I work with, www.campaignnonviolence.org.


http://www.commondreams.org/views/2016/11/07/taking-stand-standing-rock

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**November 8, 2016**

At Standing Rock, A Native American Woman Elder Says "This is What I Have Been Waiting for My Entire Life"

By Ann Wright
Common Dreams

This time I have been at Standing Rock, North Dakota at the Oceti Shakowin camp to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) for four days during a whirlwind of national and international attention following two terrible displays of police brutality toward the water protectors.

On October 27, over 100 local and state police and National Guard dressed in riot gear with helmets, face masks, batons and other protective clothing, carrying assault rifles stormed the Front Line North camp. They had other military equipment such as Mine Resistant Ambush
Protected Personnel carriers (MRAP) and Long Range Acoustic Devices (LRAD) and a full assortment of tasers, bean bag bullets and clubs/batons. They arrested 141 persons, destroyed the Frontline camp and threw the personal possessions of those arrested in garbage dumpsters. The Morton county sheriff reportedly is investigating the purposeful destruction of personal property.

In another overreaction to the unarmed civilian water protectors, on November 2, police shot tear gas and beanbag bullets at water protectors who were standing in a small tributary to the Missouri River. They were standing in the frigid water to protect a handmade bridge across the river to sacred burial sites that was being destroyed by the police. Police snipers stood on the ridge of the burial hill with their feet on sacred burial sites.

On October 3, in solidarity with water protectors, almost 500 religious leaders from all over the United States arrived to join water protectors in a day of prayer for stopping the Dakota Access Pipeline. Retired Episcopal Priest John Flogerty had put out a national call for clergy to come to Standing Rock. He said he was stunned that in less than ten days, 474 leaders answered the call to stand for protection of Mother Earth. During the two hour interfaith witness, discussion and prayer near the current digging of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), one could hear the digging machines destroying the ridge line to the south of Highway 1806.

After the gathering, about 50 of the group drove to Bismarck, the capital of North Dakota, to call on the Governor of the State to stop the pipeline. 14 clergy sat down in the rotunda of the capitol in prayer, refused to end their prayers and leave the capitol building when ordered by the police and were arrested.

Another five people were arrested 30 minutes later when storm troopers were deployed to intimidate the remainder of the group when they walked across the street toward the sidewalk in front of the Governor’s ranch style house to kneel in prayer. The women arrestees were transported 4 hours to a county jail in Fargo, North Dakota when a women’s cell was available in Bismarck. Two of the men arrested were shocked when they were told that the women arrestees had been taken to Fargo as they had been placed by themselves in a cell that would accommodate ten that was filled with feminine hygiene products. The men arrestees also said that their cash was taken and the jail issued a check for the cash, resulting in their having NO cash upon release making getting a cab or buying food virtually impossible as taxis and grocery stores generally don’t cash checks. Instead, those emerging from jail are told to go to a bank to cash the checks which are located far from the jail and probably closed when arrestees are released.

On Saturday, November 5, tribal council leaders arranged for a ceremony for horses as the plains Indians are “descendants from a powerful horse nation.” Tribal leader John Eagle reminded the approximately 1,000 persons in a large circle at the new Tribal Council Sacred Fire, that in August 1876, 4,000 horses were taken by U.S. military from the Lakota in what is known as the Battle of Greasy Grass, and known to the U.S. military as the Battle of the Little Bighorn. He also mentioned for the non-Sioux that the Sioux word for horse means “my son, my daughter.” He said that the return of horses to the sacred fire would be a healing for the horses for their genetic memory of the treatment of their ancestors in the past century as well as a healing for the native American population for the genetic trauma for their historical treatment of
their ancestors. Healing for many at Standing Rock from their recent violent treatment by police and North Dakota National Guard, was an important aspect of the ceremony.

Chief John Eagle pointed out that many Native Americans have joined the military and that as combat veterans, they have double post traumatic stress (PTS), first from their treatment as Native Americans and second as combat veterans. John emphasized that for native combat veterans in particular, it is important to use the word “water protectors,” as the terms “demonstrators and protestors” may trigger a PTSD response from their days in the U.S. military. He said that he could see PTSD in the eyes of many who went through each of the recent encounters with the police.

As John Eagle explained the purpose of the ceremony, in the distance galloping down the road of flags into the Oceti Sankowin camp came 30 horses and riders. With “peace cries” not war cries, the large 1,000 person circle opened to welcome the horses and riders. They circled the sacred fire many times to the every increasing “peace cries” and the beating of a large drum. He called on each “water protector” to have courage in their hearts to overcome anger and fear and to turn to prayer, as the police and government don’t know how to deal with nonviolence and prayer. Leaders asked that no one take photos of the sacred ceremony once the horses entered the circle.

Another leader said that Native Americans must begin forgiving rather than waiting for an apology for their treatment by the U.S. government. He predicted that the U.S. government will never give an apology and that unless Native Americans forgive the pain the live in, they will live in anger. “Lives are better if one can forgive,” he said. “We must change and we must change our treatment of Mother Earth.”

The son of American Indian Movement (AIM) leader Russell Means told of being in the Front line camp and being clubbed by police as he protected an elder woman. He said that he felt that he had seen violence unfold before, that the treatment by police in 2016 was “familiar in our blood.” Means also reminded everyone to help the young water protectors who are having difficulty in coping with their experiences with the police in the past two weeks.

As the ceremony was ending approximately thirty Navajo Hopi youth and adult supporters arrived into the circle after running from Arizona. Greeted by great cries from the 1,000 persons in the circle, a 15 year-old Hopi youth in sobs said, “150 years ago we were forced to run away from our homes but today we have run to help keep your and our homes, in a prayerful spirit, but to show the government that it cannot make us run away again.”

As I walked from the circle, an older Sioux woman told me that she had been at the Front Line camp the day it was destroyed. She had been sitting in prayer when the police stormed in, roughed people up, broke up the camp and arrested her. She said that she has been in the camp for three months and will stay until the camp ends. In tears, she said, “I am now living as my ancestors lived...in nature all day, everyday, in community living, working and praying together. I have been waiting for this gathering all my life.”
Ann Wright is a 29 year US Army/Army Reserves veteran who retired as a Colonel and a former US diplomat who resigned in March, 2003 in opposition to the war on Iraq. She served in Nicaragua, Grenada, Somalia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sierra Leone, Micronesia and Mongolia. In December, 2001 she was on the small team that reopened the US Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan. She is the co-author of the book "Dissent: Voices of Conscience." (www.voicesofconscience.com)


November 14, 2016

Roundtable on the Contribution of FBOs to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction

On October 10, 2016, in commemoration of the International Day of Disaster Reduction, Soka Gakkai International (SGI), a community-based Buddhist organization, the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities (JLIF&LC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC), co-organized a roundtable on “The contribution of FBOs to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction” at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva, Switzerland.

See the report:

http://fore.yale.edu/files/20161114_FBO_Rountable_Final.pdf

November 15, 2016

Native Americans facing excessive force in North Dakota pipeline protests – UN expert

United Nations Human Rights
Office of the High Commissioner

GENEVA – A United Nations human rights expert has accused US security forces of using excessive force against protesters trying to stop an oil pipeline project which runs through land sacred to indigenous people.

Law enforcement officials, private security firms and the North Dakota National Guard have used unjustified force to deal with opponents of the Dakota Access pipeline, according to Maina Kiai, the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

Some of the 400 people held during the demonstrations had suffered “inhuman and degrading conditions in detention,” Mr. Kiai added.
Protesters say they have faced rubber bullets, teargas, mace, compression grenades and bean-bag rounds while expressing concerns over environmental impact and trying to protect burial grounds and other sacred sites of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe.

“Tensions have escalated in the past two weeks, with local security forces employing an increasingly militarized response to protests and forcibly moving encampments located near the construction site,” the rights expert said.

“This is a troubling response to people who are taking action to protect natural resources and ancestral territory in the face of profit-seeking activity,” he noted. “The excessive use of State security apparatus to suppress protest against corporate activities that are alleged to violate human rights is wrong and contrary to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.”

“People feel that their concerns are being ignored, and it is their right to stage peaceful assemblies so that these concerns can be heard. The authorities have an obligation to actively protect that right. The rights of cultural heritage defenders have to be respected and protected,” he added.

The Special Rapporteur acknowledged reports that some protests had turned violent, but emphasized that the response had to be strictly proportionate and not affect peaceful protesters.

“The right to freedom of peaceful assembly is an individual right, and it cannot be taken away indiscriminately or en masse due to the violent actions of a few,” he said. “The use of violence by some protesters should not be used as a justification to nullify the peaceful assembly rights of everyone else.”

The Special Rapporteur said he was concerned at the scale of arrests and the conditions in which people were being held: “Marking people with numbers and detaining them in overcrowded cages, on the bare concrete floor, without being provided with medical care, amounts to inhuman and degrading treatment.”

Mr. Kiai also said an announcement on 8 November by pipeline operator Energy Transfer LLC Corporation, stating that the final phase of construction would start in two weeks, “willfully” ignored an earlier public statement by federal agencies. “I call on the Pipeline Company to pause all construction activity within 20 miles east and west of Lake Oahe,” he said.

Construction of the pipeline has continued despite a call in September by the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, and other experts for it to be halted.

The 1,172-mile (1,890km) pipeline, designed to carry crude oil to a refinery near Chicago, is being built by Energy Transfer and the US Army Corps of Engineers. Protesters say several sacred sites of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe have already been bulldozed, and construction work is nearing the Missouri River, which is held sacred. In addition, protesters believe the project poses a significant threat to the quality of the drinking water.
Mr. Kiai’s call has been endorsed by the Special Rapporteur on indigenous peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz; the Special Rapporteur on cultural rights, Karima Bennouna; the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, John Knox; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Michel Forst; the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, Léo Heller; and the current Chair of the UN Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises, Pavel Sulyandziga.

(*) Read the expert’s statement:

Mr. Maina Kiai (Kenya) took up his functions as the first Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association in May 2011. He is appointed in his personal capacity as an independent expert by the UN Human Rights Council. As a Special Rapporteur, Mr. Kiai is part of what is known as the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council’s independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. Special Procedures’ experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are independent from any government or organization and serve in their individual capacity. Learn more, log on to:
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November 18, 2016
What Standing Rock Needs Obama to Do Quickly—Before Trump Takes Over

By Tom Goldtooth and Annie Leonard
YES! Magazine

With Donald Trump’s presidency on the horizon, it is now more important than ever for President Obama to stop the $3.7 billion Dakota Access pipeline, which is slated to carry 470,000 barrels of Bakken crude oil per day, with a growth potential of up to 570,000 barrels. It is the only solution that truly respects the treaty rights of the Standing Rock Sioux, protects the tribe’s sacred areas, defends the water of life, and takes into account the pipeline’s devastating climate impacts.

There is no doubt that Donald Trump poses an urgent threat to our climate, to our environment, and to the integrity of Mother Earth. He will try to fast-track fossil fuel projects across the country, including the Dakota Access pipeline and other transport infrastructure. That makes the final months of President Obama’s term more important than ever. President Obama’s legacy must include sending a resounding message to the world that we will not stand for fossil fuel pipelines that threaten the rights of indigenous peoples and our very existence. To avoid the worst impacts of climate change, it is absolutely imperative to keep the world’s remaining fossil fuels in the ground.

The Army Corps of Engineers announced this week that it was delaying until further analysis and consultation with the Standing Rock Sioux tribe a final easement that would allow the drilling for the pipeline to go under the Missouri River at Lake Oahe. President Obama has previously stated that the Army Corps is exploring options for rerouting the pipeline. Unfortunately, simply rerouting the project does not go far enough. The administration should revoke the permits, pull the easement, and order a full environmental impact statement. There are no safe routes for carrying this fracked and highly volatile oil. Any other proposed alternatives, such as drilling deeper under the Missouri River or double-lining the steel pipe, do not provide a guarantee against the prevention of future leaks and spills.

Already this year, we have seen over 220 significant pipeline spills in the U.S. alone. Pipelines by their very nature are threats to the land, water, and climate. If the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had completed a proper full environmental impact statement assessment, it would have come to the conclusion that this project poses an immediate threat to Native communities in the region, who are already experiencing disproportionate health and environmental impacts from failed federal policies and practices. Additionally, it threatens the drinking water for millions of people downstream on the Missouri River.

Many don’t realize that an early proposal for the Dakota Access pipeline called for the project to cross the Missouri River north of Bismarck, North Dakota, a city that is mostly White. That plan was scrapped because of the potential threat to the city’s water supply. Instead, the company chose to reroute the pipeline to cross just north of the Standing Rock Sioux reservation, a sovereign Native nation that had not given its consent for construction of the pipeline. This suggests that people were concerned enough about the threats the pipeline posed to Bismarck
water supplies that they used political power to move it downstream; they didn’t care if it impacted the Lakota and Dakota of Standing Rock. This is environmental racism. The United States has an executive order indicating it would not discriminate on the basis of race, color, or national origin in its environmental decision-making processes. This project is a glaring violation of that order.

The Obama administration should pull the plug on this project immediately. Members of the Standing Rock Sioux, along with other Native water protectors and supporters, are under constant attack for peacefully resisting the destruction of their water, land, and sacred sites. We have seen an over-militarized police presence using tear gas, dogs, rubber bullets, bean bag shotgun rounds, and riot-control sound cannons on water protectors, medics, and journalists. These attacks have come while Energy Transfer Partners ignored the administration’s request for a voluntary halt to construction, instead continuing to build right up to Lake Oahe. Currently, equipment is poised for drilling under the lake.

We have also started to see the financial institutions backing this project begin to waver, noting their concerns about a project that tramples all over indigenous rights as well as the human rights of peaceful supporters. Norway’s biggest bank, DNB, said Nov. 17 that it is divesting its assets in the project after previously announcing that it is also reconsidering the credit it is providing, which amounts to 10 percent of the total funding. Other major players, including Citibank, TD Securities, Wells Fargo, and SunTrust, must be held accountable for continuing to finance the destruction of sacred treaty lands and our climate. If you have money in any of the institutions financing the Dakota Access pipeline, reach out to them to reconsider their decision or consider banking elsewhere. We hold the power to push them to divest and pull their loans.

And there’s more to be done.

President-elect Trump certainly poses a threat to the climate, and we have urgent work to do before he takes over the White House. That starts with urging President Obama to do everything in his power to stop this pipeline. His remarks last month about “letting the process play out” cannot mean kicking this down the road to our next president. We also need to continue to make it undesirable for financial institutions to invest in fossil fuel infrastructure, especially those projects that contribute to human rights violations. We need to mobilize millions of people to ensure the next administration faces up to the reality that the movement for climate justice and the Native nations movement for indigenous peoples’ rights will only continue to grow stronger. If these climate deniers choose to move forward with dangerous fossil fuel projects, we will fight back—peacefully—at every opportunity. Climate change is Mother Earth’s call for a real revolution, an awakening of humanity to reevaluate its relationship to the sacredness of the Earth, the water of life, and nature.

Tom Goldtooth and Annie Leonard wrote this article for YES! Magazine. Tom is executive director of the Indigenous Environmental Network. Annie is executive director of Greenpeace USA. She is a YES! Magazine contributing editor.
November 18, 2016

Worldviews Clashing at Standing Rock

The standoff at Standing Rock offers a choice between two worldviews: one that can lead to a new economy of shared prosperity and one that will hasten the devastation of the planet.

By Bhikkhu Bodhi
Common Dreams

The struggle to stop construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline marks not only a difference in economic policies but a contest between two radically different orientations to life. The struggle, which pits Native Americans and their allies against a company that constructs oil pipelines, has a profound significance that extends far beyond the plains of Standing Rock. The contest is both ethical and existential, and how it is resolved may well determine the future of human life, whether for harm or for good, on this beautiful but fragile planet.

On one side of the conflict stands Energy Transfer Partners, the corporation that is building the pipeline. If completed, the pipeline will extend 1,200 miles and will transport approximately 500,000 barrels daily of Bakken crude oil from North Dakota to existing pipelines in Illinois, from where it will reach markets in the Midwest, the East Coast, and the South. The pipeline will thus be a vital artery in maintaining an economy powered by fossil fuels. Construction of the pipeline, however, cuts across land sacred to the Standing Rock Sioux tribe—land they claim was recognized as theirs by the US government in a treaty going back to 1851. Moreover, the pipeline does not merely cross sacred land. If construction continues, it would pass beneath the Missouri River, putting at risk the water supply of the Native Americans and millions of other people living downstream who also depend on the river for their water.

So far, environmental assessment of the pipeline’s impact has been called “seriously deficient.” Such a hasty assessment is precarious enough, but even when they have passed rigorous scrutiny, oil pipelines have split, leaked, and even exploded, sometimes seriously enough to pollute the waters they traverse and leave behind a trail of toxic waste. These chemical spills are far from innocuous. For those living close by, the pollution has caused cancer, strange illnesses, permanent disabilities, and premature death. Birth defects and childhood leukemia are also possible dangers caused by exposure.

The pipeline represents a worldview that sees the earth as in essence a source of raw materials to service our economy. From this perspective, humanity’s task is to exploit the earth and bend it to our purposes, primarily the production of commodities to feed the fickle appetites of a consumerist culture. It is a worldview that prioritizes monetary profit over a vibrant planet; that
puts immediate gain over the needs of future generations; that commodifies everything it sees and looks with disdain at the very idea of the sacred.

Those who subscribe to this worldview give little heed to population groups outside the citadels of corporate wealth and power. Without concern for the consequences, they would extract and market all the oil they can find for the purpose of enhancing the company’s bottom line. The results of such a worldview appear in the once-fertile lands that are turning into deserts, in the transformation of seasonal rains into irrepressible floods, in the long droughts and brutal heat waves, in the threat to the world’s food supply. The results are also manifest in the movements of people who choose to migrate from their traditional homelands to strange and sometimes hostile countries, preferring a dangerous sea passage to the risks of drought and famine.

Those arrayed against the pipeline—the Native Americans and their allies—hold a different worldview that entails a different set of priorities. This is a worldview that esteems life values over market values. It is a worldview that understands water is the source of life, an irreplaceable substance far more essential than petroleum. It recognizes that, with sufficient funding and political will, we can obtain all the energy we need from the sun and wind and geothermal sources. And it sees the ideal relationship of humankind to the earth to be one of care, stewardship, and reverence rather than reckless exploitation.

The stakes in this struggle are high. Deep ramifications lie just below the surface, beneath the daily skirmishes that erupt between the pipeline staff and the water protectors. Although the Dakota Access Pipeline can be viewed as just one pipeline among a multitude of others, circumstances have turned the project into a symbol for the crossroads at which humanity has finally arrived, the juncture where the road of energy development branches off in two different directions. If we stand up against the demands of Big Oil and reject the pipeline, we can pivot away from the old economy that feeds on the resources of the earth toward a new system that offers untapped promise. We can turn away from the barren moonscapes of destruction, away from the maltreatment of peoples whose lands are stripped from their hands, whose lives are ruined by oil spills and pools of toxic waste. We can stop heating up the planet in ways that imperil the future of humankind. By shifting to a new worldview, we can hasten the emergence of an economy that promotes a shared prosperity within the limits of the biosphere. We can adopt a new outlook on the earth, one that reveres the majesty of its mountains, the splendor of its forests, the sanctity of its natural rhythms.

The choice between these two orientations has grown starker over the past decade, ever since the reality of climate change impinged on public consciousness. The two alternatives have come to a head at Standing Rock. Denial is no longer tenable. Either we go on burning fossil fuels without concern for the impact, or we finally say, “It’s time to change course.” The choice now rests with President Obama. It’s up to him to show courage. It’s up to him to choose wisely, mindfully, and compassionately. And we can let him know what we want. We can send him a petition asking him to reject the Dakota Access Pipeline, to reject it once and for all. Let’s act skillfully, remembering that our future is at stake, that our action now affects generations as yet unborn, both in America and throughout the world.
Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi is a Buddhist scholar and translator of Buddhist texts. He is also the founder and chair of Buddhist Global Relief, a charity dedicated to helping communities around the world afflicted by chronic hunger and malnutrition. He can be reached at: venbodhi [at] gmail [dot] com.

http://www.commondreams.org/views/2016/11/18/worldviews-clashing-standing-rock

November 22, 2016

We’re Missing 90 Percent of the Dakota Access Pipeline Story

By Raul Garcia
Earth Justice

Over the past few months, the Dakota Access pipeline and the Standing Rock Sioux tribe that opposes this oil project went from anonymity to full blown national news coverage. Since August, the news media has been reporting on the Native Americans who have gathered in camps in North Dakota to protect sacred land and the Missouri River, the Standing Rock tribe’s sole water source. For months, we have been informed only about the most dramatic developments, but I discovered after a visit to the Sacred Stone camp two weeks ago that public understanding of what this movement is all about is based on misrepresentations. We are missing how peaceful, respectful and solemn this struggle is.

This is unfortunate because what’s happening at the confluence of the Missouri and Cannonball Rivers is a solemn struggle to protect water and culture. As I prepared to make the trip, I read articles about the risks. And I fell for it. When I was flying into Bismarck, North Dakota, with a delegation from GreenLatinos—a group of Latino advocates committed to addressing environmental issues—I was on edge. We had gone to North Dakota to learn how GreenLatinos might be able to help the tribe, yet at first I concentrated on myself. I relentlessly googled “Standing Rock Sioux tribe arrests” and related key terms to figure out where I could or couldn’t go and what I could or couldn’t do.

But all that anxiety quickly evaporated when I reached the camps. I saw that this assembly of indigenous tribes and supporters is among the most serene and peaceful groups of people I have been around. They are not unified by indignity. What unifies the thousands of water protectors who are bracing for the incoming winter is devotion and prayer. In fact, elders and tribal leaders told us repeatedly that tribal camps aren’t protests; these are ceremonies being held at a sacred place. And, they told us, they expect the behavior of their brothers and sisters to reflect that.

Even when we were talking about politics, the sacredness of it all was what tribe members conveyed as important. The respect of the people overcame any thought of animosity, and the solemnity of the place and the need to protect nature inspired peaceful unity. This indigenous vision of sacred air, sacred water and sacred land was striking to me. I live in Washington, D.C., where polarized rhetoric dominates the landscape, and where, since the presidential election...
season, distasteful attacks are rampant. Visiting the camps and understanding the spirituality driving this struggle against corporate profit was an eye-opening and humbling experience.

Water protectors are constantly looking after one another, helping one another. They may not have a lot, but they are willing to give everything. I learned that not just by seeing how they would offer sweaters or blankets as temperatures dropped into the 20s, but also by listening to their stories. One woman, who is now one of many who prepare meals for the camp for free, told me how she arrived with little besides her eagerness to help cook. She didn’t have a stove, yet with people’s donations she got everything she needed to help the camp in four days.

I have not seen a single news report that elevates this type of story. That’s because peace may be what we value and aspire to as a nation, but peace doesn’t generate clicks. Still, peace is what this historic indigenous gathering is all about.

At a time when we know that fake news stories are rampant, I encourage everyone to verify the authenticity of the news they read. Many news reports give the impression that the Standing Rock Sioux tribe’s struggle is chaotic and tumultuous. But that’s not the case. This movement of solidarity is filled with people who, when asked about what they need, say they need us to pray for them. Pray and do what’s right, the elders tell us, noting that they are hopeful about what’s to come.

Even with an unfriendly incoming presidential administration, I believe that if we all stand strong with the Standing Rock Sioux, make our voices heard and reach out to our elected officials in Congress, we can protect the river and the land that so many hold sacred.

http://earthjustice.org/blog/2016-november/we-re-missing-90-percent-of-the-dakota-access-pipeline-story#
I was there to bring Standing Rock to the world climate talks.

Watching the events at Standing Rock unfurl over the past year, I felt compelled to ask our Navajo leadership to divest from oil, coal, and uranium and instead invest in the Standing Rock Sioux tribe’s fight against the Dakota Access pipeline. Eventually they did. Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye announced a formal stance of solidarity and traveled to Cannon Ball, North Dakota, to plant the Navajo Nation flag there. A week later, I stood on the front lines of #NoDAPL while energy company employees hit us with pepper spray and threatened us with attack dogs. I found everything dear to me, suddenly, at the heart of this battle—fought by people from the four corners of the world.

Which brings me to the significance of counting by four. To understand Standing Rock, you must remove the Western lens and adopt a holistic, indigenous perspective of the world.

BUMP bump bump bump. BUMP bump bump bump. The rhythm of the powwow drum, the heartbeat of life, beats in a sequence of fours. It celebrates the ebb and flow of the natural world. The rhythm falters only during the Honor Beats, when a Jingle Dress dancer raises her fan to catch the spirit of the drums. Rarely do so many nations come together in one space for a shared purpose. It is a gathering where commonalities are celebrated, such as the sacredness of the eagle feather and the direness of maintaining balance in the world. Certain concepts—holistic methodologies, the value of ceremony and language, the religious significance of certain landmarks, the beliefs of interconnectedness and interdependence—put indigenous groups in stark contrast with Western thinking.

This similarly has been the exception of Standing Rock.

And, just as the powwow rhythm carries four beats, an overwhelming number of indigenous communities count various elements of their lives in fours. The medicine wheel of Native culture represents the four directions. There are the four elements, which build all life and the four seasons that govern time.

Where I live in the Navajo Nation, the culture is steeped in fours. Dinébikéyah, the land given to the Diné (Navajo) by the Holy People, falls between four sacred mountains. The day is broken into four phases, which correlate to the four stages of life and the four steps that govern life in Navajo philosophy: Nitsakees (Thinking), Nahat’a (Planning), Iina (Living), and Sihasin (Reflection, which provides hope and assurance). Each Navajo has four clans that constitute his or her identity.

The beauty of using fours, to define so many aspects of life, is that we are forced to see the holistic picture. Without this bigger picture, we lose sight of the interconnectedness of humans to nature and to each other. The intricacy of this worldview is captured in the traditional Navajo home, the hooghan or hogan. It represents the entirety of life as a Navajo: its four pillars symbolizing the four sacred mountains. Its doorway faces the east, a fire at the heart. Within the hogan, you are cradled between Mother Earth and Father Sky (visible through the smoke hole in the ceiling). This same smoke hole allows the sun to pass through. It traces a clockwise path on the walls called sha bikego, or “sunwise.” This direction is used in every ceremony and every
meeting. When the sun reaches the northern wall, this symbolizes winter; when it strikes the fire, it’s time to plant. The northern star, above the hogan, is the symbolic fire in the sky around which the First Man and First Woman constellations rotate.

Everything in Navajo philosophy is related to the concept of balance, and even groups of fours balance one another. These are pairs rather than opposites, and maintains what Navajos call hózhó, a sort of harmony the universe relies on. The other key concept is k’é, or your relations. These could be your siblings, your clan relatives, your tribe, or even your belonging among all creations on this shared planet.

To me, conversations of hózhó and k’é are crucial to global talks of sustainability. We cannot address how climate change will affect our futures if we do not acknowledge the need for both balance and our fellow beings. The concepts may be of Navajo origin, but they embody the holistic viewpoint of many indigenous communities.

What does this view have to do with the climate? To achieve sustainability in any society, we must ensure the protection of four areas of community well-being:

Environmental: We are all made of water. We all breathe air. We cannot change our dependency on the four elements or the fact that they create us; therefore, we must protect our environment.

Economic: No community can operate without an adequate and fair economy. Furthermore, the diversity and adaptability of an economy are key to its survival.

Social: Our relationships to one another ensure the well-being of us as individuals and as societies. Our communities thrive when we have mutual respect, safety, and room for personal growth.

Cultural: Identity is a critical part of community sustainability, and it is often left out of the greater picture. This is a crucial issue when indigenous communities attempt to assert their sovereign authority and are faced with infringement of their cultural freedoms and rights which, without, would destroy the ability to maintain harmony.

So this is what I had to say to the climate justice world two weeks ago. Standing Rock requires us not to forget that fourth piece: cultural identity.

When we have global conversations about loss and damage, we cannot simply tick off the population counts for displaced people or the dollar figures for economic impact or infrastructure damage. This is watching disorder through a Western lens. Instead, we must analyze the loss and damage done to a way of life, to the sustainability of an entire identity of people. The United Nations may have a definition for poverty, but to be impoverished does not always equate to having no financial leverage. Hardships come in many forms.

Jon Eagle Sr., the tribal historic preservation officer for the standing Rock Sioux, recounts the struggle of his ancestors through his tribe’s winter records. Their lives were extraordinarily
difficult, but the definition of what they consider true hardships provides important context. Not surprisingly, the traditional Lakota people define four hardships in life:

To hear an orphan cry, as it was a terrible sound.

To lose a child, an indescribable pain.

To lose your mother.

To not know where your warriors fell.

With this reference point, consider Energy Transfer’s decision to desecrate sacred sites and destroy graves of warriors and other ancestors. It is forcing cultural damage on the Lakota people.

I want to make sure the world’s youth hear an indigenous perspective on sustainability and comprehend how the need to protect our cultural identity and exercise our tribal sovereignty in the DAPL fight impacts our survival as nations.

Because we are still learning how to erase the colonization of our own minds to really see the cultural implications of our so-called “infrastructure projects,” perhaps it is easier to identify straightforward acts of environmental racism, such as placing a refining factory within an impoverished community. Perhaps we can more easily oppose using cheap labor as a country’s leading export or stand up for the rights of a particular sex, gender, or religion.

And perhaps that is why, on Sept. 3, the water protectors who watched Dakota Access workers destroy the graves of their ancestors, continued to pray for and forgive the ignorance of those committing the crimes against them.

“These people in our history, they were our heroes,” explains Jon Eagle Sr. in National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Standing Rock Preservation Leadership Forum, as he described the ancestral burial sites that Energy Transfer destroyed. “I don’t think the mainstream society understands that.” Our cultural lenses prevent many of us from realizing that.

As I told the COP22 audiences, the battle at Standing Rock symbolizes the greater battle we all face: The assurance of cultural well-being and sustainability as a global community while combating the short-term visions and greed of corporations. We must remember the importance of hózhó—balance—and that we, as beings of the Five Fingered Clan, are connected as k’é—relatives. We are made of the same four elements, and we share the same finite resources. As my mother says: “We may be coming from all four directions, but we all come from the same neighborhood—the earth.”

Kayla DeVault wrote this article for YES! Magazine. Kayla is an Anishinaabe and enrolled Shawnee, living on the Navajo reservation. She currently works for the Navajo Nation Division
of Transportation as a project civil engineer while studying Diné studies at Diné College. She is a youth ambassador for Generation Indigenous and was a participant in the White House Tribal Youth Gathering.


November 23, 2016

Where Oil and Politics Mix

By Deborah Sontag
New York Times

After an unusual land deal, a giant spill and a tanker-train explosion, anxiety began to ripple across the North Dakota prairie.

TIOGA, N.D. — In late June, as black and gold balloons bobbed above black and gold tables with oil-rig centerpieces, the theme song from “Dallas” warmed up the crowd for the “One Million Barrels, One Million Thanks” celebration.

The mood was giddy. Halliburton served barbecued crawfish from Louisiana. A commemorative firearms dealer hawked a “one-million barrel” shotgun emblazoned with the slogan “Oil Can!” Mrs. North Dakota, in banner and crown, posed for pictures. The Texas Flying Legends performed an airshow backlit by a leaping flare of burning gas. And Gov. Jack Dalrymple was the featured guest.

Traveling through the “economically struggling” nation, Mr. Dalrymple told the crowd, he encountered many people who asked, “Jack, what the heck are you doing out there in North Dakota?” to create the fastest-growing economy, lowest unemployment rate and (according to one survey) happiest population.

“And I enjoy explaining to them, ‘Yes, the oil boom is a big, big help,’ ” he said.

Outsiders, he explained, simply need to be educated out of their fear of fracking: “There is a way to explain it that really relaxes people, that makes them understand this is not a dangerous thing that we’re doing out here, that it’s really very well managed and very safe and really the key to the future of not only North Dakota but really our entire nation.”

Tioga, population 3,000, welcomed North Dakota’s first well in 1951, more than a half-century before hydraulic fracturing liberated the “tight oil” trapped in the Bakken shale formation. So it was fitting that Tioga ring in the daily production milestone that had ushered the Bakken into the rarefied company of historic oil fields worldwide.
But Tioga also claims another record: what is considered the largest on-land oil spill in recent American history. And only Brenda Jorgenson, 61, who attended “to hear what does not get said,” mentioned that one, sotto voce.

The million-barrel bash was devoid of protesters save for Ms. Jorgenson, a tall, slender grandmother who has two wells at her driveway’s end and three jars in her refrigerator containing blackened water that she said came from her faucet during the fracking process. She did not, however, utter a contrary word.

“I’m not that brave (or stupid) to protest among that,” she said in an email afterward. “I’ve said it before: we’re outgunned, outnumbered and out-suited.”

North Dakotans do not like to make a fuss. Until recently, those few who dared to challenge the brisk pace of oil development, the perceived laxity of government oversight or the despoliation of farmland were treated as killjoys. They were ignored, ridiculed, threatened, and paid settlements in exchange for silence.

But over the past year and some, the dynamic seemed to be shifting.

Satellite photos of western North Dakota at night, aglitter like a metropolis with lighted rigs and burning flares, crystallized its rapid transformation from tight-knit agricultural society to semi-industrialized oil powerhouse. Proposals to drill near historic places generated heated opposition. The giant oil spill in Tioga in September 2013 frightened people, as did the explosion months later of a derailed oil train, which sent black smoke mushrooming over a snowy plain.

Then, this year, North Dakotans learned of discovery after discovery of illegally dumped oil filter socks, the “used condoms” of the oil industry, which contain radiation dislodged from deep underground.

Suddenly a percolating anxiety came uncorked. “The worm is turning,” Timothy Q. Purdon, the United States attorney, said in April.

It was against this backdrop that on a brisk spring day David Schwalbe, a retired rancher, and his wife, Ellen Chaffee, a former university president, walked headlong into the wind on their way to an F.B.I. office in Fargo.

A mile-long oil train was rumbling through downtown. Wordlessly, Mr. Schwalbe tightened his grip on the black binders bearing what he considered evidence, based on an unusual deal involving his family’s land, that Governor Dalrymple had a corrupt relationship with the oil industry.

“This has David kind of nervous,” Dr. Chaffee confided. “He comes from a very below-the-radar culture.”
A Potential Advantage for the Oil Industry

As a boy in the 1950s, Mr. Schwalbe scampered up and down the steep banks of Corral Creek, which flows from Killdeer Mountain into the Little Missouri River. His family homestead lay in the remote region where Theodore Roosevelt sought solitude in what he called the “desolate, grim beauty” of the Badlands.

Like many in his generation, Mr. Schwalbe took for granted the craggy buttes and rippling grasslands, the cottonwoods and poplars, the mule deer and mountain lions. He never anticipated a day when this singular landscape would be ravaged, in his view, by rigs, pumping units, waste pits and pipelines and when he would become an archetypal North Dakotan of a certain age, disheartened by what others saw as progress.

As he helped his father run cattle 11,000 feet above the Bakken formation, Mr. Schwalbe came to understand that the family ranch would never sustain his parents and their six adult children. After college, he settled in eastern North Dakota, returning home mostly for “brandings, hunting and holidays.”

When their father died, five Schwalbe siblings — David, Dennis, Donnie, Donnette and Dale — sold their shares of the ranch to their brother Delry. All six kept their rights to what lay beneath the surface, however. Just in case.

The Schwalbes were following the lead of Burlington Northern Railroad, which once owned every other tract in the area, the legacy of a federal land grant. The railroad eventually sold the surface but retained the minerals, which were managed by its energy company, Burlington Resources, now a subsidiary of ConocoPhillips.

“We figured they knew something we didn’t,” Mr. Schwalbe said.

Land has long been sliced and diced in North Dakota from generation to generation, with surface ownership severed from the ownership of underlying minerals like coal and oil. Given that mineral rights trump surface rights, this made many residents of western North Dakota feel trampled once the boom began.

In 2006, a land man for Marathon Oil offered to lease the Schwalbe siblings’ 480 acres of minerals for $100 an acre plus royalties on every sixth barrel of oil.

“Within a few years, people were getting 20, 30 times that and every fifth barrel,” Mr. Schwalbe said. But the Schwalbes did not expect “to see any oil come up out of that ground in our lifetime.”

Oil companies were just starting to combine horizontal drilling with hydraulic fracturing to tap into the mother lode of Bakken oil. “We didn’t really know yet about fracking,” he said.
The Schwalbes’ first well was drilled in 2008, their second the next year. Powerless to block the development, Mr. Schwalbe and his wife, nearing retirement, took some comfort in the extra income, the few thousand dollars a month.

Then that was threatened, too.

On June 20, 2011, the Schwalbes received a letter informing them that Burlington Resources intended to forge a 30,883.94-acre oil production unit that would effectively override their lease agreement with Marathon and subsume their mineral property. In the Bakken, such units are typically 1,280 acres.

The Schwalbes were instructed to sign a ratification agreement by August, when a hearing was scheduled on what some started calling “the mega-unit.” The mega-unit would include the Little Missouri State Park, a patchwork of private, state and federal land beloved for its rugged trails.

Initially perplexed by the thick document on their doorstep, the Schwalbes soon grasped a painful point: though they would be ceding control of their mineral property, their consent was not required. Only the owners of 60 percent of the unit’s minerals were needed for ratification, and Burlington, together with the federal government, already met that goal.

“That’s part of why they chose Corral Creek for their scheme,” Dr. Chaffee said. “They didn’t have to deal with a lot of fleas like us, the pesky citizens.”

The proposal had the potential to set an advantageous precedent for the oil industry.

As ConocoPhillips officials explained at the August hearing, they aimed to maximize oil recovery by being freed of the “artificial boundary lines” that require 200-foot setbacks from the borders of each standard production unit. Their plan would allow for 23 more wells; for 73,000 more barrels of oil per well; and for consolidated production that would reduce “surface disturbance,” truck traffic and air pollution. It was a proposal “for the common good,” they said.

Many of the “pesky citizens” were skeptical. “Basically this whole unit scenario is only good for one person, and that’s Burlington,” Leroy Fettig, a land and mineral owner, said at the hearing.

In normal units, oil leases expire after a set time if no drilling occurs and owners can then renegotiate on better terms or put them up for bid. But under the proposed unit, Mr. Fettig said, “You wouldn’t have to drill one additional well to hold all the acreage here theoretically for a very long period of time.”

He worried, too, he said, that Burlington would have unfettered access to a nearly 50-square-mile area and be able to situate well pads, roads and gathering pipelines without having to negotiate easements or rights of way.

“Mr. Fettig, you’re not an engineer, are you?” a lawyer for Burlington asked him. “You’re not a geologist?”
“I’m not a lawyer, either,” Mr. Fettig replied.

Mr. Schwalbe’s lawyers cautioned that he would see a significant drop in his monthly checks, as his royalties would be shared with all the mineral owners in the mega-unit, including ConocoPhillips itself. Down the road, he could recoup that loss, and then some, when wells were developed elsewhere in the unit. But he worried that if, say, oil prices dropped, he would not see that income in his lifetime.

Before the hearing, Mr. Schwalbe had approached Lynn D. Helms, director of the state’s Department of Mineral Resources, with a compromise: unitize the property in phases to be fairer to the owners of the dozen existing wells.

“I realize in the overall scope of things, my check is pretty small, but it’s got a Social Security check beat all to hell,” Mr. Schwalbe said at the hearing. “I’m hoping with the help of the commission this can be worked out equitably for everybody.”

Mr. Helms ultimately executes the policies of the three elected officials — the governor, attorney general and agriculture commissioner, all Republicans — who make up the North Dakota Industrial Commission, which regulates the oil and gas industry. Yet at their monthly meetings, he guides them calmly from vote to vote and rarely encounters dissent. A review by The New York Times of meeting minutes since 2011 found no failed motions concerning oil and gas.

