A Festival of Kinship, Defiance, and Ethnic Survival: A Photo Essay of the DAPL Protests

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ABSTRACT

In the fall of 2016, the author traveled to North Dakota as an invited guest of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe to document the emergent encampment of American Indians and their allies who had gathered to protest the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. This work explores some of these lived protests and the festival-like realities (as well as the strengths and criticisms of the “festival” notion) that were produced in such protestive actions. Ultimately, this article has three goals. First, it seeks to document, via photographs and text, some of the mobilization efforts of protesters against a segment of the oil and gas industry operating on American Indian land. Second, it questions the scholarly concept of “festival as protest”—again, highlighting the strengths and controversies of the application of this term to the Standing Rock Protests. Third, it shows how photography can complement and enhance qualitative field research.

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Introduction

This is a camp of defiance and prayer. Every day we return to voice opposition to environmental degradation, corporate greed, and the dehumanization of a people. It is like a festival of life celebrating cultural survival. It reawakens the Native spirit and environmental activism. 'Mni Wiconi!' (Lakota for "Water is Life")—Indigenous activist at Standing Rock.

In the fall of 2016, I traveled to North Dakota as an invited guest of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe to document the emergent encampment of American Indians and their allies who had gathered to protest the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline (hereafter: DAPL). In addition to previous research I have done about toxic waste on Native lands and Native identity, I am a member of the Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma and my ethnic identity helped gain initial permission to access the sites of protest.¹

This work explores some of these lived protests and the festival-like realities (as well as the strengths and criticisms of the "festival" notion) that were produced in such protest actions during my short, several-day experience and through subsequent research and follow-up with those I had come to know during my time there. More specifically, it seeks to: (1) document via photographs and text some of the mobilization efforts of protesters against a segment of the oil and gas industry operating on American Indian land; (2) question the scholarly concept of "festival as protest"—again, highlighting the strengths and controversies of the application of this term to the Standing Rock Protests; and (3) show how photography can complement and enhance qualitative field research.

In terms of structure, this article first contextualizes the DAPL protests, then examines the link between festivals and protest and suggests that protest can spur a form of festival, reviews the researcher's modes of entry into this site as well as his general methodology, and concludes with the photographic essay.

DAPL and the Protest at Standing Rock

The Dakota Access Pipeline (hereafter DAPL) is a 1,170-mile pipeline that is designed to transfer fracked oil from the Bakken fields of North Dakota to a refinement terminal in southern Illinois. It should be noted that DAPL was originally scheduled by its developer, Energy Transfer Partners, to run north of Bismarck, the state capital, but that due to concerns from capital residents that the pipeline would endanger their water supply, the company rerouted the line to the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation.

Partially in response to this relocation of the pipeline—perceived as a form of environmental racism²—members of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe began organizing social media awareness campaigns and erecting human and physical barriers in an attempt to prevent the development of the pipeline.³ As media outreach grew, and due to various social media invitations from

1. John Paul, *Structural and Social Impediments in the Mobilization against Community Nuclear Health Hazards*, Technical Report funded by the National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences under the Nuclear Risk Management for Native Communities (NRMNC) grant (Stillwater: Oklahoma State University, 2003); John Paul and Kristine Hart, "A Contemporary Fairy Tale: Vampires, Sexual Trauma, and *30 Days of Night* as 'Real' American Indian History," *Monsters and Monstrous Journal* 5, no. 1 (2015): 87–100; and John Paul and Eric Sheets, "Adapting Erving Goffman's 'Gender Advertisements' to Interpret Popular Sport Depictions of American Indians," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 2, no. 24 (2012): 71–83.

2. Wes Enzina, "How Standing Rock Sparked a National Movement toward Environmental Justice," *Grist*, December 6, 2016, <http://grist.org/justice/how-standing-rock-sparked-a-national-movement-toward-environmental-justice/>; Bruce E. Johansen, *Resource Exploitation in Native North America: A Plague upon the Peoples* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2016).

3. Alexander Zaitchik, "On Native Grounds: Standing Rock's New Spirit of Protest," *The Baffler* 34 (March 2017): 102–16.

4. Divided Films, "Mni Wiconi: The Stand at Standing Rock," YouTube video, 8:27, published November 14, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4FDuqYld8C8>.

5. David Treuer, "An Indian Protest for Everyone" *New York Times*, November 26, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/26/opinion/sunday/an-indian-protest-for-everyone.html>.

6. Donald J. Fixico, *The Invasion of Indian Country in the Twentieth Century: American Capitalism and Tribal Resources* (Niwot, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1998); Troy R. Johnson, *The American Indian Occupation of Alcatraz Island: Red Power and Self-Determination* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).

7. Donald J. Fixico, "When Native Americans Were Slaughtered in the Name of 'Civilization,'" *History.com*, March 2, 2018, <https://www.history.com/news/native-americans-genocide-united-states>.

8. Peter Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping* (New York: Knopf, 2016).

9. David Grann, *Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI* (New York: Doubleday, 2017).

10. Mike L. Lawson, *Dammed Indians: The Pick-Sloan Plan and the Missouri River Sioux, 1944–1980* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982).

members of the Standing Rock Tribe,⁴ delegations and individuals from Indigenous communities from all over the country and, eventually, the world, arrived in North Dakota to protest the DAPL and to call out the continued colonization of Native lands and resources.⁵

DAPL route, rejected route, and detail of the protest sites. Source: Energy Transfer Partners.

