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Modular Report

Native American Religions

### Standing Rock: Fight for Justice

Two years ago, a decision was made to begin the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, and would span from South Dakota to refineries in Illinois. However, different events and decisions made from the Army Corps of Engineers (ACE) without the knowledge of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe of South Dakota led to what is known as the #NoDAPL movement. This essay aims to describe the events that took place, as well as others before it, and what factors play into the larger narrative of the injustices that Indigenous Peoples face every day of their lives, whether it is against their way of living or the land that they belong to.

Many tribes and non-Natives alike made their way to Cannonball, South Dakota to participate in peaceful protesting against the construction site of the pipeline that would run through treaty lands set aside in the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. Eventually they would become “Water Protectors,” and they also would face the violence of DAPL’s private security and partly the Morton County Police Department. By the winter of 2016 the Obama Administration would temporarily suspend the construction of the pipeline after the protectors and protest received the attention of the entire world in a short time. However, that was erased and the construction continued at the start of the Trump administration.

As these events unraveled, one would see at the surface that this was a typical fight for land, and most obviously a fight for water as the mantra “Mni Wiconi,” or “Water is Life” took over all social media platforms. Although Lakota and Dakota people had the rightful concern

that the pipeline would at some point burst or leak since it was constructed under the Missouri River and would contaminate the drinking water of over 18 million people. Simply, water is sacred, and water is life. The Missouri River is the only source of water for the reservation, and the water protectors made a point that they were fearful for their children not having water in the future because of spills. In the documentary “Awake,” one woman said that we belong to the land and the water, not the other way around. Colonizers make it a point that land and water belong to us as property, but that is not the case in Native American culture. There were a number of other reasons why it was a bad idea to build a pipeline through the area. Originally, the pipeline was to go through some of Bismark, North Dakota, which was miles from the Standing Rock Reservation. However, the route was rewritten once complaints were filed against the pipeline, and the Army Corps of Engineers decided that the route could then run through treaty lands of the Standing Rock Reservation. These lands include ancestral burial sites where Sitting Bull was buried.

Digging even deeper, no matter how peaceful the water protectors were in their protests, as they were all unarmed, they were met with hostility and violence from the DAPL security. In the documentary “Awake: A Dream at Standing Rock” the protectors were very peaceful, praying for officers present although they did not get the same treatment in return. They could have been very violent, but at the end of the day, everyone is brother and sister. The fundamental belief that we are all related is vital for indigenous peoples, and the power of prayer was very evident throughout the documentary. They are taught to pray to their ancestors, and there they have an intimate connection with the land.

They mentioned Turtle Island, which is an area of land dedicated to the Lakota origins and Native peoples as a whole. There are also burial sites located there, and acts as a center for

the community, as well as during the protests. In fact, ACE and DAPL police break treaty laws when they made camps and built razor fences around a sacred land.

The #NoDAPL movement proved a lot about Native American culture and how resilient they are. For hundreds of years, they have faced adversity and violence from colonizers and to this day, fight colonizers. The Army Corps of Engineers and DAPL made sure to erase the resistance and desecrate sacred land to the tribe, all while breaking treaty laws set not too long ago. The movement proved that we as a society need a lot of work to fight the Black Snake and a corrupt government that leads us further into climate catastrophe, but as we know, the youth and next generations will continue to fight for clean water, but most of all for the justice that these people deserve.

### Work Cited

Whyte, Kyle (2017). The Dakota Access Pipeline, Environmental Injustice, and U.S. Colonialism. *Red Ink: An International Journal of Indigenous Literature, Arts, & Humanities*, 19.1. Retrieved from [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2925513](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2925513)