“You feel as if the meetings are a performance, that everything’s sort of done under the table, with a lot of back-room deals,” said Wayde Schafer, the Sierra Club’s sole employee in North Dakota.

Private citizens were not the only ones concerned about the mega-unit. “Before we get all up in arms about it, we have a few questions about what the proposal is and if it is going to benefit us or not,” a state land official wrote to a state oil official in October 2011. “One of the things that has got us so upset is that they are playing this off as a ‘done deal.’”

It is essentially a done deal, the oil official responded, saying he expected an order at the Nov. 21 commission meeting would “dispose of this case.”

The Nov. 21 vote was postponed.

On Dec. 16, Mr. Schwalbe received a notarized copy of an order signed by Mr. Helms on Dec. 5. Citing “issues in this case of such complexity that additional time is necessary for the commission to render a decision,” it continued the case for 45 days. Mr. Schwalbe breathed a sigh of relief.

On Dec. 20, however, he got a call from his brother Donnie: The commission had taken up the matter after all, voting unanimously to approve the mega-unit.
“We were just dumbfounded,” Mr. Schwalbe said. “It seemed so sneaky. You know how sick a feeling it is when somebody takes your property away and gives it to somebody else? And you don’t even get a chance to be there and protest?”

Mr. Helms’s spokeswoman, Alison Ritter, said, “There’s nothing in that order that says we couldn’t act before the 45 days was up.”

Before the vote, Mr. Helms had recommended approval because, he said, the mega-unit would allow for more efficient drilling with fewer multiwell pads and storage tank batteries and “a much smaller impact on the park.” He also cited “one other major positive” — the recovery of an additional 15 million barrels of oil. During the long discussion that followed, the park was barely mentioned, though Mr. Helms did note that the development called for no tank batteries inside it.

In a statement to The Times, Governor Dalrymple’s office said the commission had acted “solely to preserve the Missouri State Park’s viewscape.”

Under the present development plan, there will be up to 28 wells and, despite what was said before the commission’s vote, three storage tank batteries inside park boundaries, Jesse Hanson, a state parks official, said. He called it “a significant intrusion.”

North Dakota’s small conservation movement has shied away from the confrontational approach that characterizes the antifracking movement elsewhere.

“We all feel we have to issue the apologia that we’re not anti-oil, we just want to see it done responsibly,” Dr. Chaffee said.

The industry, as a result, has not grappled with much opposition. “From a conservation standpoint, I can name most of those people,” said Ron Ness, president of the North Dakota Petroleum Council.

In her split-level house overlooking the majestic White Earth River Valley, Brenda Jorgenson, for one, has been a persistent thorn in the side of industry and state officials.

“Reluctant landowners’ is the phrase they use for people like us,” her husband, Richard Jorgenson, said, laughing. “Reluctant landowners standing in the way of progress.”

While the Schwalbes were battling the mega-unit, the Jorgensons were trying to get their dirty drinking water tested by the state and then challenging, unsuccessfully, the burial of a waste disposal pit they call a “toxic tomb” on their property. Later, also unsuccessfully, they fought the construction of a high-pressure gas pipeline in their fields.

“We had a human prayer line to block that pipeline,” Ms. Jorgenson said. “It’s like having a ticking bomb in your backyard.”

Ms. Jorgenson maintains photo albums that intermingle pictures of her grandchildren doing snow angels with those of fracking trucks advancing on her home. Relatives ask why she and her
husband do not just move. “But that’s just what the oil companies want,” Ms. Jorgenson said. “They see us as the trespassers.”

One company, in fact, sued three activist landowners in 2011, seeking damages for trespassing after the men tried to document what they believed was the cover-up of a saltwater spill.

A judge dismissed the lawsuit, calling it an effort to “shut these people up.”

“It was a great result, which is kind of rare,” said Derrick Braaten, their lawyer.

When Mr. Purdon, the United States attorney, tried to hold oil companies accountable for dead migratory birds, the result was not as satisfactory.

For years, federal wildlife agents had been imploring oil companies to cover their waste pits; migratory birds sometimes dived or fell in, dying preventable deaths. But some companies preferred to absorb the cost of citations rather than invest in netting.

In 2011, Mr. Purdon decided firmer action was needed. In one sweep through the Bakken, Richard Grosz, a special agent for the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, collected 28 dead birds from drilling sites. One, found submerged, had a rock tied to its neck: “They had tried to deep-six the evidence,” Mr. Grosz said.

Six oil companies were charged with misdemeanor violations of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Mr. Purdon said that within hours of the complaints being filed, he received a call from a friend with a message from top-ranking state officials: “If Tim thought he would be a federal judge someday, that’s done.”

Three companies signed plea agreements. The others fought the charges, and not just in court. During a presidential campaign debate, Mitt Romney, whose energy adviser was chief executive of one of those companies, Continental Resources, mocked the prosecution; The Wall Street Journal called Mr. Purdon “dodo prosecutor of the year.”

A federal judge dismissed the cases, saying the bird act was meant to address deliberate killing by hunters and poachers.

Since then, Mr. Grosz said, “we have not gone back out in the oil patch to look for these things. Birds are still being killed. But we’ve quit.”

The mega-unit became a reality on Jan. 1, 2012. Mr. Schwalbe’s first royalty check was reduced by 95 percent.

For many months, Mr. Schwalbe and his wife stewed. Then Dr. Chaffee, apolitical during 15 years as president of state universities, decided to get partisan. She joined the Democratic ticket of State Senator Ryan Taylor, a fresh-faced rancher who faced an uphill battle against Mr. Dalrymple for an office under Republican control for two decades.
Mr. Dalrymple was running his own first race for governor, having ascended to the post in 2010 after his predecessor was elected to the United States Senate.

On the day Mr. Taylor announced Dr. Chaffee’s candidacy for lieutenant governor, Mr. Schwalbe stepped off the sidelines of what his wife called a “near-hermit existence.” His first campaign assignment was to study the opposition’s year-end financial disclosure report.

And there he found what he believed to be an explanation for why the mega-unit “case of such complexity” had gotten simpler after Mr. Helms signed the Dec. 5 continuation order.

On Dec. 5, the Exxon Mobil Corporation PAC contributed $600 to Mr. Dalrymple’s campaign. On Dec. 12, Harold G. Hamm, chief executive of Continental, gave $20,000. On Dec. 17, the Marathon Oil PAC gave $5,000. On Dec. 21, the day after the mega-unit vote, for which he was present, Continental’s Bismarck-based lawyer gave $5,000. On Dec. 27, Denbury Resources contributed $5,000.

All these companies held a working interest or lease ownership in the Corral Creek mega-unit. ConocoPhillips, which stood to profit the most, had contributed $1,000 through its PAC in October.

The governor’s office declined The Times’s requests to interview him, and provided a written statement. It did not verify or deny The Times’s calculation of contributions or respond to specific questions about allegations of conflicts of interest.

Over the campaign, Mr. Dalrymple would collect over $93,000 from those with a direct interest in the mega-unit and a total of about $550,000 from oil-related executives, lawyers and political action committees. That represented a quarter of the $2.16 million in contributions over $200 (the bar for disclosure) to Mr. Dalrymple.

Governors in top oil-producing states typically get industry contributions. In North Dakota, though, the governor’s relationship to those contributors’ interests is uniquely direct because he is chairman of the Industrial Commission.

In California, by contrast, the Department of Conservation supervises the industry. In Alaska, it is a commission appointed by the governor. In Texas, it is the elected Railroad Commission.

“North Dakota’s is a hugely defective setup,” said David C. Thompson, a lawyer in Grand Forks. “Our elected officials regulate companies they get contributions from and companies they own stock in. Nobody ever recuses himself; they just vote.”

In mid-2012, Mr. Schwalbe approached Mr. Thompson at a campaign event. The lawyer happened to be researching state corruption laws on behalf of Brad Crabtree, a Democratic candidate for the Public Service Commission, which, in addition to regulating utilities, oversees oil pipeline siting and mine reclamation.
Mr. Crabtree, who went on to lose, had declined to accept contributions from the energy industry and sought to shine a spotlight on “comprehensive, institutionalized conflict” in the way North Dakota’s regulators conducted business.

Mr. Thompson, meanwhile, discovered a Watergate-era bribery statute that made it a felony for public officials to accept “a thing of pecuniary value” from any “actor” with an imminent or pending proceeding before them. No quid pro quo was necessary; the mere possibility that the official’s “performance or nonperformance” of his duties could be affected made it a crime.

Therefore, Mr. Thompson concluded in a legal analysis posted on the blog NorthDecoder.com, Mr. Dalrymple, in the case of the mega-unit, had taken bribes.

That bombshell landed with a fizzle. The state media took no interest, Mr. Taylor said, and, “as a candidate behind in the polls, who would be accused of trying to make sheer political hay,” he declined to use the allegations.

Then Mr. Thompson got a call from Paul Sorum, a founder of North Dakota’s Tea Party running for governor as an independent. "He said, ‘Are you aware of the citizen-initiated grand jury process?’ " Mr. Thompson related. “You need 10 percent of voters” in a county to sign a petition.

A week before the election, a petition filed in Dunn County, where the mega-unit is, asked a judge to convene a grand jury to determine whether Mr. Dalrymple could be prosecuted for bribery.

On Election Day, Mr. Taylor lost by nearly 30 points. Even before he had formally announced his candidacy for governor, the State Legislature had eliminated two rural districts, one of them his. “That was a dirty deal,” he said.

A couple of weeks later, a judge dismissed the grand jury petition, finding a few signatures illegitimate.

The conservationists of North Dakota often express nostalgia for the strong stance that former Gov. Arthur A. Link took during a coal-mining boom in the 1970s. He pledged to protect the state for future generations “when the landscape becomes quiet again.”

“When the draglines, the blasting rigs, the power shovels and the huge gondolas cease to rip and roar, and when the last bulldozer has pushed the last spoil pile into place and the last patch of barren earth has been seeded to grass or grain, let those who follow and repopulate the land be able to say, ‘Our grandparents did their job well,’ ” he said.

The current governor is better known for his business acumen than his rhetoric. John Stewart Dalrymple III, 66, is something of a patrician, a rarity in North Dakota. His state biography says he grew up “on the family farm in Casselton,” N.D., but he was born in Minneapolis and attended a private day school there before boarding at St. Paul’s School in New Hampshire and going on to Yale, like his father before him.
The 140-year-old family farm once stretched over 32,000 acres, making it “the largest cultivated farm in the world,” according to North Dakota State University archives. More recently, Dalrymple Farms has been one of the state’s largest recipients of federal commodity subsidies.

Mr. Dalrymple was more of an agribusinessman than the typical North Dakota farmer: “I’m not saying he never greased a combine, but his farm office was in the National Bank building in Casselton and he’d wear a white shirt to work,” said Bill Patrie, a specialist in rural cooperatives who worked with Mr. Dalrymple to establish a farmer-owned pasta co-op.

Mr. Dalrymple served as co-op chairman through eight years in the legislature and a decade as lieutenant governor. While lieutenant governor, he championed the cooperative’s conversion to an investor-owned firm in which he was a major shareholder, and then oversaw its sale to a Canadian conglomerate, making $3.77 million.

“In essence, Jack converted a quasi-public local institution into a personal, one-time profit maker and sold it to a multinational corporation,” Mr. Patrie said, adding, “I believe he used his public office for private gain.”

But Mr. Patrie said the local news media and farmers’ groups did not raise objections.

“We North Dakotans trust our politicians — even when they sell us out,” he said.

Many Democrats were incensed when Edward T. Schafer, a Republican former governor, toured the state in an oil industry-sponsored “Fix the Tax” bus in 2011, arguing that oil taxes should be lowered to prevent the boom from going bust. The effort failed; afterward, Mr. Schafer was named to the board of Continental Resources, and awarded a compensation package, mostly stock, valued at $700,000 that year.

According to Mr. Dalrymple’s 2012 statement of interests, he and his wife own oil stock themselves, including unspecified amounts in at least one company with regular business before his Industrial Commission: Exxon Mobil, a top state producer through its subsidiary XTO.

Because XTO was a working interest owner in the mega-unit, Mr. Schwalbe believed the governor himself could be said to have “owned a piece of the property.”

In early February 2013, Mr. Schwalbe filed a second grand jury petition.

At the same time, state legislators pushed for a higher bar for citizens to convene grand juries so that innocent people would not be subjected to criminal charges, as one legislator put it. They succeeded. And a judge threw out the second citizens’ petition.

Mr. Schwalbe felt defeated, but pockets of resistance were beginning to develop as the boom intensified.
Early this year, an irritated crowd at a Mountrail County Commission meeting confronted Mr. Helms, the director of mineral resources, asking why state officials had approved an oil waste pit in the wellhead protection area for a municipal water supply.

Mr. Helms explained that his inspectors had had the wrong maps, adding, “We strive for perfection, but since we’re human, we have to settle for excellence.”

That came across as cavalier to the Rev. Carolyn Philstrom, a young Lutheran pastor, who shot off a letter to the editor of a local newspaper. “I baptize babies with that water,” she wrote, though she subsequently tempered her outspokenness because it bothered parishioners.

When the illegally dumped oil filter socks were discovered, Rick Schreiber, the director of solid waste for McKenzie County, became the rare official voicing outrage at what he called oil company recklessness and state inaction.

“I’m not here to make friends with the oil patch,” Mr. Schreiber said in February as trucks rolled over the radiation detector he had installed at his landfill. “If I’m the guy that has to beat the hornets’ nest with a stick, I’ll do it.”

This year, the Industrial Commission has gradually taken steps to assert greater authority over the industry.

After applications to drill near a 19th-century battlefield and near the Elkhorn Ranch in Theodore Roosevelt National Park stirred unusually heated public debate, the commission established special procedures including a public comment period for drilling on public, though not private, land near 18 “areas of interest.” The petroleum industry had resisted, cautioning that “radical environmentalists” would exploit the comment period to obstruct development. But conservationists saw the measure as a watered-down version of a proposal that already offered too little, too late.

Next, after more than a dozen mineral owners filed anti-flaring lawsuits, the commission moved to clamp down on a longstanding problem. Some 30 percent of the natural gas produced in the state — compared with less than 1 percent nationwide — was being treated as a byproduct of oil production and burned off.

At a hearing in April, Dr. Lyle Best, a pediatrician, said he lived downwind of tall flares that roared like jetliners and flickered light through his bedroom window.

“Our real annoyance, however, is the understanding that these two flares have burned off over 60 million cubic feet of natural gas in the past six months and are continuously wasting enough energy to heat hundreds of homes at the same time that many people in our country are sleeping on the street, and at least one North Dakotan died of hypothermia this winter,” he said. “This doesn’t even address the issue of carbon dioxide and other pollutants.”
When the commission voted in July to require “gas-capture plans” and impose production restrictions if companies did not meet them, Mr. Dalrymple said, “I hope that what we do today, we are serious about.”

And when QEP Resources petitioned to create its own mega-unit, Mr. Dalrymple dissented from the 2-to-1 vote of approval. In its statement, the governor’s office said the QEP mega-unit, unlike the Corral Creek one, would not have provided a “benefit to conservation efforts.” QEP later dropped its plan.

At the entrance to the mega-unit, on the dirt access road built for the hundreds of trucks that now traverse what used to be pristine pastures, Mr. Schwalbe’s cousin, Candyce Kleemann, sat at the wheel of her pickup, photographs on her dashboard.

“These are the before pictures: before the invasion,” said Ms. Kleemann, who lives and ranches inside the unit. “When we fought the unit, they told us there would be minimal damage or changes. But it’s a different landscape. Look, that’s our new saltwater injection well.”

She pointed to a sign: “Danger: H2S. Poisonous gas.” And to another: “Caution: power lines.” Her own sign, proclaiming her land to be private property, made her snort.

“That one’s useless,” she said. “We’re even more powerless than surface owners in the rest of the oil patch. In this unit, oil can go wherever they want here, put roads and gathering lines wherever they want, bury crud in our ground. The state does not seem to care.”

In 2012, Ms. Kleemann’s husband, Robert, a Dunn County commissioner, complained to the state that the unit development plan was being modified, putting 11 wells within a half-mile of six homes.

When an official responded that the changes appeared necessary for topographical reasons, Mr. Kleemann wrote back, “I do not think you could understand our concerns unless we could put a drilling rig on each side of your house so you could listen to the clang of pipes, the roar of motors, the constant beep of the horn and be awakened in the morning to the driller giving orders over the bullhorn and you could try to sleep with the constant noise of Jake Brakes.”

State officials were more concerned that ConocoPhillips was not developing the unit as aggressively as promised. Now the pace has picked up, with several dozen wells drilled in 2013 and several dozen more this year.

In April, when the Schwalbes laid out their concerns to two F.B.I. agents in a windowless room in the Fargo federal building, they felt encouraged. The agents seemed apprehensive “because of the individual involved,” Mr. Schwalbe said, but gradually “their interest was piqued.”

“They thanked us for coming forward,” he said afterward, surprised.

In the summer, though, a final meeting with the agents left them disheartened. The investigation remained open, they were told, but prosecutors saw no federal case to be made.
Mr. Schwalbe, who had wagered that “this year is going to be better because people are starting to get mad,” was disappointed by the November elections, too.

His wife’s former running mate, Mr. Taylor, ran again, this time for agriculture commissioner, proposing that oil well setbacks from homes be increased to a quarter-mile from 500 feet and that pipelines be fitted with antispill devices. But he lost, as did a ballot initiative to set aside tax revenues for conservation. With considerable oil industry backing, the agriculture commissioner was re-elected, as was the attorney general, extending the mandate of the current Industrial Commission.

Mr. Schwalbe does not like to visit Corral Creek anymore. The landscape is, in his eyes, scarred, the tranquillity spoiled. His new outspokenness led him into an uncharacteristic public role as spokesman for a new group, North Dakota Rural Voters.

“I never thought I’d be involved in anything like this,” he said. “At my age, I thought we’d just slide through the rest of our lives. But at a certain point, it became a point of pride for me personally and me as a North Dakotan. I don’t like people taking things that don’t belong to them, not my money, not my property, not my state.”

See photos from this article here:


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November 23, 2016

'People Are Going to Die': Father of Wounded DAPL Activist Sophia Wilansky Speaks Out

Is devastating policy brutality against water protectors in North Dakota a harbinger of what's to come when Donald Trump takes office?

By Nika Knight
Common Dreams

Sunday's brutal police assault against peaceful Dakota Access Pipeline activists left one water protector, Sophia Wilansky, at risk of losing an arm, and her distraught father spoke out Tuesday and Wednesday against the shocking show of force and demanded government action.

Wayne Wilansky, a 61-year-old lawyer and yoga teacher from New York City, spoke to a reporter in a Facebook live feed about his daughter's devastating injury, allegedly caused by a concussion grenade.

"This is the wound of someone who's a warrior, who was sent to fight in a war," Wayne said. "It's not supposed to be a war. She's peacefully trying to get people to not destroy the water supply. And they're trying to kill her."
Most of the muscle tissue between Sophia's left elbow and wrist as well as two major arteries were completely destroyed, Wayne said, and doctors pulled shrapnel out of the wound.

The Morton County Sheriff's Department has denied using concussion grenades or any equipment that could cause an injury like Sophia's, despite witness accounts and the shrapnel recovered by surgeons from Sophia's arm.

The police in Morton County, North Dakota are acting with such brutality, Wayne warned, that eventually "people are going to die."

Watch the full interview here:

Wayne's words were echoed on Democracy Now! by Brandi King, a U.S. Army combat veteran and fellow water protector who helped transport Sophia to the hospital.

"[Y]ou don't expect those kind of wounds happening when they're not in combat," King said. "That was just—just felt like it was a combat wound, you know, looked like it was a combat wound. She had shrapnel wounds. She didn't have any burns. Her arm was split open. Her skin, her flesh was ripped off of her arm. Her bones were broke."

A medic with Standing Rock Medic and Healer Council, who was on the scene on Sunday, made similar comparisons in comments to InsideClimate News: "I think of Birmingham, [Alabama], I think of Wounded Knee, it felt like low-grade war," Michael Knudsen said. "If we hadn't been there on Sunday night, people would have probably died. The use of water canons for eight hours on hundreds and hundreds of demonstrators in 22 degrees [F] is enough to kill someone."

Sophia's prognosis was made far worse by the fact that ambulances couldn't breach the police blockade of a main access road, which water protectors were attempting to clear when they were attacked by the Morton County Sheriff's Department, said Wayne.

Because of the blockade, it took over six hours for Sophia to finally reach the hospital in Minneapolis where she is undergoing multiple surgeries now, her father said. The harrowing delay very likely caused additional harm, Wayne added, because "every minute counts" with an injury as severe as Sophia's.

And Sophia's injury was no accident, Wayne said.

"The police did not do this by—it was an intentional act of throwing it directly at her," he said in a statement released by the Standing Rock Medic and Healer Council. "Additionally police were shooting people in face and groin intending to do the most possible damage."

Sophia fears that the pipeline company, Energy Transfer Partners (ETP), is going to kill her, requesting that her father stay by her hospital bed to protect her, Wayne said.
ETP head Kelcy Warren also told reporters early last week that he had offered to "reimburse" the government of North Dakota and Morton County for the costs of the militarized police force, but government officials denied receiving such an offer.

Wayne reported the attack on his daughter to the FBI and the Justice Department, he said, adding that the Justice Department is investigating. But in his description to Democracy Now!, the FBI appeared to behave as though they were investigating Sophia, rather than her assailants:

Sophia was [...] waiting to go to surgery. And they're basically keeping us prisoner inside her hospital room, waiting for a warrant, which never came. They didn't tell us what they were there for, for many hours. Eventually, I got to speak to a supervisor and learned that what they were looking for was her clothing. And I did eventually consent. I had taken her clothing back to my hotel room the night before, and I did consent to give them the clothing, eventually, after talking to the supervisors. I have an unwritten agreement, but I put it in writing anyway, that they will give me access to those materials so that I can test them, as well, and that they’ll preserve and not destroy that evidence, because I would want to see it, and I would want to have it forensically tested myself.

One FBI agent was wearing a jacket identifying him as a member of the Joint Terrorism Taskforce, the broadcast observed.

And despite the tragic result of the road blockade in Sophia's case, the Morton County Sheriff's Department apparently are now seeking to reinforce it by building a cement wall across the highway, water protectors said Wednesday.

"The police have built a wall between the Standing Rock Sioux reservation and Mandan/Bismarck on a public highway," commented Honor the Earth campaigner Tara Houska on Facebook. "Cutting off direct access to a hospital appears not to [faze] the people responsible for nearly blowing off a young woman's arm a few days ago."

In the wake of what the Indigenous Environmental Network condemned as "crimes against humanity" by the Morton County's Sheriff Department, the global outcry is growing.

A multiracial delegation of over 100 frontline community leaders are traveling to North Dakota and joining the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in their fight; a fundraiser for Sophia’s hospital bills has been flooded with donations; and even mainstream outlets such as the editorial board of the New York Times and the hosts of the daytime talk show The View are urging President Barack Obama to take action to reroute the pipeline and protect the Standing Rock Sioux tribe and its supporters.

Yet Obama is swiftly running out of time to act, and observers fear that the brutality of the Morton County Sheriff's Department in North Dakota may be a harbinger of what's to come under the looming Donald Trump administration.
"Standing Rock has for months been a frontline in the fights for indigenous sovereignty and against reckless extraction," argued journalist Kate Aronoff. "It may also now be the frontline of Trump's America."


November 23, 2016

Sheriffs Refuse to Send Troops to Standing Rock as Public Outrage and Costs Mount

North Dakota is stretched thin in its battle to protect the Dakota Access pipeline construction: Costs are nearing $15 million, and police reinforcements are diminishing.

By Jenni Monet
YES! Magazine

Agents with the U.S. Customs and Border Protection will be the latest agency assisting Morton County Sheriff Department deputies to guard Dakota Access pipeline construction as it prepares to drill under the Missouri River. But as tensions mount, along with costs to keep up with militarized attacks on water protectors, there are signs that North Dakota’s resources are stretching thin.

Sheriff Kyle Kirchmeier announced the aid of CBP officers Monday following the most violent confrontation yet near the Standing Rock Sioux reservation. Dozens of activists were hospitalized after Sunday night’s standoff when police sprayed water on hundreds of people in 26-degree temperatures and fired what has been described as concussion grenades. One activist, Sophia Wilansky, 21, may face the amputation of her arm.

Even before Sunday’s subfreezing assault on the Backwater Bridge, the escalating violence, the masses of arrests—528 as of Monday—and even the routine response to demonstrations were taking their toll on local agencies. The policing costs have reached nearly $15 million. The courts are taxed. The jail is burdened. The 34 local law enforcement officers are stressed.

All this comes amid an increasingly loud public outcry against the militarized policing.

Organized campaigns to contact the people and agencies responsible for sending officers and equipment to aid Morton County in the assaults on water protectors have in some cases been effective. YES! Magazine published that contact information Oct. 31, and in less than a month, the Facebook post had reached more than half a million people with commenters trading stories about their experiences making complaints. The article has been published by media worldwide.

It was intense public response that led Montana’s Gallatin County Sheriff Brian Gootkin to literally turn his detail around. He and his deputies were en route to Morton County when Gov. Steve Bullock raised concerns about the potential misuse of the interstate statute. The Emergency
Management Assistance Compact obligates law enforcement around the country to fulfill requests for aid under any form of emergency or disaster.

“I got messages from England, Poland, New Zealand, Australia,” Gootkin recalled. And he received phone calls and hundreds of emails from his constituents, too—people that may have elected him sheriff. They were concerned about the use of force on protesters, Oct. 27, he said, and also had been affected by the public outrage from Minneapolis’ Hennepin County.

Gootkin said the callers and emailers believed the EMAC was meant for natural disasters and catastrophic events like 9/11, not for protecting a corporation’s pipeline construction. All that caused Sheriff Gootkin to change his mind. He turned to Facebook to post his decision to stand down on Standing Rock: “Although my actions were well-intentioned, you made it clear that you do not want your Sheriff’s Office involved in this conflict. One of the biggest differences of an elected Sheriff from other law enforcement leaders is that I am directly accountable to the people I serve (YOU).”

It was not an easy choice to make, Gootkin said. “I wanted to go and help my fellow law enforcement.” Then, he raised a question that has begun to rattle many communities across America lately. “I just don’t understand where we separated from the public. It really breaks my heart. We are not the enemy.”

Sheriff Dave Mahoney from Wisconsin’s Dane County was also empathetic to those decrying deployment of his officers. “All share the opinion that our deputies should not be involved in this situation,” Mahoney told the Bismarck Tribune. He and his unit stood by Morton County officers for one week before pulling out and refusing to return.

This week, the ACLU released the most comprehensive list of law enforcement participating in the conflict at Standing Rock, 75 agencies total, all believed to be operating under the EMAC agreement. The ACLU’s current list of agency support to Morton County can be found here.

Of the $15 million spent so far to protect the pipeline construction, $4.4 million has been spent by Morton County alone, officials said. The figure also includes more than $10 million in state emergency funds, according to Cecily Fong, spokeswoman for the North Dakota Department of Emergency Services. Fong told the Associated Press that protest-related law enforcement costs reached $10.9 million dollars last week, including $6 million borrowed from the state-owned Bank of North Dakota in September and an additional $4 million on Nov. 1.

Now it seems likely that the state will need to request even more money from its Emergency Commission. In a press conference two days prior to Sunday’s violence, Gov. Jack Dalrymple expressed frustration in the ongoing police action against protesters. “We’re incurring expenses every day,” Dalrymple said.

The governor has pressed the Obama administration for federal aid in responding to the escalating conflict. He has suggested the U.S. Marshal Service step in to evict thousands of protectors who have occupied U.S. Army Corps of Engineers land. “They are camped without a
permit,” Dalrymple said of those occupying the mass encampment near the Backwater Bridge blockade. “In other words, they’re there illegally.”

But the Obama administration has refused to do that, opting to sit down with the Standing Rock Sioux and negotiate a solution. It has asked that construction of the $3.8 billion pipeline stop until one is reached, but Energy Transfer has refused. It is now suing the federal government and meanwhile continuing to advance the pipeline.

With the absence of federal assistance, Morton County has had to rely on the EMAC and support from police agencies nationwide. Since early August, the sheriff’s department says that nearly 1,300 officers have come from 24 counties, 16 cities, across nine different states.

The farthest traveled was the president of the National Sheriff’s Association, Greg Champagne of St. Charles Parish, Louisiana. He arrived Oct. 28, the day after Morton County led its heavily militarized removal of occupants from the “1851 Treaty Camp.” In a lengthy post on Facebook, Champagne commended the multiagency action while taking special care to praise Minnesota’s Hennepin County Sheriff Rich Stanek. He said they were “protecting lives and property” that day.

But in the aftermath of the violent Oct. 27 raid, the number of law enforcement agencies assisting Morton County has dwindled—in some instances, because of the pipeline’s polarizing effect.

Minneapolis’ Hennepin County has received some of the loudest public outrage as taxpayers, voters, even state lawmakers turned out to denounce Sheriff Stanek’s decision to send Minnesota personnel and equipment to Standing Rock. “I do not have any control over the Sheriff’s actions, which I think were wrong,” said Lt. Gov. Tina Smith in a prepared statement. “I believe he should bring his deputies home, if he hasn’t already. I strongly support the rights of all people to peacefully protest, including, tonight, the Standing Rock protest.”

Following a nine-day stint in North Dakota, Sheriff Stanek said enlisting 29 of his deputies to serve on Morton County’s front lines was “the right thing to do.”

But he also said his deputies would not be returning.

Jenni Monet wrote this article for YES! Magazine. Jenni is an award-winning journalist and tribal member of the Pueblo of Laguna in New Mexico. She’s also executive producer and host of the podcast Still Here.


November 24, 2016

Veterans Plan "Deployment" to Join Water Protectors' Battle Against DAPL
"Let's stop this savage injustice being committed right here at home. If not us, who? If not now, when?"

By Nika Knight
Common Dreams

Over 1,000 U.S. military veterans are planning to "deploy" to join the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and peacefully support the water protectors' fight against the controversial Dakota Access Pipeline near Cannon Ball, North Dakota.

"We are calling for our fellow veterans to assemble as a peaceful, unarmed militia at the Standing Rock Indian Reservation on Dec 4-7 and defend the water protectors from assault and intimidation at the hands of the militarized police force and DAPL security," the organizers wrote on the group's GoFundMe page.

"Come to Standing Rock Indian Reservation and hold the line with Wes Clark Jr., Michael Wood Jr., [Hawaii Democratic Rep.] Tulsi Gabbard, and hundreds of other veterans in support of the Sioux nation against the DAPL pipeline," reads the description of the action on Facebook.

The event, Veterans Stand for Standing Rock, was put together by "veterans of the United States Armed Forces, including the U.S. Army, United States Marine Corps, U.S. Navy, U.S. Air Force, and U.S. Coast Guard," according to the group's fundraiser.

The call to action has already garnered nearly $200,000 in donations, which will go toward funding veterans' travel to North Dakota and legal fees they are likely to incur.

Clark Jr. and Wood Jr., the two primary organizers of the campaign, spoke to their passion for the water protectors' cause and their commitment to nonviolence when they were profiled earlier this week in the veterans' publication Task & Purpose:

"This country is repressing our people," Wood Jr. says. "If we're going to be heroes, if we're really going to be those veterans that this country praises, well, then we need to do the things that we actually said we're going to do when we took the oath to defend the Constitution from enemies foreign and domestic."

[...] "We're not going out there to get in a fight with anyone," Clark Jr. says. "They can feel free to beat us up, but we're 100% nonviolence."

"According to an 'operations order' for the planned engagement, posted to social media in mid-November, 'First Americans have served in the United States Military, defending the soil of our homelands, at a greater percentage than any other group of Americans. There is no other people more deserving of veteran support,'" Task & Purpose writes.

Indeed, Wood Jr. posted full the operations order on Twitter:
The veterans are prepared for the police violence that they may encounter: "Bring body armor, gas masks, earplugs, AND shooting mufflers (we may be facing a sound cannon) but no drugs, alcohol, or weapons," the organizers told the volunteers.

*Task & Purpose* delved into all the details of the veterans' plan, which is intended both to bolster the peaceful water protectors' fight as well as to draw media attention to the ongoing protest:

On Dec. 4, Clark Jr. and Wood Jr., along with a group of veterans and other folks in the "bravery business," as Wood Jr. puts it [...] will muster at Standing Rock. The following morning they will join members of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, including Young, for a traditional healing ceremony. With an eye toward the media, old military uniforms will be donned so that if the veterans are brutalized by the police, they are brutalized not as ordinary citizens, but as people who once served the government they are protesting against. Then body armor, ear plugs, and gas masks will be issued to those who didn’t bring their own. Bagpipes will play, and traditional Sioux war songs will be sung. The music will continue as everyone marches together to the banks of the Missouri, on the other side of which a line of guards in riot gear will be standing ready with rifles, mace, batons, and dogs. Then, the veterans and their allies—or at least the ones who are brave enough—will lock arms and cross the river in a "massive line" for their "first encounter" with the "opposing forces." The goal is to make it to the drilling pad and surround it, arm in arm. That will require making it through the line of guards, who have repelled other such attempts with a level of physical force Sioux tribal members and protesters have described as "excessive"—claims that recently prompted a United Nations investigation. Of course, that's what the body armor and gas masks are for.

"We'll have those people who will recognize that they're not willing to take a bullet, and those who recognize that they are," Wood Jr. told *Task & Purpose*. "It's okay if some of them step back, but Wes and I have no intention of doing so."


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**November 25, 2016**

Thanksgiving Blessings Following a Peace Vigil for Clergy at Standing Rock

Letter by Wendy Johnson

Dear Dharma friends, teachers and family,

I write you a day after the annual celebration of Thanksgiving, always a holiday of mixed blessing as well as one of love and awareness, so necessary now in these post election times.

A few weeks ago at the end of October during the sacred trio of days commemorating Samhain and All Hallows Eve, All Saints Day and All Souls Day or El Dia de los Muertos, I answered a compelling call for clergy to gather in prayer and solidarity with the Standing Rock Water
Protectors at Oceti Sakowin Camp in rural North Dakota. There, at the confluence of the Cannonball and Missouri Rivers, the Dakota Access Pipeline is excavating a 1700 mile long pipeline to carry crude Bakken Shale oil through the sacred burial grounds of the Sioux Nation and under the Missouri River, the longest river in North America. The Missouri is also the living source of drinking water for twelve million people.

I responded to this call with every cell in my body. The proposed action was immediate, peaceful and clear: clergy were invited to gather at Standing Rock for a day of non-violent training and another full day of prayer and non-violent solidarity with the Water Protectors.

I immediately reached out for support from many of you, my strong and embodied blood and Dharma family, and from the extended indigenous community with whom I have been privileged to study Traditional Ecological Knowledge and to grow nourishing Native food crops for the last five years. With your love and support the next steps were easy: I packed my zen robes, gathered together plenty of warm clothes and winter camping gear, and carried a full jar of Muir Beach honey and a long, formal braid of Oneo, or Seneca White corn grown at Indian Valley Organic farm, to be offered as a gift to Grandma’s Kitchen, one of the five thriving kitchens in the heart of the Standing Rock Camp.

More than 500 members of the Interfaith community responded to the call for clergy to gather, a call issued by Father John Floberg who has served at Standing Rock as Episcopal Supervising Priest for the last 25 years. Father Floberg invited us to "gather and stand witness to Water Protectors' acts of compassion for God's Creation, and to the transformative power of God's love to make a Way out of no Way".

More than twenty faith traditions, mostly Christian, were represented. We gathered from the ten directions, sleeping on the floor of Father John's churches, at the local casino, and in the smoky bottom land of the Oceti Sakowin Camp. The assembly was diverse in age and ecumenical composition. We gathered to support the Water Protectors and to listen and learn. Throughout our non-violent vigil all training and public prayer was guided and led by indigenous clergy.

On November 3rd at daybreak we journeyed to the Standing Rock main camp in full religious finery. We gathered for prayer at the central council fire of the camp. Christian clergy representing more than ten denominations stepped forward to repudiate the controversial Doctrine of Discovery, a 1493 Papal Bull granting European nations the absolute right to claim so-called New World indigenous lands for their own. Following formal statements of repudiation, copies of the Doctrine of Discovery were passed to indigenous elders from Standing Rock who burned the documents in large metal bowls and abalone shells to raucous acclaim. The flame of five hundred year old words was then covered with fresh sage from the high prairie to smudge and bless each member of the clergy as we passed in formal procession out to the front lines of the Dakota Access Pipeline.

Hundreds of allies and relatives gathered on the hills above the Cannonball River to witness the procession and prayer vigil of the clergy. We chanted, sang, prayed and stood in silent solidarity with indigenous hosts for more than three hours. Representatives of every faith tradition offered prayers and blessings from the back of a large flatbed truck as indigenous members of the
Standing Rock community stood in peaceful attention guarding the front line of their ancestral lands in the intimidating presence of militarized guards in full riot gear.

Around noon some clergy exited our vigil to demonstrate on the courthouse steps of the capitol building in Bismark, North Dakota, calling on the Governor of the state to affirm his Christian roots and halt the pipeline. Other clergy engaged in non violent protest, many of them arrested for their actions.

Those of us remaining at Standing Rock after the vigil walked out to the front lines to join the indigenous guardians on the live edge of the conflict. Some of these Water Protectors were practicing Christians. We prayed together there as the sun sank low in the Winter sky. Then many of us made our way into the main camp, walking down the long, dusty Avenue of Flags representing more than 200 Native nations. We volunteered until dark, helping however possible to support the camp.

Upon returning to Father Floberg's church I was particularly moved to learn that at the end of our day of prayer into action, two local police officers who had been deputized to guard the Dakota Access Pipeline respectfully turned in their badges, no longer willing to serve.

On my final day at Standing Rock I joined dawn prayers at the Oceti Sakowin council fire. The remainder of the day, before flying home to the Bay Area at nightfall, was spent volunteering in Grandma's kitchen, helping the beloved Piute Hoopa elder and her practicing assembly of dedicated Bodhisattvas sort and serve food to hundreds of hungry people throughout the day.

I apologize for not communicating with you sooner about the courageous efforts of the Water Protectors at Standing Rock. When I first came home I found it difficult to speak. Following the results of the US Presidential election and as tensions increase at Oceti Sakowin, I am grateful for our patch-robed, cloud-and-water-wanderer sangha, willing to live and die together, moment by moment. Fierce and grounded prayer turned toward engaged action is essential now to uncover a "Way out of no Way".

Thank you for your love and service and for the gift of practicing together in consequential times.

Yours, always and ever,

Wendy Johnson

Wendy Johnson is a Buddhist meditation teacher and organic gardening mentor who lives in the San Francisco Bay Area. Wendy has been practicing Zen meditation for thirty-five years and has led meditation retreats nationwide since 1992 as an ordained lay dharma teacher in the traditions of Vietnamese teacher Thich Nhat Hanh and the San Francisco Zen Center. Wendy is one of the founders of the organic Farm and Garden Program at Green Gulch Farm Zen Center in Marin County, where she lived with her family from 1975 to 2000. She has been teaching gardening
and environmental education to the public since the early 1980s. For more, visit her website:
http://gardeningatthedragonsgate.com/index.html
http://fore.yale.edu/news/item/thanksgiving-blessings-following-a-peace-vigil-for-clergy-at-standing/

November 25, 2016

It’s cowboy cops cavalry against peaceful Indians and their Anglo supporters at Standing Rock

The corporate media meanwhile, have been for the most part shameless and useless in this enormous conflict between native people and the state.