Specifically, the protesters wished to tell the world that the route of the pipeline would take possession of ancestral lands claimed by the tribe and therefore challenge the inherent sovereignty of the Standing Rock Sioux. By law Native tribes are indeed considered "nations within a nation" and the US government is to have a government-to-government relationship with them.⁶ Further, members of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, and their Native and non-Native allies, known as "water protectors," contended that the pipeline would harm sacred cultural lands and tribal burial grounds and worried about the catastrophic damage it would do if it were to break under the Missouri River. A mere leak would send oil directly into the tribe's main source of drinking water.

Unfortunately, this had happened before. Indeed, such land grabs are as old as Indigenous-settler/colonial interactions.⁷ Examples of recent scholarship that detail this history include Peter Cozzens's exploration of nineteenth-century acquisition of tribal land in the United States, fueled broadly by the discovery of gold in tribal lands.⁸ David Grann's work has revealed a history of white incursions into Native America via criminal conspiracy and mass murder.⁹ In the 1950s and 1960s, the US government seized hundreds of thousands of acres of tribal land as part of a plan to build several dams along the Missouri River Basin, including a long stretch of the river in North and South Dakota that ran through the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation. One of the dams, the Oahe, flooded over one hundred thousand acres on the reservation. Natural resources and wildlife along the river bottom were almost completely eradicated, including 90 percent of the tribe's timber resources. Entire towns were destroyed and sacred sites, including gravesites, were lost.¹⁰ While DAPL activists gained international visibility in the fight against such incursions into

11. For examples of this history of protest and survival, see Troy R. Johnson and Alvin M. Josephy Jr., eds., *Red Power: The American Indian's Fight for Freedom* (Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1999); Johnson, *American Indian Occupation*; and Bradley G. Shreve, *Red Power Rising: The National Indian Youth Council and the Origins of Native Activism* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014).

12. Alison Thoet, "Audio Shows Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Objected to Pipeline Two Years Ago," PBS.org, December 2, 2016, <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/audio-shows-standing-rock-sioux-tribe-objected-pipeline-two-years-ago/>.

13. Eyder Peralta, "Dakota Access Pipeline Protests in North Dakota Turn Violent," NPR.org, September 4, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/09/04/492625850/dakota-access-pipeline-protests-in-north-dakota-turn-violent>.

14. Zoe Carpenter and Tracie Williams, "Photos: Since Standing Rock, 56 Bills Have Been Introduced in 30 States to Restrict Protests," *The Nation*, February 16, 2018, <https://www.thenation.com/article/photos-since-standing-rock-56-bills-have-been-introduced-in-30-states-to-restrict-protests/>.

15. Blake Nicholson, "More than \$600,000 Spent in North Dakota on Police Gear for Pipeline Protest," *Des Moines Register*, December 16, 2017, <https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/2017/12/16/more-than-600-000-spent-north-da->

tribal and geographic sovereignty, they were but the most recent collective incarnation in the long tradition of Indigenous resistance and persistence throughout history.¹¹

History of DAPL

The history of the pipeline began in 2014, when Energy Transfer Partners (hereafter ETP) filed a formal application with the South Dakota Public Utilities commission to build a new conduit for conveying oil. Standing Rock officials then met with ETP to voice their strong opposition to the project, which ETP apparently ignored.¹² In December 2015, the Army Corps of Engineers released an environmental impact statement concluding that there would be no significant impact to the environment as a result of the pipeline and that construction should commence. In March of 2016, the EPA criticized the assessment, questioning why the tribe had not been consulted—and shortly thereafter, in April 2016, as construction began, Standing Rock tribal members began pursuing legal action to stop the pipeline, and the first physical camps to actively protest DAPL were erected.

In September 2016, Dakota Access bulldozers plowed through land tribal members say holds ancient burial sites and other sacred and cultural artifacts of the tribe. This action occurred while the land access was being contested in court. The tribe noted over and over again that they were not adequately consulted on this project and that the company had started building this four-state, \$3.8 billion pipeline before it had all of the permits in hand. As a result, protesters and DAPL security guards engaged in physical confrontation. Videos of these incidents show protesters being bitten by guard dogs and pepper-sprayed.¹³ Following these initial videos, mass mobilization against DAPL grew and ultimately tribal members from over three hundred American Indian Nations turned up in support, along with thousands of non-Native allies (including college students, representatives of Black Lives Matter, various religious groups and environmental activists worldwide).

Unfortunately, violent interaction between private security, police, and protesters also grew more frequent and the area became highly militarized. Police in North Dakota made several hundred arrests between August and December of 2016 and exhausted approximately \$35 million protecting the pipeline.¹⁴ ETP offered to pay \$15 million of these costs, most of which was for payroll, but it was also used to purchase equipment such as riot helmets, smoke grenades, and nonlethal ammunition.¹⁵ As a result of this "militarization," violence grew and the police were captured on video using water hoses, tear gas, and rubber bullets on protesters in twenty-degree weather.

In October 2016, Amnesty International called for the Department of Justice to investigate the use of force by police and, partly due to this public pressure, the Obama administration and the Army Corps of Engineers said it would not grant an easement for the construction of the pipeline at Standing Rock. Further, the agency said it would consider alternatives, including a previously rejected path that would travel north of Bismarck.¹⁶ In Standing Rock, the Army Corps' decision was met with jubilant celebration by the hundreds of American Indians, environmentalists, and other activists protesting the pipeline. "The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and all of Indian Country will be forever grateful to the Obama administration for this historic decision.... [B]ecause of the support that we have and the people who gather and are a part of this, we are able to build

[kota-police-gear-pipeline-protest/958422001/](https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/standing-rock-celebrates-as-dakota-pipeline-easement-denied-w453719)

16. Daniel Kreps, "Standing Rock Protestors Celebrate as Dakota Pipeline Easement Denied," *Rolling Stone*, December 4, 2016, <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/standing-rock-celebrates-as-dakota-pipeline-easement-denied-w453719>.