By Dave Lindorff
Nation of Change

The struggle at Standing Rock, North Dakota, between the Sioux people and their supporters and the oil corporations and banks trying to run a dangerous pipeline for filthy Bakkan crude oil through their sacred lands and underneath the Missouri River was cranked up to a new level of violence Sunday and in ensuing days as National Guard troops and the Morton County Sheriff’s Department, bolstered by volunteers from various other police departments conducted an all-night attack using maximum violence, including flash-bang concussion grenades, rubber bullets, mace, teargas and three water cannons – this at a time the temperature on the prairie had fallen to a low of 22 degrees fahrenheit.

The casualties of this one-sided battle against peaceful protesters on a bridge were enormous, with some 300 of the estimated 400 protesting water protectors, both native people and non-native supporters, injured, 26 of them seriously. There was evidence that police were aiming rubber bullets at protesters’ heads and groins to inflict maximum pain and damage, with eight of the injured hospitalized, including a 13-year-old girl shot in the face, whose eye was reportedly damaged.

The gravest injuries were a tribal elder who suffered a cardiac arrest, and Sophia Wolansky, a 21-year-old New York City resident who had come to back the Standing Rock Sioux in their struggle to halt construction of the pipeline. She was hit in the arm by a flash-bang grenade thrown at her by a Morton County Sheriff’s deputy, which blew up on impact, blowing away the flesh and muscle and reportedly some of the nerves and bone of the elbow joint. She has been evacuated to a hospital in Chicago where physicians and nurses are fighting to save her arm and hand from an amputation.

Wolansky’s father Wayne, a 61-year old lawyer in New York, angrily called on President to put a halt to the violent repression at Standing Rock. He said of his daughter’s injury, which was the result of a flash-bang concussion grenade being thrown directly at her, “This is the wound of someone who’s a warrior, who was sent to fight in a war,” Wayne said. ”It’s not supposed to be a war. She’s peacefully trying to get people to not destroy the water supply. And they’re trying to kill her.” Concussion grenades are not supposed to be used to target people.
The grenade wound suffered by Sophia Wolansky blew away the muscle, exposing bone, looking like a war injury, not the typical police-abuse type of injury.

The attack on Sunday night, which has been rightly condemned by UN human rights observers as an atrocity, harks back to the simultaneous country-wide crushing of the Occupy movement occupations in cities across the US during early November, 2011, when local police aided in some cases by armed federal parks police, assaulted occupiers with maximum violence, almost always at night, barring the media from witnessing their deliberate and coordinated over-the-top violence.

In that case, an aggressive campaign of legal discovery by the Partnership for Civil Justice using the Freedom of Information Act, resulted in the unearthing of documents from both the Department of Homeland Security and the FBI proving there had been a concerted campaign by those federal agencies to coordinate the crushing of the Occupy Movement. That campaign urged police to use maximum violence, to operate at night, and to share the results of their attacks with other city police departments so that tactics of repression that “worked,” could be replicated.

It would appear that the repressive lessons learned by police agencies in 2011 are now being used as a kind of repression handbook by Morton County Sheriff Kyle Kirchmeier and his deputies against the protesting Sioux water protectors and their Anglo supporters.

There is no indication that such vicious repression is working though. Even as the brutal assault last Sunday night and Monday morning sent dozens of people to area hospitals, more brave people continued to pour into Standing Rock to support the struggle of the Standing Rock Sioux and the many representatives of some 300 US tribes around the country, and the representatives of indigenous peoples from around the world fighting this battle.

The decision to run the so-called Dakota Access Pipeline through Sioux sacred lands, some of it formerly awarded to the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe by US treaty, but later stolen from them, stands in stark contrast to an earlier decision to reroute it from a planned Missouri River crossing point near North Dakota’s capital city of Bismarck. There, protests by the local (white, middle-class) public forced a rethink by the companies behind the pipeline, and the US Army Corps of Engineers. They decided to alter the planned route to run it through Indian territory instead.

The Standing Rock Tribal Council has called on President Obama to put a halt to this dangerous and obscene project, suggesting that as president he has the power to declare the crossing site a National Historic Site, thus protecting it from such defilement. The president, of course, could also look at the local Sheriff’s repressive and violent tactics against an Indian people, and simply federalize local National Guard troops, ordering them to force local police to stand down instead of follow the Republican governor’s orders to participate in the repression.

That he hasn’t already done so speaks volumes about this president’s lack of courage and of principle. In 2014, President Obama visited the Standing Rock Sioux, and acknowledged their centuries of abuse by the US government. Now, however, that abuse is occurring on this president’s watch, and incredibly, despite the extent of the violence, he has done nothing to stop it.
It’s time for all decent Americans to take a stand in support of the Sioux People of Standing Rock. Contact the White House at 202–456–1414 and demand that the president send troops to stand between Sioux water protectors and their local law-enforcement assailants, and to have Federal Marshals arrest those who commit acts of brutality.

The militarized response to peaceful protest at Standing Rock should stand as a warning to all who would protest America’s slide into totalitarianism. What the government will do to Native Americans and their Anglo supporters today is what we can probably expect them to do to any of us who protest in this new Trumpian America.

The corporate media meanwhile, have been for the most part shameless and useless in this enormous conflict between native people and the state. Even as local sheriff’s deputies launched what appears to be building into a third Wounded Knee-style massacre at Standing Rock, the press keeps referring to a “confrontation” between protesters and law-enforcement, as though it is a battle being fought between equals. NPR yesterday ran with a story that referred to the Standing Rock challenge to the pipeline as “a magnet for activists.”

The NPR reporter might more honestly have called it a “magnet for police” since many of the “law enforcement” thugs attacking the peaceful water protectors are volunteers from neighboring states’ police departments – people anxious for a chance to play “cavalry” in this latest iteration of American’s murderous history of Indian Wars.

*Dave Lindorff is an American investigative reporter, a columnist for CounterPunch, and a contributor to Businessweek, The Nation, Extra! and Salon.com. His work was highlighted by Project Censored 2004, 2011 and 2012.*


**November 25, 2016**

At Standing Rock and Beyond, What Is to Be Done?

By Eric Martin
The Stone
New York Times

Near Cannon Ball, N.D. — “We love you!” yelled someone from our line, linked arm in arm.

We were facing Dakota Access Pipeline workers threatening us with baseball bats and wrenches, one of whom had only moments ago sped his large truck through our ranks. They had called us “the scum of the earth,” and replied to our assurance that we were nonviolent by warning, “We’re not.” A helicopter had appeared and begun circling low over our heads. And from this scene, one of the men who had not yet spoken sheepishly replied, “We love you, too.
We eventually parted ways, not in peace but at least not in physical violence. We had distracted them from further construction of the project that threatened to spill oil in the Lakota water supply and headed back to our cars to take part in a march through the streets of Bismarck, N.D. But amid all the movement, that moment stayed with me.

I had come with a group of Catholic Workers for reasons anyone studying or teaching theology as I do might find obvious. The violation of basic dignity happening here defies the consistent refrain by the prophets and Jesus to do justice with an eye toward the exploited. We had been told white bodies could help by surrounding native ones, shielding them while they sought to protect their water.

The anxiety about immigrants’ diluting “American culture” that helped usher Donald J. Trump to victory has caused many Americans to forget that “American culture” itself began as an intrusion from foreign lands; Lakota people at Standing Rock also have a historically well-established reason to fear this culture. The Lakota are reminding those who will listen that this land’s original immigration problem was of European origin and it continues to threaten their lives and livelihood after half a millennium of a genocidal onslaught. Its most recent manifestation is this pipeline.

I have meditated on that profession of love several days ago from a grown man wielding a bat to threaten us. It called to mind a conversation with my theology students at Fordham about Henry David Thoreau’s essay “On the Duty of Civil Disobedience,” in which he argues that “all machines have their friction,” but that “when the friction comes to have its machine, and oppression and robbery are organized, I say, let us not have such a machine any longer.” He had in mind the evils of slavery and the American government’s theft of half of Mexico in the Mexican-American War, but it spoke fittingly to this older form of oppression and robbery the Lakota people still suffer, in which even those who love them will still oppose them with a weapon and disrupt their sacred grounds.

After our class argued over how we might know when these frictions came to possess the machinery of government, one student declared emphatically that if we could not already recognize that the friction had taken over, then we would never see it.

It was hard to disagree, especially the day after our encounter with the pipeline workers when the police pepper sprayed a Lakota prayer service and those of us surrounding it, arresting whom they could. What kind of machine produces violence to meet prayer, and prison in return for demanding resources to simply live? What kind of machine responds to those trying to protect their water by spraying them in subfreezing temperatures with water? Is it a machine overtaken with friction, or is the nexus of power between corporations and government that is trying to trample over the Lakota once again simply an unfortunate byproduct of an otherwise benevolent and worthy machine? How much oppression and theft is tolerable in order to keep the machine running? Where is our breaking point, at which we say that the benefits do not outweigh the human cost?

Thoreau’s claim was that citizens needed to become a “counter-friction” against injustice, that all people had a duty to disobey immoral laws and orders. The idea directly influenced Gandhi and
the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who added their own positive notions to resistance. Gandhi insisted that more than ahimsa (the Sanskrit word for causing no harm) was needed in the Indian independence movement. Satyagraha, or “the force of truth,” had to be embodied as well. Dr. King invoked the Christian demand to love one’s enemies in the civil rights movement, summoning the Greek notion of agape, a form of universal love, to channel God’s love for racists in power like Bull Connor. In both cases, this notion of being a counter-friction was fundamental, as was Thoreau’s insistence that it was one’s duty.

We ought to ask ourselves whether Thoreau was right. What line in Standing Rock would have to be crossed to demand our resistance that had not been passed over long ago? Do we wait until the Missouri River flows with oil? Would we need the police to begin shooting the water protectors with metal bullets instead of rubber ones? At what point does Thoreau’s duty kick in? When white people rather than native tribes bear the brunt of oppression?

Another question arises: how to disobey? Must we hold allegiance to satyagraha and agape, or was Malcolm X right to assert that Dr. King’s insistence on love was just another layer of white colonization that put hypocritical conditions on how minorities might protest? Actions led by the Lakota people were disciplined in something like this concept of agape, reminding those on the front lines that we are to love these police officers and issuing prayers over the loudspeaker for their own children’s water supply. But some white allies who had joined their struggle, quite understandably, held no love for those who might mace them midprayer without warning. There was no clear consensus on the parameters for civil disobedience.

Of course, it is not for others to dictate to the Lakota how to protect their water. But Thoreau’s claim must be grappled with for those who reap the benefits of systemic injustice and exploitation, as he did. Donald Trump’s tenure as president-elect immediately began with protests, some more peaceful than others. As more people embrace the need to say “no” in some capacity, whether in North Dakota or beyond, the issue of how to do so and what is worth preserving has become pressing.

Daniel Berrigan, the poet and priest who died in April, and whose actions throughout his life pushed the limits of civil disobedience, posed the issue in language that closely echoed that of Thoreau and bears relevance today: “Someone, as a strict requirement of sanity and logic, must be willing to say a simple thing: ‘The machine is working badly.’ And if the law of the machine, a law of military and economic profit, enacted by generals and tycoons, must be broken in favor of the needs of man, let the law be broken. Let the machine be turned around, taken apart, built over again.”

I still churn that moment over in my mind: A man threatening us with a baseball bat told us he loved us. Despite the presence of agape, love between people who had never even met before, we had already organized ourselves in a violent way that ruptured any chance for human community. It seems clear that the moment for resistance had come too late, that something was allowed to flourish that never should have had the chance to sprout. Lines were drawn centuries ago, were never erased, and we had simply stepped into ready-made roles. We loved one another, but a system was in place encouraging hatred, and we could only navigate it awkwardly and poorly.
It’s worth communal consideration whether this machine is worth maintaining. The ascension of the country’s next president demands it. But the question of whether we have a duty to be a counter-friction was answered a long time ago, and the situation at Standing Rock is merely a reminder that far too many of us are still refusing to answer it.

Eric Martin is a doctoral candidate in systematic theology at Fordham University and co-editor of “The Berrigan Letters.”


November 26, 2016

Officials to Close Standing Rock Protest Campsite

By Christopher Mele
New York Times

Citing public safety concerns, federal officials plan to close access to a campsite where demonstrators have protested the construction of a crude oil pipeline near the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in North Dakota and create a “free speech zone.”

The Army Corps of Engineers, in a letter Friday to the chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, Dave Archambault II, said the decision had been made to “protect the general public from the violent confrontations between protesters and law enforcement officials that have occurred in this area.”

Mr. Archambault said in a statement that the tribe was “deeply disappointed” by the decision.

“It is both unfortunate and disrespectful that this announcement comes the day after this country celebrates Thanksgiving — a historic exchange between Native Americans and the first immigrants from Europe,” he said. “Although the news is saddening, it is not all surprising given the last 500 years of mistreatment of our people.”

The authorities will close the area north of the Cannonball River, including the Oceti Sakowin camp, about 40 miles south of Bismarck, where opponents of the 1,170-mile Dakota Access Pipeline have gathered for months.

Native American tribes, led by the Standing Rock Sioux, have been protesting the pipeline project. They fear it would pollute the Missouri River and harm sacred cultural lands and tribal burial grounds. There have been large protests at the Lake Oahe crossing; the Missouri River is the tribe’s primary source of drinking water.

Mr. Archambault said the best way to protect demonstrators during the winter and to reduce conflicts with the police “is to deny the easement for the Oahe crossing and deny it now.”
The letter from the district commander of the Army Corps, Col. John W. Henderson, said the emergency services and facilities needed to protect demonstrators camped north of the Cannonball River during the harsh North Dakota winters could not be provided.

“I do not take this action lightly but have decided that it is required due to the concern for public safety and the fact that much of this land is leased to private persons for grazing and/or haying purposes as part of the corps’ land management practices,” he wrote.

He said anyone found on the land after Dec. 5 could be charged with trespassing.

The project has spurred months of clashes between the police and demonstrators. The most serious injury happened early Monday. An explosion during a protest badly damaged the left arm and hand of a woman who grew up in the Bronx, Sophia Wilansky, 21.

Her father, Wayne Wilansky, said that someone from the police lines had thrown a device he described as a grenade; the police suggested that fellow demonstrators had caused the explosion, and said officers did not use concussion or flash grenades at any time.

On Monday, the police confronted hundreds of protesters. Nearly 300 people were treated for injuries resulting from the use of police force, according to the Standing Rock Medic and Healer Council.

The pipeline project was delayed in September when the Obama administration temporarily blocked it from crossing under the Missouri River. President Obama called on both sides to show restraint and revealed that the Army Corps of Engineers was considering an alternative route for the project.

But Kelcy Warren, chief executive of the pipeline company, Energy Transfer Partners, told The Associated Press it would not consider a different route. Though the project has been delayed by legal disputes, the pipeline is nearly complete.


November 26, 2016

Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe Reacts to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Eviction Notice: Your Letter Makes a Grave & Dangerous Mistake

By Levi Rickert
Native News Online

EAGLE BUTTE, SOUTH DAKOTA – Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe Chairman Harold Frazier was quick to respond to the U.S Army Corps of Engineers’ letter, dated November 25, 2016, that will evict the water protectors who are camping at Oceti Sakowin camp. The 10-day eviction
notice came one day after Thanksgiving where thousands have come to show solidarity with the water protectors who oppose the Dakota Access pipeline.

Fraizer was curt in his response to Colonel John W. Henderson, who sent the eviction letter. Fraizer writes: “This decision, coming on the heels of the Thanksgiving holiday, is not only disrespectful, but continues the cycle of racism and oppression imposed on our people and our lands throughout history.”

Read Frazier’s letter below:

November 25, 2016

Colonel John W. Henderson
Commander and District Engineer
Omaha District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
1616 Capitol Avenue
Suite 900
Omaha, NE 68102

Re: November 25, 2016, Letter Regarding Closure of Treaty Lands

Dear Col. Henderson:

This letter responds to your correspondence, dated November 25, 2016, announcing the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ (“Corps”) plan to close certain “Corps’ managed lands to all public use and access effective December 5, 2016.” You state that “[t]his decision is necessary to protect the general public from the violent confrontations between protestors and law enforcement officials that have occurred in this area, and to prevent death, illness, or serious injury to inhabitants of encampments due to the harsh North Dakota winter conditions.”

You have warned that anyone found outside of a so-called “free speech zone” will be considered trespassing and may be subject to prosecution under federal state, and local laws.” You have asked me to “encourage members of [the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe], as well as any non-members who support you who are located in the encampments north of the Cannonball River on Corps lands to immediately and peacefully move to the free speech zone. . . .”

The area north of the Cannonball River is both the ancestral homeland of the Lakota people and inside the boundaries of the 1851 Fort Laramie Treaty, a treaty that has not been abrogated and law that governs us all. The best of these lands have already been unjustly taken and flooded by the Corps in the disastrous Pick-Sloane legislation. We will no longer allow our rights as a Tribe or as indigenous people as a whole to continue to be eroded.

This decision, coming on the heels of the Thanksgiving holiday, is not only disrespectful, but continues the cycle of racism and oppression imposed on our people and our lands throughout history.
We ask that the Corps and the United States reconsider this decision. Treaties are the supreme law of the land and the Constitution of the United States demands that they be respected. Removal from Sioux Treaty lands should be the choice of the Oceti Sakowin Camp north of the Cannonball River, not the United States, which has been violating our rights for hundreds of years. The Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe stands with the more than 300 Tribal nations and the water protectors who are here peacefully protesting the Dakota Access pipeline while defending the rights of indigenous people.

Furthermore, your letter dangerously and profoundly misunderstands the basic function and status of a tribal government and its elected leaders. I am the chief executive of a sovereign nation that is comprised of individual citizens with physical territory within the exterior boundaries the State of South Dakota. Under the laws of the United States, my government lacks jurisdiction at Cannonball; but more importantly, I no more control the acts and behaviors of Cheyenne River Sioux Tribal members or non-member water protectors at the Cannonball site than you do, Col. Henderson.

As set forth above, even if I could control the water protectors, I recognize and respect their rights under the Constitution of the United States to peaceably assemble in prayerful protest against the cultural and environmental atrocity that is the Dakota Access Pipeline. I would not use my authority, which is based on the consent of my citizens, to curtail their human and constitutional rights.

Perhaps the most terrifying aspect of your letter is your acknowledgement of the stark reality that that the confrontation between our peaceful water protectors and law enforcement could result in death or serious injury, a fact demonstrated by the brutal attack on Sophia Wilansky by North Dakota police last week. But in the very next paragraph you guarantee that further confrontations will occur by promising that these peaceful people will be trespassing on closed areas and you threaten that they will do so “at their own risk” and will “assume[] any and all corresponding liabilities for their unlawful presence and occupation of such lands.”

I take your letter as issuing a direct and irresponsible threat to the water protectors. It appears to further empower the militarized police force that has been brutalizing and terrorizing our water protectors while imposing the blame and the risk on unarmed peaceful people. We have pleaded for the protection of the United States. Your letter makes a grave and dangerous mistake. Federal efforts to de-escalate the violence should be aimed at the wrongdoers, not at our peaceful people

Sincerely,

Harold Frazier, Chairman
Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe

cc: President Barack Obama
Assistant Secretary, Jo-Ellen Darcy
Secretary of Interior Sally Jewell
Attorney General Loretta Lynch
November 27, 2016

Standing Rock is a new turn in Christian ties with native Americans

By Erasmus
The Economist

WHATEVER the final result of the huge, long-running protests by native Americans against the Dakota Access Pipeline, the demonstrations will surely be remembered as a landmark in relations between organised religion, Christianity in particular, and indigenous people. Along with representatives of over 200 indigenous groups from across the New World, camped out at the Standing Rock Reservation since April, Christian clergy have been adding their voice to the protests in multiple ways.

Given that Pope Francis called for a rapid switch away from fossil fuels in his environmental encyclical, you might expect the radical end of the Catholic church to be the religious community most intensely engaged in this cause. But it is liberal or "mainline" Protestant churches who have made the running. If there is one individual who personifies Christian support for the indigenous protests, it is the Reverend John Floberg, who is responsible for Episcopal (Anglican) parishes on the North Dakota side of Standing Rock.

He co-ordinated the actions of 500 clergy and lay people from 20 different religious groups who gathered at the camp on November 3rd, and he has persuaded his own denomination's leadership, including Michael Curry, the African-American presiding bishop of the Episcopal church, to play an active part in opposing the line's completion. Although the Episcopal church is firmly on the liberal side of America's religious spectrum, this is still new territory for a religious group which for years was the spiritual home of the nation's social and cultural elite.

Mr Floberg has called the protests "the most powerful experience I have had in 25 years at Standing Rock" while also lamenting that the demonstrations had triggered a "racist response" in some quarters in North Dakota. Leaders of the United Methodist Church, which counts plenty of indigenous people, as well as oil workers, among its flock, have joined the Anglicans in opposing the $3.8 billion project. The pipeline, which is nearly complete, is intended to run nearly 1,200 miles from oil fields in North Dakota before connecting to an existing line in Illinois. Its parent company argues that it will provide safer transport than trucks or trains; the indigenous protesters fear pollution of their drinking water and disturbance of sacred lands and burial sites. Some of this, they say, has already occurred.
Bruce Ough, a Methodist bishop responsible for the Dakotas and Minnesota, is one of the senior clergy who has linked the pipeline controversy to a "spiritual battle" over much broader issues, including respect for the indigenous understanding of sacred land. "This is a protest about the stewardship of God's creation and justice for the indigenous peoples of the Great Plains," he has said.

Although plenty of individual Catholics of a radical persuasion have become involved in the protests, this is a rather awkward issue for the Catholic church at an institutional level. Indigenous groups have long been pressing the Vatican to renounce, more explicitly than hitherto, the "doctrine of discovery" whereby popes of the 15th century underpinned the conquest of the New World, and the accompanying subjugation of native Americans, by the Spanish and Portuguese. Some indigenous leaders were disappointed when Pope Francis went ahead with the canonisation of Junipero Serra, a founder of Catholic missions on the American West coast, who is either a hero or a villain in the history of native Americans, depending on how you read the past.

Starting with Pope John Paul II, all recent pontiffs have acknowledged that the Catholic church has done great wrong to indigenous peoples and owes them a profound apology. But the standard line on the "doctrine of discovery", which is still cited in secular American courts, is that it has already been rescinded through papal statements in the 16th century. America's radically-minded nuns, grouped in the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, are among those who say that a clearer renunciation is still needed. The Episcopal, Methodist and Presbyterian churches have all declared their opposition to the doctrine.

Compared with that of any other Christian group, the involvement of the Catholic church with the indigenous peoples of the New World has been the longest and messiest: cleaning up that mess will take a while longer yet.


November 28, 2016

North Dakota pipeline protest (photos)

By Stephanie Keith
Reuters

View a slideshow of photos by photographer Stephanie Keith:

http://in.reuters.com/news/picture/north-dakota-pipeline-protest?articleId=INRTST0OT&slideId=1163335901

November 28, 2016
Neil Young Begs Obama To Step In, End Violence At Standing Rock

“We will be going back to support the water protectors again.

By Maxwell Strachan, Senior Editor
The Huffington Post

Neil Young and his girlfriend, Daryl Hannah, published an open letter on Monday calling for President Barack Obama to do whatever he can to make sure authorities begin to treat the protestors at the Standing Rock Native American Reservation with decency and respect.

“We are calling upon you, President Barack Obama, to step in and end the violence against the peaceful water protectors at Standing Rock immediately,” Young and Hannah wrote.

In recent days, police have fired rubber bullets and water cannons at the protestors, who oppose building the Dakota Access Pipeline through the North Dakota reservation. Hundreds have been injured and more than 20 have been taken to hospitals as a result, according to The Intercept.

Young has become one of the most famous celebrities to stand in public support of the protestors. In September, he released a protest song, “Indian Givers,” that will appear on his upcoming album. On Nov. 12, the day of his 71st birthday, Young joined the protestors at Standing Rock to perform and bring attention to the issue. In the letter published Monday, he said the protestors he met were “committed to peaceful resistance” and forbid “[w]eapons[,] alcohol and drugs.”

“It is an awakening,” Young and Hannah wrote of the protests. “All here together, with their non-native relatives, standing strong in the face of outrageous, unnecessary and violent aggression, on the part of militarized local and state law enforcement agencies and National Guard, who are seemingly acting to protect the interests of the Dakota Access Pipeline profiteers, at a cost of hundreds of thousands of tax-payer dollars, above all other expressed concerns.”

Young also said he would return to Standing Rock yet again, and issued a call to all people who stand in solidarity with the protestors in Standing Rock.

“Unintimidated, stand, speak up and show up. Be counted. Be like our brothers and sisters at Standing Rock. Be there if you can,” the letter reads. “The progress we have made over two hundred and forty years as a nation, has always come first from the people.”

Tales of a feast on Plymouth plantation in the Autumn of 1621, where of pilgrims from the Mayflower, celebrated the harvest, shared and broke bread with the first Americans are false. They are still used as inspiration and shared with children, teaching them the beauty of gratitude.

But it is now widely understood this Thanksgiving story is a fictional history. It was invented to whitewash the vicious genocide wrought upon the native inhabitants of this magnificent continent. Not only did the Europeans try to eradicate native populations, but they made every effort to eviscerate their culture, their language and eliminate them from these coveted lands.
From Plymouth Rock to Standing Rock, this lie has made our Thanksgiving Day a Day of Mourning for the First Nations, all the tribes big and small, those who came before us.

A few weeks ago we traveled to visit the Standing Rock Sioux In North Dakota. We arrived at this unprecedented historical gathering of over five hundred tribes and thousands of others standing on the front lines to protect water, to state the most basic human truth, to say water is life. Despite the painful history, today they fight peacefully for us all.

The camp grows as winter comes. Standing in protection of our most vital life support systems, but also for the rightful preservation of Native American cultural ways and their sovereignty. Everyone we talk with is committed to peaceful resistance. Weapons alcohol and drugs are forbidden there.

Standing together in prayer to protect water displays a deeply rooted awareness of life’s interconnected nature, and of the intrinsic value and import of traditional ways. This growing movement stems from love, it is the most human instinct to protect that which we love. An eager and engaged youth are at the core of this pipeline route resistance, learning from a population of elders who pass down unforgotten knowledge.

It is an awakening. All here together, with their non-native relatives, standing strong in the face of outrageous, unnecessary and violent aggression, on the part of militarized local and state law enforcement agencies and National Guard, who are seemingly acting to protect the interests of the Dakota Access Pipeline profiteers, at a cost of hundreds of thousands of tax-payer dollars, above all other expressed concerns. They stand against corporate security forces, the county sheriff and the National Guard.

Standing while being hit with water cannons, mace, tear gas, rubber bullets. Standing without weapons and praying, the water protectors endure human rights abuses in sub freezing temperatures. Supplies arrive from all over as the social media universe shares the heartbreaking news to the world, that an American corporate media is not free to report. Thus, it is the ugliness of corporate America, seen around the world.

But they stand, their hair frozen from water cannons. They stand for all that is good and they stay strong.

We are calling upon you, President Barack Obama, to step in and end the violence against the peaceful water protectors at Standing Rock immediately.

We will be going back to support the water protectors again.

Let us all stand with them in thanks, in appreciation for the ancient wisdom they carry, In thanks for this opportunity for true gratitude.

For giving us a path forward.

For trying to show us a road to survival.
We offer our support and our respect. We hear the call to protect the water protectors to listen, learn and get engaged. They are brave. We thank them.

And we can give thanks for the bounty.

Like water on the garden of activism, America’s surprise president brings a bounty of opportunity. The great issues of our time are now brightly illuminated and people are becoming more aware of them than ever, from sea to shining sea, from Standing Rock to Wall Street.

The surprise president elect was not the winner of the popular vote, does not have a mandate for the change of ideals envisioned. Keep in mind, close to over two million more people voted for another candidate.

Nor is the surprise president the leader of the free world. Two hundred of the world's nations believe in science, above the profits of the oil, gas and coal industries, and are committed to working together to protect the future from an unchecked climate crisis.

The surprise president claims he does not believe in climate science nor the threats it presents and his actions and words reflect that claim in tangible and dangerous ways.

Do not be intimidated by the surprise presidents’ cabinet appointees as they descend the golden escalator. Those who behave in racist ways are not your leaders. The golden tower is not yours. The White House is your house.

Your growing activism in support of freedom over repression, addressing climate change, swiftly replacing a destructive old industries with safe, regenerative energy, encouraging wholistic thinking in balance with the future of our planet; that activism will strengthen and shed continued light on us all. These worthy goals must be met for the all the world’s children and theirs after them.

This is our moment for truth.

Unintimidated, stand, speak up and show up. Be counted. Be like our brothers and sisters at Standing Rock. Be there if you can. The progress we have made over two hundred and forty years as a nation, has always come first from the people

Thank you
Neil & Daryl

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/neil-young-standing-rock-obama-trump_us_583c8be9e4b06539a789d9bb

November 28, 2016

Senator Reid, Standing Rock Sen. Reid on Standing Rock (Video)
North Dakota governor orders evacuation of Standing Rock protest site, but no forcible removals planned

By William Yardley
LA Times

North Dakota Gov. Jack Dalrymple on Monday ordered a mandatory evacuation of protesters seeking to block construction of the Dakota Access pipeline, but both the state and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers said they have no plans for “forcible removal” of the protesters.

The Corps of Engineers earlier had said that it planned to close the camp, led by the Standing Rock Sioux tribe of North Dakota, by Dec. 5, and that anyone still there could be prosecuted for trespassing.

On Sunday, however, after a broad backlash, the corps said it has “no plans for forcible removal” and “is seeking a peaceful and orderly transition to a safer location.”

Dalrymple’s evacuation order came Monday, citing safety concerns related to the region’s harsh winter weather.

In an emergency declaration, the governor, a Republican who has urged federal officials to allow completion of the pipeline, said the camp is “not zoned for dwellings suitable for living in winter conditions, and also [does] not possess proper permanent sanitation infrastructure to sustain a living environment consistent with proper public health.”

The governor referred to safety concerns stated by the corps and “the inability to effectively provide emergency, medical, fire response services, and law enforcement services.”
But though the order said people who defy it could face legal consequences, officials said the state also would not seek to forcibly remove people.

“It’s part of our due diligence. These folks out there have to understand the situation. We’ve got folks from all over the country out there and I don’t know what they know about North Dakota winters,” Jeff Zent, a spokesman for the governor, said.

“Today we got dumped about 5 inches of snow. I’m sure conditions are not good out there. This order lets them know the situation in no uncertain terms,” he added.

The corps said Sunday that groups that were not part of the original protest of the pipeline helped shape its decision to try to close the camp.

“Unfortunately, it is apparent that more dangerous groups have joined this protest and are provoking conflict in spite of the public pleas from tribal leaders,” said Col. John Henderson, the commander of the corps’ Omaha district. We are working to transition those engaged in peaceful protest from this area and enable law enforcement authorities to address violent or illegal acts as appropriate to protect public safety.”

The corps, which has allowed the camp to grow for months, had said “safety reasons” prompted the notice on Friday. More than 500 people have been arrested since the summer in sometimes violent clashes with local law enforcement, which has come under fierce criticism for what protesters say have been abusive tactics.

The notice prompted an array of criticisms and vows by protesters and their supporters to stay. Some noted that it came just a day after Thanksgiving, a holiday associated with oppression for many Native Americans, though it is also portrayed as symbolic of goodwill with European settlers. Others pointed out that Dec. 5 is the birthday of Gen. George Armstrong Custer, who famously clashed with Native Americans.

On Monday morning, Dallas Goldtooth, a leader of the Indigenous Environmental Network, posted a video showing snow falling outside the yurt in which he was camping at the site.

“We don’t expect a forced removal or a sweep ... of this camp relatively soon based on their words,” Goldtooth said, referring to the Sunday night clarification. “But we as a camp are prepared, are preparing, for any scenario for the protection and safety of our folks.
“In the meantime, shout out to all of you lovely people out there, rabble rousers, pipeline fighters. Let’s keep fossil fuels in the ground. Talk to you later. Peace. I’m going sledding later on.”

The Standing Rock Sioux tribe has argued for months that the pipeline will put its water supply and cultural sites at risk. The corps announced this month that it would continue to withhold a final permit for the pipeline while it conducts additional analysis of the project and expands consultation with the tribe.

The corps said the additional review was “warranted in light of the history of the Great Sioux Nation’s dispossession of lands, the importance of Lake Oahe to the Tribe, our government-to-government relationship, and the statute governing easements through government property.”

The company building the pipeline, Energy Transfer Partners, has said that the Obama administration made the pipeline a political issue and that it has filed suit in federal court asking to proceed with the project.

The 1,170-mile pipeline would transport as much 500,000 barrels of crude oil daily from the Bakken production region of North Dakota to an existing pipeline in Patoka, Ill.


November 29, 2016

Standing Rock is the civil rights issue of our time – let's act accordingly

By Bill McKibben
The Guardian

The US government sent helpers to protect integration efforts in the 1960s. Why not do more to protect the Dakota Pipeline protesters today?

When John Doar died in 2014, Barack Obama, who’d already awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom, called him “one of America’s bravest lawyers”. Without his courage and perseverance, the president said, “Michelle and I might not be where we are today”.

Doar was the federal lawyer sent south by the Kennedy and Johnson justice departments to keep an eye on the explosive centers of the civil rights movement. Those White Houses didn’t do enough – but at least they kept watch on things. Doar escorted James Meredith to classes at the
University of Mississippi, and helped calm crowds at the murder of Medgar Evers; he rescued activists from mobs during the Freedom Rides. A figure of history, in other words.

But history is just news from a while ago. Right now, we’re seeing a scene as explosive as the Freedom Rides or the bus boycotts play out in real time on the high plains of the Dakotas. And it’s a scene that desperately needs some modern-day John Doars to keep it from getting any worse.

Representatives of more 200 Indian nations have gathered at the Standing Rock Sioux reservation in an effort to prevent construction of an oil pipeline that threatens the tribe’s water supply, not to mention the planet’s climate. It’s a remarkable encampment, perhaps the greatest show of indigenous unity in the continent’s history. If Trump Tower represents all that’s dark and greedy in America right now, Standing Rock is by contrast the moral center of the nation.

But the peaceful protests have been met with repression that closely resembles the work of Bull Connor, as the pipeline company’s hired guards began by using dogs, and the local sheriff escalated from pepper spray to using water guns in freezing weather, “sonic cannons” and rubber bullets.

Clearly the authorities are attempting, a la Birmingham or Selma, to goad nonviolent protesters into some kind of reaction that will justify more repression. They’ve used every trick in the book, including arresting reporters and shutting down camera drones to make sure they’re operating in the dark.

So far the Native Americans and their allies have held back despite the most intense provocation – for instance, the pipeline company bulldozed sacred sites and ancient graves the day after the tribe handed a list of their locations to a federal court. Now the Army Corps of Engineers has announced that they’re revoking the permit under which everyone is camped at the confluence of the Cannonball and Missouri rivers as of 5 December.

So far the Obama administration has announced at least a short delay before granting the final pipeline permits. But that delay could expire at any moment, adding to the tension in the camp. Clearly the administration needs to do much more: the entire pipeline, which underwent an “antiquated” approval process, needs a full environmental review – by a body other than the project’s own developer.

Yes, Donald Trump will likely overturn the delay. But Trump’s not president yet; this tragedy is playing out in the Obama years.

Along with other actions, the federal government needs to grant the Sioux tribal government request to send justice department observers — contemporary John Doars — to the Standing Rock reservation to ensure that the local authorities don’t keep escalating the situation. They should do it because it’s right, and also because it’s a historic moment.

November 29, 2016

Dakota Access Pipeline ‘akin to cultural genocide’ - DAPL activist to RT (VIDEO)

RT.com

Linda Black Elk, who has treated Standing Rock protesters injured by law enforcement, describes the Dakota Access Pipeline as “cultural genocide” in an RT interview. Vowing not to give up the effort, she calls on President Barack Obama to stand with them.

“The pipeline is actually akin to cultural genocide. They are destroying important plants, eatable and medical plants. They are destroying future restoration sites for plants that the Lakota people use every day in their culture, whether it is for food, medicine or ceremony,” Black Elk of the Standing Rock Medic and Healer Council said.

For months, protesters have been asking the White House to stop the construction of the 1,200-mile pipeline and order a full environmental impact statement. Almost a year ago, Obama used his power to veto legislation authorizing construction of the Keystone XL oil pipeline after a final environmental impact statement by the State Department.

“We really ask Obama to demand a full environmental impact statement so that these issues can be addressed properly,” she told RT’s Ed Schultz. “If we are speaking just simply environmental, there are number of endangered species right within the path of the pipeline that are never even mentioned.”

The DAPL protesters celebrated a significant victory as the US Army Corps of Engineers backtracked their pledge to forcibly remove Standing Rock activists from a disputed protest camp by December 5.

“It was indeed a very emotional announcement,” Black Elk said, adding that she thinks that “a lot of people took it in stride.”

“This is really nothing new to us. As someone else said this has been happening for 500 years, so we are not surprised,” she said.

North Dakota Governor Jack Dalrymple (R) has issued an executive order for protesters to evacuate a campsite near the Dakota Access Pipeline over concerns of harsh winter weather and lack of sanitation.

However, even the coming winter storm and heavy snow are not going to shake protesters’ resolve, Black Elk vowed.

“We are standing with people of the Standing Rock. We are not leaving, we will stand with them,” she said.
November 29, 2016

17 Former Native American Obama Administration Officials Send President DAPL Message

By Levi Rickert
Native News Online

WASHINGTON – Seventeen Native Americans from different tribal backgrounds and who served at various capacities within the Obama administration have called on President Barack Obama to take immediate action to block or reroute the Dakota Access Pipeline.

The collective group sent President Obama yesterday to ask him to stand up for Standing Rock.

“America has just completed a contentious presidential election; and, soon, President-elect Donald Trump will be responsible to uphold the sacred trust relationship between the United States and Indian tribes. But, that moral and legal responsibility still rests with your Administration,” says part of the letter.

The following individuals, who were part of the Obama administration signed the letter: Kim Teehee (Cherokee), former White House Senior Policy Advisor; Charles Galbraith (Navajo), former Associate Director of White House on Native American Affairs Intergovernmental Affairs and Public Engagement; Raina Thiele (Dena’ina Athabascan & Yup’ik), former Associate Director of White House on Native American Affairs Intergovernmental Affairs and Public Engagement; Donald “Del” Laverdure (Crow Nation), former Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Interior – Indian Affairs; Lillian A. Sparks (Rosebud Sioux Tribe/Oglala Sioux Tribe), former Commissioner of the Administration for Native Americans; Pilar Thomas (Pascua Yaqui Tribe), former Deputy Solicitor of the Interior; Janie Simms Hipp (Chickasaw Nation), former Senior Advisor for Tribal Relations to the Secretary of Agriculture; Paul Tsosie (Navajo Nation), former Chief of Staff to the Assistant to the Secretary of the Interior – Indian Affairs; Wizipan Little Elk (Rosebud Sioux Tribe), former Senior Policy Advisor to the Assistant to the Secretary of the Interior – Indian Affairs; Sarah Harris (Mohegan Tribe), former Chief of Staff to the Assistant Assistant Secretary of the Interior – Indian Affairs; Nicole Willis (Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation), former Special Assistant for Indian Affairs at the U.S. Department of Labor; Bryan Newland (Bay Mills Indian Community – Ojibwe), former Senior Policy Advisor to the Assistant to the Secretary of the Interior – Indian Affairs; Rodina Cave (Quechua), former Senior Policy Advisor to the Assistant to the Secretary of the Interior – Indian Affairs; Elizabeth Hensley (Inupiaq), former Senior Policy Advisor to the Assistant to the Secretary of the Interior – Indian Affairs; Burton Warrington (Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation/Menominee Indian Tribe), former Counselor to the Assistant to the Secretary of the Interior – Indian Affairs; Michalyn Steele (Seneca Nation), former Counselor to the Assistant to the Secretary of the Interior –

Watch the video:

Indian Affairs; and Dion Killsback (Northern Cheyenne), former Counselor to the Assistant Secretary of the Interior – Indian Affairs.