17. Naomi Schaefer Riley, "Bury Their Future at Standing Rock," *Commentary Magazine*, December, 4 2016, <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/bury-their-future-at-standing-rock/>, pars. 18-19, 1.

18. Wes Enzina, "Arrests and Anxiety at Standing Rock as Trump Pushes DAPL Ahead," *Mother Jones*, February 2, 2017, <http://www.motherjones.com/environment/2017/02/dakota-access-pipeline-standing-rock-trump>, par. 4.

19. Oliver Milman, "Dakota Access Pipeline Company and Donald Trump Have Close Financial Ties," *The Guardian*, October 26, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/oct/26/donald-trump-dakota-access-pipeline-investment-energy-transfer-partners>.

20. Synclaire Cruel, "Dakota Access Pipeline in Operation after Months of Resistance," PBS.org, June 3, 2017, <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/dakota-access-pipeline-operation-months-resistance/>; and Alleen Brown, "Five Spills, Six Months in Operation: Dakota Access Track Record Highlights Unavoidable Reality—Pipelines

enough noise to help America understand [this need for activism]," declared Standing Rock chairman Dave Archambault. And Tomas Lopez, a representative of the International Indigenous Youth Council, pointed out, "Today we're celebrating. For the first time in US history, the US government is going to honor tribal sovereignty and the treaties that were signed by the US government."¹⁷

However, this jubilation was short-lived. A few days after Donald Trump was elected president, his administration exerted pressure on the Army Corps of Engineers to reverse its decision. A January 24 executive order insisted that the Army Corps "review and approve [the Dakota Access Pipeline] in an expedited manner."¹⁸ Trump also asked the Corps to consider withdrawing the environmental impact requirement. Reports indicated that Trump owned between \$15,000 and \$50,000 of ETP stock as well as shares in Phillips 66, an investor in the pipeline. Further, ETP CEO Kelcy Warren had given \$100,000 to help elect Trump.¹⁹ Following Trump's inauguration, the Army Corps of Engineers rescinded the previous study and gave the company permission to complete the pipeline.

Oil is now flowing through the pipeline—and crucially, it has already leaked five times as of this writing. Two leaks occurred in March 2017: 84 gallons on March 3 and 20 gallons on March 5 in North Dakota. Then two more happened in April 2017, spilling 84 gallons in South Dakota and 168 gallons in Illinois. And finally, in November 2017, there was a 21-gallon spill in Iowa.²⁰ While these spills were not deemed "significant" by the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, they serve as reminders that "it is not a matter of if a pipeline spills, it's a matter of when a pipeline spills," as Dallas Goldtooth, the Indigenous Environmental Network campaign organizer, noted.²¹

On June 14, 2017, the US District Court for the District of Columbia directed the Army Corps of Engineers to release a report detailing "the impacts of an oil spill on fishing rights, hunting rights, or environmental justice, or the degree to which the pipeline's effects are likely to be highly controversial."²² The Corps' failure to release such a report has only reinforced suspicions of "stonewalling" by the US federal agency: "In response, Standing Rock Sioux leaders have accused the Corps of stonewalling [and] wondering naturally, why they and the general public have been denied access to the full report on which the memo is based.... [T]he tribe [vows] a continued fight."²³

DAPL Protests as "Festival"

Standing Rock is going to be remembered. Like the Jerusalem Wall, people will come here. – Allyson Two Bears, tribal councilwoman

Academic research on festivals has generally depicted them as annual events, marked by one day or more of celebration.²⁴ Indeed, many persons at the camps suggested that, despite the eventual completion of the pipeline, Standing Rock would continue to be a place in years to come that would draw in activists and serve as a place of cultural and spiritual exchange. One of the tribe's future goals is to turn the initial protest site, the Sacred Stone Camp, into a place of ecotourism, with an educational camp built around training in sustainable living practices and environmental protection and activism.

Leak," *The Intercept*, January 9, 2018, <https://theintercept.com/2018/01/09/dakota-access-pipeline-leak-energy-transfer-partners/>.

21. ICMN Staff, "Dakota Access Pipeline Springs a Leak," *Indian Country Today*, May 16, 2017, <https://indiancountrymedianetwork.com/news/environment/dakota-access-pipeline-leak/>, par. 4.

22. Jeffrey H. Wood, "Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe v. United States Army Corps of Engineers and Dakota Access, LLC," August 31, 2018, available at <https://earthjustice.org/sites/default/files/files/dapl-remand-decision.pdf>, 1.

23. Jeff Turrentine, "Hey, Army Corps of Engineers—Show Us Your Work in Your DAPL Report," Natural Resources Defense Council, September 14, 2018, <https://www.nrdc.org/onearth/hey-army-corps-engineers-show-us-your-work-your-dapl-report>, par. 11.

24. Hazel Andrews and Teresa Leopold, *Events and the Social Sciences* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

25. Camp attendee and member of the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma, name withheld, personal communication, 2016.