Click to view letter

About The Author

Levi Rickert, a tribal citizen of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation, is the publisher and editor of Native News Online. Previously, he served as editor of the Native News Network. He is a resident of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

http://nativenewsonline.net/currents/17-former-native-american-obama-administration-officials-send-president-dapl-message/

November 29, 2016

The Many Ways to Help Standing Rock

Even if you can’t show up at the wintry encampments, you can join water protectors in other ways: from calling the North Dakota governor to breaking up with your bank.

By Sarah van Gelder
YES! Magazine

The timing couldn’t have been more awful.

The day after Thanksgiving, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers told the Standing Rock Sioux tribe that people camped at the Oceti Sakowin Camp would be considered trespassers on that federally managed land after Dec. 5. With thousands of people, it is the largest of the water protectors’ camps. Next came the snow, which is piling up across the camp as I write. North Dakota Gov. Jack Dalrymple ordered an immediate evacuation allegedly out of concern for the well-being of water protectors in the “harsh winter weather.”

“He gave a whole list of concerns … that we’re going to freeze to death and the solution is to cut off emergency services,” said Tara Houska, an organizer from Honor The Earth, at a news conference on Monday. The move evokes the “collective memory of Native people being pushed off land,” she added. “In 2016, that history is still happening.”

“The most dangerous thing we can do is force well-situated campers from their shelters and into the cold,” Standing Rock Tribal Chairman Dave Archambault II said in a statement. “If the true concern is for public safety than [sic] the Governor should clear the blockade, and the county law enforcement should cease all use of flash grenades, high-pressure water cannons in freezing temperatures, dog kennels for temporary human jails, and any harmful weaponry against human beings.”
An elder at the camp, Faith Spotted Eagle said, “It is so transparent that what they are doing is to protect the pipeline.”

What will you do? With these rapidly unfolding events at Standing Rock, what can you do? How can you support this indigenous-led nonviolent movement?

“We call on all people of conscience, from all Nations, to join the encampments and stand with us by Dec. 5 as we put our bodies in front of the machines,” says a statement from the Sacred Stone Camp, which also states: “We call on allies across the world to take action EVERY DAY starting December 1.”

How can we do something every day, as requested, to make a difference where we are?

When I interviewed Chairman Archambault earlier this month, he said this: “Follow your heart. If you want to be here, you’re welcome. If you want to pray from home, pray from home. If you want to send a letter of support, send a letter of support. If you want to send a contribution, send a contribution.”

Here are some things to consider as you decide what to do.

Show up

If you’re a veteran, consider joining the 2,000-plus veterans who are “self-deploying” to Standing Rock on December 4–7 to stand nonviolently with the water protectors.

People with skills like nurses and other medics are needed. Check with Oceti Sakowin camp or teams already on the ground to find out. And there is always work to do in the kitchen or chopping wood. People are also needed at the front lines to maintain a nonviolent presence; they risk arrest and attack from law enforcement’s “sub-lethal” weapons.

If you do go to Standing Rock, remember that this is a movement founded in nonviolence and prayer. Respect the indigenous leaders there and follow their requests about how to behave at camp in keeping with Lakota traditions.

But before you pack up your car and head out, consider the snow. You will need to be well-provisioned to avoid becoming a burden on the community there. Many of the organizers have asked White allies to consider whether the money spent to get yourself to Standing Rock would be better spent donating to the cause: covering mounting legal costs, provisioning an indigenous water protector, or helping the Standing Rock tribe pay for costs.

You may be a more effective advocate where you are, where you have easy access to elected officials and banks; at Standing Rock, access to phone and internet service is limited.

Break up with your bank

Banks are feeling the heat from the protests and from their own customers. One bank, DNB of Norway, has responded to pressure by divesting from Energy Transfer, the parent company of the Dakota Access pipeline. DNB is reportedly reconsidering more than $400 million in credit. The ING Bank of the Netherlands, which prides itself on its sustainability and human rights stance, posted a statement on its website expressing concern about excessive police force at Standing Rock.
If your bank is one of the direct investors in DAPL or one of the investors in its parent companies, Energy Transfer and Sunoco Logistics, ask them to withdraw support. Tell them you plan to close your account if their support continues. Photograph yourself cutting up your credit card, or share your letter on your social media networks. I posted my break-up letter to Chase Bank on my blog and on Facebook and Twitter—and was surprised by how many responded that they planned to do the same.

If you have a retirement fund or mutual fund, find out if it is invested in Energy Transfer Partners, Energy Transfer Equity, or Sunoco Logistics—or any of the 38 banks offering credit to the pipeline project. If so, let those investment companies know you object and tell them you would like the fund to divest or you’ll shift your account to a socially responsible investment fund.

Consider planning or participating in a nonviolent protest at a bank branch or headquarters. Sacred Stone Camp has posted a map to find bank branches near you and recommends actions beginning Dec. 1.

Banks are risk-averse, and this pipeline project has become quite risky because of public relations problems as well as the oil price bust and reduction of oil extraction in North Dakota. Banks and investors may be hoping for an excuse to back out. Your action could help tip the balance.

Call off the police

There are now dozens of law enforcement agencies participating in the multistate force that is shooting water cannons, pepper spraying, and shooting various “sub-lethal” weapons at unarmed water protectors.

If your police force is there, call them home. Although the police staffing is changing constantly, some sheriffs have responded to public pressure by refusing to send deputies. Contact elected officials, write to local papers and local blogs, and contact local media to object to law enforcement involvement at Standing Rock.

Complain to government decision-makers

Angry about the evacuation order? Talk to the person who made it:

**North Dakota Gov. Jack Dalrymple**

600 East Boulevard Avenue  
Bismarck, ND 58505-0100  

Phone: 701-328-2200  
Email: [http://www.governor.nd.gov/contact-us](http://www.governor.nd.gov/contact-us)  
[https://www.facebook.com/NDGovDalrymple](https://www.facebook.com/NDGovDalrymple)  
[https://twitter.com/NDGovDalrymple](https://twitter.com/NDGovDalrymple)
“Where is President Obama and why does he remain silent on this issue?” Kandi Mossett of the Indigenous Environmental Network asked in a statement responding to the governor’s evacuation order.

When he visited Standing Rock on June 13, 2014, President Obama said this: “I promised when I ran to be a president … who honors our sacred trust, and who respects your sovereignty, and upholds treaty obligations, and who works with you in a spirit of true partnership, in mutual respect, to give our children the future that they deserve.”

Remind President Obama of this and of the way his decision on DAPL will shape his legacy.

**President Barack Obama**

Phone: 202-456-1111  
Email: president@whitehouse.gov

You can also call Denis McDonough, White House chief of staff, at 202-456-3182.

Contact the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which is charged with making a decision about the permit to drill under the Missouri River. Tell them to reject the permit and order a full environmental impact statement.

**The commanding general is Lt. Gen Todd T. Semonite**

441 G Street NW  
Washington, DC 20314-1000  
Phone: 202-761-0011

https://www.facebook.com/USACEHQ/

**Jo-Ellen Darcy, assistant secretary of Army (Civil Works)**

108 Army Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20310  
joellen.darcy@us.army.mil  
(703) 697-8986

**Col. John W. Henderson**

Commander  
Omaha District, USACE  
1616 Capitol Ave., Ste. 9000  
Omaha, NE 68102  
Phone: 888-835-5971 or 402-995-2229
The Department of Justice should be concerned about the use of excessive force against the water protectors and alleged violations of civil and human rights.

**Attorney General Loretta Lynch**

United States Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20530  
Tracy.Toulou2@usdoj.gov

You can also call the Department of Justice Office of Community Relations, which offers mediation to communities facing racial and religious confrontations.

Federal office: (202) 305-2935  
Regional office: (303) 844-2973  
Askcrs@usdoj.gov,  
https://www.justice.gov/crs/what-we-do

Remember to speak politely and factually about your concerns. If you send an email, copy it to your social media account to inspire your friends, and to local media.

**Call out the media**

If media outlets are ignoring or distorting the news, call them on it. Send open letters and share them on social media. Ask major media to fully and factually cover the unfolding drama at Standing Rock.

**Donate**

There are many opportunities to donate cash or supplies. Here are three that I can vouch for:

• The Standing Rock tribe, which is using the funds for their substantial legal expenses and for providing facilities for the camp: standwithstandingrock.net/donate/.

• Oceti Sakowin Camp is the largest of the water protector camps, the closest to the front lines, and is now facing evacuation: ocetisakowincamp.org/donate.

• The Water Protector Legal Collective (formerly the Red Owl Collective), which has been providing legal support to the many who have been arrested at Standing Rock: https://fundrazr.com/campaigns/11B5z8

You can also support some of the key indigenous organizations that are leading this movement nationwide and worldwide:

• The Indigenous Environmental Network: http://www.ienearth.org/?s=donate.

• Honor the Earth: http://www.honorearth.org/.

You can raise more money for these and others by organizing support events and fundraisers in your community. Invite people who are curious about the issues as well as people who are
already passionately engaged. Make it a celebratory or prayerful event in whatever way makes sense to your community.

Other options

**Phone a bank.** Invite friends over to make phone calls and send emails. It’s more fun together.

**Resist extraction where you live.** Join work to stop the pipelines, coal trains, fracking, and export terminals in your city or state and include #NoDAPL and #WaterisLife messages to remind people of the link to Standing Rock.

**Resist but also renew.** Remember that as you resist the dystopian world of extraction, Donald Trump, violence, and racism, you can also use your activism to build up the world you want. Do your own “just transition,” switching to clean energy, conserving, protecting the water, rebuilding the soil—while including everyone in a way of life that is more soul-satisfying and joy-filled.

Resilience for the days ahead

When I talk to people at Standing Rock, I feel the trauma and pain but also the resolve. The young people speak of being the Seventh Generation, the ones that were prayed for. And many speak of the suffering they are prepared to endure to ensure the next generations has the clean water they will need to survive. That resolve is helped by the support that continues to flow in from more than 300 tribes nationwide, and from hundreds of thousands of allies, including next week’s arrival of thousands of veterans.

“We are not standing down,” said LaDonna Brave Bull Allard, founder of Sacred Stone Camp, at a news conference on Monday in response to the governor’s evacuation order. “We are in our home, we are strong, and we have prayer.”

*Sarah van Gelder wrote this article for YES! Magazine. Sarah is co-founder and editor at large of YES! Magazine. Her new book, “The Revolution Where You Live: Stories from a 12,000-Mile Journey Through a New America” is available now from YES! Read her blog and more about her road trip and book here and follow her on Twitter @sarahvangelder.*


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**November 29, 2016**

Sioux anti-pipeline action sustained by Native American spirituality

By Emily McFarlan Miller, Religion News Service
National Catholic Reporter

**STANDING ROCK SIOUX RESERVATION, N.D.** - In the Sioux creation narrative, water was one of the first beings the Creator made, and it became a major part of the people's religious ceremonies.
Now the Lakota prayer over water has become a rallying cry in the mass action to prevent the construction of a crude oil pipeline near this reservation.

“Mni wiconi’ — we see that as a cry to rally people, and it’s not just here anymore, it’s worldwide. You see the hashtag, #MniWiconi. That means ‘water is life,’” Standing Rock Sioux tribal councilman Dana Yellow Fat said.

For the better part of a year, the hills along the Cannonball River near Cannon Ball, N.D., have been transformed into a small city, the epicenter of what is in essence a spiritual movement to protect that water from the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline.

The largest encampment is called Oceti Sakowin, which means "Seven Council Fires," the name of the Great Sioux Nation.

As many as 8,000 people have camped there under the flags of 280 Native American nations. They include representatives of all seven bands of the Sioux Nation, reportedly gathered for the first time since defeating Lt. Col. George A. Custer 140 years ago at Little Bighorn.

As the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe waits for a final court decision, expected in January, on its challenge to the Dakota Access pipeline project — which it fears will endanger the tribe's water supply and sacred grounds — many at the camps say they feel called to be there.

Camp coordinator Phyllis Young said the movement has been sustained to a large extent by the tribe’s spiritual beliefs, which had been banned for more than a half-century until the 1978 American Indian Religious Freedom Act.

“Now we’re adults in our spirituality," Young said. "We took back, and we evolved, so now we exercise our freedom of religion in our way, which is peaceful in prayer.”

Everything with prayer

The $3.8 billion Dakota Access pipeline would run nearly 1,200 miles from North Dakota to Illinois.

Statistically, pipelines are the safest way to transport oil, according to Dakota Access. But the pipeline also would snake through Sioux sacred sites and run beneath the Missouri River upstream from the reservation and its water supply.

All but the river crossing now is complete in North Dakota, according to Dakota Access.

But the project has been in limbo since President Obama’s administration put a temporary hold on it in September, and, earlier this month, Obama told Now This News, “Right now, the Army Corps is examining whether there are ways to reroute this pipeline.”

The movement started April 1 with a nearly 30-mile prayer ride on horseback from Sitting Bull’s burial site in Fort Yates, N.D., to the Sacred Stone Camp site.
That prayer has continued in the camps since then: communal prayers in the morning and evening and at mealtimes; prayers in vigils and in songs; prayers while sage, cedar and tobacco are burned. And the Standing Rock Sioux have invited all people to join.

“As long as there’s prayer, we don’t judge. ... Our belief is there’s one Creator, and he taught all the nations of this world a way to pray in their own way,” Yellow Fat said.

The Oceti Sakowin camp in North Dakota, one of three camps gathered in opposition to the Dakota Access pipeline project. Activists are calling the gathering "the largest, most diverse tribal action in at least a century," @nytimes reported. #dapl

‘It doesn’t matter how you pray’

On a rainy Thursday morning in mid-September, Morgan MacIver stood circled in prayer with a half-dozen other women around a fire in the Oceti Sakowin Camp, mud splashed up to her knees and pressed into a dot on her forehead.

MacIver, who is not Native American, had come three weeks earlier after hearing about the gathering on Facebook. And while she said she doesn’t find her spirituality “from any other place than within myself,” she said she could feel the power of prayer in the camp.

“It doesn’t matter how you pray or who you pray to, all of that love in our hearts is the same, and the power of prayer is really the most powerful thing,” she said.

On Nov. 3, more than 500 clergy joined in those prayers, singing hymns while marching to a bridge that has been the site of clashes between demonstrators — who prefer to be called "water protectors" — and police, according to reports.

For the Rev. David Wilson — the Choctaw superintendent of the United Methodist Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference, who had visited the camps early on — Christian Scripture is filled not just with commands to “act justly,” but also with water imagery: Moses striking a rock to bring forth water for his people; Jesus’ words about “rivers of living water”; the waters of baptism.

“I think about those images,” Wilson said. “We can’t live without water, and for Christian people, the image of water in relation to Jesus is very important. It’s in our hymnody, Scriptures, liturgy — everything we do.”

A delegation from the American Humanists Association also visited the camp this month.

Prayer walk

In the days before construction came to a stop in early September, Dakota Access crews had removed topsoil across two miles of land, which several campers likened to desecrating and destroying a church.
For four days, until medicine men had held a ceremony and declared it finished, hundreds of demonstrators had marched in a prayer walk from Oceti Sakowin to the site of the digging. They sang and carried the flags of the nations they represented, stopping to knot prayer ties to fences along the site and leave tobacco offerings.

Tensions have escalated in the past few weeks, most notably Sunday (Nov. 20) when the Morton County Sheriff’s Department turned fire hoses, tear gas and rubber bullets on a group of about 400 demonstrators reportedly trying to remove a police blockade cutting off the camp from a nearby highway in freezing temperatures.

And a final decision on the Dakota Access pipeline isn't likely to come until after a hearing in early 2017. But tribal councilman Yellow Fat said the Standing Rock Sioux's action will end in the same way it began.

“We began this with prayer, and we look at this whole movement as a ceremony. It began with prayers before we left, and in the end, it will close with prayers,” he said.

“We’re fighting the pipeline with prayer.”

South Dakota
Dakota Access Pipeline protests
Standing Rock Indian Reservation
Sioux


November 29, 2016

Veterans to Serve as ‘Human Shields’ for Dakota Pipeline Protesters

By Christopher Mele
New York Times

As many as 2,000 veterans planned to gather next week at the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in North Dakota to serve as “human shields” for protesters who have for months clashed with the police over the construction of an oil pipeline, organizers said.

The effort, called Veterans Stand for Standing Rock, is planned as a nonviolent intervention to defend the demonstrators from what the group calls “assault and intimidation at the hands of the militarized police force.”

The veterans’ plan coincides with an announcement on Tuesday by law enforcement officials that they may begin imposing fines to block supplies from entering the main protest camp after a
mandatory evacuation order from the governor. Officials had warned earlier of a physical blockade, but the governor’s office later backed away from that, Reuters said.

Protesters have vowed to stay put. Opponents of the 1,170-mile Dakota Access Pipeline have gathered for months at the Oceti Sakowin camp, about 40 miles south of Bismarck. The Standing Rock Sioux and other Native American tribes fear the pipeline could pollute the Missouri River and harm sacred cultural lands and tribal burial grounds.

The evacuation order issued on Monday by Gov. Jack Dalrymple cited “anticipated harsh weather conditions.” It came before a winter storm dumped about six inches of snow and brought strong winds to the area on Monday, making roads “roads nearly impassable at the camp sites,” according to Doualy Xaykaothao of Minnesota Public Radio, who was cited by NPR.

The governor’s statement said, “Any person who chooses to enter, re-enter or stay in the evacuation does so at their own risk.” The order was effective immediately and was to remain in place indefinitely.

The veterans’ effort will also run up against a plan by the Army Corps of Engineers to close off access to the protesters’ campsite and create a “free speech zone.” Federal officials said anyone found on the land after Dec. 5 could be charged with trespassing.

“Yeah, good luck with that,” Michael A. Wood Jr., a founder of the veterans’ event, said in an interview.

Mr. Wood, who served in the Marine Corps, organized the event with Wesley Clark Jr., a screenwriter, activist and son of Wesley K. Clark, the retired Army general and onetime supreme allied commander in Europe for NATO.

Mr. Wood said he had initially hoped to attract about 500 veterans; he had to stop sign-ups when they reached 2,000. He said volunteers are from diverse backgrounds: “We have every age, we have every war.”

An online fund-raiser has drawn over $570,000 in pledges as of Tuesday afternoon to pay for food, transportation and supplies for the veterans’ “muster,” which was planned for Dec. 4-7.

One veteran, Loreal Black Shawl, said the mission to support the protesters was intensely personal.

Ms. Black Shawl, 39, of Rio Rancho, N.M., is a descendant of two Native American tribes, the Oglala Lakota and Northern Arapaho. She served in the Army for nearly eight years, finishing her career as a sergeant.

“O.K., are you going to treat us veterans who have served our country in the same way as you have those water protectors?” Ms. Black Shawl said, referring to the protesters. “We’re not there to create chaos. We are there because we are tired of seeing the water protectors being treated as non-humans.”
The authorities have used rubber bullets, pepper spray and water cannons against demonstrators, hundreds of whom have been injured, according to protest organizers. The clashes have been highly contentious, with the police and demonstrators leveling accusations of violence at each other.

Some protesters filed a class-action lawsuit on Monday against the Morton County police and others, alleging excessive use of force and seeking a court injunction to prevent the authorities from using rubber bullets, explosive grenades and water cannons, according to The Atlantic. One woman was injured and in danger of losing her arm after an explosion at the protest site this month.

By spotlighting issues such as the use of force by the police, national energy policies and the treatment of Native Americans, the protests have garnered national headlines and widespread attention on social media.

Ms. Black Shawl acknowledged that the operation could prove problematic because the veterans and the police both have military or tactical training. She said she had a “huge, huge nervousness and anxiety” about possibly being injured and what could happen to other veterans.

An “operations order” for participants outlined the logistics with military precision and language, referring to opposing forces, friendly forces and supporting units. Organizers encouraged attendees to wear their old uniforms.

Mr. Wood said they were discouraging active-duty service members from attending. “There’s no reason for them to get into hot water,” he said.

In a break from military custom, the gathering will have a “chain of responsibility” instead of a chain of command, he said. There are no ranks, and participants will refer to one another by their given names.

Mr. Wood said the early stages of the event will be logistical: setting up tents and organizing food supplies. The first arrivals are expected on Wednesday.

The premise is for the veterans to be fully self-sufficient, he said. “There will be civilian and tribe members watching us from behind but nobody supporting us,” the operations order said. “We are the cavalry.”

A spokesman for the North Dakota State Highway Patrol, Lt. Thomas O. Iverson, said in an email on Monday, “Law enforcement is aware of the upcoming event planned for December 4-7.” He added, “If the group remains lawful and refrains from blocking the roadway, there will be no issues.”

Some officials expressed the hope that the demonstrators would move on.
“The well-being and property of ranchers, farmers and everyone else living in the region should not be threatened by protesters who are willing to commit acts of violence,” Senator John Hoeven, a Republican, said in a statement on Friday, The Associated Press reported.

The chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, Dave Archambault II, said in an email that he had no concerns that tensions could escalate.

“Everyone that comes knows our intent — to remain in peace and prayer,” he said.


November 29, 2016

The twisted economics of the Dakota Access Pipeline

By Jonathan Thompson
High Country News

As the weather gets colder, the fight over the Dakota Access Pipeline is heating up, in rather ugly ways. Just days before Thanksgiving, law enforcement officers tried to blast the protesters away with water cannons in 25-degree weather and employed other “less than lethal,” though still harmful, dispersal methods. One protester may lose her arm as a result of injuries suffered during the violence. And to top it off, the Army Corps of Engineers plans to close one of the camps of "water protectors" next week, which may embolden law enforcement to take a more forceful approach.

High Country News has reported what’s at stake for the Standing Rock Sioux tribal members and their allies trying to stop or re-route the project: Tribal sovereignty, water, environmental justice, holy lands, treaty-rights and antiquities. Add to that the prospect of more carbon spewing into the atmosphere, and one can see why activists are risking so much to stand in the pipeline’s way.

Less clear is what the $3.78 billion, 1,172-mile-long crude oil pipeline offers in return if and when construction is completed and it goes into operation. Energy Transfer Partners, the project’s main proponent, says that the pipeline will offer jobs, economic relief to a struggling region and, by spurring production of North Dakota Crude, it will take the U.S. closer to the lofty ideal of energy independence.

Construction on the pipeline is about 85 percent complete and it has, indeed, put people to work. Yet it is not clear how many new jobs have been created since the jobs are spread out over 1,000 miles. Rural towns along the pipeline’s corridor have reported a boost in hotel and campground occupancy rates as the contractors move through. That, in turn, generates sales and lodging tax revenues for the local governments. The boost, however, won't last. In a few months, when (and if) construction is complete, the workers and their spending money will depart. The finished pipeline will require just 40 permanent maintenance and operational jobs along its entire stretch.
Once oil is flowing, property tax revenues — an estimated total of $55 million annually — will kick in. While it’s a big chunk of change, the impacts will be diffused, shared by four states. North and South Dakota are expected to receive about $13 million each, divided between several counties, a drop in the budget bucket (Colorado generates nearly $20 million per month from taxes and fees on marijuana). That said, it might be enough to buy the county sheriffs some more military gear from the Pentagon in order to squelch the next pipeline protest. It will not, however, cover the costs of such squelching: The current law enforcement effort has reportedly cost $15 million so far.

The fact is, pipelines, like transmission lines, don't have a major economic impact except when they’re built. They otherwise go mostly unnoticed until they spill, burst or explode.

The bigger-picture impact, whether on climate change or energy independence, is more difficult to suss out. Both proponents and opponents seem to be working on the “build-it-and-they’ll-fill-it” premise. That is, if you expand pipeline capacity for North Dakota crude, it will encourage more oil drilling and thus more oil production. If more domestic oil is produced, the logic goes, then we have less need to import foreign oil and we achieve greater energy independence. The flip side to that is, the more oil we drill, the more we consume, resulting in greater carbon emissions. It's summed up in this nifty formula:

• More Pipeline Capacity —→ More Oil Production —→ More Energy Independence and Carbon Emissions

This formula, however, holds only if lack of pipeline capacity is a major hindrance to oil development. It's not. We can move crude oil not only through pipelines, but also with trucks, trains and tankers. Oil’s mobility (along with its relative fungibility) help make it a global commodity in a way that natural gas, for example, is not. The lack of pipeline capacity is not a major limiting factor in oil development and production; when the North Dakota boom was on, no one opted out of drilling because of lack of transportation options. In fact, prices were so high, no one opted out of drilling at all.

Just as the biggest driver of oil development is a high oil price, the biggest hindrance, particularly for expensive-to-drill North Dakota crude, is a low oil price. That relationship has been on display in North Dakota, and across the West, for the last decade: Oil prices went up, thanks to burgeoning demand in China and the developing world, so drilling intensified and production went bananas. Oil prices crashed as China's economic growth slowed, the drill rigs were stored away and production has decreased.

Very few wells have been “shut-in” or plugged up. Most of the already-drilled wells continue to produce, but at lower and lower rates, a phenomenon known as the “decline curve.” Wells that produced 220 barrels per day when they were drilled in 2005, for example, now only produce about 20 barrels per day.

Plug these critical factors -- global supply vs. demand and price -- into the aforementioned formula and the outcome becomes far murkier. No longer does more pipeline capacity directly lead to more production; it must first either raise the price of oil, or induce demand. The latter's
not going to happen. A pipeline across the upper Midwest will not inspire the masses in China to buy cars and drive them all over the country. It will not affect global demand.

So how about price? The Dakota Access Pipeline is expected to carry half-a-million barrels of oil per day to refineries and market hubs in Illinois. Moving a barrel of oil on the pipeline is expected to cost about $8, compared to approximately $15 for shipping it via rail. That is, if the producer would have received $34 per barrel for rail-shipped oil, it will get $41 per barrel for Dakota Access Pipeline-shipped oil.

This $7-per-barrel bonus could add up to hundreds of thousands of dollars in additional revenue for the producer over the well’s life, and could certainly keep wells from being shut-in. Yet it's doubtful that it's enough to push the producer to dust off the rigs and start drilling again. It costs anywhere from $5 million to $15 million to drill a well in North Dakota's Bakken formation. After the last bust, producers and their investors are unlikely to fork out that kind of cash until oil prices go up considerably and stay there, which will only happen if Saudi Arabia commits to a long-term slash in its production. Unless new wells are drilled in North Dakota at a furious rate, production will continue to decrease, thanks to the decline curve.

There is one other way the pipeline could impact oil prices, at least for the oil flowing through the line. Some oil customers reportedly entered into contracts with producers prior to construction to buy DAPL oil at or near 2014 prices. If those contracts remain in place despite the protest-caused construction delay, it could, theoretically, push producers to drill a few more wells to produce enough oil to fetch the higher price. But probably not. It's more likely that those producers will simply divert oil now shipped by rail to the pipeline, thus increasing profit without increasing production.

If, somehow, the pipeline were able to increase oil production, then we'd still have another variable to plug into our equation. I'll call it the T. Greg Merrion factor, for the New Mexico oil executive who told me about it: “Nothing helps low prices like low prices, and nothing hurts high prices like high prices.” That is, the increased supply delivered by the pipeline (without a consequent increase in demand) would increase the amount of oil supply on a market where demand can’t keep up with supply. The glut grows. Prices slide further downward. There's even less drilling. Production slides. The cycle continues.

• The Dakota Access Pipeline, on its own, is not likely to result in increased production of North Dakota Crude, because More Pipeline Capacity ≠ More Demand;

• Therefore the pipeline will not create more oilfield jobs or result in higher severance tax revenues to North Dakota;

• If there is any uptick in production thanks to the pipeline, it won't be enough to put a dent in the 5.2 million barrels of oil the U.S. continues to import each and every day;

• Since the pipeline won't push more production, it also will not result in more consumption. Therefore, it will not directly lead to a significant increase in carbon emissions.
Which is to say, the pipeline will be neither the economic boon, nor the climate bane, it's been made out to be. Nor will it get the U.S. any closer to energy independence.

Why, then, is Energy Transfer Partners so intent on building this thing? The equation that answers that one is far simpler. If the pipeline indeed carries 470,000 barrels per day, at a rate of $8 per barrel, the company should gross about $1.37 billion per year. Operating costs are low (remember, there are just 40 employees running this thing), so it shouldn’t take long to recoup the capital costs. That leaves a lot for the investors, like Energy Transfer Partners' billionaire CEO Kelcy Warren, or reputed billionaire and President-elect Donald Trump.

Yes, Trump is invested in the companies behind the pipeline, though the amount of his stake decreased substantially between 2015 and 2016. Meanwhile, Warren donated more than $100,000 to Trump’s campaign, clearly hoping he would remove federal obstacles to the pipeline.

These numbers are worth considering when you see the images of the “water protectors” getting pummeled with water cannons, rubber bullets and tear gas. They’re not being attacked in the name of jobs, the economy or energy independence. They’re being attacked in the name of profit.

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November 29, 2016

Pope Francis: “Never been such a clear need for science” to protect the planet

By Brady Dennis
Washington Post

Pope Francis this week implored world leaders not to postpone the implementation of global environmental pacts, an appeal that appeared aimed at President-elect Donald Trump’s vows to end the United States’ leading role in combating climate change.

The pope’s remarks came during a gathering of scientists at the Vatican, at which he said there has “never been such a clear need for science” to guide human actions to safeguard the future of the planet.

“‘It is worth noting that international politics has reacted weakly — albeit with some praiseworthy exceptions — regarding the concrete will to seek the common good and universal goods, and the ease with which well-founded scientific opinion about the state of our planet is disregarded,” the pontiff said, according to a translation provided by the Vatican. He added that the “‘distraction’ or delay” in implementing global agreements on the environment demonstrates
how politics have become submissive “to a technology and an economy which seek profit above all else.”

Trump, who is set to become one of the only world leaders to question the notion of global warming, has vowed to “cancel” U.S. participation in the international climate accord signed last year in Paris, in which countries pledged to cut carbon dioxide emissions sharply in coming years. In addition, Trump has called for rolling back pollution regulations on the oil, gas and coal industries and shrinking the role of the Environmental Protection Agency.

This week’s comments echoed an encyclical regarding the environment issued by Francis last year in which he wrote about the “urgent challenge to protect our common home” and argued that “the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor.”

At the Vatican, Francis praised the work of scientists, who he said must remain independent and emerge as leaders in fighting for climate action.

“I would say that it falls to scientists, who work free of political, economic or ideological interests, to develop a cultural model which can face the crisis of climatic change and its social consequences,” he said, “so that the vast potential of productivity will not be reserved for only a few.”


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**November 30, 2016**

John Grim on Standing Rock: ‘This is Not Only About Water, It’s All About Water’

By Timothy Brown
Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies

*In recent days, the conflict has escalated over construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. John Grim, a senior lecturer and research scholar at F&ES and an expert in Native American religions, discusses the historical, cultural, and spiritual significance of the Standing Rock demonstrations for Native people.*

Since last April, members of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and their allies — who collectively call themselves “water protectors” — have been camped on the windswept prairie of North Dakota in an effort to block construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) across the Missouri River some 40 miles south of Bismarck.

But in recent days, the conflict over DAPL has escalated. There are reports of rubber bullets, tear gas, and water cannons being used against the demonstrators, and last Friday, North Dakota Gov. Jack Dalrymple issued an executive order calling for the mandatory evacuation of the Oceti
Sakowin camp. Native activists have responded that they have no intention of leaving the camps, except on their own terms. Indeed, this week a group of 2,000 military veterans announced they’re traveling to Standing Rock this coming weekend to serve as human shields for the water protectors.

Construction of the nearly $3.7 billion, 1,172-mile pipeline, which would transport oil from the Bakken shale in northwestern North Dakota to distribution centers in southern Illinois, is nearly complete. But organizers are hoping that their actions will convince the government to block the pipeline from crossing the Missouri River, the primary drinking water source for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. Protests against the pipeline’s construction have occurred at several points, especially where the pipeline crosses rivers in Iowa and Illinois. But none has garnered as much support and attention as Standing Rock.

Standing Rock is the largest Native gathering in the U.S. since the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876. Hundreds of American Indian tribes and indigenous allies from as far away as Scandinavia and New Zealand have come to support the water protectors. And despite the current sub-zero temperatures and blizzard-like conditions, activists say there are still upwards of 5000 people at the camps.

For greater cultural and historical context of the water protections at Standing Rock, we sat down with John Grim, senior lecturer and senior research scholar at F&ES. Grim, a native of North Dakota, is an expert in indigenous religions and culture. He has written and lectured extensively on indigenous religions, and has been adopted into a Crow family and participated in many Crow ceremonies. Grim, along with his wife, Mary Evelyn Tucker, coordinates the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology. He is the author of “The Shaman: Patterns of Religious Healing Among the Ojibway Indians” (University of Oklahoma Press, 1983), and series editor of “World Religions and Ecology,” from Harvard Divinity School's Center for the Study of World Religions. In that series he edited “Indigenous Traditions and Ecology: The Interbeing of Cosmology and Community” (Harvard, 2001).

This interview was edited for length and clarity.

I’ve read that up to 300 American Indian tribes — and the Sami in Scandinavia and Maori from New Zealand — have come to North Dakota in support of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. How significant is this action for indigenous people?

JOHN GRIM: It’s important for me to say that no one speaks for Hunkpapa people. They are capable of presenting themselves. There are people out there from the community who are speaking about these issues and who realize how important it is to bring this information out and to let people know what they’re doing and why they’re doing it.

This action has called across Indian country and has brought up participants from so many different peoples to stand in solidarity. We know that kind of pan-Indian movement from the powwow highway and the Native American Church, but this is at a scale that’s remarkable.

I think part of what this is about is an education for the larger American public. [The Hunkpapa]
have been interacting with the dominant U.S. government for 150 years. They know the stakes are loaded against them. They’ve won a few, but lost more than they’ve won. And they’re still willing to stand up in this regard.

What is the role of religion for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe?

GRIM: For the Hunkpapa, the use of the word “religion” here is really problematic. I find the word “lifeway” much more helpful. Lifeways are the values that pervade the way they interact with the world, with one another. I think that we, namely dominant America, are not entirely out of that interpretive schema either. Our values pervade the way we are interacting with Hunkpapa people now. The Lakota concept is to stand in reciprocity, to deal with the need to bring to bear one’s values on the world. Among the Lakota, there’s this phrase: Mitakuye oyasin. When you enter into a ceremony, especially a sweat lodge, it’s entirely appropriate for a Lakota person to say Mitakuye oyasin, as if to say, “Everything I have experienced in this ceremonial moment is in relationship to all my relatives.” This is not a scientific ecology; Mary Evelyn Tucker and I tend to use this phrase “religious ecology” to try and get at what’s going on when people have a sense of humans embedded in a world in which they stand in relationship to this world in a certain way.

It’s really interesting to think about what is culture in relation to values — they’re one and the same. That’s what I’m trying to get at with “lifeway,” the idea that this is not simply an environmental resistance movement.

You’ve spoken about a Doctrine of Discovery. Describe that term and what it has meant for Native peoples?

GRIM: These Lakota people experienced during the mid-nineteenth century the full brunt of the then-developed United States of America. The experience of the Lakota and of all Native people was of a state moving across this continent strongly influenced by a Doctrine of Discovery that had been formulated in the European nations in conjunction with Christianity. The whole idea of the Doctrine of Discovery is that religious ideas are embedded in domination, and the deeper argument for domination is based on the Christian sense of subjugation to conversion. The Doctrine of Discovery ignored the religion and culture of indigenous peoples of the Americas. It thus provided the justification to subjugate others if you convert them because Christianity provides the path to heaven. You’re actually saving people who otherwise would be lost and you’re doing them a huge salvific favor by Christianizing. And of course, they become members of the state by being baptized. In this country we moved to separate church and state, but those values are totally embedded when we talk about eminent domain. We’ve shifted the Christian ethos of baptism into citizenship in the marketplace of ideas that’s the United States of America.
**What does a sacred site mean coming from the Native perspective, and what's really at risk of being damaged with this pipeline?**

GRIM: I think sacred sites are just so amazingly different among Native peoples. There are sites there that are understood to be spiritual presences where people don’t go, and there are other places that people go in order to communicate with those spiritual beings. And there may be occasions where they overlap, or they flip. I think this is where the people themselves, their understanding, is crucial. And we need to respect that understanding.

**I’ve seen photographs of water protectors on horseback or wearing feathers in their hair. Why are these traditional symbols important to the Lakota?**

GRIM: That type of background question is very helpful because perceptions of Native peoples are largely by virtue of acting in a grade school Thanksgiving play, or a Hollywood movie that generally situates Native people in the period of the Indian Wars of the 1860s-70s. The image is really crucial and complex and historically fraught. But this image issue also works against Native people in the sense that if they show signs of adapting to cars, watches, iPads, going to Yale Law School, then they have, by that very action, left behind their so-called tradition. The DAPL action, by using the word “protector,” is affirming traditional values of these Lakota people who call themselves Hunkpapa.

People who come to the Sacred Stone Camp are given nonviolence training. Even the use of that word casts it in a Gandhian, or at least contemporary, resistance. This nonviolent training has to be anchored into Lakota traditional values. These Hunkpapa people have a profound cultural history in which they have thought about themselves in relationship to where they’ve lived for thousands of years and they have come up with an intricate and complex set of stories, set of values, set of ways of acting in the world that they find successful and communicates not only who they are as people, but a way of life that nurtures them and the life community… I think that’s also what we’re seeing with all the feathers, headdresses — the efforts to foreground what we call “culture.”

I can hear people saying, “These people are standing in the way of progress. They’re frozen in history; they don’t understand what the world is about.” My response is that I think they understand the world better than dominant America does. We can’t live without water; we can’t survive. And so this action in support of water is all the more important. It’s what this School is about.

**For somebody who’s unfamiliar with treaty rights, how important are these treaties for the Lakota?**

GRIM: The U.S. Constitution mentions Indians and gives to the United States government the right to negotiate with these foreign nations. We inherited from the British and the French a process of interacting with Native nations as nations. Those treaties are not all the same. Some treaty makers were quite savvy and some were not. The Great Sioux Reservation included the
Black Hills. Gold was discovered there in 1875 and in rushed illegal gold prospectors. The military came in to protect the miners, and with a larger agenda of, again, domination. The Indian Claims Commission, in an effort “to do right” concerning all broken treaties, determined that the Black Hills were illegally taken and offered $15 million in compensation, but the Lakota refused the money, which has been held in escrow and is now worth over a billion dollars. This is their Holy Land. What we did is alienate these people from their Vatican and carved Mount Rushmore in the midst of their Holy Land.

The Lakota word for white person is wasi’chu — (which means) fat-takers; they take the best parts and they want everything.

*I recently read quote by a Hunkpapa person who said, “They’ve been waiting since Custer to do this.” What do you think he meant by this statement?*

**GRIM:** Someone who was not sympathetic would say it’s paranoia. But I don’t think it’s paranoia; I think it’s a real assessment. If you think about 1887 — all the bison are killed. There are remnant herds in Canada and individual animals were brought to the U.S. and that’s the basis of the herds here today. There are Northern Plains people — Crow, Blackfeet, that used these buffalo. We now know that documents show very clearly that the military encouraged and actively assisted in the aimless, pointless, and wasteful killing of buffalo. So that sense of “out to get us” can be traced back very early. In 1887, the Dawes Act allotted 160 acres to every man, woman, and child on the Indian reservation. And when that land was allotted, all the so-called “extraneous land” was then open for non-Native settlement. So, no “prior and informed consent” by Native people at all. They knew about it, but what voice did they have in the United States Congress?

There was the Dawes Act, and the forced removal of Native people from the eastern U.S., and boarding schools where children were taken away from their families to be educated out of their languages, out of their cultural identity. In the 1950s, there was an effort by the Truman administration and the first Eisenhower administration to terminate all treaties. Treaty-making ended in the 1870s by a formal act of Congress, but the 1950s termination policy was an effort by the United States to get out from under — that’s how the metaphors were put — the burden of these wards of the state; to cut off any kind of promised payment that many people had never received. These ongoing activities are behind the statement: “They’re out to get us.” It’s not as if it was just one thing.