26. Facebook communication, <https://www.facebook.com/jon.eagle.sr>, 2016.

27. Saul Elbein, "The Youth Group That Launched a Movement at Standing Rock," *New York Times Magazine*, January 31,

Further, one activist termed the protests at Standing Rock a "daily festival," for they served to "celebrate Indian and pan-Indian identities" and show the world that "Indian people still exist." This activist went on to say that such daily protest actions also worked on him at a psychological level to remind him that he too "existed" and "had purpose."²⁵ So, for him, the protest and participation at Standing Rock was a festival celebrating "living." In related fashion, Jon Eagle Jr., the tribal historic preservation officer for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, noted that "because of what happened at Standing Rock, it gave our people hope and suicide rates among our people have gone down."²⁶ The reality has been that Native American teenagers and young adults are 1.5 times as likely to kill themselves as the national average, with suicides often clustering in epidemics that hit and fade. Saul Elbein writes:

Suicide is so common on the reservation that youth don't bother to say 'committed suicide' or 'attempted suicide.' They just say 'attempted' or 'completed'... no one seemed to pay much attention to how their lives were hard, bordering on hopeless.... But in the fight over the Dakota Access Pipeline, Native American activists achieved one of the most galvanizing environmental victories in years—and it all began with a group of teenagers.... In April of 2016 a few teenagers and mentors helped establish a tiny "prayer camp" just off the Dakota Access route, on the north end of the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation. Over the next six months that camp grew into an improbable movement that united conservative farmers with the old radicals of the American Indian Movement; urban environmentalists with the traditional chiefs of hundreds of tribes. Standing Rock gave many other youths a sense of purpose they had been lacking. It also inspired something more radical, in a way, than anti-pipeline activism: the belief that a group of lost people from scattered nations could still find kinship.²⁷

"Standing Rock was a festival of kinship and purpose," an Indigenous anti-suicide activist told me. "It united persons behind a traditional way of life, forced people to move-in and live together in a tepee or tent and act like family."²⁸ And as Elbein notes, the Standing Rock movement "was the first experience of family for many tribal members."²⁹ In this way, festivals are also social gatherings for the purpose of crafting pride in place and social cohesion, as well as vehicles encouraging social interaction for specific social groups.³⁰ Festivals are often displays of social and cultural identity³¹ that reinforce the connections and shared values within a community.³²

Finally, festivals have been identified as a sort of social frustration release-valve—a way to organize and release expressions of social angst and disenchantment with the "way things are."³³ In this way, festivals are linked with (and often originate from) protests³⁴ and may be acts of resistance and drivers of social change,³⁵ as illustrated by the following:

My sole purpose is to create for the youth what we did in Standing Rock at my home in Cheyenne River. To really challenge the youth in my community to follow in the lead of Standing Rock to fight for their own people.³⁶

With this [pipeline] they've inadvertently sparked a whole generation of us Indigenous folks and everyone who wants to stand with us to fight for Mother Earth. We're going to inherit this planet, bro, and everyone's welcome to inherit it with us if they want.³⁷

They thought they could bury us; they didn't know we were seeds! Resistance, prayer and teaching camps have been set up to continue the fight against destructive fossil fuels and hazardous pipelines.³⁸

But some Standing Rock activists were opposed to the use of the term festival in defining Standing Rock. For example:

2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/31/magazine/the-youth-group-that-launched-a-movement-at-standing-rock.html>, pars. 2, 7, 8.

28. Camp attendee and member of the Standing Rock Tribe, name withheld, personal communication, 2016.

29. Elbein, "Youth Group," par. 25.

30. Bernadette Quinn, "Arts Festivals and the City," *Urban Studies* 42, nos. 5-6 (2005): 927-43.

31. Dianne O'Sullivan and Marion J. Jackson, "Festival Tourism: A Contributor to Sustainable Local Economic Development?" *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 10, no. 4 (2002): 325-42, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669580208667171>.

32. Montserrat Crespi-Vallbona and Greg Richards, "The Meaning of Cultural Festivals: Stakeholder Perspectives in Catalunya," *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 13, no. 1 (2007): 103-22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286630701201830>.

33. Max Gluckman, *Order and Rebellion in Tribal Africa* (New York: The Free Press, 1963).

34. David Picard and Mike Robinson, eds., *Festivals, Tourism and Social Change: Remaking Worlds* (Towanda, NY: Channel View Publications, 2006).

35. Erin K. Sharpe, "Festivals and Social Change: Intersections of Pleasure and Politics at a Community Music Festival," *Leisure Sciences* 30, no. 3

This is not a festival... YOU ARE NOT ON VACATION. This is not a camping trip.³⁹

Some people are arriving at Standing Rock for the 'cultural experience' and are treating it like Burning Man festival. They are colonizing the camps.⁴⁰

Many of the 'festival kids' have come to Standing Rock due to a mix of a deep calling in their hearts, and it being the off-season for festivals. Many arrived with little or nothing to support themselves. No tent, no money, no winter clothing, and no real knowledge on why exactly they are here, which makes them an immediate drain on the camps that have been working for months to prepare for winter.⁴¹

In this way, the term "festival" became a critical and sometimes disparaging term (typically applied to whites) for persons who were perceived to be disrespectful of the tribal political leadership or who were stubbornly ignorant of Native culture. During the eleven-month history of the protest, several persons were asked to leave Standing Rock for: (1) as noted above, treating Standing Rock as a party atmosphere; (2) being willfully "lazy" and exploiting camp resources such as food and water without a return in the form of labor; (3) promoting tactics that the tribal leadership thought were too extreme; and (4) being openly combative with tribal elders and pushing their agenda over the concerns of the tribe. For example, there were tensions between white-led environmental groups that wanted to focus on climate change, and Native activists, who believed the larger issue was that of tribal sovereignty and the unfinished struggle for Native American rights. Many of these white activists were described as the "Brooklyn residents" (meaning, in this context, those who gentrify, or push out the original inhabitants) or the "festival kids" of Standing Rock.