**How do treaty violations play into the legal argument that the Tribe has to fight the pipeline?**

**GRIM:** The pipeline itself is not on the reservation but the fact that the pipeline would go under the Missouri River is what is threatening to the water on the reservation should there be any leaks. Many scientists have expressed concerns about leaks that have occurred across the country. So the threat that is perceived to the water and that these individuals are standing up to protect is embedded in the treaty right that Native people have to foster life and sustain life on the reservation. And outsiders, or the United States government, shall not take activities that
endanger their lives. So in the treaties are written these stipulations that Native nations, like the Pueblos in the Southwest, have used to successfully sue cities, like Albuquerque, about water quality for rivers that flow through Albuquerque and then onto the reservation.

**In essence, Standing Rock is really about a lot more than protecting water.**

GRIM: I find an interesting way to get at it is, “This is not only about water; it’s all about water.” We’re in this incredible contradictory episode where, when you talk about water, well that’s romantic imaging, or it’s religion, or it’s a symbol; and it’s also about reality, pragmatic reality. It’s not only about water; it’s about a whole range of issues. But it’s about water.

**Standing with Standing Rock**

Earlier this month, F&ES students organized a public conversation about DAPL and drafted a [Statement of Support](http://environment.yale.edu/news/article/john-grim-on-standing-rock/) for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. This statement, signed by over 300 concerned students, alumni, faculty, and staff, was delivered to the Tribal Chairman Dave Archambault II last Thursday. Students continue to organize, fundraise, and travel to North Dakota to protest the pipeline’s construction, which, if completed, has huge implications for climate change and other environmental issues.


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**December 2016**

Pope Francis, the Interfaith Movement and Global Environmental Ethics

By Kusumita P. Pedersen


[http://fore.yale.edu/files/Pedersen_Pope_Francis.pdf](http://fore.yale.edu/files/Pedersen_Pope_Francis.pdf)

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**December 2016**

The Priest in the Trees

Feral faith in the age of climate change

By Fred Bahnson

Harper's Magazine
On the last Sunday in September 2015, the Reverend Stephen Blackmer stopped beside the stand of beech stumps where he had once performed the chain-saw Eucharist. He was leading a dozen or so members of the Church of the Woods on a contemplative walk. With his plaid shirt, decades-old custom Limmer hiking boots, and graying beard sans mustache, Blackmer didn’t look the part of a religious professional. He skipped nimbly over roots and rocks, turning around to laugh or make a point. His talk swept from exuberant to pensive to crass; at times he sounded like the theologically astute priest he was, at others like a mischievous wood sprite. It was the first anniversary of the church, located several miles from the town of Canterbury, New Hampshire. A full lunar eclipse was expected that night, and Blackmer would be turning sixty in a few days. To celebrate these auspicious events, church members had planned a full day of activities: meditation walks, trail work, a Eucharist service, a bonfire, and, for those who still had energy, an eclipse-viewing party. When the group paused along the ridge of beech stumps it was midmorning; they were only halfway through a circumnavigation of the church’s 106 acres, which Blackmer described as a “labyrinth on a grand scale.” There was no church building, just woods. If you wanted to see the sanctuary, you had to hike.

The contemplative trek would take around three hours, but no one was complaining. Long walks in the woods are conducive to stories. Like the story of the chain-saw Eucharist. On a sunny, twelve-degree day in January, Blackmer had hiked into the Church of the Woods pulling a sled full of trail-clearing gear: axe, chain saw, oil, and gas. He wanted to clear new meditation trails, which mostly involved sawing up blowdowns and saplings. When he came to the ridge, he found it choked by the stand of young beech, so he cranked up his Jonsered and began felling trees. Over the next hour, Blackmer had a growing feeling that something wasn’t right. He hit the kill switch. Shit, he thought, I have utterly sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. It wasn’t cutting trees that bothered him. It was that he had been taking life after life “and had been utterly oblivious to the enormity of that act.” He had failed to remember that trees, even scrubby little saplings, are worthy of reverence.

Blackmer’s sled also held what he called his prayer kit: Communion bread, a water bottle full of wine, the Book of Common Prayer. Kneeling in the sawdust and snow beside one of the widest stumps, he spread out the elements and set up an altar. That day’s lectionary reading was from Isaiah. He read aloud:

I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you. . . . Shout, O depths of the earth! Break forth into singing, O mountains, O forest, and every tree in it.

He prayed the prayer of confession, consecrated the bread and wine, and offered them to his fellow congregants — the trees — before partaking himself.

Until nine years ago, Blackmer was an agnostic. After training as a forest ecologist at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies in the early Eighties, he founded and directed two successful conservation organizations in New England: the Northern Forest Center, where he managed a staff of more than a dozen and an annual budget of roughly $1.2 million, and the Northern Forest Alliance, a coalition of advocacy groups that succeeded in both shifting the local logging industry to more sustainable types of forestry and conserving millions of acres of land.
across Vermont, New Hampshire, New York, and Maine. At the time, Blackmer had no use for religion, especially for Chris-chens, as he called them — “those angry, antiscience, antienvironmental bigots.” He was fond of the bumper sticker that read BORN PRETTY GOOD THE FIRST TIME.

Then, on a flight to Dublin in 2007, Blackmer heard the Voice. As the plane descended he looked down and saw a church steeple. Priest, the Voice said. You are to be a priest. He had heard the Voice before, and would hear it many times over the next year, but on the plane it would be the clearest. It was a sound he heard in his heart rather than his ears, but a voice nonetheless, and what it said was not a suggestion like, Have you ever considered a career in the ministry? You have the right set of skills. It was a statement of fact. You are to be a priest.

There is more to Blackmer’s story, both before and after that flight over Dublin, but perhaps the most immediately startling thing is this: not until he arrived at divinity school, two years later, did he actually read the Bible. As a child, he’d read a few chapters of Genesis and heard the Christmas story. When he finally sat down and read the story to which he had committed his life, he was struck by how often the biblical writers engaged the very subject he’d spent his career studying: the land. The places in which the narrative occurred — mountaintops, hillsides, lakeshores, gardens — were not just stages on which the human story played out; they were actors in the story itself. He came to love the Psalms, and the frequency with which the psalmist used metaphors of nature, especially trees. In Psalm 92 the righteous ones “flourish like the palm tree. They are planted in the house of the Lord. In old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap.” In other Psalms the trees of the fields clap their hands, shout for joy. When humans sing praises, they do the same thing. Nature is not inert. It was a revelatory idea.

In the Gospels, Blackmer found the most intriguing examples of divine encounter in nature. He kept noticing what he called “throwaway lines”: after Jesus had “dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray” (Matthew), or “He would withdraw to deserted places and pray” (Luke). Sometimes Jesus went to a garden. Or a lakeshore. Or the Judean desert. The location varied, but the pattern was evident throughout the Gospels. Jesus went to the temple “to teach and to raise a ruckus,” but when he needed to pray Jesus fled to the countryside, to places unmediated by both temples and the religious authorities that governed them. Blackmer came to believe that direct contact with God is religion’s raison d’être, but one that’s often lacking in church. Of course one can experience God in a building, he concedes. But for at least some people, especially at this moment in history, there needs to be a practice of going into the wilderness to pray. And if one lives in New England, the obvious place to do that is the woods.

Though affiliated with the Episcopal Church (the denomination in which Blackmer was ordained), the Church of the Woods is tied to a nonprofit organization called Kairos Earth, which Blackmer founded in 2013. In biblical Greek, kairos refers to an opportune or critical moment when God acts. In its first year, nearly nine hundred people attended services at the Church of the Woods. Of its thirty or so regular members, nearly half have graduate degrees. Many are medical professionals whose finely tuned diagnostic skills tell them that our planet is running a fever. As Wendy Weiger, a Harvard-trained research physician, told me, “Climate change is the biggest public-health crisis humanity has ever faced.”
Blackmer believes our ecological crises have precipitated a *kairos* moment. He sees a parallel with the Book of Jeremiah, in which the prophet describes a sense of impending doom as the Babylonians laid siege to Jerusalem in 587 B.C. “I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void,” Jeremiah wrote, “and to the heavens, and they had no light.” On reading the book in seminary, Blackmer’s first thought had been, *He’s talking about climate change.*

As Western Christianity undergoes its identity crisis — a reformation or a slow implosion, depending on your leaning — a small but determined number of people like Blackmer are urging the church to seek God in the literal wilderness. They are calling for carbon repentance, but their credo is more nuanced than just slapping a fresh coat of Christian morality onto secular environmental politics; the Sierra Club at prayer this is not. At the Church of the Woods there is no action plan, no hive of online activity promising the earth’s salvation if only you *click here.* There is rather a summons, an invitation to carry contemplative practice and ritual enactment into one’s local ecosystem and thereby rediscover the awe and wonder that Moses experienced before the burning bush. By wooing Christianity back to its feral beginnings, Blackmer believes, we can finally confront the long trajectory of our ecological sin, and perhaps begin to change direction.

It was late morning at the stand of beech stumps. One of Blackmer’s congregants, an eighty-year-old retired physician named Peter Hope, had brought his GPS to map the network of trails. If he wanted to cover the distance before nightfall, he would have to get going. He set out walking, and the meditative trekkers followed in silence.

For the first-time visitor, there isn’t much to distinguish the Church of the Woods from any other forested part of southern New Hampshire. The previous landowner had cut the most desirable timber, leaving behind the stunted or misshapen trees in a practice known as high-grading. Though the forests are diminished, the bone structure of this land presents a walker with intriguing features: oddly shaped ridges, dells, and vernal pools. Something more than trees or squirrels resides there. The land tells a story about itself that, like braille, becomes legible only if you feel your way across the signs.

Growing on a dead hemlock stump was a dinner-plate-size reishi, a polypore known in China and Japan as the “mushroom of immortality” for its alleged immune-boosting properties. “Hey,” Weiger shouted up to Blackmer, “maybe we should apply for a religious exemption to eat psychedelic mushrooms. Like a peyote ceremony!”

Weiger is not the sort who goes in for hallucinogens. After earning her M.D. and Ph.D., she worked for a number of years as a researcher at Harvard Medical School’s Osher Center for Integrative Medicine. Ever since living in Nepal in her twenties she had been drawn to meditation, and in 2003 she moved to Maine to pursue a more contemplative life. Once a month she drives the six hours down to the Church of the Woods.

Many of the church’s members are either former or current environmental activists. Wendy helped form a nonprofit that fought a protracted legal battle against Plum Creek Timber, a lumber company that wanted to develop 400,000 acres of Maine woods. Sue Moore, who is sixty-nine, was arrested alongside the environmentalist Bill McKibben at a rally against the
Keystone XL pipeline in 2011. Blackmer fully supports lobbying and activism, but a common theme at the Church of the Woods is that activism isn’t enough. When he considered the difference between Christians protesting a coal plant and secular activists doing the same, he thought, *There has to be something different in liturgy,* giving the word its full extent of meaning in the New Testament Greek. *Leitourgia* gets translated as “worship or service to God,” but it can also be parsed as “the work of the people.”

This need to find a new path through liturgy and contemplation was true both of seasoned activists like Blackmer and Weiger and of younger members such as Rachel Field, who had looked at the available activist responses to the ecological crisis — secular or faith-based — and found them wanting. For two years Field worked for the Center for the Environment and Society at Washington College, in Maryland, where she and her co-workers banded 14,000 migratory birds a year. She loved the work, but found it difficult to speak about faith in that science-heavy environment, so eventually she enrolled at Yale Divinity School and began attending the Church of the Woods. She was considering returning to Maryland to start a Church of the Marshes, where she might offer up the bread and wine among the egrets and plovers on the tidal flats of the Chesapeake Bay.

The forest trekkers arrived at the Altar, a small clearing where the church holds its services. The altar itself is a white-pine stump festooned with British soldier moss. Field counted the rings and reported that the tree was more than ninety years old, ten years older than Peter Hope. This would have been one of the trees felled when the land was high-graded. Someone placed Indian cucumber on the altar as an offering, another set down the reishi.

The Altar is the spiritual, if not the actual, center of the church. It is here that Blackmer offers Communion to his peripatetic flock. There is a worry among certain mainline Christians that once you start dabbling in nature, you’re on the slippery slope to paganism, but Blackmer is no druid. He found years ago that the vague, earth-based spirituality he’d lived with for most of his life wasn’t enough, and now considers himself a solid Trinitarian. But that makes it sound as though his conversion was the result of a spiritual shopping trip, when the better comparison would be a boxing match.

In 2005, Blackmer had been an environmental activist for nearly three decades, and he found he couldn’t sustain it any longer. Despite some successes, the overwhelming reality of climate change made him feel as though the movement was fighting a losing battle. A friend invited him to a vision quest in California’s Inyo Mountains, a land of extremes. To the west stands the highest point in the contiguous United States, to the east lies the lowest. Just north grows the oldest tree on earth. An auspicious place to receive a vision.

Blackmer’s quest ended in a solitary four-day fast on a mountain, a time full of signs and portents. On his last night, in total darkness, he attempted a walk around the mountain. With no trail to follow, he came to a place where he had to choose between two routes. He asked aloud for a sign, and in the next moment saw a shooting star. “I mean, it was just silly,” Blackmer laughed. He followed the star. Groping along in the dark, he stumbled into a deep gully and ran into a rock wall. There appeared to be no way out. “I was scared out of my freaking mind,” he said. Feeling his way along the wall, he eventually came to a lone piñon pine silhouetted against
a black sky, a tree he had seen before. He knew how to get back. In the small hours of the morning, having walked many miles, he finally stumbled into camp. Blackmer believed that “something utterly profound” had happened in his life, but he had no clue what it meant. He lived with that uncertainty for the next two years and fell deep into depression. That’s when he first heard the Voice.

While meditating one morning, Blackmer heard: *The meaning of your journey around the mountain is that you must turn around and go the other way. You must follow the same path, but going in the other direction. This is a spiritual path.* He tried Buddhism, which seemed like a logical fit — he had been meditating for several years — but it just didn’t take. Sometimes he woke in the night with horrible anxiety, and the Voice would say, *Rest in the crucible of anxiety. It will destroy you. It will transform you.* Then came the flight into Dublin.

In the months following the trip, Blackmer resigned from the Northern Forest Center and began to experience visions. He dreamed he saw a triptych of the face of Christ, except the face in all three panels was his own. At the urging of a friend, a fellow forester and conservationist who also happened to be the only priest he knew, Blackmer visited the Society of St. John the Evangelist, an Episcopal monastery in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He spent three days in utter silence and anonymity, feeling like a foreigner. He saw the monks bowing before they passed the altar and thought, *I can’t bow to this altar, to the white linens and shiny goblets.* Then he realized that the monks were simply bowing to the mystery. That he could do. On the third day, Blackmer heard the brothers chanting the Psalms and something inside him broke. Their beauty, the chanted words from three thousand years ago, shattered his defenses. He wept. He took the Eucharist for the first time in his life. But when he returned home, he still resisted attending church.

Two months later, Blackmer and his wife were visiting his brother in the cloud forest of Costa Rica. One morning, meditating alone in the house, he heard a knock at the window. He checked and found nothing there. When he sat down he heard a second knock, this time a bit louder. Again, nothing. This happened a third time, and then he heard the Voice say, *Let me in.*

*Oh shit,* he thought, *it’s Jesus.* It was Easter Sunday.

Like Flannery O’Connor’s Hazel Motes, who saw Jesus “move from tree to tree in the back of his mind, a wild ragged figure,” Blackmer was a man haunted by God. He often laughed at the absurdity of it all. Vision quests, voices, shooting stars? Knocks at the window? He was amazed too at his former self, at the strength of his resistance — “heels dug in every inch of the way.” He wasn’t going to church.

But after so many rounds in the ring, he surrendered. He began reading about Christianity. He wanted to find out “if there was room for me in this hierarchical, antiquated, rule-bound, anti-environmental faith. Do they have people like me?” The more he read, the more he was convinced the answer was yes. One year after his flight to Dublin, he was baptized. Four years later, in 2012, he finished divinity school. And a few months after that, he purchased, with help from a generous donor, the 106 acres that would become the Church of the Woods.
Following a long respite at the Altar, the trekkers took a fork in the trail. Blackmer stooped, picked a handful of wintergreen leaves from the understory, and passed them around for people to chew. They nibbled, walked, and prayed.

After crossing a century-old dam now overgrown with vegetation, the group paused to observe a young hemlock. Its trunk stood atop an upright protrusion of roots, making the tree appear as if it had legs.

“Maybe it’s an Ent,” Field said, referring to Tolkien’s mythical tree creatures. “Stand back, it might start walking.”

They climbed another small rise. “It’s an odd piece of land,” Blackmer said, “like this funny little ridge we’re standing on. But that’s fitting, because we’re an odd bunch of people.”

One of the church’s members goes by the name of Sister Athanasius. An Episcopal nun in California since the Seventies, she chose her name when she read about the bishop of Alexandria who was consecrated, in A.D. 326, only after vigorous resistance. Sister Athanasius had not wanted to become a nun, which explains in part why she and Blackmer get along so well. In addition to their attempts at dodging the divine, both speak their minds freely, often employing a most impious lexicon. More important, they are equally smitten with the natural world. On Blackmer’s coffee table he keeps a book-length poem given to him by Sister Athanasius: W. S. Merwin’s *Unchopping a Tree*. The poem is an imaginative exercise in arboreal reconstruction. The narrator issues directives: how to rig the tackle for lifting the bole, how to reattach the broken trunk, how to glue back every splinter, chip, and piece of moss, until reaching this final, devastating line: “Everything is going to have to be put back.”

The walkers came to the boundary of the church’s property. Someone wondered aloud why the border still had barbed wire, and Sister Athanasius chuckled and said, “So the prisoners won’t escape.” Suddenly everyone grew quiet. The Canterbury-pilgrim mood of jocular ease had given way to something else.

Before them lay a bowl-shaped depression, a tiny clearing encircling a dried-up vernal pool. Moose tracks led into the muddy water. A gentle slope rose up and away into thick woods. Fallen hemlock and paper birch lay crisscrossed over the clearing like giant pickup sticks. Trees that had fallen and were not going to be put back. The air was still. Smells of pine, rotting duff, the dank musk of humus. An ordinary forest clearing, and yet more than ordinary. The kind of place that you might chance upon as a child while wandering in the woods, though if you were asked why you tarried there, or for how long, you couldn’t say.

Soon Blackmer would send them off for a period of individual contemplation, but before he spoke there was a long, palpable hush. Sister Athanasius slowly raised her palms to her temples. She gazed at the pools, the bits of sunlight dappling the glade, the dark mystery of the woods beyond. “Ahh, Jesus,” she said softly, “just look at that.”

The story of Moses and the burning bush is one of Blackmer’s favorite texts. In Exodus, the Lord appears to Moses in a bush that burns but is not consumed. “Remove the sandals from your feet,
for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” Blackmer often takes that literally, celebrating the Eucharist barefoot. Confronted with the threat of climate change, he believes, we must think of all ground as holy ground. Without such a recognition, there is no way out of our ecological woes. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the burning bush prefigures Mary the Theotokos, the God-bearer, who carried the Incarnate God inside her womb but remained unharmed. Blackmer thinks of the Earth itself as a theotokos. Would we clear-cut a forest or demolish a mountain or frack a field that bore the living God?

When the little band of pilgrims returned to the parking lot, Blackmer pointed out the church’s sole “relic,” a bent and broken aluminum ladder leaning against a tree, left behind by the loggers when they high-graded the place. It reminds him of Jacob’s Ladder, another favorite biblical story. Genesis recounts how Jacob lay down upon a stone to sleep and dreamed of a ladder that joined heaven and earth. Upon awakening, he exclaimed, “Surely the Lord is in this place — and I did not know it!”

A common theme in Blackmer’s conversations is that we’ve lost the face-to-face connection with God, the awesome, fearsome encounter that so often occurs in wild settings. Art, music, a beautiful sanctuary — all of those can be soul-stirring. But they can also obfuscate one’s connection to God. Nature strips away the human intermediary.

A hawk cried overhead. Peter Hope ambled over with trekking poles, backpack, and GPS unit. It was midday now, and after walking the property that morning with the contemplative hikers, he was off to take readings on the remaining trails. By the end of the day this eighty-year-old man would have trod seven or eight miles over this land of mounds and folds. Traversing the theotokos, praying with his feet.

Since the Industrial Revolution we’ve scaled up development to a tremendous degree, and even under the most optimistic scenarios we’re going to be dealing with climate change for centuries to come. Blackmer foresees a time of unimaginable suffering and grief. His faith tells him that on the far side of that suffering stands the tree of life, symbol of the resurrected world in which humans will have found their place in creation. There is no path to that perfect world, however, that does not involve hardship and death. “We’re not going to skate through this one untouched,” he told me.

Blackmer’s understanding of the Second Coming is not one in which Jesus returns to fix everything. His eschatology leans toward the Eastern Orthodox understanding of theosis: deification. Through the slow work of prayer and contemplation, a person becomes more like Christ, and Christ comes to dwell more completely within that person. “That’s the way Jesus becomes present,” he said. “It’s through our transformation. A spiritual death. And a rebirth.” What must die is the materialist worldview in which physical reality is viewed as just stuff: “The world is not merely physical matter we can manipulate any damn way we please.” The result of that outlook is not just a spiritual death but a real, grisly, on-the-cross kind of death. “We are erecting that cross even now,” he said.

Rachel Field also knows that humans are causing climate change and that the results will be catastrophic, but she wonders about our ability to stop it. She sees the human role as that of a
witness, a provider of hospice care for the ecosystems we’ve damaged. Coming to a place that has been as heavily logged as the Church of the Woods is one way she can say to the land, *Yes, we did this. And we are not going to leave you.* She knows that this earth, this cosmos, will endure and will transform into something beautiful even if humans can’t survive on it. “Every time a creature is lost, a piece of God’s glory is leaving,” she said. “But it’s bigger than us.”

Though Blackmer freely acknowledges that some are called to activism and that such work is sorely needed, he himself has left that role behind, at least in the usual sense. Activism, in his view, too often becomes a mask for hiding undigested fear or grief. His work now is to change people’s consciousness rather than to affect policy.

Hearing Blackmer talk, one might wonder how a shift in consciousness can save a beleaguered planet. As environmentalist groups like 350.org have shown, it takes direct political action to achieve tangible results, such as the protests that managed to stop the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline, or Blackmer’s own efforts to preserve millions of acres of New England forest. It’s difficult to imagine achieving those results through an internal shift, but for Blackmer, the emphasis is on the activist’s starting place. The question is not whether one takes action, it is from what heart and mind one does so.

The church’s *leitourgia,* the work of the people, is first the work of prayer. The once-thriving Canterbury Shaker Village lies only a few miles east of the Church of the Woods, and for Blackmer the proximity is no coincidence. The Shakers’ connection to the land and their devotion to prayer left a spiritual presence that is still palpable. “Prayer transforms places as well as people,” Blackmer said. “You can actually feel it when you walk into a place where people have prayed for long periods of time. It is as if prayer has changed the molecular structure of a place.” Thus altered, the woods become a kind of inner sanctum in which we are faced with what the theologian Rudolf Otto called the *mysterium tremendum.* “The semi-darkness . . . of a lofty forest glade,” he wrote in *The Idea of the Holy,* “has always spoken eloquently to the soul, and builders of temples, mosques, and churches have made full use of it.”

The work of the people also includes the Eucharist. For Blackmer, “It is the act of taking into ourselves the body of He who died and went through death and came back.” Death and grief transmuted into love. That expression of hope in the midst of death is where, for Blackmer, the Christian faith comes into its own. “All of us go down to the dust,” he said, quoting the burial rite from the Book of Common Prayer, “yet even at the grave we make our song: Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.” Death does not have the final word. Joy does. “That’s what Jesus was all about,” Blackmer said. “And if we forget that, then shit — we’re a sad, pitiful bunch. And we’re sure as hell not leading anybody to the Promised Land.” When he presides over the liturgy each Sunday, this priest in the trees, a sixty-one-year-old man still green and full of sap, carefully spreads his elements across the white-pine stump. He offers the first morsels of bread and the last sip of wine to the earth.

That Sunday evening, when most of the crowd had left the Church of the Woods, a dozen members huddled by the campfire and watched the lunar eclipse. The moon rose red above the trees. A super blood moon. It faded as it climbed, its face slowly adumbrated by Earth’s shadow.
The fading orb seemed to glow from within. Just before the full eclipse, a luminous plane of light appeared on the moon’s edge. For a brief moment it grew bright. Then it was gone.

Though it began in a desert, Christianity is a faith haunted by trees. The story opens in a garden, in the center of which grows the tree of life. Ignoring that tree, Adam and Eve make for another — from which they pluck our downfall. The primal couple are hungry for knowledge and knowledge they get, but they soon find it’s a mixed bag. They eat the fruit and “the eyes of both were opened,” and lo, the beginnings of human consciousness. Of the tree of life we hear no more until the final chapter of Revelation, where we find it growing on either side of the river in the center of the New Jerusalem. Its leaves “are for the healing of the nations.” Between the Bible’s arboreal bookends stands a third tree, the cross at the center of the Christian story. Given their narrative prominence, the biblical drama stands or falls with the trees.

“The bulk of a tree,” writes Tom Wessels in *Reading the Forested Landscape*, “is mostly dead wood.” Other than the leaves, the only living part is the cambium, a group of cells a few millimeters thick that resides under the bark. The trunk may be lifeless and inert, but it’s still needed to provide structure for the growing cambium. The bulk of Christianity — whether it be ancient cathedrals or big-box megachurches — is mostly dead wood. The cambium of faith resides unseen, just beneath the surface, ever growing in new directions.

I had already been thinking a great deal about trees long before my visit with Reverend Blackmer. I’m surrounded by them, for one thing. Transylvania County, where I live, is aptly named. *Trans*, “through”; *sylvan*, “woods.” Trees thrive in this part of western North Carolina because it is a temperate rainforest, containing some of the greatest biodiversity in North America. The landscape here feels maternal. It swaddles you in its gentle folds, its swaying branches, the humid air of so much life breathing in, breathing out. Here I’ve taken to pondering the symbiosis between these forests and the Christian faith I attempt, and often fail, to practice.

That August, in Transylvania County, it began to rain. Right on through to Christmas, it rained: fifty-nine inches in all. Normally we average around seventy inches of rain a year. As the atmosphere warms, increasing the air’s capacity to hold moisture, that amount will surely increase. It already has. Two years earlier we had received 112 inches of rain. A few days after Christmas, on a day like so many other days that December — rainy, seventy-five degrees — I followed my three young sons down to the creek that runs near our house. The boys had been building a mud dam and were eager to show me their handiwork. On a winter’s day when we should have been sledding, my sons and I squatted beside a creek in the warm drizzle and played in the mud.

There is a word, coined by the Australian philosopher Glenn Albrecht, that describes the longing for your own home, not homesickness from a distance but the yearning you feel for a place in which you still live but which has become unrecognizably damaged by some extractive industry: “solastalgia.” We now speak of “shifting baselines” and the “new normal” — euphemisms that soften the blow of climate catastrophe. Perhaps this is our work now, to abandon the false linguistic signposts that lead us astray — “stopping” or “fixing” climate change — and instead find new words and stories and metaphors that will help us confront what is already upon us, and devote ourselves to what we might yet save. “The powerful metaphor,” Bill McKibben has
written, “will be more useful than the cleanest engine.” As the Church of the Woods has discovered, such metaphors are already waiting in our religious traditions, claiming a power far deeper than the utilitarian “ecosystem services” or even the language of democracy. The question climate change poses is how to confront the enemy within, and that is not primarily a technological or political question; it is a religious one.

We have high-graded the world, taking the best and leaving the scrubby undergrowth. We now find ourselves chastened by the scope of our destructive power, yet still hungry for the awe and wonder we once felt before creation’s magnitude. The Babylonian invaders are approaching, and we have no choice but to face them — which is to say, face ourselves.

The search for God in a sacred grove recalls the Israelites in their tabernacle in the Sinai desert. That search cannot be contained by human walls, despite the solidity that Chartres or Notre Dame or the National Cathedral might suggest. If Christianity is going to confront climate change, perhaps it needs to rewild itself, go feral. What the faith has to offer first is not protest or activism, though it may lead there. It is leitourgia. The work of the people. And the work of the people now is this: Keep the land holy. Keep the carbon in the ground. Renounce the myth that this earth is a random assortment of bio-geophysical processes that can be prodded, manipulated, fracked, or drilled for our own purposes, however nefarious or benign. Approach with awe the theotokos, the bush that burns but is not consumed. Perhaps we begin by taking off our shoes.

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http://harpers.org/archive/2016/12/the-priest-in-the-trees/

December 2, 2016

Iran 'serious' about fighting climate change

Al Jazeera

Iran's Vice President Masoumeh Ebtekar discusses her country's latest environmental policies.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PM3B1JTYuw&feature=youtu.be

December 2, 2016

Standing Rock: A Change of Heart

By Charles Eisenstein
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I am told by Native American friends active at Standing Rock that the elders are counseling the Water Protectors to undertake each action prayerfully and to stay off the warpath.

I would like to explain why this advice is not only spiritually sound, but politically astute as well. I would like to translate it into a strategic compass for anyone who is going to Standing Rock or supporting the Water Protectors from afar. I also want to explain how it contains a recipe for the kind of miracles that we need for the healing of our planet.

Let me explain what I mean here by a miracle. A miracle is a kind of a gift, an occurrence that is beyond our capacity to make happen. It is something beyond the normal rules of cause and effect as we have understood them. These include the rules of political and economic power that determine what is practical and “realistic.”

The halting of the Dakota Access Pipeline would be miraculous simply because of the array of powerful ruling interests that are committed to building it. Not only has Energy Transfer Partners (ETP) already spent hundreds of millions of dollars on the pipeline, but a who’s-who of global banks has committed over $10 billion in lines of credit to ETP and other involved entities. Those banks, many of whom are facing financial stress of their own, are counting on the profits from the loans at a time when credit-worthy capital investments are hard to come by. Finally, the United States government has (in its estimation) a geopolitical interest in increasing domestic oil production to reduce the economic power of Russia and the Middle East. To hope to halt the pipeline in the face of such powers is in a certain sense unrealistic.

Since when has a Native American people successfully thwarted large-scale plans of mining, energy, or agricultural interests? The usual pattern has been one land grab after another in which resistance is at best futile and at worst suicidal. But at Standing Rock, something different is possible. It is not because the Dakota Sioux have finally acquired more guns or money than the pro-pipeline forces. It is because we are ready collectively for a change of heart.

That would be good news not only for the people directly affected by the pipeline, because the whole planet is in need of similar miracles on a massive scale. Around the globe, powerful interests are destroying ecosystems and landscapes, clearcutting, stripmining, and polluting. In every case, the destroyers have more military, political, and financial power than those who would resist them. If this planet and our civilization is to heal, it cannot be through winning a contest of force. When you have a chance of overcoming an opponent by force, then fighting is a reasonable option. Absent that condition, victory has to come some other way: through the exercise of a kind of power that makes guns, money, and other kinds of coercive force irrelevant. Dare we call this power love?

Before I go on, let me convey to you my awareness of the injustice and suffering that the Water Protectors have endured. Many of my friends have witnessed them first hand. These things must be taken into account if a philosophy of nonviolence is to be relevant to the real world. Furthermore, I am no armchair philosopher in this matter. My own son is at Standing Rock as I write this.
OK then, love. I am not talking about shying away from confrontation and hoping to stop the pipeline by loving the police or energy company from afar. Standing Rock has given us many examples of love in action that offer a hint of the miracle that is possible.

I heard about one incident in which a group of Water Protectors went to talk to the sheriff about the water cannons. They were met with police who began to arrest them. While she was being arrested, one of the women began to sing a native prayer song; soon all of the group were singing in unison. The police began to look uncomfortable; one of them even started crying. Another, who looked like he might have Native heritage himself, started to take off his helmet but thought better of it when he saw none of the other police were doing it.

There have been many actions like this at Standing Rock involving song, prayer, ceremony, and nonviolent resistance. To a great extent the urging of the elders has been heeded, and as the above incident demonstrates, these actions have an effect on the police. They disrupt the narratives that legitimate the forceful suppression of the Water Protectors, narratives about violent extremists, criminal elements, protecting the public, and so forth. This has already born fruit: if not for the resolute nonviolence of the resistance, the government would surely have forcefully evicted the Water Protectors by now, justifying violence with violence.

If the Water Protectors go onto the warpath and see and treat the police as enemies, they play into the narratives that legitimize state violence. Consider this report from an army veteran, Harlan Wallner, who wrote to me after spending some time at Standing Rock: “I witnessed people on the shore shouting that the police were fat donut-eating pigs, cowards, etc., that they should be ashamed of themselves, that they have no honor. I heard one man shout that a curse was being placed on them and all of their descendants. I saw one man throw a rock at police in a boat and then be shot in the leg with one of their bean-bag bullets. On two occasions when the anger got particularly fevered I shouted ‘It’s still important to be kind! It’s still important to be kind!’ and the second time I was nearly attacked. ‘Fuck you! Fuck that, it’s way beyond time for that!’ one man nearly growled at me. I shut up after that.”

Now put yourself in the shoes of the police officers. Nothing creates solidarity in the ranks like a common threat. Slurs like “donut-eating pigs” eliminate any possibility that the police will sympathize with the protestors. They play into the very narratives that justify police action to begin with: maintaining law and order in the face of violent extremists. In other words, by engaging in this kind of verbal violence against the police, the militants comply with their own demonization. They put themselves in a position where the only kind of victory possible is a victory by force.

That kind of victory is unlikely. Worse, even if it is achieved, it creates the conditions for an eventual defeat. What are the deep conditions that give rise to the desecration of indigenous peoples and destruction of nature? In the case of indigenous peoples, their oppression is invariably facilitated by their dehumanization or even demonization. This is the deep template of genocide, the primary prerequisite. By demonizing the police or ETP executives, one contributes to the field of dehumanization. One upholds the basic premise that some people are less fully human than others, that they are contemptible, abhorrent… deplorable. That is the essence of racism and the enabler of war.
The dehumanization of the Other that happens in war, racism, and genocide is no different from any reduction of the sacred to the profane. It is the same mentality that informs the reduction of nature from a sacred, living intelligence into a collection of insensate things: mere resources to be exploited or an enemy to be conquered. The reduction of humans to enemies or to subhuman caricatures like greedy executives and donut-eating police pigs is the same mentality that makes it OK to threaten a river with catastrophic oil spills. Invoking the principle of morphic resonance, by entering into war mentality we strengthen the field of war, including the reduction and domination of nature. That is why victories in war so often lead to just more war. The war is won, but the ideals for which it was fought remain as distant as ever. So it has been for five thousand years.

In other words, if we seek to win a fight using the tactics of dehumanization, we are contributing to the sacrilege that is at the root of the problem. No pipelines would be built if we loved the river like a grandmother.

When the elders ask us to proceed prayerfully, what do they mean? To be prayerful is to be in awareness of the sacred. We too easily forget the sacred, whether in relationship to human beings or to other-than-human beings like trees, soil, and rivers. If prayer is sacred speech, then to act prayerfully is to be reverent in action as well as speech. The dehumanization that leads us onto the warpath is the opposite of reverence.

It is not easy to stay off the warpath. Each new atrocity and outrage renews the invitation into hatred. Lord knows we’ve received many such invitations onto the warpath. The attack dogs, the pepper spraying, the water cannons, the woman whose face was shattered by a rubber bullet, the news that the police will start carrying live ammunition, the state government’s fines for those bringing supplies to Standing Rock, the fact that ETP’s drilling is currently illegal, the historical robbery of native lands and the breaking of every treaty… there are any number of reasons to adopt a good-versus-evil view. As tempting as it is for me, all the more for people at Standing Rock who have been subjected to violence personally or witnessed it first hand. To counsel forgiveness or nonviolence from afar seems almost arrogant, were it not echoing the elders and so many others on site.

Each of these invitations onto the warpath also presents an opportunity to defy the enabling narratives of violence and to take a step toward victory without fighting. It is an opportunity to employ what Gandhi called “soul force.” Meeting violence with nonviolence invites the other into nonviolence as well. Refusing the invitation onto the warpath automatically extends a counter-invitation to the enemy to cease being an enemy. That is why it is so important to remember that the purpose of nonviolent action is not to make the other side look bad. That would be a kind of attack, a kind of violence, and a tactic of war. No, the purpose is to invite the other side and onlookers alike to join you in courage. Of course, they may decline the invitation, but it grows more powerful with each escalation of violence.

Each time you refuse the invitation onto the warpath, you become more powerful. Those who can stay peaceful in the face of any terror or threat become virtual miracle-workers. I am reminded of an Afghan woman I know named Sakena. She does peace and education work in Kabul, including the education of girls. This is a dangerous line of work in a place where
religious fundamentalists believe that educating girls should be punishable by death, and indeed Sakena receives her share of death threats – something to be taken seriously in that place.

One day Sakena was in a car with her driver, two staff people, and her unarmed bodyguard. Suddenly the driver stopped. A makeshift roadblock was ahead of them, manned by twenty or so young men dressed in fundamentalist garb and armed with rifles, which were pointed at the car. “Tell Sakena to get out,” they shouted.

Bravely, the driver said, “You’ve got the wrong car. There’s no one by that name here.”

“Oh yes there is,” they replied. “We know she’s in there. We’ve been watching her.”

Sakena got out of the car and strode up to the young men. “I’m Sakena,” she declared. “What do you want?”

For the next half hour, the four people in the car watched as Sakena talked to the young men. Finally she returned to the car and said, “OK, we can go now.” Astonished, her staffers asked what happened. She told them that the young men had decided that they wanted to be educated too, just like the girls, and had arranged to meet her again the next week outside a certain mosque.

Such is the potential power of staying off the warpath. Even with guns pointed at her, Sakena refused to see the young men as anything less than divine human beings. She refused to reduce them in her vision to crazed terrorists or subhuman “fundamentalists.” She saw them as promising young men who of course wanted an education. Her fearlessness and goodwill exerted an invitation so compelling that the men were nearly helpless to refuse it.

The way we see and treat someone is a powerful invitation for them to be as we see them. See someone as deplorable, and even their peace overtures will look like cynical ploys. Distrust generates untrustworthiness. On the other hand, when we are able to see beyond conventional roles and categories, we become able to invite others into previously unmanifest potentials. This cannot be done in ignorance of the subjective reality of another’s situation; to the contrary, it depends on an empathic understanding of their situation. It starts with the question that defines compassion: What is it like to be you?

That question is anathema to the militant and the warmonger, because it rehumanizes those that they would dehumanize. Broach it, and they will call you soft, naïve, a fool or a traitor.

What it is like to be a police at Standing Rock? Or what it is like to be an ETP executive? Can you bring yourself into the knowledge that they are our brothers here on earth, doing their best under the circumstances they have been given? I imagine myself in the ETP executive suite. The stress level is high. The board of directors are freaking out. The banks are threatening to pull their funding. We’ve spent tens of millions leasing capital equipment. Maybe we have bond payments due. Business is tough enough as it is, and now these protestors come in who don’t realize that pipelines are safer than rail tankers. They use gasoline too, the hypocrites! And they’re making us into the bad guys! And look how hate-filled they are! Yup, it’s obvious who
the good guys are. I am not endorsing this viewpoint. I am merely trying to understand it. One product of that understanding that is uncomfortable for the ego of the militant is that it would take courage for the ETP executives to halt the project — to do so would require sacrificing their self-interest as they understand it. Similarly, it might take courage for a policeman to defy orders or disbelieve propaganda or break ranks. In a way, we are all in the same boat; we are all facing situations that invite us to choose love over fear, to listen to the heart when it feels unsafe to do so. We need to help each other obey that call. In that, we are allies. We can be allies in calling each other to our highest potential.

Another friend described his encounters with pepper-spraying police at Standing Rock. He noticed that in each instance, it was only one or two police who were doing most of the violence. The others were standing around looking uncomfortable, probably wishing they were somewhere else.

What would activist tactics look like if they were based on the conviction, “Most of the police don’t really want to be doing this”? What would it look like to express in word and deed an underlying certainty that each of them is here on earth to carry out a sacred mission of service to life? How would it feel to them to be told, “I am sorry you are being put in this position. I am sorry you are under such pressure to contravene your heart. But it is not too late. We forgive you and welcome you to join us in service to life.”

As I write this, the first of two thousand U.S. military veterans are entering the camps at Standing Rock. They have vowed to stand with and protect the Water Protectors with their own bodies. They are not bringing weapons. Many of them are leaving jobs and families in order to help protect the water. If they too can keep peaceful hearts, they will magnify the invitation to the government, the company, and particularly the police to make the courageous choice themselves.

Victory at Standing Rock will have far-reaching consequences. It may seem inconsequential in the macro view if the pipeline is merely rerouted or replaced with rail tankers (which are even worse than pipelines). On a deeper level though, a victory will establish a precedent: if it can happen at Standing Rock, why not globally? If a pipeline can be stopped against great odds in one place, similar violations can be stopped in every place. It will shift our view of what is possible. That’s one reason why I agree with the Sioux elders’ preference to keep the movement focused on the water and not let it be hijacked by climate change activists. Climate change is the result of a million insults to a million places on earth. Honoring the place of Standing Rock establishes a principle of honor to all places.

Writ large, the situation at Standing Rock is the situation of our whole planet: everywhere, dominating forces seek to exploit what remains of the treasures of earth and sea. They cannot be defeated by force. We must instead invite a change of heart by being in a place of heartfulness ourselves – of courage, empathy, and compassion. If the Water Protectors at Standing Rock can stay strong in that invitation, they will demonstrate an unstoppable power and win a miraculous victory, inspiring the rest of us to follow their example.
What if I am wrong? Not every nonviolent action succeeds in its explicit aims; not every invitation, no matter how powerful, is accepted. Yet even if the pipeline goes through, if the Water Protectors stay off the warpath another kind of victory will be won – the creation of a psychic template for the future. With each choice we face, we are being asked what kind of world we want to live in. The more courage required to make that choice, the more powerful the prayer, because Whoever listens to prayers knows we really mean it. Therefore, when we choose love in the face of enormous temptation to hate, we are issuing a powerful prayer for a world of love. When we refuse to dehumanize in the face of atrocity, we issue a prayer for universal dignity. When thousands of people sacrifice their safety and comfort to protect the water, a powerful prayer issues from their gathering. Some day, in some form, it will be answered.

http://charleseisenstein.net/standing-rock-a-change-of-heart/

December 2, 2016

Veterans and elders ignore eviction notice, arrive at #NoDAPL camp in North Dakota (video)

By Chris Stewart
APTN National News

As the Dec. 5 eviction date at the North Dakota camp trying to shut down construction of a pipeline, new groups of supporters have arrived on the scene.

Watch the video here:


December 2, 2016

Fake Cowboys and Real Indians

By Timothy Egan
New York Times

For most of this past week, a winter storm has lashed at the North Dakota prairie camp where the Standing Rock Sioux are making a stand to keep an oil pipeline away from water that is a source of life for them.

The sight of native people shivering in a blizzard, while government authorities threaten to starve them out or forcefully remove them, is a living diorama of so much awful history between the First Americans and those who took everything from them.
The authorities have brought water cannons, rubber bullets, tear gas, helicopters and dogs against what has become one of the largest gatherings of tribes, from all nations, in a century. They’ve given the protesters, who will soon include a brigade of veterans, until Dec. 5 to disperse.

Now flash back a few years to another Western standoff, the Nevada siege of Cliven Bundy, the deadbeat rancher who drew heavily armed white militia members to defend a man who stiffed the government while grazing his cattle on public land. There, the feds backed off.

Mr. Bundy and his thugs on the range were praised by Fox News and Tea Party Republicans. His two sons later took over the Malheur Wildlife Refuge in Oregon, occupying that sanctuary of birds until they were arrested. In October, the Bundys and five others were acquitted of conspiracy and weapons charges.

At the heart of these cases is land — who owns it, and the narrative justification for a way of life. The Bundy brothers are comic-book cowboys. One of them runs a valet service in Phoenix. The other has a construction company in Utah. But they look the part; playing the role of principled Western men doin’ what a man’s got to do.

For the Indians, the Dakota Access Pipeline, which will run from oil fields in North Dakota to a terminal in Illinois, is an existential threat. “Water is life” is the protest name. As planned, the pipeline would pump an artery of oil under the Missouri River — the source of the tribe’s water. The Indians want the pipeline rerouted.

The new administration of Donald J. Trump will be heavy with people who see public land, and Indian Country, as just one thing — a place to drill for oil, move it along, or get out of the way.

The story behind the policy is all-important here — what Senator Al Franken called “the complex burden of historical trauma.” Consider how Jon Stewart once described the national holiday just passed. “I celebrated Thanksgiving in an old-fashioned way,” he said. “I invited everyone in my neighborhood to my house, we had an enormous feast, and then I killed them and took their land.”

Now consider what the Bundy brothers said they were fighting for when they took over the Malheur Wildlife Refuge by armed force earlier this year. They wanted the government to give up turf owned by every American and let a handful of white ranchers “come back and reclaim their land.”

This prompted collective whiplash from members of the Paiute Tribe, whose people have lived in the high desert of Oregon for centuries. “For them to say they want to give the land back to the rightful owners — well, I just had to laugh at that,” the tribal chairwoman, Charlotte Rodrique, said at the time.

The Indian view is much more than P.C. revisionism, if you believe in the rule of law. A huge swath of the northern Plains was promised to bands of the Sioux in the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, one of the few times when Native Americans forced the government to terms after defeating it in war.
The tribes lost much of that treaty land to intruders, backed by the Army. “A more ripe and rank case of dishonorable dealings will never, in all possibility, be found in our history,” the Supreme Court concluded in 1980. One of the legacies of the great Sioux tactician, Red Cloud, was an apt description of how the big emerging nation treated the diminished ones. “They made many promises,” he said. “But they kept but one: They promised to take our land, and they took it.”

The “complex burden” of trauma that Senator Franken referred to includes images of frozen Indian bodies in the snow after the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890. And yet, even with that history haunting the present protest, many of the natives at Standing Rock are not bitter, and see this stand in spiritual terms.

“In the face of this we pray,” Lyla June Johnston, a young Native leader, told me the day after the blizzards blew in. “In the face of this we love. In the face of this we forgive. Because the vast majority of water protectors know this is the greatest battle of all: to keep our hearts intact.”


December 2, 2016

Restoring Paradise One Watershed at a Time

Reflections from Miriam MacGillis at Genesis Farm

Perhaps Paradise was never lost. Earth can’t be lost. She can be desecrated and abused. She can be diminished severely in her beauty, health and creativity, yet still endure.

Prophets, poets and wise people from earlier times also mourned the loss of people, lands and things they loved. They did their best to explain the mystery of change. Especially difficult change that brought a sense of loss.

Maybe they told stories about loss that helped them to cope. Maybe some of them thought Earth was originally a magical Paradise where there was no loss. Then, a serious event happened which caused Earth’s very self to be degraded causing everything and everyone with it to undergo the same fate.

A sense of Paradise was lost.

Maybe there was a sense that Earth needed to be redesigned and re-engineered to create a better Paradise.

Hence, hard work and perseverance gave birth to industrialization, eugenics, war, genetic engineering, nanotechnology, robotics, artificial intelligence, torture, and bullying.
Maybe at some depth of soul, the eight billion of us in this human generation knows better.

Maybe Earth is Paradise. Maybe humans are sensing that the older stories need to be re-examined. Maybe the prospects of leaving Earth to go to Mars are producing some hesitation. And anxiety.

Mars?

Maybe the indigenous wisdom arising at Standing Rock is an uprising of common sense, sanity and compassion for the planet.

Maybe the clear vision, love and courage in the people realistically facing the loss of their water is stirring something deep in all of us.

Perhaps we are looking into the severe differences being played out over the implications of some of those older stories.

Maybe that is why so many countless people at Standing Rock, day after freezing day, are aligning with the common sense and love for life still enduring at the depths of our collective soul. Perhaps we are remembering our own indigenous wisdom. Maybe it has just been forgotten and neglected, but never lost. Anymore than Paradise.

Perhaps it has taken the awful brutality done to those crying out to protect the waters of our planet, for the rest of us to gaze into the shadow of our nations’ soul, our collective self, and say:

No more. No more.

________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________

We all live close to the waters that we drink. Water is life. Every water basin is a “shed” holding water. A watershed. No people in their right mind would poison or contaminate it.

Common sense knows better.

We Can Restore Paradise; One Watershed at a Time

Let us begin with the Missouri River.
Here’s how:
Write, call, petition President Obama to permanently halt the Dakota Access Pipeline through the sacred lands and waters of the Standing Rock Sioux.

http://lakotalaw.org/?gclid=CNm1-ojy1dACFZJMDQodcGgDeQ

Contribute to the Standing Rock Winter Encampment

http://www.honorearth.org/

Be prepared to defeat a fracked gas pipe coming your way before it does.

http://earthjustice.org/features/campaigns/fracking-across-the-united-states

Divest in Fossil Fuel Companies

https://350.org/divest/

Write to Pope Francis, asking him to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery

https://1drv.ms/w/s!AkhNLVylX0V5gRnrFeN_ZOOHhMGB

Come home to a sense of place,
to the bioregional possibilities of the place where you live.
Think small, think local but carry the whole planet in your soul.
We can help to restore it, one watershed at a time.

https://1drv.ms/w/s!AkhNLVylX0V5gRsnwiKreMZbUENI

Explore in every way possible the insights of a new evolutionary story of the origin of the Universe, Earth, life and human life with all its racial, religious, gender and cultural diversities.

But consider especially the possibilities you will unleash within yourself by enrolling in

https://www.coursera.org/learn/thomas-berry

http://hosted.verticalresponse.com/857531/4544cf46ba/1634009901/d32c77a1c6/

December 2, 2016

Water Protectors Deliver Donations to Morton County Officers
By Jade Begay

Indigenous Environment Network

MANAND, ND - On Friday December 2nd at approximately 2pm CST Water Protectors from Oceti Sakowin camp will fulfill a donation list that the Morton County Sheriff’s Department released on November 22, 2016.

The Oceti Sakowin headsman will join veterans, youth, and women leaders and stand with Leonard Crow Dog who will offer a prayer as Protectors deliver the supplies to the Sheriff’s Department in Mandan, ND.

Water Protectors offer these donations to the Morton County officers in generosity and compassion, despite the aggression and hostility they have shown innocent unarmed Protectors of this camp.

The following is a joint statement from the Indigenous Environmental Network and the Indigenous Peoples Power Project:

“North Dakota taxpayers have already bankrolled the Morton County Sheriff Department with approximately 10 million dollars for the suppression of peaceful water protectors. Despite this excessive financial support, Morton County officers are asking taxpayers to donate supplies.

The Oceti Sakowin camp is a prayer camp, and a resilient, self-sufficient community. The camp is full of abundance— in spirit, in humanity, and in resources. Oceti Sakowin has enough to share. Generosity is an original teaching for the Lakota.”

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Established in 1990 within the United States, IEN was formed by grassroots Indigenous peoples and individuals to address environmental and economic justice issues (EJ). IEN’s activities include building the capacity of Indigenous communities and tribal governments to develop mechanisms to protect our sacred sites, land, water, air, natural resources, health of both our people and all living things, and to build economically sustainable communities.

Indigenous Environment Network
Contact:
Jade Begay, 505-699-4791, jade@ienearth.org

http://www.commondreams.org/newswire/2016/12/02/water-protectors-deliver-donations-morton-county-officers

By Alexa Erickson
Collective Evolution

Environmental attorney and activist Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has put in decades of work to protect the environment, so having him publicly show his support in the fight against Energy Transfer Partners and the Dakota Access pipeline (DAPL) is of massive importance.

“What [Energy Transfer Partners] is doing is a real environmental crime,” said Kennedy, who serves as senior attorney and president of the Waterkeeper Alliance, which is a non-profit organization regarding the right to clean water.

Kennedy is among a growing list of high-profile supporters who have shown their support against DAPL by visiting the site to stand with Standing Rock in the movement to protect water and indigenous sovereignty.

Recently, Kennedy wrote a letter on EcoWatch that revealed valuable insight regarding the looming removal of the water protectors from the DAPL site they are protesting on.

“On Sunday, the U.S. Army Corps issued a declaration to the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe that might have been penned by the Kern county sheriff. The Corps Colonel John Henderson told Standing Rock Chairman Dave Archambault II that the agency was evicting the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) protesters from their camp for their own protection.”

“The tribes and their supporters will be moved to a ‘free speech’ zone a great distance from the pipeline. Henderson’s threats would be troubling if addressed to any group of American citizens, but coming from the U.S. Army Corps to the Sioux nation, it is positively chilling. One wonders whether Colonel Henderson is even peripherally aware of the Corp’s central role in the Indian genocide, the most shameful stain on America’s national experience, our high ideals and character.”

Kennedy then provided valuable insight on genocide, referencing anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes’ observation that genocide is “a continuum that runs for years, decades, or centuries” through the initiation of “marginalization and dehumanization of an identifiable minority, the theft of their lands and property, their slaughter and decimation, and the gradual squeezing of remnant populations.”

What happens then is the transformation of people into monsters that makes discrimination and violence rationalized behaviors.

“Colonel Henderson’s letter manages to be both, patronizing and menacing. In that sense, it captures perfectly the tone and content of a hundred letters received by Indians from U.S. Corp
colonels and generals over four centuries, all of them repeating genocide’s persistent refrain: ‘For your own good, move off the land, or else,’” Kennedy said.

He then points out that the lands and waterways that are now in the hands of Dakota Access, a subsidiary of Energy Transfer Partners, are the very same lands that our government and the U.S. Army Corps gave property rights to in the treaties of 1825 and 1851, of which, along with the Fort Laramie treaty of 1868, promised the tribe the lands would stay in the hands of the Sioux tribe “so long as the grass is green, the eagles fly, and the rivers flow.”

“No, once again, illegal white mineral interests need the Sioux’s land, and, once again, the Army Corps is insisting the Sioux move.”

Colonel Henderson’s threats are meant to protect DAPL’s promoters, Energy Transfer Partners, an outlaw oil company. Construction of the 1,200 mile Dakota Access Pipeline project clearly violates the National Environmental Policy Act, which requires a full environmental impact review for any project that “might have significant environmental impacts” on an area larger than one-half acre. “There is no question that the 1,200 mile pipeline meets both criteria,” Kennedy said.

Kennedy urges that the pipeline will, along with unjustly take away land that is not lawfully permitted to be taken away, will also generate more carbon pollution than “27 coal burning power plants, and cross and disrupt 209 waterways, including Lake Oahe, the Sioux’s only water source.

The Sioux recognize this as the final eviction—without Lake Oahe, their remnant reservation is uninhabitable. The Corp considers a catastrophic water poisoning pipeline failure, so likely, that following protests by Bismarck residents, Henderson agreed to move the pipeline away from its more direct route across the Bismarck water supply and into Indian country.

And so, with so many downsides, what do the people behind DAPL have left to say besides admit to their dirty desire to garner company oil profits? “This project is a 1,200-mile boondoggle designed to allow billionaire investors like Donald Trump to make themselves richer by impoverishing other Americans,” Kennedy explained.

“The company’s claims to be a job creator will wither in the daylight. Like the Keystone XL pipeline, DAPL is unlikely to produce even 100 long term jobs while jeopardizing the water supply for 18 million people and the breadbasket of American food production.”

“Despite its contrary denials to the public and regulators, DAPL has admitted privately that its oil will be shipped to Asia where it will lower manufacturing costs for America’s foreign competitors and aggravate climate chaos. If Obama were to order an Environmental Impact Statement, our incoming president, Donald Trump, would be powerless to reverse that determination. The question now is: Will Obama act?”

Americans are rushing to Standing Rock to support the Sioux because they care about freedom and justice. They are sick of the unjustified profit at the hands of land and people.
“I’ll see you at Standing Rock’ has become the battle cry for Americans who still share an idealistic vision for our country,” concluded Kennedy.


December 4, 2016

The victory at Standing Rock could mark a turning point

By Bill McKibben
The Guardian

The defeat of an energy company by indigenous activists shows what nonviolent unity can accomplish. There are lessons here as we enter a challenging new age

The news that the US federal government has refused to issue the permit needed to run a pipeline under the Missouri river means many things – including that indigenous activists have won a smashing victory, one that shows what nonviolent unity can accomplish.

From the start, this has been an against-the-odds battle. Energy Transfer Partners, the company building the pipeline, is as wired as they come: its line of credit links it to virtually every bank you’ve ever heard of. And operating under a “fast-track” permit process, it had managed to win most of its approvals and lay most of its pipe before opponents managed to mount an effective resistance.

But that opposition finally did arise, and it centered on the last place the pipeline would have to cross: the confluence of the Missouri and the Cannonball rivers. It wasn’t standard-issue environmental lobbying, nor standard-issue protest, though there was certainly some of both (lawyers took the company to court, activists shut down bank branches). At its heart, however, in the great camp that grew up along the rivers, this was a largely spiritual resistance. David Archambault, the head of the Standing Rock Sioux who demonstrated great character and dexterity for months, kept insisting that the camp was a place of prayer, and you couldn’t wander its paths without running into drum circles and sacred fires.

As a result, overlapping epochs of sad American history were on display. When native American protesters sat down in front of bulldozers to try and protect ancestral graves, they were met with attack dogs – the pictures looked like Birmingham, Alabama, circa 1963. But it went back further than that: the encampment, with its teepees and woodsmoke hovering in the valley, looked like something out of an 1840s painting. With the exception that this was not just one tribe: this was pretty much all of native North America. The flags of more than 200 Indian nations lined the rough dirt entrance road. Other Americans, drawn in part by a sense of shame at this part of our heritage, flooded in to help – when the announcement came today, there were thousands of military veterans on hand.
Indigenous organizers are some of the finest organizers around the globe – they’ve been key to everything from the Keystone fight to battling plans for the world’s largest coal mine in Australia. If we manage to slow down the fossil fuel juggernaut before it boils the planet, groups like the Indigenous Environmental Network and Honor the Earth will deserve a great share of the credit. Right now, for instance, Canada’s First Nations are preparing for “Standing Rock North” along the route of two contested pipelines out of Canada’s tarsands. But in the Dakotas it’s been particularly special: they’ve managed to build not just resistance to a project, but a remarkable new and unified force that will, I think, persist. Persist, perhaps, even in the face of the new Trump administration.

Trump, of course, can try and figure out a way to approve the pipeline right away, though the Obama administration has done its best to make that difficult. (That’s why, instead of an outright denial, they simply refused to grant the permit, thus allowing for the start of the environmental impact statement process). But if Trump decides to do that, he’s up against people who have captured the imagination of the country. Simply spitting on them to aid his friends in the oil industry would clarify a lot about him from the start, which is one reason he may hesitate.

In any event, though, time is measured somewhat differently in the dispute between this continent’s original inhabitants and the late-coming rest of us. For five hundred years, half a millennia, the same grim story has repeated itself over and over again. Today’s news is a break in that long-running story, a new chapter. It won’t set this relationship on an entirely new course – change never comes that easily. But it won’t ever be forgotten, and it will influence events for centuries to come. Standing Rock, like Little Big Horn or Wounded Knee, or for that matter Lexington Green and Concord Bridge, now belongs to our history.

https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/dec/04/standing-rock-victory-turning-point

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**December 4, 2016**

Army Corps Blocks Dakota Access Oil Pipeline Route

The Corps' decision is a victory for several thousand protesters camped near the construction site

By James MacPherson

NBC Washington

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers said Sunday that it won't grant an easement for the Dakota Access oil pipeline in southern North Dakota.

The decision is a victory for the several thousand camped near the construction site, who've said for months that the four-state, $3.8 billion project would threaten a water source and cultural sites.

The pipeline is largely complete except for the now-blocked segment underneath Lake Oahe, a Missouri River reservoir. According to a news release, Assistant Secretary for Civil Works Jo-
Ellen Darcy said her decision was based on the need to "explore alternate routes" for the pipeline's crossing.

"Although we have had continuing discussion and exchanges of new information with the Standing Rock Sioux and Dakota Access, it's clear that there's more work to do," Darcy said. "The best way to complete that work responsibly and expeditiously is to explore alternate routes for the pipeline crossing."

The company constructing the pipeline, Dallas-based Energy Transfer Partners, had said it was unwilling to reroute the project. It and the Morton County Sheriff's Office, which has done much of the policing of the protests, didn't have immediate comment.

U.S. Secretary for the Interior Sally Jewell said in a statement that the Corps' "thoughtful approach ... ensures that there will be an in-depth evaluation of alternative routes for the pipeline and a closer look at potential impacts" and "underscores that tribal rights reserved in treaties and federal law, as well as Nation-to-Nation consultation with tribal leaders, are essential components of the analysis to be undertaken in the environmental impact statement going forward."

North Dakota Republican Rep. Kevin Cramer says that the Army Corps' decision not to grant an easement for the Dakota Access oil pipeline is "a very chilling signal" for the future of infrastructure in the U.S.

Cramer said in a statement that infrastructure will be hard to build "when criminal behavior is rewarded this way," apparently referring to the large protest encampment on federal land and the clashes between demonstrators and law enforcement. Cramer also said that "law and order" will be restored when Donald Trump takes office and that he feels bad for the Corps having to do "diligent work ... only to have their Commander-in-Chief throw them under the bus."

The federal government has ordered people to leave the main encampment, which is on Army Corps of Engineers' land, by Monday. But demonstrators say they're prepared to stay, and authorities say they won't forcibly remove them.

Earlier Sunday, an organizer with Veterans Stand for Standing Rock said tribal elders had asked the military veterans not to have confrontations with law enforcement officials, adding the group is there to help out those who've dug in against the project.

About 250 veterans gathered about a mile from the Oceti Sakowin, or Seven Council Fires, camp in southern North Dakota for a meeting with organizer Wes Clark Jr., the son of former Democratic presidential candidate Gen. Wesley Clark. The group had said about 2,000 veterans were coming, but it wasn't clear how many actually arrived.

"We have been asked by the elders not to do direct action," Wes Clark Jr. said. He then talked about North Dakota authorities' decision to move away from a key bridge north of the encampment by 4 p.m. Sunday if demonstrators agree to certain conditions, saying the National Guard and law enforcement have armored vehicles and are armed.
"If we come forward, they will attack us," Clark said. Instead, he told the veterans, "If you see someone who needs help, help them out."

Authorities said they'll move from the north end of the Backwater Bridge if protesters stay south of it and come to the bridge only if there is a prearranged meeting. Authorities also asked protesters not to remove barriers on the bridge, which they have said was damaged in the late October conflict that led to several people being hurt, including a serious arm injury.

"The question was asked if we would consider pulling back from the Backwater Bridge," Cass County Sheriff Paul Laney said in a Saturday news release after a conversation between law enforcement and the group's organizers, "and the answer is yes! We want this to de-escalate."

Protesters also are not supposed to walk, ride or fly drones north of the bridge, Laney said. Any violation will "will result in their arrest," the statement said.

The bridge blockade is something that Standing Rock Sioux tribal chairman Dave Archambault has been asking to be removed, the Bismarck Tribune reports, and something he said he would talk to Gov. Jack Dalrymple about when they meet in person. A date for that meeting hasn't been set.

Veterans Stand for Standing Rock's GoFundMe.com page had raised more than $1 million of its $1.2 million goal by Sunday — money due to go toward food, transportation and supplies. Cars waiting to get into the camp Sunday afternoon were backed up for more than a half-mile.

"People are fighting for something, and I thought they could use my help," said Navy veteran and Harvard graduate student Art Grayson. The 29-year-old from Cambridge, Massachusetts, flew the first leg of the journey, then rode from Bismarck in the back of a pickup truck. He has finals this week, but told professors, "I'll see you when I get back."

Steven Perry, a 66-year-old Vietnam veteran who's a member of the Little Traverse Bay band of Odawa Indians in Michigan, spoke of one of the protesters' main concerns: that the pipeline could pollute drinking water. "This is not just a native issue," he said, "This is an issue for everyone."

Art Woodson and two other veterans drove 17 hours straight from Flint, Michigan, a city whose lead-tainted water crisis parallels with the tribe's fight over water, he said.

"We know in Flint that water is in dire need," the 49-year-old disabled Gulf War Army veteran said. "In North Dakota, they're trying to force pipes on people. We're trying to get pipes in Flint for safe water."

On Monday, some veterans will take part in a prayer ceremony in which they'll apologize for historical detrimental conduct by the military toward Native Americans and ask for forgiveness, Clark said. He also called the veterans' presence "about right and wrong and peace and love."
December 4, 2016

Obama Administration Halts Construction Of Dakota Access Pipeline

The “historic” decision comes as thousands of protesters gather on the Standing Rock Sioux reservation.

By Chris D'Angelo
Huffington Post

The Obama administration has halted construction of the controversial Dakota Access Pipeline amid growing protests that were expected to draw some 2,000 U.S. military veterans.

The Army announced Sunday that it has denied the final easement required for the $3.8 billion project to cross under Lake Oahe in North Dakota. Instead, it will conduct an Environmental Impact Statement to examine the impacts and explore alternative routes, it said.

“Although we have had continuing discussion and exchanges of new information with Standing Rock Sioux and Dakota Access, it’s clear that there’s more work to do,” Jo-Ellen Darcy, the Army’s assistant secretary for civil works, said in a statement. “The best way to complete that work responsibly and expeditiously is to explore alternative routes for the pipeline crossing.”

In a statement, Standing Rock Tribal Chairman Dave Archambault II applauded the news.

“We wholeheartedly support the decision of the administration and commend with the utmost gratitude the courage it took on the part of President Obama, the Army Corps, the Department of Justice and the Department of the Interior to take steps to correct the course history and to do the right thing,” he said.

Archambault added that the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and all of Indian Country “will be forever grateful to the Obama Administration for this historic decision.” He noted his hope that the incoming Trump administration would respect the decision.

This is a developing story. Check back for updates.

December 5, 2016

Indigenous Activists at Standing Rock Told a Deep, True Story
And that’s why they won at least a temporary victory.

By Bill McKibben
The Nation

All organizing is story-telling, and the story that got told at Standing Rock was so powerful that ultimately the Obama White House had little choice but to go along.

The decision by the Army Corps of Engineers not to grant the permits necessary for sending the Dakota Access Pipeline beneath the Missouri River is a tribute to truly remarkable efforts by Indigenous organizers, from the Standing Rock Sioux tribe to groups like the Indigenous Environmental Network and Honor the Earth. It’s also a tribute to the incredible power of civil disobedience, a tool I tried to describe in last week’s print edition of The Nation.

But my analysis pales next to the actual story from the Oceti Sakowin encampment. There, the last few months have unfolded with almost eerie grace, and the textbook on nonviolent action has been revised and illustrated in the process. The highlights include:

- Remarkable unity. The politics of Indian country is historically fractious, at least on occasion. But this time representatives of more than 200 tribes came together in common purpose on the banks of the Cannonball River. Their flags flew along the dirt road that bisected the camp, and that spirit of unity was palpable. It extended to Indigenous people around the world—yesterday morning, for instance, came word that the Sami people of Norway had helped force that country’s biggest bank to withdraw from financing the project.

- Remarkable discipline. The Morton County sheriff’s department and other “public safety” agencies devoted themselves to the task of goading the water protectors into violence. They fired beanbag pellets and rubber bullets and concussion grenades, not to mention “sonic cannons” and water cannons and canisters of pepper spray. They were met with prayer, and with strict nonviolence. In the camp, elders made sure that no one went too far with their protests. All of that was essential, because any bad image would have been splashed across the nation’s press, breaking the spell that the activists were casting.

- Remarkable images. Instead, the battle of photos broke decisively the other way. Amy Goodman and her crew from Democracy Now! were on hand the late summer day when a security crew from Energy Transfer Partners unleashed German shepherds on unarmed Native Americans. The pictures were uncannily close to the images that emerged from, say, Birmingham in 1963 at the height of the civil-rights movement. Those pictures helped the world set this fight in context. And the beautiful art that was churned out at the camp workshop almost from day one helped too.

- Remarkable solidarity. Though the camp at the Cannonball was big—sometimes one of the six or seven biggest cities in North Dakota—only a tiny fraction of the supporters of this cause ever made it there. Yesterday it was veterans flooding in, and the day before that clergy, all of which was crucial. But just as important was the involvement of people around the world, who started figuring out their own actions, closing out accounts in the
banks that backed the pipeline or sitting in at Army Corps offices. No one outside the
camp tried to lead; everyone did their best to follow. There was little overt choreography,
and much spontaneous cooperation.

Taken together, all of that told an irresistible story, of the many and small and courageous
against the militarized power of the state. (The local sheriff’s office was driving what were
essentially tanks; they constantly bulked up in body armor and balaclavas.) And it played out
against the larger story that all Americans know, the story of shame that is the treatment of this
continent’s original inhabitants.

The question now is whether similar tactics will be of use against Donald Trump. The answer, in
the short term, is maybe and maybe not. Obama did his best to tie the hands of his successor; had
they merely rejected the pipeline outright, he would have had a fresh start, but instead there’s an
environmental impact review underway now, and with that comes certain legal constraints. Still,
it’s entirely possible that Trump will simply sweep all that aside.

If he does, he will take a hit to his popularity—a great many people, even among his ranks,
understand that we owe a debt to Native Americans that can’t really be repaid. He will earn the
unending enmity of every tribe in the country, and that will haunt his presidency in at least a
small way. His racism will be proved. And he will seem the miniature marionette of the mighty
oil industry, never a good look.

But if he does approve the pipeline, and the Keystone pipeline, and a dozen other bad things, it’s
still not a sign to abandon the fight. Because the real target of activists is always the zeitgeist.
Trump rode one zeitgeist wave to power, but the next one, if we can make it build, may wash
him back to Mar-a-Lago. Those waves don’t come from “power”—power reckoned that way is
almost always in the hands of the wealthy. They come instead from the power of story. No one
has ever told a tale truer or deeper than the Standing Rock Sioux.

Bill McKibben is the author of 15 books, most recently *Oil and Honey: The Education of an
Unlikely Activist*. A scholar in residence at Middlebury College, he is the co-founder of 350.org,
the largest global grassroots organizing campaign on climate change.


December 5, 2016

New “MAPTING” App Launched to Increase Youth Participation in Achieving Sustainable
Development Goals

Soka Gakkai International (SGI)
Tokyo: A new app has been created to track and map activities that contribute to actualizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development launched at the UN in September of last year.

Called “Mapting” (“mapping” and “acting”), the app was developed jointly by the Soka Gakkai International (SGI) and Earth Charter International (ECI) as a way of engaging and educating youth in the challenge of making the 17 SDGs a reality by the target date of 2030.

The Mapting app, which became available for use on both Android and iOS devices as of December 2, 2016, can be viewed and downloaded here: www.mapting.org.

Mapting is a mobile participatory app that invites users to take photos or videos of any act, project or idea that will help achieve the SDGs and share them on a world map.

The SGI and ECI have cooperated for over 15 years in the creation of awareness-raising exhibitions that promote education for sustainable development. Tadashi Nagai, Program Officer for the SGI, commented, “We believe the Mapting app can make a real contribution in terms of sharing information. It can spread a positive message that one individual’s action can make a difference.”

Dino De Francesco, Digital Communication Specialist for ECI added, “With the ‘browser’ function, users can see other activities going on in their area. For example, if I see that someone has organized a really great organic garden, maybe I can contact them and even collaborate.”

Users can also learn about the values and principles of the Earth Charter by unlocking principles with each shared picture or video.

The launch of the Mapting app was announced at an event titled “Youth Boosting the Promotion and Implementation of the SDGs” held at the UN Headquarters in New York on November 10, 2016. The event was organized by the Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the United Nations in collaboration with the SGI and ECI.

Dr. David Nabarro, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Adviser on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, commented at the event, “The SDGs are the plan for the future of the world and its people. We have to make sure there is space for young people everywhere to be part of this movement . . . I’d love it if we have one million activists.”

The Mapting app homepage features 17 SDG icons representing each of the SDG action areas (Climate Action, Gender Equality, Responsible Consumption and Production and so on). When uploading a photo or video to the app, users can enter their content under one of the action areas simply by clicking on the relevant icon. For example, planting trees would relate to Climate Action, so they could click on the icon for Goal 13.

The event at the UN Headquarters announcing the launch of the app can be viewed here.
Soka Gakkai International is a community-based Buddhist association with 12 million members around the world. It engages in grassroots awareness-raising activities promoting peace and disarmament, education for sustainable development and human rights education in partnership with other NGOs and in support of the United Nations.

Learn more about the SGI’s awareness-raising activities here.

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December 5, 2016

Rowan Williams Keynote Speaker at 2018 Yale Liturgy Conference

Yale University Institute of Sacred Music

Yale Institute of Sacred Music (ISM) has announced that Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, will be the keynote speaker at the fifth international liturgy conference at Yale University, to be held June 18 – 21, 2018. The theme of the conference is “Full of Your Glory: Liturgy, Cosmos, Creation.”

The conference will explore ideas of creation and cosmos embedded in the worship life of the church at a time of unprecedented attention to ecological and cosmological concerns. Conference speakers will highlight some of the rich traditions of the past (ritual, visual, and musical, among others) and also address contemporary concerns. The broader aim of the conference is to offer the resources of the liturgical tradition – and its particular insights – to the ongoing conversations around ecology and cosmology. It will become clear that liturgy has always been about more than human beings at worship: specific understandings of creation and the cosmos are in fact at the heart of all Christian worship.

Rowan Williams served as Archbishop of Canterbury for ten years from 2002 to 2012. Since 2013 he has been master of Magdalene College at the University of Cambridge. A Fellow of the British Academy, he speaks or reads nine languages in addition to his native Welsh, and has published many books, including studies of Dostoevsky, Arius, Teresa of Avila, and Sergii Bulgakov, together with writings on a wide range of theological, historical, and political themes. He is also a noted poet and translator of poetry.
“This conference will address these important subjects in new and significant ways,” said Martin Jean, director of the ISM, an interdisciplinary graduate center at Yale University. “We are delighted to welcome Rowan Williams to Yale, who will add insight from a unique perspective, as well as draw global attention to these pressing ecological and cosmological issues.”

The conference is organized by the liturgical studies faculty at the ISM and Yale Divinity School: Teresa Berger, Melanie Ross, and Bryan Spinks, and is supported by Berkeley Divinity School at Yale.

Registration will open in mid-2017 at ism.yale.edu/Liturgy2018

NOTE: there is also a Call for Papers for the conference; details at http://ism.yale.edu/events/liturgy-conference-2018/call-papers


December 5, 2016

“We beg for your forgiveness”: Veterans join Native elders in celebration ceremony

Wes Clark Jr. was among the veterans celebrating the DAPL news and asking forgiveness

Salon

Wes Clark Jr., the son of retired U.S. Army general and former supreme commander at NATO Wesley Clark Sr., was part of a group of veterans at Standing Rock one day after the Army Corps announcement. The veterans joined Native American tribal elders in a ceremony celebrating the Dakota Access Pipeline easement denial.

Lakota spiritual leader and medicine man Chief Leonard Crow Dog and Standing Rock Sioux spokeswoman Phyllis Young were among several Native elders who spoke, thanking the veterans for standing in solidarity during the protests.

Clark got into formation by rank, with his veterans, and knelt before the elders asking for their forgiveness for the long brutal history between the United States and Native Americans:

“Many of us, me particularly, are from the units that have hurt you over the many years. We came. We fought you. We took your land. We signed treaties that we broke. We stole minerals from your sacred hills. We blasted the faces of our presidents onto your sacred mountain. When we took still more land and then we took your children and then we tried to make your language and we tried to eliminate your language that God gave you, and the Creator gave you. We didn’t respect you, we polluted your Earth, we’ve hurt you in so many ways but we’ve come to say that we are sorry. We are at your service and we beg for your forgiveness.”
December 6, 2016

The Dakota Access Pipeline and the Doctrine of Native Genocide

By Tim Scott
Truthout

The peaceful Native Water Protectors who have been resisting the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) on sacred land belonging to the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe have succeeded in winning federal accommodations to temporarily halt DAPL construction, but the energy company behind DAPL has pledged to proceed (with state support). Knowing the enduring historic and structural nature of this modern struggle -- a struggle in which the Water Protectors have courageously confronted violent local, state and private militarized forces, inspiring support from thousands of US military veterans -- is vital to understanding its significance.

While the origins of the legal doctrine that facilitated conquest, genocide and the structure of settler colonialism in the US is well known to Native people throughout North America (and beyond), they are less known to current generations of white settlers.

The Doctrine of Discovery, Colonialism and White (Christian) Supremacy

The Crusades were launched in 1095 by Pope Urban II and his papal bull (an official papal decree), Terra Nullius. Terra Nullius, Latin for "land that belongs to no one" permitted European Christian kings and princes to "discover" and claim land occupied by non-Christians. During the Crusades in 1240, the canon lawyer Pope Innocent IV penned a legal commentary on the rights of non-Christians that questioned if it was lawful to invade a land that "infidels" possess. Innocent went on to respond that it was, because the Crusades were "just wars" and were being fought in "defense" of Christianity and to take back lands that rightfully belonged to Christians. Innocent asserted a Christian right to legally dispossess pagans of sovereignty and property.

In 1452, Pope Nicholas V issued the papal bull Dum Diversas, which gave King Alfonso of Portugal the God-given right to conquer and enslave sub-Saharan Africans. In the bull, Nicholas V mandated Alfonso to "invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens [Muslims] and pagans whatsoever ... to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery, and to apply and appropriate to himself and his successors ... and to convert them to his and their use and profit." In 1455, Pope Nicholas V issued another bull, the Romanus Pontifex, to King Alfonso -- and extended to all Catholic monarchies -- the right of "discovery" and seizure of all lands that were not inhabited by Catholics. It also encouraged the enslavement of the non-Christian inhabitants of all stolen lands. Thus, when Christopher Columbus landed on Guanahani island in
1492, he performed a ceremony to "take possession" of the land in the name of the king and queen of Spain, as ordained by the church. Columbus was also following church doctrine when he wrote in his personal diary about his intentions for the Indigenous people he encountered by claiming, "I could conquer the whole of them with 50 men, and govern them as I pleased."

A year later, in 1493, Pope Alexander VI issued the papal bull *Inter Caetera*, which gave Spain the Americas, while Africa and India were allotted to Portugal (and later, land that would become Brazil, as well), for the purposes of colonization and to convert and enslave the Indigenous inhabitants of the Americas. *Inter Caetera* also justified the enslavement of Africans. *Inter Caetera* established the Law of Nations (also known as the Law of Christendom), a papal and thus legal decree stating that "one Christian nation did not have the right to establish dominion over lands previously dominated by another Christian nation."

All together these papal decrees (between 1095-1493), originating from the Crusades, served as a bedrock for the ideology of white supremacy as tied to the establishment of international law under the Doctrine of Discovery (or the Doctrine of Christian Discovery). This ideological doctrine was fundamental in the creation of sovereign rights in settler colonial nation-states and the legalization of European claims to own, occupy, colonize and exploit the continent of Africa and the entire Western Hemisphere, condemning Indigenous peoples to a subhuman status in domestic and international politics. The Doctrine of Discovery advanced the structural foundations (political/legal, cultural and economic) for the transatlantic slave trade and the genocidal policies and practices of colonization across the globe.