Further, various law enforcement and governmental personnel, as well as select residents of the predominantly white capital of Bismarck, also used the term "festival" to mock activists and the term become a symbolic shorthand for troublemakers, undesirables, and ignorant outsiders.⁴²

Left: Signs in Bismarck, ND that went up in response to criticism of police tactics at Standing Rock. Right: "Nobody cares about your protest," written as a protestive statement by a former law enforcement officer on his personal vehicle.

In fact, this terminology was often used to delegitimize the activists' claims and infantilize them. For example, the then governor of North Dakota, Jack Dalrymple, argued that protesters were unable to handle the harsh winters and therefore needed to be removed for their own protection.⁴³ In response, Greenpeace spokesperson Lilian Molina stated:

It is not up to Governor Dalrymple or the Army Corps of Engineers to decide whether an Indigenous sovereign nation can remain on its own lands.... Ironically, the same governor who ignored the use of water cannons in

(2008): 217–34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400802017324>.

36. Jasilyn Charger, Indigenous youth activist, quoted in Elbein, "Youth Group," par. 39.

37. Chanse Adams-Zavalla, Indigenous activist, quoted in Wes Enzinna, "I Didn't Come Here to Lose: How a Movement Was Born at Standing Rock," *Mother Jones*, January/February 2017, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/12/dakota-access-pipeline-standing-rock-oil-water-protest/>, par. 21.

38. Post on the "Standing with Standing Rock" Facebook page, 2016, https://www.facebook.com/pg/StandingWithStandingRock/posts/?ref=page_internal.

39. Post on the "Standing with Standing Rock" Facebook page, 2016, https://www.facebook.com/pg/StandingWithStandingRock/posts/?ref=page_internal.

40. Camp attendee and Indigenous Mayan, name withheld, personal communication, 2016.

41. Member of local law enforcement, name withheld, personal communication, 2016.

42. Jack Dalrymple, "Dakota Access Pipeline: Mob Rule Triumphed over Law and Common Sense: Misinformed Environmental Activists and Paid Agitators Forced a Weak-Kneed Army Corps to Postpone the Project," *Star Tribune*, December 16, 2016, <http://www.startribune.com/dakota-access-pipeline-mob-rule-triumphed-over-law-and-common-sense/406939436/>.

sub-freezing temperatures against protectors now claims to want to remove them for their well-being through the winter. If Governor Dalrymple or the Army Corps of Engineers truly cared about the health and well-being of water protectors, they would put an end to the pipeline once and for all.⁴⁴

Linguist George Lakoff has noted that "most people think that words just refer to things in the world and that they're neutral. And that's just not true ... language use fits the way you understand the world via your frames."⁴⁵ Indeed, language use is a politically loaded activity and at Standing Rock, the term "festival" was used by some activists as positive force: a dynamic gathering that built solidarity networks and celebrated life and cultural identity. For others, the term was used with derision to call out "vacationers," "lookie-loos," and—to borrow a term from social movement literature—"free-riders."⁴⁶ Finally, figures of authority also made the term a political one and used it to delegitimize the movement itself, saying that the protesters were incompetent or ideologically ill-informed vagabonds who had to be removed for their own protection.

In the photographic essay that follows I wish to draw attention to the way festivals are linked with (and often originate) from protests and are defined by participants as acts of resistance and drivers of social change. Before the essay, however, I offer a brief note about my mode of entry and my methodological process.

Personal Reflective Statement and a Brief Note on Methodology

As mentioned in the introduction, in the fall of 2016, I traveled as a guest of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe to document the emergent gathering of American Indians and their allies to protest DAPL and bring attention to issues of sovereignty and land use. I am a member of the Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma and my ethnic identity helped gain me initial permission to access the sites of protest. However, I do not look traditionally (or stereotypically) "Native."⁴⁷ I am Caucasian in appearance and this hindered initial rapport-building with Native and tribal interlocutors. To help build trust and encourage participants to speak with me, I engaged in two things. First, I "got to work" immediately upon arrival to the site at Standing Rock. I spent many hours each day collecting trash and, recycling, and sorting and organizing the food pantry for the water protectors and guests to help ensure the ease of daily meal preparation. I knew that completing these tasks would facilitate psychological ingratiation and social-communal integration, but I also wish to emphasize that I believed in the movement and I wanted to "be there" to issue my support.

Second, I was able to build rapport by using my camera. I found that taking photographs during an event operated to remove perceptual barriers between me, the research-observer, and the participants. Similar to Al Gedicks's experience of incorporating himself into an environmental conflict as a social scientist, an advocate, and a filmmaker, I found that the role of photographer enabled access and inclusion—as people wanted their own, and the collective, story of Standing Rock told.⁴⁸ Please note that photographic permission was obtained by the tribe and rules specifying what could or could not be photographed (i.e., religious ceremonies) were followed. Finally, while photographs do not replace attendance, nor can they fully capture an event, they nevertheless serve as a type of experiential vehicle,⁴⁹ a way to combat the casual passing of the event from our societal memories,⁵⁰ and as a methodological tool to bolster recall, check reliability or augment research notes.⁵¹

43. Valerie Richardson, "North Dakota Governor Orders Emergency Evacuation of Pipeline Protest Camp," *Washington Times*, February 15, 2017, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/feb/15/doug-bur-gum-north-dakota-governor-orders-emergency/>.

44. Quoted in Andrew V. Pestano, "N.D. Gov. Jack Dalrymple Orders Dakota Access Pipeline Protesters to Evacuate," UPI News, November 29, 2016, http://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2016/11/29/ND-Gov-Jack-Dalrymple-orders-Dakota-Access-pipeline-protesters-to-evacuate/2011480418019/, pars. 6, 10.

45. Quoted in Ari Shapiro, "Loaded Words," NPR.org, February 26, 2013, <http://www.npr.org/sections/2013/02/26/172882077/loaded-words-how-language-shapes-the-gun-debate>, par. 14, 15.

46. J. P. Weismuller, "Social Movements and Free Riders: Examining Resource Mobilization Theory through the Bolivian Water War," *The Macalester Review* 2, no. 2, article 4 (2012): 1–9, <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/macreview/vol2/iss2/4>.

47. Maureen T. Schwarz, *Native American Appropriation of Indian Stereotypes* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2013).

48. Al Gedicks, "Liberation Sociology and Advocacy for the Sokaogon Ojibwe," *Organization & Environment* 17, no. 4 (2004): 449–70.

49. Amos Zeeberg, "How Images

During my stay, I traveled between: (1) the capital city of Bismarck, North Dakota, where I interviewed and engaged in observation and casual conversations with the predominately white population about the DAPL protest; (2) the various camps on the Standing Rock Reservation that emerged as frontline spaces of protest, where I worked and visited with tribal members and guests; (3) the Prairie Knights Casino and Resort (a casino on the Standing Rock Reservation), observing and interacting with Indigenous leadership groups, the media covering the protests, and casino workers and guests; and (4) the Standing Rock Tribal Headquarters and surrounding Fort Yates community, where I interacted with various tribal members and numerous locals. The following photos and corresponding narrative texts emerged from these experiences.

The Photo Essay

A Place of Festival, Ceremony, and Community

Left: Entrance, Sacred Stone Camp. Right: Tents and Traditional Structures, Sacred Stone Camp

Atop Sacred Stone Camp. A mixture of modern, traditional, and more permanent structures being erected at the Sacred Stone Camp. Since this land is held in private ownership (now donated to the tribe), it is not subject to the same governmental mandate of removal of persons and structures. One of the tribe's future goals is to turn this area into a site of ecotourism with an educational camp built around the training of sustainable living practices and environmental protection and activism.

Trigger Empathy," *The Atlantic*, January 6, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2016/01/cultivate-empathy-photograph/422793/>.

50. Risto Sarvas and David M. Frohlich, *From Snapshots to Social Media: The Changing Picture of Domestic Photography* (New York: Springer, 2011).

51. Patricia Widener, "Oil Conflict in Ecuador: A Photographic Essay," *Organization & Environment* 20, no. 1 (2007): 84–105.

Sacred Stone Camp was founded by Standing Rock's historic preservation officer, LaDonna Brave Bull Allard, on April 1, 2016, as a center for cultural preservation and spiritual resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline. In the spring and early summer of 2016, Allard and other Indigenous leaders focused on media outreach, resulting in tribal delegations and individuals coming to stand with them from around the world. As noted earlier, many considered this to be a festival of kinship and a celebration of Indigenous values within a newly built community of Native activists.

Camp Oceti Sakowin. As the numbers grew beyond what Allard's land could support, an overflow camp was also established nearby, which came to be known as the Oceti Sakowin Camp. Oceti Sakowin (O-chet-ee-shak-oh-win) and translates to the "gathering of the council fires." Symbolically, it refers to the meeting place of various "tribes" and had become a "parliamentary place" where representatives worked to make laws, organize camp life, and oversee protest actions. Indeed, multiple "council fires" showed up—Tribal members from over 300 American Indian Nations turned up in support and various non-native allies (ranging from representatives of Black Lives Matter, various religious groups, and environmental activists worldwide) had grown the camp to several thousand people.

Camp Interior. At its height, the Oceti Sakowin camp was a village with kitchens, a medical center, food and clothing storehouses, a grade school, horse corrals, sport sites (soccer and lacrosse, a sacred fire circle and thousands of people living in tents, yurts, trailers and teepees. It was bigger than all but nine cities in North Dakota.

52. Carpenter and Williams,
"Photos."

53. Sandy Tolan, "Taxpayer-Funded Horror at Standing Rock," *The Daily Beast*, February 22, 2017, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/taxpayer-funded-horror-at-standing-rock>.

54. Stewart Tolnay and E. M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence* (Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

55. Alleen Brown, Will Parrish, and Alice Speri, "Leaked Documents Reveal Counterterrorism Tactics Used at Standing Rock to 'Defeat Pipeline Insurgencies,'" *The Intercept*, May 27, 2017, <https://theintercept.com/2017/05/27/leaked-documents-reveal-security-firms-counterterrorism-tactics-at-standing-rock-to-defeat-pipeline-insurgencies/>.

A Festival of Violence: Points of Conflict

As thousands filled the camp and the police were ordered to protect access points to the DAPL construction site, confrontation arose between protesters and the local sheriff's office. During the duration of the protest from April 2016 to February 2017, hundreds of persons were arrested on charges ranging from disorderly conduct and trespassing to inciting a riot.⁵² Further, more than three hundred were injured on or around police barricades that protected the access to the pipeline. Injuries came from batons, rubber bullets, and water from fire hoses delivered in freezing temperatures in attempts to keep protesters away from the pipeline dig site. From my perspective, police were often quick to escalate conflict, as they would culturally misinterpret prayer circles as riot mobilization and mistake ceremonial objects like Chanupa (sacred) pipes for pipe-bombs. In fact, I heard several police officers and pipeline allies term this a "cowboy versus Indian conflict," using language ripe with cultural stereotypes that painted the confrontation as one of "savages" against persons of civility and progress. For example, the local police said (and later retracted) that protesters had aimed bows and arrows at them.⁵³ For me, such attitudes were reflective of Stewart Tolnay and E. M. Beck's use of the term "festival of violence"—a quasi-celebratory infliction of violence against perceived racial and cultural inferiors.⁵⁴ Further connected to this concept is the implication that such violence is justified due to these perceptions of inferiority and "backwardness." Evidence also shows that pipeline executives had hired retired military special forces members, who used military-style counterterrorism measures against what they considered an ideologically driven insurgency.⁵⁵ Tactics included protest camp flyovers, video surveillance, social media monitoring, public relations—described in one document as "pro-DAPL propaganda"—and providing equipment and support staffing for law enforcement. However, this said, I also recognize that police were working twelve-hour days and existed in a constant state of near exhaustion and were often "jumpy" as they followed orders to protect the dig site. Thus, in this way, I also considered the police to be victims of a corporate entity endangering their well-being.