With the "discovery" of the Americas, the imperialist nations of England and France followed the new doctrine of discovery and quickly used it to claim rights and powers of first discovery in North America. In 1496, England's King Henry VII issued a Royal Charter, which commissioned an expedition led by John Cabot -- in the name of England -- "to find, discover and investigate whatsoever islands, countries, regions or provinces of heathens and infidels, in whatsoever part of the world placed, which before this time were unknown to all Christians ... to conquer, occupy and possess whatsoever such towns, castles, cities and islands by them." Based on Cabot's explorations, England laid claim to his "discoveries" from Newfoundland to Virginia. France contested England's claims, and declared first discovery rights of ownership and sovereignty over North America. At the time, both countries were Catholic, making them cautious to violate papal bulls. It would not be until the end of the 16th century when France, England and the Netherlands were able to compete with Spain and Portugal for supremacy over the lands and bodies of Indigenous peoples on a global scale.

By the late 16th century, England freed itself from papal rule and attached the name and principles of the 1095 papal bull *Terra Nullius* to Queen Elizabeth I's definition of discovery rights, which required the occupancy and actual possession by Europeans of non-Christian lands as crucial elements of a discovery claim.

Thereafter England proclaimed that only Christian nations could discover and claim territory in the Americas (and later Australia), conditioned on the establishment of permanent settlements that cultivated the land. According to the Encyclopedia of Public International Law, this version of the doctrine of *Terra Nullius* was to become the "eighteenth-century convention of European
international law -- it being held that any land which was unoccupied or unsettled could be acquired as a new territory by a sovereign State, and that the laws of that State would apply in the new territory."

In his article, "The Doctrine of Discovery in American Indian Law," professor Robert Miller documents how "the Doctrine of Discovery was the international law under which America was explored and ... was the legal authority the English Crown used to colonize America and to obtain Indian lands." After the American Revolution, the "Doctrine of Discovery" was embraced by the states and the courts as both common and natural law. Thus, the doctrine became the legal and ideological basis for settler colonialism in the United States, and became further entrenched as the centerpiece of land rights and Native law in the US by the time of the 1823 US Supreme Court decision, Johnson v. M'Intosh. This decision affirmed that the "Doctrine of Discovery" was indeed a well-established legal principle of English and American colonial law and had carried over to become the law of the land in US states and the federal government. According to journalist Julian Brave NoiseCat, "Justice John Marshall used the doctrine to support the majority opinion of the court, which found that Indians ... could not own, the ancestral homelands where their people had lived, loved, worshipped, married, mourned and died for millennia." The Johnson v. M'Intosh decision stands to this day. NoiseCat went on to report:

The doctrine has had a significant influence on Indian law and set a precedent that resonates even in modern decisions. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg -- widely considered the most liberal justice on the Supreme Court -- even cited cases based upon the doctrine as recently as 2005 to deny a land claim brought before the court by the Oneida Nation.

To this day, the doctrine continues to be a structural barrier to Indigenous rights to lands, resources and self-determination (liberation).

US Settler Colonialism: "Destroy to Replace"

The nationalistic narrative attached to the Doctrine of Discovery inspired the notion of Manifest Destiny and conjured up a social imaginary where intrepid white immigrant pioneers courageously settled a vast continent that was there for the taking. The counter-narrative to this tale is best described by settler colonialism, which frames this undertaking not as a set of distinct historical events, but as a persistent and ongoing cultural, political and economic structure. In their article, "Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy," Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck and Angie Morrill explain:

Newcomers/colonizers/settlers come to a place, claim it as their own, and do whatever it takes to disappear the Indigenous peoples that are there. Within settler colonialism, it is exploitation of land that yields supreme value. In order for settlers to usurp the land and extract its value, Indigenous peoples must be destroyed, removed, and made into ghosts.

As a nation-state, the United States is defined by the genocide of Native people and the enslavement of Black people and would not exist without the brutal structure of settler colonialism (and chattel slavery). In fact, genocide is not an aberration of US democracy, but is instead foundational to it.
The colonization of North America by Christian whites -- especially after the formation of the US -- differed significantly from "franchise colonialism" (or extraction-oriented colonialism) that was practiced in other parts of the world, such as in India under British rule.

As professor Lorenzo Veracini describes it in Settler Colonial Studies journal, franchise colonialism differs from settler colonialism in that its "message to Native populations is 'You, work for me,'" while "the settler-colonial message is 'You, go away.'" Settler colonialism, as Wolfe puts it in the Journal of Genocide Research, "destroys to replace" by erecting "a new colonial society on the expropriated land base ... settler colonizers come to stay [and] invasion is a structure not an event ... to get in the way of settler colonization, all the native has to do is stay at home." While in some instances, white settlers in US settlements enslaved Indigenous peoples for their labor, the primary goal of the US settler state was to eliminate Native people altogether.

Soon after the American Revolution, Congress passed the Naturalization Act of 1790, which claimed, "any Alien being a free white person, who shall have resided within the limits and under the jurisdiction of the United States for the term of two years, may be admitted to become a citizen." As a result, scholar Malathi Michelle Iyengar points out, "even the lowest-status whites (Jews, Irish peasants, indentured servants) were legally white -- i.e. Human -- by virtue of not being Black (i.e. Slave) or Indian (i.e. Savage-to-be-vanquished)." This dehumanizing racial paradigm allowed Congress to establish that only "free white" people are eligible to be citizens in the growing settler nation and deserving of the "unalienable Rights" of "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

Despite nationalist ideologies, the social structure of settler colonialism cannot be reduced to distant and unfortunate "birth pangs" of a young nation as it strived to live up to its enlightened values and institutions. The violence of settler colonialism is reasserted each and every day of the occupation for as long as it lasts. Its violence is inherently entwined in other persisting forms of brutality.

In addition to frontier homicide, other genocidal strategies of elimination and social control characterized by the US settler colonial nation-state include systematic and state-facilitated assimilation techniques via boarding schools, child abduction, Christian conversion, forced sterilization and the breaking down of Native title into alienable individual freeholds (see Dawes Act of 1887). Elimination strategies continue to this day through criminalization, impoverishment and perpetual treaty violations as suicide rates among Native youth skyrocket. Additional strategies include blood quantum laws (Indian blood laws) designed to decrease recognition of Indigenous land claims over generations, as well as laws that enable white settlers to make claims of indigeneity (claim membership in an Indigenous group).

Native poet and novelist Sherman Alexie claimed, "In the Great American Indian novel, when it is finally written, all of the white people will be Indians and all of the Indians will be ghosts." The racial construction of Native people continues to be embedded within the ideology of eugenics, whereby the destiny of their Indigenous identity will be diluted and disappear over generations and white settlers can more legitimately claim native status. Arvin, Tück and Morrill emphasize that "settler colonialism must be understood as a multi-fronted project of making the First Peoples of a place extinct; it is a relentless structure, not contained in a period of time."
Only through continued resistance have Native people survived the ongoing genocidal project of the Doctrine of Discovery and US settler colonialism. Recognizing this reality reveals what is at stake for the Water Protectors who will continue to resist big oil at Standing Rock, for it is a struggle for Indigenous survival and for the preservation of Earth itself.


December 6, 2016

'Would you go and tear up St. Peter's in Rome?'

By Maureen Fiedler
National Catholic Reporter

"Would you go and tear up St. Peter's in Rome just because you want to put a pipeline through it?" This is a quote from Miles Allard, a Native American elder at Standing Rock in North Dakota, where the protests against a proposed oil pipeline have been growing for months. The essence of that protest is actually religious in nature. The Sioux regard the land where the pipeline would run as "sacred land," deemed so by their ancestors as well as present-day Native Americans. This is not often mentioned in the news.

Allard was interviewed by Abby Holtzman, an assistant producer and Loretto volunteer here at Interfaith Voices on her recent visit to Standing Rock.

The comparison to St. Peter's Basilica in Rome is especially striking. Native Americans have long believed in the sacredness of the Earth, and have often designated tracts of land as "sacred." There are no buildings, temples, churches, steeples or stained-glass windows in those sacred spaces — only the Earth itself.

That often strikes outsiders as odd or peculiar. But there is true wisdom here. Native Americans understand at some deep level the sacredness of our planet and the need to preserve it from nefarious uses. That consciousness is part of their gift to us.

So it is with great rejoicing that the Sioux, and the thousands who have stood with them in North Dakota, rejoice now that they have won a major victory in their struggle. The Army Corps of Engineers recently denied the proposed pipeline route that would have run through sacred lands.

However, the protesters are not leaving. Everyone knows that the administration of Donald Trump will take office after Jan. 20. Trump has already made clear that he supports the pipeline, and may well to try to reverse this Corps of Engineers decision once he's in office. It's not likely that he cares about "sacred land," if he even knows what that means.

However, those of us who do care about the Earth, and the very future of our planet, can learn a great deal from the Native Americans who have led the protests at Standing Rock. They are
teaching us that our very planet is sacred, and we have a duty to preserve it from anything that would despoil or threaten it.

I have not heard Pope Francis make any statements on this protest. But given his words on environmental justice in "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home," I suspect he blesses the courageous efforts of Native Americans and their allies. Let us hope that this recent victory, which could reroute the pipeline away from sacred land, holds.


December 6, 2016

How Standing Rock became a site of pilgrimage

By Rosalyn R. LaPier
The Conversation

The Army Corps of Engineers, the federal agency responsible for investigating, developing and maintaining water and related environmental resources, recently announced that they would not allow the Dakota Access pipeline to be constructed under the Missouri River and through Lakota territory.

This decision essentially ended the Standing Rock Sioux tribe’s protest against the pipeline, which they claimed would both desecrate their sacred sites and cause potential environmental harm.

The Standing Rock Sioux tribe was able to achieve this victory in part because of the assistance of thousands of “water protectors.” In his letter of thanks, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Chairman David Archambault Jr. wrote,

“Standing Rock could not have come this far alone. Hundreds of tribes came together in a display of tribal unity not seen in hundreds of years. And many thousands of indigenous people from around the world have prayed with us and made us stronger.”

Thousands of people, both those within Native American communities and their non-Native allies, felt called to go to Standing Rock. But what drew that many people to Standing Rock?

As a Native American scholar of environmental history and religion, I believe that for most individuals who gathered at the site, it was a modern-day pilgrimage.

Here’s why.

**Idea of pilgrimage**
First, what is a pilgrimage? Anthropologists Victor Turner and Edith Turner in their classic study “Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture” addressed that question when they researched the personal motivations of those who traveled long distances on pilgrimage.

Their answer was twofold. The Turners contended that individuals on a spiritual quest seek both an “out of this ordinary world” experience and a sense of community, “unity” or “oneness” with those on a similar quest. Individuals on a pilgrimage usually have these experiences both while traveling to certain places of transcendence and while at those sacred places.

Lakota scholar Philip Deloria, has also described how the transformative experience of Native American sacred places provides meaning and personal growth for individuals who journey to be in their presence. In the book “American Indian Places,” Deloria discusses how people are likely to return to these important places again and again.

Going to Standing Rock evolved into a pilgrimage for many Native Americans: they left their “ordinary” lives behind to journey to a Lakota sacred place, and participate in a larger collective action.

My cousin Renee LaPier and her daughter Modesta LaPier, for example, journeyed 2,600 miles to and from Standing Rock. As Ojibwe women, with family on the Turtle Mountain reservation in North Dakota, they felt inspired to go to Standing Rock after meeting hundreds of like-minded individuals at a “water protectors” gathering they organized in their hometown of Portland, Oregon.

Going to Standing Rock forced them and others to step out of their “ordinary” modern lives and travel to a remote rural area of the U.S. with few amenities including no cellphone coverage. And once at the site, they encountered a transformative experience. Reflecting on her experience, Renee said, “It’s personal. It’s deeply deeply personal. It’s important for all of us to stand up together.”

**Modern-day pilgrimage**

It is not just Native Americans who have gone to Standing Rock. On Dec. 5 an estimated 2,000 U.S. veterans, both Native American and their non-Native allies, made their pilgrimage to Standing Rock in a freezing blizzard. They came from across the U.S. and other parts of the world; they represented American veterans from many conflicts and wars, including older Korean and Vietnam vets and younger Iraqi vets. They said they came to Standing Rock for “peace and prayer.”

What does this mean?

Religious scholar Laurel Zwissler has studied why and how young people are “refocusing their personal religious practices” to include “religious practice with public action.” She explains how they are blending their individual religious ideas and political activism into a new form of religious expression.
Zwissler’s research reveals participating in protests, even those across a great distance, becomes a new place of individual and collective spiritual practice.

Many Native Americans and non-Native allies viewed going to Standing Rock as a pilgrimage. I have read hundreds of social media posts of people who were drawn to go there as a spiritual quest, reflecting on how the experience changed their sense of identity, gave meaning to their lives, provided a sense of community and transformed them forever.

Even Chairman David Archambault Jr., in an address to the veterans, said their pilgrimage had meaning because “What you’re doing is sacred.”

I believe a modern kind of pilgrimage for Native Americans is emerging in which people travel to sites of collective action as a form of religious practice. It is true that some come for personal goals of spiritual awakening and some to journey to a sacred place. And, there are others who undertake a spiritual journey to find community, and purpose.

In the end, utilizing prayer and ceremony, they would have all experienced a pilgrimage – returning to their home different from when they left.

Rosalyn R. LaPier is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Women's Studies, Environmental Studies and Native American Religion, Harvard University. She is affiliated with Saokio Heritage.

https://theconversation.com/how-standing-rock-became-a-site-of-pilgrimage-70016

December 6, 2016

While Eyes Were On Standing Rock, The Dakota Pipeline Was Being Drilled Under Another Water Source

By Adele Peters
Fast Co.Exist

While the pipeline may have been halted in North Dakota, construction workers just finished drilling under the Des Moines River, which supplies the water for half a million people in Iowa.

In the heart of Appalachia, in places like West Virginia and eastern Kentucky, life has long been built around coal, figuratively and literally. In the early 20th century, coal companies founded towns in the rugged and steep interiors of West Virginia to hold their workforces. But coal—and the traditional idea of coal country with it—is dying. Markets have embraced cheaper or cleaner alternatives. Natural gas has surpassed coal as the country’s largest source of net electricity generation. Renewables are projected to increase by 72% by 2040. After years of coal booms and busts, "this is final," says Gwendolyn Christon, the owner of the IGA grocery store in Isom, Kentucky, and one of the many locals we spoke to in a trip across the region to document the future of coal country. "If we’re gonna stay here and prosper, we have to start looking for other ways of making a living. You have to do that quickly and not just sit back and wait for
something to happen. It’s not going to depend on the federal government or someone coming in to rescue us. It’s going to be us going to work and doing it ourselves.”

Throughout 2016, the decline of coal has been used as a political football, a metaphor for the damage done by liberal, environmentalist regulation to the working class. Hillary Clinton, who said that her energy plans would "put a lot of coal miners and coal companies out of business," lost enormously across Appalachia. Donald Trump, both during the campaign and since his victory, has promised to save the coal industry with energy reform that rescinds environmental efforts like Obama's Climate Action Plan; he’s also spoken of abolishing the Environmental Protection Agency, and there is concern he will ignore international climate agreements. In West Virginia, the newly elected Democratic governor, Trump-esque billionaire coal baron Jim Justice, is noncommittal on the existence of climate change and has pledged to "promote new uses for coal," incentivize power plants to use only West Virginia coal and bring back coal jobs. But economics might be a stronger force than rhetoric: Even with the prospect of supportive federal and state administrations, many power company executives—including ones in Appalachia—are declaring that coal is simply too cost-ineffective, and are continuing with plans to shut down their coal-fired power plants.

But while coal country happens to be in the political spotlight today, the region is not unique in its susceptibility to the problems in which it finds itself. The 20th century has seen countless regional economies built on extractive and polluting industries that have been decimated by technological advancement and globalization: manufacturing in the Rust Belt, the auto industry in Detroit, the timber industry in the Pacific Northwest. As the coal industry dies—and make no mistake, it is dying—some in Appalachia are still clinging to a past that can’t save them, but many others are trying to find a way to create a new economy, focused on a future where the communities of Appalachia are more self-sustaining. In driving through the region this fall, we discovered that the lessons they’re learning and sharing will be vital as more and more industries—and the economies they support—fall victim to the same forces that are ending coal. The innovative web of entrepreneurs, community organizations, and government programs in Appalachia can serve as the model for the transition to a new economy for any community.

Coal keeps the lights on—until it doesn't

In places like West Virginia, where my colleague Elaine McMillion Sheldon and I are from, coal is a foundational part of the cultural identity. So much so that on a rainy day this August, when we drove past a modest lot of used cars on West Virginia's Route 19, the sign that loomed above it seemed completely normal: King Coal Pre-Owned Super Store. It might have held a certain significance now, as we crisscrossed West Virginia and eastern Kentucky, but we have driven by this sign and others like it dozens of times in our lives. To grow up in the heart of Appalachia is to internalize this narrative, whether your family has worked in the mines for generations (as in Elaine's case) or it hasn't (as in mine). Coal is king. Friends of coal. Coal keeps the lights on—until it doesn't.

Listen to a short audio documentary introducing you to this trip to document the new economy of coal country:
The coal economy has been many things in and to Appalachia—pride, livelihood, environmental villain, political juggernaut—but it has never been particularly resilient. While U.S. coal production was on an overall increase from 1949 to the mid-2000s, that rise was peppered with spikes and plateaus, as well as fluctuations in the labor force. In the mid-20th century, mechanization and consolidation in the coal industry sent jobs plummeting. West Virginian mining jobs dropped from 125,000 to 65,000 between 1947 and 1954, eventually hitting 41,000 in 1968, which was at the time a 65-year low. (This era also marked a large regional migration to northern industrial cities, often referred to as the "Hillbilly Highway." Between 1940 and 1960, 7 million Appalachians left.) Eastern Kentucky’s production experienced sharp downward spikes in the late 1950s and '80s, West Virginia in the early '90s and early 2000s. Coal has always brought booms as well as busts.

There is much evidence to suggest that Appalachia’s last boom has come and gone. Even without the rise of renewables, the bottom has fallen out of the coal market. The driving force in the decline of U.S. coal production is the booming shale gas market. Last year, for the first time, natural gas surpassed coal as the country's largest source of net electricity generation. And coal from the western United States—where coal is generally cheaper and mined less labor-intensively in surface mines—is supplanting Appalachian coal. (The country's biggest coal producer today is, by far, Wyoming.) Global exports, which account for an estimated 27% of West Virginia’s coal production, are also down.

Coal production here has been in overall decline since 1990, dropping by 45% between 2000 and 2015; in eastern Kentucky, production has plummeted by 80%. West Virginia, Appalachia's biggest coal producer, produced 168 million short tons in 2008. If this year's output continues at pace, that number is expected to hit 68 million, the state's lowest annual output in a century. Long-term forecasts are similarly low: the West Virginia University Bureau of Business and Economic Research (BBER) projects state coal production to fall to fewer than 67 million short tons by 2036. (Back in 2009, Charleston Gazette-Mail writer Ken Ward Jr., long an important voice in this conversation, pointed out that the Appalachian Basin could hit "peak coal"—the point of maximum production, after which it’s all downhill—as early as 2020.) Between 2000-2015, Appalachia lost more than 9,300 coal jobs, and major mining companies like Alpha Natural Resources have filed for bankruptcy, leaving behind devastated livelihoods and devastated earth. WVU's BBER sees only .5% job growth in the state’s natural resources and mining sector (with all of those jobs coming in natural gas) over the next five years; it expects coal industry employment to contract by an average annual rate of 2% per year through 2021.

A new economy, and a new identity

From the outside, coal's dethroning to cheaper, cleaner alternatives may seem inarguable. But the reason for coal's demise has been something of a debate, especially to those who believe that its only real problem is the Obama administration and a liberal, Environmental Protection Agency-led war on coal. (In fact, while compliance with the carbon-emissions-reducing Clean Power Plan contributes to decreased coal production, the U.S. EIA found that Appalachia would actually see the country's smallest CPP-attributable drop.) So when Elaine and I set out to document the efforts underway in Appalachia's transitioning economy, we knew that we could
not presuppose that everyone believed such a transition was happening. The first question had to be not how is Appalachia transitioning, but is it?

On our travels through West Virginia and eastern Kentucky, we heard just one person refer in earnest to a war on coal. We heard many others—economists, community development leaders, small-business owners, ex-miners—say that the moment of transition had arrived. That there was no going back. That coal might still be mined, some miners might keep their jobs, but the industry would never again be what it once was. To say good-bye to coal—even if just to say good-bye to its halcyon days—is a profound spiritual and emotional decision for a people who have watched their family members work, suffer, and die underground, who have loved and taken deep pride in the community coal created. One person invoked the stages of grief, several others mentioned post-traumatic stress disorder. It's hard to overstate—and perhaps, to outsiders, hard to explain at all—the mental shift that this economic change represents, and the reevaluation of identity it prompts.

It creates an opportunity, but it also creates a vacuum. For decades in West Virginia, for instance, the economy has been dominated by largely absentee companies that have, in essence, extracted twice: first resources, then profit. Relative to the wealth of coal moguls like Don Blankenship, the disgraced Massey Energy CEO (currently serving a one-year sentence for conspiring to violate federal mine safety standards in the Upper Big Branch disaster that killed 29 miners) and governor-elect Justice, little of coal's prosperity has touched the people whose land it came from or who toiled to get it out, save for the new vehicles and homes bought with coal salaries and so easily repossessed after layoffs came to town. One possible outcome of an imbalance like this is the sense that one is living in a feudal state—that, when those lords leave, others need to come in to take their places. Much of the work being done by economic development groups around Appalachia starts with reversing this idea and helping people see the possibility, and opportunity, within themselves and their home.

**Reinventing The Rural Economy**

But this is less a story about coal’s decline than it is about what the people left in the wake of that descent can do after to quickly strengthen economic muscles that atrophied while coal grew more and more powerful. The decline of coal brings unprecedented opportunities to build lasting, meaningful economies. Here, in a place largely without the urban centers that traditionally attract the likes of Google and Uber, it is a chance to find new ways to utilize potential, to reinvent the rural economy into something multifaceted and resilient.

All around Appalachia, people are trying to harness that possibility and realize that opportunity for as many people as possible, by trying to figure out how to both capitalize on their strengths in new areas and improve existing economic sectors (and how to do both fast). In some places, these efforts have the flash of millennial innovation (life sciences businesses, tech startups), and in others (auto shops, aerospace mechanics) they don't. They involve new ideas and existing infrastructures, young people who are just starting their careers, and people who have had to figure out, in the middle of their lives, how to start over.
These efforts are encouraging—as are the modest drops in forecasted unemployment rates in both West Virginia and Kentucky, led by construction, professional, and service sectors—but they exist within a context of systemic, pervasive challenges. The decline of coal has affected not just those who work in the industry, though they are undoubtedly hit the hardest, but also those who work in transportation, as metal fabricators, even at shopping malls. Entrepreneurship is a major tenant of a diversified Appalachian economy, but Appalachian entrepreneurs often lack access to capital; there is not a single venture capital firm in the state of West Virginia, which Forbes has declared the worst state in the country in which to do business. An average of 29% of the population of Eastern Kentucky is below the poverty line; in West Virginia, it’s 18%. West Virginia had the country's highest percentage of drug-overdose deaths in 2014, and it's losing population faster than any state in the country. John Deskins, director of the WVU BBER, says the state's main economic challenge is human capital: a healthy, skilled workforce.

The major barrier to a skilled workforce, of course, is lack of education. Coal provided high-paying jobs for those with relatively little education, and now that workforce is often ill-prepared for other markets, but they're not alone. Only 19% of the population of West Virginia and an average of 12% of the population of eastern Kentucky have bachelor degrees or higher. (Projections suggest that, in West Virginia alone, 52% of jobs will require post-secondary degrees by 2020.)

Here, there is progress: WVU and the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission are working to improve graduation rates with student-centered programs that target rural counties with low college attendance, offer on-campus support, and support entrepreneurialism, and last year the state had a record number of two- and four-year graduates. Almost every economic-development initiative we saw in West Virginia and eastern Kentucky came back, somehow, to education, even if just a workshop, training program, or retraining program. (Many involved financial assistance.) Progress in education can be slow to pay off, especially considering the length of a bachelor's degree, but it must be prioritized, says Chris Bollinger, director of the University of Kentucky Center of Business and Economic Research. Otherwise, history stands to repeat itself yet again: "A generation from now, we're going to be in the same place," he said. "You can go back to Night Comes to the Cumberlands"—Harry Caudill’s seminal 1963 book on the region’s troubled and depressed history—and it could have been written yesterday.

In Kentucky, a bipartisan initiative called SOAR (Shaping our Appalachian Region) united longtime Republican Congressman Hal Rogers and Republican Governor Matt Bevin in an "honest dialogue" about a future beyond eastern Kentucky's struggling coal economy, with events and seminars that work toward job creation and innovation in what it calls a "landscape-changing enterprise." It’s not an understatement: By dint of its existence, SOAR has given state actors like the Mountain Association for Community Economic Development (MACED) a new freedom. When we sat down at the 40-year-old advocacy group's office in Berea, Kentucky, its director, Peter Hille, pointed to a row of books on a shelf behind him, which contained a 1986 MACED coal study that, among other things, challenged the longevity of coal and its economic impact on the state. "There's stuff in there that was not popular to say," he says. "But now you've got Rogers, the Republican chair of the appropriations committee, saying essentially, 'Coal's not coming back and we need to do something different.'"
That this kind of dialogue is lacking in West Virginia leaves people like James Van Nostrand, director of the WVU College of Law's Center for Energy and Sustainable Development, still feeling hamstrung in his ability to act on what he considers economics-driven issues, not political ones. "It makes it harder to have those conversations about where we need to go when some are saying, 'We don't need to go anywhere, we just need to get the EPA off our back,'" Van Nostrand said. "It's a complete copout in terms of the leadership we need to start addressing these issues."

**An Old Story With A New Ending**

Perhaps some solace is that many people we met, from former coal miners to independent artists, weren't waiting—they were addressing their issues themselves, as best they could. In Beckley, West Virginia, a former miner opens an auto shop. In Charleston, a man starts a hotdog stand as part of a downtown revitalization. In Berea, Kentucky, an artist sells her friends' work in her art and coffee house. Nearby, a laid-off miner is trained for a new job: to retrofit houses to be more energy efficient. It isn't that simple, of course—as Hille put it, we also need an industrial-sized solution, because we have an industrial-sized problem—but Deskins and Bollinger agree: that these small independent actors are a big part of a diverse economy's success. When citizens are given the resources they need to open a business or retrain for a new job, Bollinger says, "People making decisions about the economic conditions around them generally make good decisions."

In driving through West Virginia and eastern Kentucky, we found five places being shaped by these kinds of decisions—and the new economies that can spring up around them. They do not represent a comprehensive overview of the many efforts like them, nor are they the only way forward. If there is one common thread of the many conversations we had in the region, it's that there can never be just one way again.

In Berea, Hille spoke about a project he did years ago, visiting rural communities around the country with the Kellogg Foundation. Everywhere he went, someone would tell him what made their hometown different. This is what's happening here, they would say: Their economy wasn't working anymore, their children were leaving, their businesses were boarding up, their schools were closing, and they didn't know what to do. They might have been talking about cotton in the South, timber in the Pacific Northwest, or sugar cane in Hawaii. When you looked past the details, it was the same story everywhere. Now, though, there might be a happier ending.

**Next Stop: Morgantown, West Virginia:** Can West Virginia University Jump-Start A New Economy Based On Innovation—Not Coal?

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December 7, 2016

Why Standing Rock Is About Way More Than a Pipeline

By Jordan Chariton
Mediaite

Growing up in a land of white privilege on Long Island, I had it fairly good. I wasn’t rich nor poor; I was middle class with two loving, working parents.

Neither my family nor tribe of relatives were slaughtered; my land wasn’t stolen in the name of another race and class colonizing their own country from the burnt ashes of mine.

So when I first arrived in Cannonball, North Dakota in September for what would become the first of five reporting trips, my world shook. Interview after interview, all the melodrama I’d ever built up in my head about my own experience ceased to matter.

Speaking with hundreds of Native American water protectors at Standing Rock over the last four months, a heartbreaking trend gnawed at me: where I was shocked and shaken, indigenous people were numb and utterly unsurprised.

All of the militarized police brutality perpetrated by North Dakota police toward the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and their non-native allies; the environmental racism perpetrated by federal and state authorities onto the Tribe; and the desecration of their land perpetrated by a private oil company cloaked with federal and state police protection—forces who are supposed to be protecting them rather than an oil company—was nothing extraordinary to these prayerful and righteous people.

After all, this was the centuries-old story they’ve been forced to endure.

That’s why December 5th, 2016 will forever be an historic day. That’s when veterans, led by The Young Turks host Wes Clark Jr. and contributor Michael A. Wood Jr., kneeled down and begged Native American tribal leaders for forgiveness for the original sins of the United States.

“We came here to be the conscience of the nation,” Clark Jr. began while kneeling in front of Native tribal leaders during a forgiveness ceremony.

“Within that conscience, we must first confess our sins to you because many of us in particular are from units that have hurt you over the many years. We came, we fought you, we took your land, we signed treaties that we broke, we stole minerals from your sacred hills, we blasted the faces of our presidents onto your sacred mountains, and we took more land, and then we took your children, and then we tried to take your language, we tried to eliminate your language that
God gave you and that the creator gave you. We didn’t respect you, we polluted your earth, we hurt you in so many ways, and we’ve come to say that we are sorry. We are at your service, and we beg for your forgiveness.”

In the endless drivel that is our corporate-media-horse-race-industrial-complex, those inside the bubble might read that and indignantly shout, “Who gives a damn about the plight of the Native Americans, President-Elect Trump just tweeted he’s going to bomb Scandinavia because the Prime Minister didn’t like The Apprentice!”

Here’s why you should care: America just elected one of the most unqualified, potentially diabolical presidents in history because of a frozen, deep despair; an anger and hopelessness that’s quietly swept across the country over the last 30 years.

The raw emotion and frustration that sprung a man like Trump into office came from the never-ending dark cloud that poisons America: unfettered greed and heartlessness; a type of social Darwinism fired by the plutocratic elite at average people—those with far less of a voice or chips to gamble into the corrupt pot that’s become America.

You know, like the Native Americans.

Of course, we have to be vigilant and steadfast in trying to achieve equality and respect for all groups, minorities, and people attacked by corporate, economic, and social colonialism, including our African American, Latino, Asian, and LGBT brothers and sisters.

This is especially vital as incoming forces inside the White House, and those supporting them, try and rewrite America into their diluted concept of what makes it great.

But, of all the historic lessons to take from the epic battle of Standing Rock—one that is still not over despite President Obama’s decision to deny a crucial final drilling permit—we can ironically learn one courtesy of Trump.

For, on election night, when he promised to rescue the “the forgotten men and women of our country,” he was unknowingly talking about the group thousands of brave veterans from across the U.S. just kneeled down to in a genuine desire for forgiveness.

Our real founders—the Native Americans.

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*Jordan Chariton* is a Politics Reporter for The Young Turks, covering the presidential campaign trail, where he’s interviewing voters on both sides. He’s also a columnist for Mediaite and here’s his latest column. Follow him [@JordanChariton](https://twitter.com/JordanChariton) and watch videos at [YouTube.com/tytpolitics](https://www.youtube.com/tytpolitics).

December 7, 2016

Veterans apologize to Indigenous on behalf of U.S. Army at Standing Rock

By Amanda Froelich
Nation of Change

*Today, hundreds of veterans from across the United States took a knee and begged for forgiveness for crimes committed toward indigenous people in the name of the U.S. military.*

A massive awakening is being realized, and it’s stemming from the Standing Rock protest camps located near Cannon Ball, North Dakota. Since April, “water protectors” have been protesting the development of a four-state Dakota Access Pipeline.

Individuals in support of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, who believe the land is rightfully theirs due to an 1851 treaty, have been maced, tased, beaten with batons, shot with rubber bullets, and even sprayed down with water canons in freezing temperatures because they believe the DAPL’s construction will uproot burial ground and potentially contaminate the Missouri River.

Energy Transfer Partners insists that the pipeline is incredibly safe, but betting on “human error” has proven to be too much of a risk, which is why advocates for the Standing Rock Sioux tribe protest. This past weekend, over three thousand veterans arrived at the Sacred Stone camp to show their support for the indigenous peoples’ plight, as well as to help prepare activists for the cold winter.

Likely because of the veterans’ arrival – which was organized by Michael J. Wood, a former Baltimore police officer, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers denied an easement to the oil companies responsible for the $3.7 billion pipeline. Cheers erupted in the camp as word spread, but a statement by Energy Transfer Partners soon made it clear that construction of the DAPL will continue regardless of the Obama Administration’s interference.

As of now, a standoff continues between law enforcement workers and water protectors; those who are present at Standing Rock – and many more who intend to venture to North Dakota – are adamant that they are not going anywhere until the pipeline is rerouted.

With heartache and humility in the air, veterans led by Wesley Clark Jr. did something remarkable today. Hundreds of veterans gathered before tribal leaders of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe and begged for forgiveness for crimes committed toward indigenous people in the name of the U.S. military.

The ceremony, according to Redhawk’s Facebook post, was led by Arvol Looking Horse, Leonard Crow Dog, Phyllis Young, Ivan Looking Horse, and a number of other natives of Turtle Island.

Though many military personnel are in favor of the pipeline’s construction due to the potential boost it could offer the economy, others see it as another instance in which native Americans are
being trampled upon within a two-hundred-year period. To attempt to ‘right’ the many wrongs of the past, the brave veterans asked for forgiveness.

According to Jon Eagle, who is the tribal historic preservation officer for the Standing Rock Sioux, Leksi Leonard Crow Dog – a Sioux spokesman – forgave the veteran military members present for the past actions of their government. In turn, he asked for forgiveness for the Battle of Big Horn – also known as Custer’s Last Stand – when Sioux warriors killed approximately 268 U.S. soldiers affiliated with the 7th Cavalry.

Redhawk wrote that they were “forgiven for actions taken to dehumanize the indigenous of this country, and a step towards solitary has been made.”

After the moving ceremony, the two groups made a unified call for world peace.

What’s happening at Standing Rock is no longer a fight between the indigenous and those employed by an affluent oil company. The uprising has morphed into a battle between those who understand that all life is connected and that by honoring the Earth, everyone benefits – especially future generations.


December 8, 2016

'This is an awakening': Native Americans find new hope after Standing Rock

For those who left behind communities ravaged by poverty and substance abuse, their time spent at this historic gathering has been transformational

By Julia Carrie Wong
The Guardian

Frank Archambault’s tent sits on top of a small hill in the middle of Oceti Sakowin, the largest encampment at Standing Rock. It is easy to spot him on the small rise, wearing a long black coat, feathered hat, and yellow, red, white and black ribbons on his arm that mark him as a member of Iktčé Wičháša Oyáte – A Common Men’s Society.

Archambault founded Iktčé Wičháša Oyáte shortly after he arrived, with his five children and grandchild, at the “water protector” encampments in August. He saw that there was work around the camp that wasn’t getting done, and he saw that there were men around camp not doing work. Now the group helps run security and coordinates work crews.

It’s a big change from Archambault’s previous life in Little Eagle, South Dakota, a community of about 300 people within the Standing Rock Sioux reservation. A recovering meth addict,
Archambault describes the existence he left behind, before he joined the movement fighting the Dakota Access pipeline: “Sad.”

“Back home, it’s drugs, alcohol, no jobs. People don’t really know how to survive. It’s hopeless,” he said. “All we have left is the river.”

Many of the Native American activists, also known as water protectors, who have gathered on the windswept plains of North Dakota to defeat a multibillion-dollar pipeline, come from reservations ravaged by poverty, substance abuse, and a legacy of historical traumas that reach well into the present.

“This is like an awakening,” Archambault said as he surveyed the camp from his spot on the hill. “Something I’ve been struggling with my whole life is doing something to be proud of.”

‘You can’t leave’

Before Lauren Howland travelled to Standing Rock, she was back home at the Jicarrilla Apache Nation reservation in Dulce, New Mexico, taking a break from the University of New Mexico to help her family through some hard times.

“I was a bad kid,” she said of her life before Standing Rock. “I was always drinking, always with my hoodrat friends doing hoodrat stuff, just being a typical Native American, giving into the stereotype that we’re all drunks and druggies and we just get our checks and get drugs.”

“It’s not hard to be that way when it’s all you see,” she added.

Howland, who is San Carlos Apache and Navajo, calls herself a “recovering alcoholic”. When we spoke, in early November, she was 31 days sober.

“Back on the rez, there’s nothing really to do. All there is do is drink and kill yourself,” she said. “I’m only 21 and I’m an alcoholic. I know 13-year-old alcoholics, 11-year-old alcoholics. I started drinking when I was, like, seven.”

Surveys by the National Institute of Health conducted in 1991-1992 and 2001-2002 showed that Native Americans were almost twice as likely as other racial and ethnic groups in the United States to be alcohol dependent. However, a more recent study by researchers at the University of Arizona, looking at the period from 2009-2013, found no elevated rate of alcoholism in Native American populations.

And among young adults, Native Americans are more than twice as likely to take their own lives than other racial groups, according to a 2015 study by the US Centers for Disease Control.

For the Cheyenne River Sioux, the crisis is even more acute. Between 2002 and 2003, the tribe suffered 17 youth suicides, according to multiple news reports.
In 2005, Julie Garreau, the executive director of the Cheyenne River Youth Project, told the Senate Indian Affairs Committee that there were between three and seven attempted suicides on the reservation every week.

Before getting involved in the Standing Rock movement, Jasilea Charger, 20, was working at a Taco John’s and living on the Cheyenne River Sioux reservation, in her hometown of Eagle Butte, South Dakota.

On the reservation, she said, she felt “stuck”. She lost friends and family to the suicide epidemic. Her father died before she was born, and her mother has “lost her way”.

“She taught me what not to do by doing it,” Charger said of her mother. “It’s a gift on its own because it taught me forgiveness.”

“It’s kind of hard living there, but then again you can’t leave,” she said, while cooking slices of spam over a fire pit on a sunny day. “I don’t want to leave home because I feel like I’m running from the problem.”

‘A family gathering’

Hunter Shortbear always wanted to serve in the military. He wanted to join the marines, but a March 2010 beating left him with a fractured skull and just one eye.

At Standing Rock, he has become a “warrior”.

Shortbear’s black eye patch, barrel chest, and proud carriage set him apart in a crowd. He speaks deliberately and eats voraciously. He describes the tasks he has been assigned on the security team by his “superior officer” as “an honor and a privilege”.

It wasn’t until I came here that I realized it’s a powerful thing to learn your traditions and ways

As a child, the 29-year-old Oglala Hunkpapa Lakota was adopted by a white family and grew up one of the only Native Americans in Carrington, North Dakota. But at Standing Rock, he has reconnected with his roots.

“I consider it a family gathering,” he said. “The Shortbear family is here.”

The way of life at the camp – communal kitchens, work crews chopping firewood and building shelters, medics and healers providing care, councils coming together to make decisions, and everyone keeping an eye out for each other – has been a revelation for Shortbear.

He compared it to a mural of a historic Sioux tribe living in tipis on the wall of the casino restaurant where we were eating.

“It’s all coming back,” he said. “I don’t want to lose this.”
In every moment, Standing Rock is suffused with indigenous ceremony and prayer, from the women who walk down to the water at sunrise to the singers who gather at the sacred fire.

At home, Howland said, tribal elders would tell young people to “get back to prayer and get away from drugs and alcohol” but it never made sense to her.

“It wasn’t until I came here that I realized it’s a powerful thing to learn your traditions and ways,” she said. “We do everything in prayer. This morning I woke up in prayer. You wake up and you smudge and you pray. At home, I would wake up and open a bottle and drink.”