Highway 1806

There were two primary geographic points of conflict: Highway 1806 and Turtle Island. Highway 1806 passes through the Standing Rock Reservation and runs alongside the drilling site for the

North Dakota Highway 1806 prior to protests.

DAPL. It was closed by police (and later militarized) for almost a year as thousands of people protested the pipeline's proposed path under the Missouri River. The following photographs show Highway 1806 before and after its closing and militarization.

North Dakota Highway 1806. Please note the green rope. This was placed by tribal leaders, urging people not to go beyond this line. The tribe did not want persons risking arrest or injury by going beyond and provoking police response. In response to the protest, a bill sponsored by Rep. Keith Kempenich, was proposed to protect non-native drivers from legal consequences if they inadvertently hit, injured or killed pedestrians who were obstructing traffic. "If you stay off the roadway, this would never be an issue," Kempenich said. "Those motorists are going about the lawful, legal exercise of their right to drive down the road ... Those people didn't ask to be in this."⁵⁶ The legislation drew criticism from Standing Rock supporters, who worried that it could be open season for protesters on North Dakota roads. The bill failed. Prayer sessions, organized by tribal elders, did frequently occur past the rope and into the barricades – these sessions were not filmed per the request of elders.

56. Jennifer Brooks, "North Dakota Bill Aimed at Standing Rock Protest," *Star Tribune*, January 16, 2017, <http://www.startribune.com/north-dakota-bill-aimed-at-standing-rock-protest/410860535/>, par. 4.

Highway 1806 with increased militarized presence.

North Dakota Highway 1806 at night. Protestors termed this the DMZ.

Turtle Island

In clashes that involved water cannons, pepper spray, and tear gas, protesters were pushed back from this highway as well as from a nearby hill (known as Turtle Island). Tribal members contended that Turtle Island contained burial sites and police made it a defensive position to keep protesters away from the DAPL construction site.

But, “even if the site is void of bodies,” said tribal archaeologist Kelly Morgan, “it remains significant to the Sioux and should not be trampled. Different cultures have different beliefs on graveyards. That’s hallowed ground. Period. And it’s offensive to have people disturbing this sacred space by patrolling on the hill.”⁵⁷

57. Caroline Grueskin, “Historians Claim Remains May Be Buried in Turtle Island,” *Washington Times*, November 20, 2016, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/nov/20/historians-claim-remains-may-be-buried-in-turtle-i/>, pars. 1, 6.

Turtle Island is located on land that was originally part of Cannonball Ranch and now is commandeered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Police Patrol (top) and Protestors (bottom).

Atop Turtle Island.

Base of Turtle Island.

Patrolling Turtle Island.

Protestor at the base of Turtle Island.

The creek. This body of water creates the "Island" (which appears like a turtle's shell rising from the water) and separates protestors from police.

Youth at the base of Turtle Island. Remember, the protest movement was started and made concrete by indigenous youth.

Floodlights from Turtle Island at Dusk. Rather than perceiving the police as peacekeepers, many tribal members felt their land been occupied by a standing army.

Images of Protesters and Protest Art

While in camp, the protests I witnessed were broadly peaceful and were organized under the guidance of tribal elders. Further, they generally took the form of prayer and silent civil disobedience (i.e., sitting at the police barricades in prayer or silent contemplation). From the perspective of local law enforcement, all actions at the camp were termed “unlawful protests” and an “organized riot,” and interactions between police and camp members were often tense. I found such language and the militarized presence shocking, as weapons, drugs, and alcohol were prohibited in the camp and children and family pets routinely marched in the daily demonstrations. At camp meetings, tribal elders reminded all that they were camped out in prayer and in the friendship of the tribe, but would be removed if tribal culture was ignored and if violence was promoted.

Please note that I was asked by tribal elders to refrain from capturing images of communal prayer sessions and similar (in their words) “festivals” of kinship. Thus, I present some of the lasting images of protest art (a cultural and aesthetic record of this collective human action) as well as some images of pre- and post-gatherings.

People over Pipelines.

Kill Black Snake. Lakota prophecy contains a tale that a black snake that would slither across the land, desecrating the sacred sites and poisoning the water before destroying the Earth. For many Indigenous persons that snake has a name — the Dakota Access pipeline. "There is a prophecy saying that there is a black snake, and when it goes underground, it's going to be devastating to the Earth"—Chairman Dave Archambault.

Water is Life/ Water is Sacred. The image is of a dancing figure whose force of movement stimulates both thunder and the growth of plants from the soil (symbolic of the people's power to cultivate energy and transform life). Insert: "Thunderbird Woman" by Isaac Murdock (2016).

58. Lauren Donovan, "Standing Rock Protests Inspires [sic] Artist," *Bismarck Tribune*, September 30, 2016, https://bismarcktribune.com/community/mandannews/local-news/standing-rock-protests-inspires-artist/article_5480f6e8-fb1e-5a1c-952a-11e762de3005.html.