‘Take this fire’

On Sunday, the Army Corps of Engineers announced that it was denying an easement for the Dakota Access pipeline to cross the Missouri river. It’s a victory for the movement, though many don’t trust the government or the company not to figure out another way.

With the temperatures dropping, a blizzard raging through North Dakota, and the chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux asking people to leave, the camps are at a crossroads.

Xhopakelxhit was an activist before she arrived at camp. A member of the Nuu-chah-nulth, Coast Salish, and Cree nations from the Village of Maaqtusiis in Sovereign Ahousaht Territory, Canada, she grew up reading Mao with her father.

As a member of the Red Warrior Camp, a group within Oceti Sakowin responsible for many of the direct actions against the pipeline, like chaining themselves to machinery, Xhopakelxhit carries a certain amount of mystique. “The joke around Red Warrior Camp is we eat rubber bullets for breakfast,” she said while receiving a large tattoo on her chest.

The challenge now, Xhopakelxhit says, is ensuring that everyone stays in the fight.

“One-hundred percent of indigenous people who leave here have a battle at home they weren’t taking care of. So maybe they can go home and fight.”

Howland agreed: “Imagine if we go back to our different reservations and start implementing tradition and prayer. Think about how much change we can make.”

“When I go home, I’m not going to be the same,” said Charger. “People back in our community deserve to know what it feels like to stand strong and pick each other up.”


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December 12, 2016

Moroccan mosques go solar
600 Moroccan mosques are installing solar to save money and inspire people.

By Diana Madson
Yale Climate Connections

In the North African kingdom of Morocco, religion and technology are joining forces on a project that will reduce global-warming pollution.

The goal is to retrofit 600 mosques so they use more clean energy and become more energy efficient.

Kuntze: “The project aims to equip mosques with mainly three technologies: with LED lighting, with solar water heaters, and with photovoltaic panels.”

That’s Jan-Christoph Kuntze, principal technical advisor for the project. He says the benefits go beyond reducing pollution. In fact, the effort was developed to increase public awareness of energy efficiency and to create jobs in Morocco.

The project is already creating jobs in engineering, manufacturing, and in new fields such as energy auditing.

Retrofitting any public buildings would have provided the same benefits. But Kuntze says the team deliberately chose to start with mosques.

Kuntze: “Mosques play a quite central role in the social lives of many Moroccan people.”

The idea is that when the Moroccan people see the benefits, they will be inspired to invest in the same solutions for their own homes and businesses — creating even larger environmental and economic benefits.

Listen to this story here:

http://www.yaleclimateconnections.org/2016/12/moroccan-mosques-go-solar/

December 13, 2016

Rock and a Hard Place

Recent events at Standing Rock spark new questions about sacredness, environment, tribal nation sovereignty

By Rob Enslin
Syracuse University College of Arts & Sciences
When Brian Patterson heard the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) was being delayed and possibly rerouted, he let out a whoop of joy. For him and thousands of others, particularly those at the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in the snow-covered Dakotas, it was a victory more than two years in the making. “There’s a sense of relief I cannot fully express,” says Patterson, a Bear Clan representative to the Oneida Indian Nation’s governing body. “I believe it’s linked to generational, historical trauma.”

Speaking by phone from his home in Central New York, Patterson says the Dec. 4 announcement by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to legally block construction of the DAPL, denying an easement it needs to drill under the Missouri River, is the latest, most substantial blow to the 1,172-mile pipeline, first proposed in 2014. Currently, more than 90 percent of the project is done. If the remaining section is ever built, a leak, rupture or spill could spell disaster for the reservation and approximately 17 million other people who depend on the river for clean water.

Patterson also is guarded. “In many ways, our struggles are just beginning,” he says, referencing an incoming oil-friendly president and Canada’s recent approval of two controversial pipelines, one of which would link Alberta to the United States. “It’s time to build and leverage our many ‘water protectors’ [what Standing Rock protesters are called] and alliances. For now, we sing and dance our victory song.”

Phil Arnold, director of the Skä•noñh-Great Law of Peace Center in Syracuse, says the Army Corps’ decision to look for alternate routes for the $3.8 billion pipeline, presaged by an environmental impact statement (EIS), could delay construction for months, maybe years. “It’s a significant victory, but it’s temporary,” cautions Arnold, who also serves as associate professor and chair of religion in the College of Arts and Sciences. “When an EIS was done for a proposed expansion of the Keystone XL Pipeline, the project was shelved because the environmental risks outweighed the economic benefits. An EIS hasn’t been done yet for the DAPL. Drillers may wait for President-elect Donald Trump, whose interests are aligned with fossil fuel development, to take office in January and reverse the decision.”

News of the Army Corps’ decision spread like wildfire through the Sioux’s Oceti Sakowin camp, situated on a sprawling grassland, south of Bismarck, North Dakota. (“Oceti Sakowin” is the proper name for members of the Sioux people and means “Seven Council Fires.” They are part of the Dakota and Lakota nations.) Native members celebrated by parading around on horseback and singing and dancing into the wee hours of the morning.

Since April, Oceti Sakowin has hosted tens of thousands of activists, environmentalists and tribal nation representatives, who have joined in solidarity with the people at Standing Rock. It is with a trace of irony that the Army Corps’ announcement came hours before the North Dakota governor was scheduled to evacuate Oceti Sakowin for the winter—and hours after the arrival of more than 2,000 U.S. military veterans and first responders, hoping to serve as an unarmed militia and peaceful human shields for the protesters.

Clutching a microphone at the camp’s central fire, Standing Rock Chairman Dave Archambault II praised supporters for their months of prayers and protests. “It’s wonderful,” he said, amid
cheers and shouts of “Mni Wiconi” (Lakota for “Water is life”), Standing Rock’s oft-repeated mantra. “You all did that. Your presence has brought the attention of the world.”

Reaction has been swift—from Energy Transfer Partners, which owns the Dakota Access company, saying it intends to complete the pipeline (“The White House’s directive is the latest in a series of overt and transparent political actions,” the company states) to Greenpeace lauding the decision as a “monumental victory in the fight to protect indigenous rights and sovereignty.”

Jo-Ellen Darcy, the Army’s assistant secretary for civil works, says there still is more to be done. “The best way to complete that work responsibly and expeditiously,” she writes, “is to explore alternate routes for the pipeline crossing.” The Army Corps is part of the Department of the Army.

Scholars believe the bigger story here is a renewed awareness of indigenous knowledge and values. The traditional narrative, Arnold says, is that Native Americans have felt invisible or relegated to the past. Standing Rock, a global flashpoint for environmental and indigenous activism, has become the exception. “Seeing different people, especially different religious groups, rally around climate change is remarkable,” he adds. “I think we’ll start seeing more of these collaborations, as the Old World view of conquest, domination and extractive economical uses of the planet reveals itself to be counterproductive to human survival.”

Arnold’s colleague, Scott Manning Stevens, calls the decision a victory for all indigenous peoples—from the “water protectors” at Standing Rock to native students, activists and allies around the globe who have organized protests and rallies. “The struggle at Standing Rock is about several things: the environment and health of our homelands, U.S. treaty commitments, Native sovereignty and the importance of the sacred,” says Stevens, associate professor and director of Native American studies, as well as associate professor of English. “We will continue to fight for those rights wherever they are threatened and fight for the future of this planet for everyone else.”

Leave it to Patterson, who recently honeymooned at Standing Rock with his bride, Renée Roman Nose, to have the last word: “Really, the whole thing is about conscious-raising.”

**Water Is Life**

In a span of eight months, Standing Rock went from a relatively quiet protest movement to an all-out zeitgeist. When the calendar flipped to December, an estimated 6,000 activists were encamped on the windswept prairie, enduring heavy snow and sub-zero temperatures. Many of them inhabited tents and teepees; others, modern campers and tiny makeshift houses. At night, they dozed off to the sounds of chanting and drumming against the purring of generators.

Kacey Chopito, a history major in the College of Arts and Sciences and Maxwell School, was one of several Syracuse students who made the pilgrimage to Standing Rock, which is tucked in the shadow of the sacred Black Hills near Cannonball River, a tributary of the Missouri River. He spent Thanksgiving learning about, praying for and protecting the sacredness of water and Mother Earth. Chopito says that, as an indigenous person, he has felt called to protect and give
back to the planet—a philosophy reflected in the “water-is-life” saying.

“‘Water is life’ has deep cultural and spiritual meaning because water gives us life, and, without water, life cannot continue,” says Chopito, a member of Zuni Pueblo in western New Mexico. “At camp, people didn’t say ‘Water is life’; instead, they shouted it with every part of their being. … Land is more than a place to stay. It includes our culture, our language and our way of life. At Standing Rock, we’ve been standing strong to protect and ensure the survival of Mother Earth and its sacredness.”

Chopito's travel partner was Cody Jock, a political science major in A&S and Maxwell and one of the organizers of a recent march on campus against the pipeline's construction. “This fight is not over. It’s far from over,” he told the Daily Orange. “We’ve got still a lot of work to do.” Jock is a member of the Mohawk Nation of Akwesasne in Upstate New York.

Standing Rock didn’t become part of the national consciousness until recently, when the Sioux objected to the pipeline’s path being close to their main source of drinking water. A single leak, they argued, could poison water supplies for them and for other reservations downstream. What is less known is that Dakota Access originally had planned to run the pipeline upstream, near Bismarck, but decided otherwise when they thought it was too close to the city’s drinking water.

“Although state and federal regulators had issued permits for the pipeline to proceed, the Army Corps never give permission to drill under the Missouri River, next to the reservation,” says Joe Heath ’68, general counsel for the Onondaga Nation and a New York State attorney. “What worries a lot of people is that Trump wants to finish the pipeline because he's been invested in it.”

Heath says that, if completed, the DAPL would traverse four states, carrying more than 570,000 barrels of crude every day from the Bakken Formation in western North Dakota to a terminal in Illinois, east of St. Louis, where it would be shipped to refineries and converted into usable fuel.

“If the pipeline comes to pass, it would be another sad chapter in the U.S. government’s long history of permitting construction of potentially hazardous projects on tribal nation lands and waters, without consulting them,” says Heath, a former adjunct professor of law at Syracuse. “There’s a lot at stake here.”

The Sioux also have been concerned about the DAPL running through a patch of nearby land teeming with burial and prayer sites and culturally significant artifacts. Although the land is not theirs, they claim it has been unilaterally taken away from them by the U.S. government—a violation of the Fort Laramie Treaty, which they and seven other tribes signed in 1851. Drillers have been bulldozing these sites without proper authorization or tribal consultation.

“The legal process behind these environmental and archaeological reviews for energy projects doesn’t always work,” Heath adds. “It’s a potent reminder of how U.S. government treaties with Native Americans are done under what [indigenous author] Vine Deloria has called a ‘cloud of impotence.’ Clear promises often dissolve into rhetoric when put to the test.”
Heath should know. Before taking up with the Onondaga in 1983, he made headlines as one of the attorneys representing inmates involved in the 1971 Attica prison riot in Western New York. (The suit was settled 18 years later to the tune of $12 million, in favor of the prisoners.) Since then, he has gained a reputation for being a “people’s lawyer,” fluent in civil rights litigation.

In October, Heath traveled to Standing Rock, where he saw more than 200 police and National Guardsmen use rubber bullets, pepper spray and water cannons to dispel activists from private land along the DAPL’s proposed route. When the dust cleared, 141 people were charged with criminal trespassing, rioting and endangerment by fire. “[The suspects] were thrown into dog kennels, with numbers inked on their arms, and held without due process of law,” Patterson says. In time, the scene at Standing Rock turned uglier. Clashes between protesters and law enforcement officials, in full riot gear, became regular occurrences.

Even though Oceti Sakowin is officially closed and temperatures are dropping, many protesters have refused to budge. “There are too many uncertainties about the Army Corps’ decision,” Heath says. “Plus, a lot of people have invested too much in the struggle to leave now.”

Chopito puts it this way: “Outside camp, we’re called ‘protesters’ and ‘agitators,’” even though we’ve been protecting water in a peaceful manner. Standing Rock is, and always will remain, unarmed. We are armed only with our prayers and our culture.”

**Ride the Snake**

When Patterson traveled to Standing Rock in August, he was in the final moments of his decade-long presidency of United South and Eastern Tribes, representing 25 tribes east of the Mississippi River. Like his wife, an actress with ties to Oklahoma’s Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes, he is an activist with fire in his blood. In November, this was powerfully evident, when the activist pair whipped the audience into a frenzy at a campus panel discussion about Standing Rock. Patterson doesn’t suffer fools lightly, and often says what others don’t—that oil leaks and ruptures are daily occurrences and drillers rarely catch them; that the United States should do away with fossil fuel; that the Sioux are unlikely to benefit from the DAPL, anyway.

What also makes Patterson’s rap different from others is a willingness to tackle lesser-known yet equally salient issues, such as race, tribal nation sovereignty and sacredness. “They’re applicable not just to Standing Rock, but to all of Indian Country,” he says. A&S professor Sascha Scott says people at Standing Rock call themselves ‘protectors,’ instead of ‘protestors,’ to show they are not aggressors.

Patterson warns of an ancient Lakota prophecy about a “black snake,” which is supposed to rise from the deep and bring with it great sorrow and destruction. The “snake,” he says, may well be one of the more than 2.4 million miles of pipe that pumps black oil throughout the American heartland.

It is against this backdrop that the Sioux and other native people fear oil pipelines of any kind. “Pipelines may be cheaper and less accident-prone than trains, but they still leak or spill, usually
with horrible results,” Patterson says, referring to a pipeline break in 2013 that dumped more than 20,000 barrels of oil onto a North Dakota wheat field. “The Army Corps of Engineers wrongly approved the whole DAPL project without adequately consulting Indian Country. This is a violation of tribal sovereignty, where we’re supposed to have a government-to-government relationship with the United States.”

That governments are obligated to consult tribal nations on infrastructure projects is outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which originated at a conference at Standing Rock in 1974. Adopted by the U.N. in 2007, UNDRIP has yet to be ratified by the United States, where the Obama administration considers it an aspirational document, but without any legal weight. “President Obama has done a lot to support UNDRIP, such as advancing the concept of self-determination to tribal nations, but that’s not the same as following international law,” Patterson says. "The situation at Standing Rock might have been avoided if the United States had embraced UNDRIP sooner."

Heath thinks the Sioux, who have been wrangling with the Army Corps in court for most of the year, still have a convincing case. “The area affected by the pipeline is private treaty land, granted to the Sioux as part of the Treaty of Fort Laramie,” he says. “Even though the U.S. government has tried to fix broken treaties by compensating tribes for lost land, none of them, including the Sioux, have accepted payment because they’d have to cede treaty claims.”

Complicating the situation are two laws that are supposed to protect tribal nation interests: the National Historic Preservation Act (1966), which preserves historical and archaeological sites in the United States; and the National Environmental Policy Act (1970), which provides a broad national framework for protecting the environment.

The question on everyone’s minds, says Jack Manno G’03, professor of environmental studies at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, is whether the DAPL has met the requirements of these two laws. “On one hand, the Army Corps and ETP claim the Sioux didn’t respond to their requests to identify sacred and cultural sites near the pipeline,” he says. “On the other, the Sioux feel they haven’t been given enough time to address the environmental-impact question. All sorts of risks, such as oil leaking into their water supply, haven’t been taken into account.”

Some of that might change, if the Army Corps keeps its word. As a sovereign nation, the Sioux have the right to control their natural resources, as well as their domestic and tribal business dealings. But even with an EIS on the table, the Sioux are at a disadvantage. “Many tribal nations suffer from environmental racism,” says Arnold, adding that Standing Rock’s poverty rate is 43 percent, nearly triple the national average. “Suicide, mortality and dropout rates are some of the highest in the nation, as are rape and sexual assault. Health care is almost nonexistent. Eminent domain [expropriating private property for public use] has virtually obliterated Indian Country.”

Scholars insist the problems at Standing Rock—and the plight of tribal nations—run deeper. Arnold, for instance, points to the Doctrine of Discovery, a notorious papal document that European monarchies have used for centuries to legitimize the colonization of lands outside of Europe. Credit Thomas Jefferson for applying the doctrine to the U.S. government in the 1790s, thus setting the stage for American imperialism and the treatment of conquered indigenous
peoples. It quietly was adopted into U.S. Indian law with Johnson v. McIntosh (1823).

Arnold is one of many trying to get the doctrine revoked. “It has justified racism and the enslavement of indigenous peoples since 1493,” he says. “This edict has given Christians the right to exploit any land occupied by non-Christians. It also has allowed them to enslave or kill pagans, if they can’t be converted. Combined with Johnson v. McIntosh, which has yet to be overturned, the doctrine has celebrated genocide on a global scale.”

Says Manno: “The clashes at Standing Rock are rooted in the doctrine principles of greed and subjugation. We must expose and renounce these papal bulls, if we have any hope of creating a more just society.”

**Digital Smoke Signals**

Bob Wilson, associate professor of geography in Maxwell, has built a career on studying the American environmental movement. He is part of a growing segment of scholars who feel that social media, combined with laptops, tablets and smartphones, is changing the way people engage in nonviolent activism.

Since the fall, social media has been covered Standing Rock with a focus and seriousness that is virtually unprecedented. “We’ve come a long way from the famous 1970s ‘Crying Indian’ anti-littering commercials or the how-to tips [to lower greenhouse gas emissions] at the end of ’An Inconvenient Truth,’” Wilson says. “Live streaming videos and photographs showing police shooting tear gas into the crowd or spraying water cannons have captured the chaos at Standing Rock. The ‘water protectors’ have been narrating their own history.”

Fine by Sascha Scott, who says that mainstream media have been guilty of “rewriting the narrative” to suit their agenda. “Throughout American history, even when American Indians have been fighting to defend and protect their families, their land, their sovereignty, their way of life—even when they have been under fierce attack by the U.S. government and other forces—they have been depicted as the aggressors,” says Scott, associate professor of art history in A&S, where she specializes in American Indian visual culture. “That’s why [at Standing Rock] the people have called themselves ‘protectors,’ instead of ‘protesters’—to make it clear that they are not the aggressors, that they are protecting their land and water and the rights of those living downstream.”

Stevens thinks social media activism is the way forward. He references the more than 1 million people who checked into Standing Rock’s Facebook page in October, in a show of support. “There was a rumor on social media that local police were using Facebook check-ins to track activists protesting the DAPL,” he says. “Organizers then called on ‘everyone’ to check in at Standing Rock to ‘overwhelm and confuse’ police. It was a great demonstration of solidarity.”

Based in A&S, Stevens says this “new kind of activism”—consistent, persistent reporting by people on the ground, without aid from mainstream media and their “profit-driven motives”—changes how indigenous people and their allies interact with one another. “At Standing Rock, we’ve been connected by the Internet and by a common cause,” he continues. “With the new [presidential] administration, new tactics will need to counter new threats. The academy is vital
to this process, as we think about educating the current and next generation of students about respecting the planet.”

Ostensibly, Standing Rock raises important questions about tribal nation sovereignty and the legacy of colonialism. “Opposition to the pipeline always was more than threats to water posed by the pipeline, itself,” Wilson explains. He is concerned, however, that the Army Corps’ decision will be a short-lived victory for the Sioux. “Many of the people Trump has appointed to key positions in his administration are supportive of the pipeline and of increased oil development, more generally. More worrisome, the president-elect seems intolerant of dissent. Future protesters … may be met with a harsh response by the federal government.”

Which is where social media comes in, bridging distances and connecting cultures. The first thing Patterson did at Standing Rock was whip out his phone and send some “digital smoke signals.” “Indigenous networking picks up where other communications leave off,” he says. “We’re finally seeing humanity respond to our traditional knowledge and value systems. This response will help turn all of us into more responsible stewards of the environment, making Mother Earth better for our children and our children’s children.”

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**December 13, 2016**

Pipeline 150 miles from Dakota Access protests leaks 176,000 gallons of oil

By Derek Hawkins
Washington Post

A ruptured pipeline has spilled more than 176,000 gallons of crude oil into a hillside and a Little Missouri River tributary about 150 miles west of Cannon Ball, N.D., where thousands of activists have spent months fighting construction of the Dakota Access oil pipeline, state officials said Monday.

A segment of the Belle Fourche Pipeline near Belfield, N.D., began leaking earlier this month, contaminating nearly six miles of the Ash Coulee Creek before cleanup workers contained it, Bill Suess, an environmental scientist from the North Dakota Department of Health, told the Associated Press. An estimated 130,200 gallons of oil spilled into the creek, and another 46,200 gallons leaked onto a hillside, Suess told Forum News Service in a separate interview.
The spill dirtied private and federal land along the waterway, but no drinking water sources were affected, Suess said. About 37,000 gallons of oil have been recovered so far, he said, and a crew of about 60 workers were averaging 100 yards of cleanup per day, though snow and single-digit temperatures have complicated the response.

“It’s going to take some time,” Suess told the AP. “Obviously there will be some component of the cleanup that will go toward spring.”

The incident stirred up fears among opponents of the Dakota Access pipeline about what could happen if project developer Energy Transfer Partners builds a segment of pipe under a Missouri River reservoir that provides drinking water to the Standing Rock Indian Reservation.

The spill occurred about a two and a half-hour drive west from Cannon Ball, where members of the Standing Rock Sioux and other Native American tribes, as well as environmental activists from around the country, have camped out since April in an ongoing demonstration against the Dakota Access pipeline. Opponents of the $3.8 billion project, many of whom call themselves “water protectors,” argue that the pipeline will pollute Standing Rock’s water supplies and damage burial grounds and other sacred lands. Energy Transfer Partners has said that leak detection equipment and the pipeline’s thick steel walls would prevent a major accident.

Earlier this month, the Army Corps of Engineers denied Energy Transfer Partners an easement that would have allowed the company to drill under the reservoir. The 1,172-mile pipeline is nearly complete, but the Army Corps said it will weigh alternate routes.

The Belle Fourche Pipeline, owned by Wyoming-based True Companies, was immediately shut down after a local landowner reported the spill to regulators on Dec. 5, company spokeswoman Wendy Owen told the AP. Electronic monitoring equipment failed to detect the leak, according to Owen, who said the pipeline may have ruptured when the hillside slumped.

“That is our number one theory, but nothing is definitive,” she said. “We have several working theories and the investigation is ongoing.”

Built in the 1980s, the pipeline is six inches in diameter and transports about 1,000 barrels of oil daily, Suess told Forum News Service.

The Dakota Access pipeline is 30 inches in diameter and could transport more than 500,000 barrels of oil daily.

Shortly after the leak was discovered, a labor group in the region with members working on the Dakota Access pipeline criticized True Companies for what it called a track record of accidents.

“Our members take pride in their work, and we won’t just stand by and allow an irresponsible pipeline operator to harm North Dakota’s natural resources or damage reputation of our industry,” Evan Whiteford, a spokesman for the Laborers District Council of Minnesota and North Dakota, told Forum News Service. “We think it’s time for state officials to step in and force the True organization to clean up its act.”
True Companies has a history of oil spills in the region, reporting three dozen spills totaling 320,000 gallons of oil since 2006, according to the AP. Federal pipeline regulators have hit True Companies with 19 enforcement actions since 2004, resulting in nearly $400,000 in penalties, the AP reported.

The Poplar Pipeline, operated by a True Companies subsidiary, leaked about 30,000 gallons of crude oil into the Yellowstone River in eastern Montana in 2015, prompting a town to shut down its drinking water service to 6,000 residents, the Casper Star Tribune reported. Belle Fourche Pipeline Co., also part of the True Companies family, has reported 10 oil spills since 2011, totaling nearly 5,000 barrels and resulting in more than $2 million in property damage, Reuters reported.

A representative from True Companies did not immediately respond to a request for comment.


December 14, 2016

RCBWG Releases Summary of Best Practices Survey on Engaging Faith Communities

By Jame Schaefer
Society for Conservation Biology


Conducted on behalf of RCBWG from May 31-September 10, the results of this survey underscore the benefits to conserving biological diversity when researchers and practitioners relate positively to faith leaders and communities.

Respondents to the survey also shared their approaches to engaging leaders and members of faith communities in ways that might be helpful to other SCB members. Societal support for conservation has become increasingly vital for approval, collaboration, and advocacy of scientific solutions aimed at mitigating threats to the loss of biological diversity on the land and in the water. Results of the survey point to religious and native faith communities as allies in this quest.

Prepared by Jame Schaefer (Marquette University) and Susan Higgins (Center for Large Landscape Conservation) who serve on the RCBWG Board, “Best Practices Survey—Promising First Step toward Developing Guidelines” provides an overview of the responses to ten questions submitted by thirty-nine SCB members who have engaged leaders and members of faith communities in conservation projects. The faith communities represent the major world religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism—and a diversity of native spiritualities including Australian Aborigine and Native American.
The projects on which SCB members reported occurred on all continents except Antarctica. Among the foci are aging polar bears, bison, climate change, coral rehabilitation, fish, iguana, kangaroo, rattlesnakes, terrestrial vertebrates, wildlife used for bush meat, forest management and restoration, restoration of rivers, and protective management of shrines and sacred places.

The Best Practices Survey was launched by the RCBWG as the first step of the three-year Best Practices Project aimed at producing guidelines for SCB members to consider when planning and conducting conservation research and application. During the second step proposed for ICCB 2017, the successful practices of some SCB members who participated in the survey will be highlighted in a symposium followed by a workshop during which best practices guidelines will be drafted. They will be refined subsequently, processed through several iterations, and presented to the SCB Board of Governors for recommending to SCB members.

Established in 2007, the RCBWG focuses on strengthening dialogue between biological conservation and faith communities and promoting within the SCB an awareness of the importance of their collaboration. The working group has engaged in a variety of activities including collaborative research on religious practices that affect biological diversity, sponsoring symposia at ICCBs and regional congresses to highlight projects in which SCB members have engaged faith communities, and the three-year Best Practices Project. During ICCB 2017, the RCBWG will be presenting the first Assisi Award to a faith community that has demonstrated a commitment to biological conservation.

Contact Jame Schaefer and/or Sue Higgins for additional information about the Best Practices Survey and Project.


December 20, 2016

Standing Rock 'water protectors' dig in for the winter

As winter rages over the Dakotas and temperatures plummet below freezing, NoDAPL protest movement members hold ground.

By Avery White
Al Jazeera

Standing Rock Indian Reservation, United States - When word came down from the Army Corps of Engineers to the Oceti Sakowin camp that the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) had been denied the final easement to drill below the Missouri River, residents of the camp celebrated the victory with hundreds of veterans who had come to protect natives and their allies.

The excessive force used by authorities in recent clashes near the drilling site had spurred a public outcry on behalf of the unarmed occupants, who call themselves "water protectors", of
Oceti Sakowin, and many veterans saw it as a call for action. For the veterans, native and non-native alike, of every age and from every war, travelling to Standing Rock was an extension of their lifelong commitment to serving the country.

Successive blizzards have left the camp thickly blanketed with snow.

Even as winter rages over the Dakotas and temperatures plummet below freezing, members of the movement are not ready to pack it in yet. Those who have chosen to hold the ground at Oceti Sakowin have doubts that Energy Transfer Partners, the company behind the DAPL, will honour the Army Corps' decision.

With the rapidly approaching term of President-elect Donald Trump, who has been vocal in his support of the pipeline, many fear that the struggle has only just begun.

View photos here:


December 21, 2016

Standing Rock Sioux - A Model for Protection of Planet and its People

By David Schilling, Senior Program Director, Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility Institute for Human Rights and Business

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe met with representatives of Energy Transfer Partners (ETP) on October 30, 2014 and learned of their plans to build the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), a 1,172 pipeline from North Dakota to Illinois that would carry 470,000 to 570,000 barrels of oil per day. A tribal spokesperson told us this month that their response to ETP was clear: they opposed a project “that would jeopardize our water and sacred sites.”

With most of the DAPL completed, the Standing Rock Sioux, after a months-long campaign against the pipeline, has won a major victory when, on December 4th the Army Corps of Engineers announced it will not grant the permit to drill under the Missouri River, near Sioux lands. Assistant Secretary for Civil Works Jo-Ellen Darcy said they would need to explore alternate routes for the crossing.

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, the Elders, International Indigenous Youth Council, and Oceti Sakowin Camp led a movement that touched tens of thousands of people, many of whom came to Standing Rock to show solidarity with the “water protectors”. Tribes across the US and Canada, veterans, religious leaders, human rights and environmental activists all came to stand with the Standing Rock Sioux. On a conference call with over 100 investors the day after the decision, Tribal Chairman Dave Archambault II said to us: “For once our voices are being heard and the right decision was made.”
The struggle is not over. The new US President-elect has declared his strong support for the project and the Army Corps of Engineers’ decision could be reversed. Security and law enforcement has used violent tactics against the nonviolent water protectors, yet support for the movement to protect water, sacred sites and the right to self-determination remains strong.

The investor community can play an important role, particularly in engaging the seventeen banks that have provided loans for DAPL. On the December 5th investor call, organized by the Standing Rock Sioux, First Peoples Worldwide, and the Investors & Indigenous Peoples Working Group, information was shared about the risk to banks lending to the project because the oil markets have changed drastically since ETP negotiated the contracts in 2014, putting their investments at risk. Clark Williams-Terry, director of energy finance for Sightline Institute and co-author of the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis’s report, The High-Risk Financing Behind the Dakota Access Pipeline: A Potential Stranded Asset in the Bakken Region of North Dakota, said that there is a contractual obligation for ETP to complete the project by January 1, 2017, which is not going to happen. Companies that have committed to ship oil through the pipeline have a right to back out of their commitment.

The current situation creates an opening to press the banks and energy companies to adopt strong human rights criteria that recognize and respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples, as determined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. Members of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility have already filed shareholder resolutions with a number of companies, including Enbridge Energy, Phillips 66, Marathon Petroleum, Wells Fargo, Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs, with more to come. The resolutions call on the banks to issue a public report on the North Dakota DAPL, describing its financing of companies involved in the pipeline and whether its Indigenous rights policy was applied, and to consider policy options to improve implementation, including enhancing the risk metrics and due diligence process. Free, prior and informed consent is central to any meaningful criteria to assess whether or not to invest in projects that impact Indigenous lands and communities.

With the Brexit decision in the UK in June and the results of the November US presidential election, the human rights and business community is doing some soul-searching about what serious challenges it might face in 2017 and beyond. In this context the Standing Rock Sioux and its supporters present an example of effective action and the ripples of hope have gone out to a wide circle of humanity with the message that committed leadership, nonviolent action and respect for the earth can create transformative change.


December 21, 2016

Ecuador’s Standing Rock? Tanks and Helicopters Deployed Against Indigenous Shuar People Defending Ancestral Territory From Mega-Mining
Chakana Chronicles

The Shuar community of Nankints in Ecuador’s Southern Amazon region was evicted in August 2016 to make way for a Chinese copper mega-mining project. The mining company, through a court order, has claimed these indigenous territories without prior consultation or consent from the affected communities, who have lived there for hundreds of years. The land allocated for the project covers over 41,000 hectares and the forced evacuation of other Shuar communities is expected.

Since the August eviction, the county of San Juan Bosco has been militarized to quell protest. In November, several Shuar people attempted to reclaim the indigenous territory of Nankints within the San Juan Bosco county. Clashes broke out with police and military personnel guarding the mining camp, leaving several injured. The Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), and the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon (CONFENIAE), called for dialogue with the Government to avoid further confrontations but no resolution was reached.

On Wednesday December 14th, a new confrontation took place in the mining camp, leaving one police officer dead and others wounded. After these events, the Ecuadorian Government announced a state of exception throughout the Morona Santiago province, stripping residents of the rights to freedom of movement, freedom of association, freedom of assembly and inviolability of the home, among others. The Government also deployed over 700 elite soldiers and policemen, military tanks, trucks and helicopters to San Juan Bosco to join the existing military presence there. According to witness testimony, army rifle blasts have caused women and children to seek refuge in the mountains. Military personnel and police are patrolling the streets in armoured vehicles. The community is in a state of terror.

A statement from the President of CONAIE, Jorge Herrera, reads: “We fear that the direction [the Ecuadorian President] has taken will lead to a massacre of Ecuadorians, and it is the absolute priority of CONAIE to avoid this. We are strongly requesting that the Church and international organizations intervene and mediate to find a dialogue that does not deepen and aggravate the existing conflict.”

An online petition has been addressed to key decision makers in the Ecuadorian Government demanding:

- the demilitarization of San Juan Bosco and dialogue to avoid further confrontation and acts of violence.
- adherence to international law and the Ecuadorian Constitution, both of which forbid the presence of military personnel in indigenous territories and require prior, informed and free consultations before the implementation of mining or oil projects.

Dr Carlos Perez, President of the Andean Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations (CAOI) has issued a statement expressing “solidarity with the family of our brother, the fallen police officer, and those wounded, who are also our brothers, knowing that no extractive project, no matter how
profitable, nor any amount of bloodshed is a justification for violence. We demand a rigorous judicial investigation into the acts of violence to find those responsible for these criminal acts”.

Dr Perez went on to demand an investigation into the unsolved murders of Bosco Bisuma, Fredy Taisha and José Tendenza, leaders of the anti-mining resistance movement in Ecuador, killed in 2009, 2013 and 2014 respectively.

Protests in solidarity with the Shuar people have been mobilized in cities across Ecuador.

For more information about mining in Ecuador, see the documentary “Paradise Under Threat: The Mirador Mine in the Condor”. The film presents information about the Chinese copper mine and its potential impacts on the environment; shows the biological and cultural diversity that is at risk; and presents some of the perspectives of the local people and other Ecuadorians about the mine project. The trailer can be viewed below.


To see Dr Carlos Perez talking about why he fights against mega-mining projects in Ecuador, see this short interview from 2013: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=irw-d-xhOlA&feature=youtu.be

Sign this petition to show solidarity with the Shuar people of Ecuador.

#SOSPuebloShuar


December 22, 2016

Latinx Christianity and religion/ecology are focus of new M.A.R. concentrations

Yale Divinity School

Yale Divinity School is launching two new concentrated programs of study in the Master of Arts in Religion (M.A.R.) degree path: Latinx and Latin American Christianity and Religion and Ecology.

The School is accepting applications now for students interested in entering the new programs as they debut in fall semester 2017.

“We are excited to lead the way in these important areas of study, which build on our existing strengths and address important demographic and social trends that are calling out for scholarly attention,” said Jennifer Herdt, Gilbert L. Stark Professor of Christian Ethics and Senior Associate Dean of Academic Affairs. “A rapidly growing percentage of U.S. Christians today are
Latinx. As symbolized by Pope Francis, Christianity’s center of gravity is increasingly shifting toward Latin America. And the environmental crisis is the most critical issue facing humanity today.”

The new program in Latinx and Latin American Christianity is led by two new members of the YDS faculty, Erika Helgen and Benjamin Valentin. Helgen’s research focuses on Protestants and Catholics in the struggle for Brazilian national identity and on pluralism and religious history in Mexico. Valentin’s research and teaching concentrate on contemporary theology and culture; U.S. Latino/a Christianity and theology; Christianity in Latin America; liberation theology; and constructive theology.

The program allows students to focus their study on Latinx Christianity in the United States or Christianity in Latin America—or both, with an eye towards developing a more hemispheric perspective in relation to these fields and geographic areas.

The Religion and Ecology concentration draws on faculty resources across the theological disciplines including biblical studies, ethics, liturgical studies, pastoral care, spirituality, theology, and world religions and ecology. It spans the study of eco-theology; eco-spirituality; eco-feminism; environmental ethics; and cosmology. The program grows out of the decades-long work of senior lecturers Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim in building the field of religion and ecology, most recently in collaboration with the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies.

Faculty and their courses include:

- Willie Jennings, “Doctrine of Creation”
- Eboni Marshall-Turman, “Race, Gender, and Ecology”
- Teresa Berger, “Liturgy and Cosmology”
- Jennifer Herdt, “Animal Ethics”

Students in the new Religion and Ecology concentration are also able to take “Introduction to Religion and Ecology,” a joint offering of YDS and Forestry taught by Tucker and Grim, as well as other cross-school courses including “A Communion of Subjects: Law, Environment, and Religion”—a joint offering of Divinity, Forestry, and Yale Law School.

YDS Dean Greg Sterling described the new concentrations as expressions of two of the major goals outlined in the School’s strategic plan: diversity and the effort to build a living-building residential complex.

“Some of our new faculty make the first possible, and widespread commitment of faculty to eco-theology make the second feasible,” Sterling said. “It is essential that we have a curriculum that aligns with our orientation and ambitions as a school. The new programs reflect the commitment of YDS to address two of the most important concerns in our society.”
Added Herdt: “The arrival of our many new faculty makes this the perfect moment to launch these new M.A.R. concentrations. One is highly focused, and one is intensely interdisciplinary. Both signal our presence at the leading edge of theological education.”

Updates to this article:

*The M.A.R. Concentration in Religion and Ecology is separate from the Joint Degree in Religion and Ecology offered in cooperation with the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies (FES). Learn more about the Joint Degree in Religion and Ecology here.*

The M.A.R. Concentration in Religion and Ecology was originally named “Faith and Ecology”. The name was updated to “Religion and Ecology” in this article on Jan 25th, 2017 to reflect a decision approved by the YDS faculty.

*http://divinity.yale.edu/news/latinx-christianity-and-religioneology-are-focus-new-mar-concentrations*

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**December 27, 2016**

Vermont diocese to celebrate Year of Creation in 2017

By Cori Fugere Urban
Catholic News Service

**Burlington, Vt.** - The Burlington, Vermont, diocese will observe a special Year of Creation during 2017.

Similar to the global Year of Mercy, which emphasized the role of mercy in the Catholic faith, the diocesan-wide Year of Creation will bring an intentional, heightened focus on ecological justice.

Various events, initiatives and resources will be made available to parishes and Catholic schools to better educate and encourage the embracing of Pope Francis' message in his 2015 encyclical, "Laudato Si’, on Care for Our Common Home."

The pope's second encyclical is addressed to "every person living on this planet" for an inclusive dialogue about how people are shaping the future of the planet. He calls the church and the world to acknowledge the urgency of environmental challenges and to join him in embarking on a new path.

Burlington Bishop Christopher Coyne is inviting all Catholics to join with him in celebrating this Year of Creation in the diocese.
He noted the pope emphasized that concern for the natural world is no longer optional but an integral part of church teaching on social justice. "While it has been nearly two years since its publication, I think it is time for the church here in Vermont to study, ponder and begin to implement much of what the pope calls for" in the document, the bishop said.

A diocesan Year of Creation Committee comprised of scientists, activists and people of faith has been formed to assist with the initiative.

The committee will be working on an awareness campaign and events throughout the year including a statewide Catholic schools ecological awareness and action project in April; an Ecological Justice conference in September; four creation-themed liturgies throughout the year; a possible "Laudato Si' in the Parish" training program; the spring issue of Vermont Catholic, the diocesan magazine, dedicated to the Year of Creation; and a soon-to-be completed website — vermontcatholic.org/yearofcreation — will provide resources for parishes and anyone interested in learning more.

David Mullin, executive director of Green Mountain Habitat for Humanity and a member of the Year of Creation Committee, said Habitat for Humanity builds simple, decent and affordable housing for families in need: "The indoor and outdoor quality of life go hand and hand. Energy-efficient homes help decrease our dependence on all forms of energy."

The diocese also has formed a partnership with Commons Energy that allows for low-cost energy efficiency audits and energy efficiency/renewable energy projects on many church-owned buildings throughout the state.

Additionally, one of the first steps taken at diocesan headquarters in South Burlington to take seriously Francis' call to counteract a throwaway culture and set an example of ecologically responsible practices is to adopt the practice of composting. It is "a simple way to support circular models of production and consumption," said Stephanie Clary, mission outreach and communication coordinator.

"My work is helping families get into simple, decent and affordable housing. If the earth beneath and around those homes is not healthy, the families will not be healthy — physically or spiritually. It is all connected," Mullin said.