Left: Signage promoting tribal sovereignty as going "hand-in hand" with environmental protections. Note the broken snake (pipeline) logo. **Right:** *Not Afraid to Look* (2016) by famed artist Charles Rencountre. Located on a hill above the Sacred Stone camp, the sculpture surveys Turtle Mountain and the site of the DAPL construction. Completed in October, during a significant influx of people into the camp, the Lakota artist says of his work, "we should not be afraid to let corporate super powers know we are watching. The pipeline crosses our farms and through our water, at the cost of our sons and daughters, so we watch for any environmental crises. This humble little guy stares down the force taking over his world."⁵⁸

An individual leading a group to participate in an act of silent protest and prayer—Highway 1806. The banner reads: "Since 1492: One Blood." This is meant to promote a pan-Indian ethnic identity and solidarity across tribal/national membership.

Contingent leaving a prayer ceremony held at Turtle Island.

Flying the American flag upside down is an officially recognized signal of distress. The Flag Code states it should only be displayed upside down when there is extreme danger to life or property. Certainly, the members of Standing Rock tribe and their allies hold this reality of danger has been met with the construction of the DAPL pipeline.

Conclusion

Festivals are generally defined as annual events, marked by one or several days of celebration.⁵⁹ Will the tradition of protest and festival continue at Standing Rock into the future, then? Many persons at the camp suggested that despite the completion of the pipeline, Standing Rock would continue to be a place that draws activists and Indigenous persons for spiritual exchange, cultural renewal, and ecotourism/engagement. In fact, an inaugural Standing Rock Nation Film and Music Festival took place in 2017. According to organizers, the film festival aimed to embolden the pipeline protest movement and showcase the work of Native American filmmakers and musicians.⁶⁰ Time will tell if the film festival and broader eco-activism around Standing Rock will become a continued national and international event. But to tribal citizens, the DAPL protests initiated a way to organize and release expressions of social angst and disenchantment with the “way things are,” and my feeling is that it will continue to serve as a gathering place that puts activism and community cohesion at the center of its cultural and social environment. Indeed, as sociologist Gary Alan Fine notes, “festivals are focused micro-gatherings,” and as “the archetypal form of emergent communities” they can become the basic building blocks of society and play a pivotal role in organizing social life and developing local cultures and identities.⁶¹

Additionally, the “emotional value and emotional benefits” produced by this protest festival were immeasurable.⁶² As noted by several participants, the Standing Rock movement was the first experience of a “pan-Indian family” for many Indigenous persons across the nation, regardless of their tribal identities. The experience I had, and observed in others, mirrored my reading and reflection on the 1969 symbolic occupation and reclamation of Alcatraz Island for the purpose of bringing national attention to Indigenous sovereignty.⁶³ Thus, while Standing Rock had a “functional” value in generating protest, the gathering also satisfied the powerful emotional need for belonging and the creation of a symbolic kinship.

59. Andrews and Leopold, *Events and the Social Sciences*.

60. Associated Press, “Standing Rock Film Festival Centers around Pipeline Protest,” *Daily Mail*, May 29, 2017, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-4552468/Standing-Rock-film-festival-centers-pipeline-protest.html#ixzz4jtiDRJlk>.

61. Gary Alan Fine, *Tiny Publics: A Theory of Group Action and Culture* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2012), 117, 116.

62. Jin-Soo Lee, Choong-Ki Lee, and Youngjoon Choi, “Examining the Role of Emotional and Functional Values in Festival Evaluation,” *Journal of Travel Research* 50, no. 6 (2011): 685–96.

63. Troy R. Johnson, *The American Indian Occupation of Alcatraz Island: Red Power and Self-Determination* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).

64. Amy Dalrymple, "Energy Transfer Partners CEO Says He Hopes to Announce DAPL Expansion Soon," *Bismark Tribune*, August 13, 2018, https://bismarcktribune.com/bakken/energy-transfer-partners-ceo-says-he-hopes-to-announce-dapl/article_ad64d741-5c4d-5969-8806-39ce2b73cc89.html.

65. Susan Cosier, "Stopping a Dakota Access Pipeline Leak in Under 10 Minutes? A Fairy Tale, Say the Standing Rock Sioux," *EcoWatch*, May 23, 2018, <https://www.ecowatch.com/dakota-access-pipeline-leak-2571433356.html>, par. 4.

66. Blake Nicholson, "Tribes Seek to Challenge Corps' Dakota Access Pipeline Study," *Rapid City Journal*, December 10, 2018, https://rapidcityjournal.com/news/latest/tribes-seek-to-challenge-corps-dakota-access-pipeline-study/article_2b417d19-7ac8-587f-af7b-1e0b4a4a19f7.html.

67. Quoted in Jenni Monet, "An End and a Beginning at Standing Rock," *Reveal: The Center for Investigative Reporting*, February 24, 2017, <https://www.revealnews.org/blog/and-end-and-a-beginning-at-standing-rock/>, par. 14.

Beyond these celebratory notions, the perception and use of the term "festival" was not without controversy. At this gathering I also witnessed a "festival of violence" perpetuated by the police against activists. I define this use of festival as a quasi-celebratory infliction of violence against perceived racial and cultural inferiors. Again, from my perspective, police were often quick to escalate conflict, as they would culturally misinterpret prayer circles as riot mobilization and mistake ceremonial objects for weapons. Additionally, there were violent undertones to the language they used when describing the activists. Further, the term "festival" also became a critical and sometimes disparaging term (typically applied to whites) for persons who were perceived to be disrespectful of the tribal political leadership or who were stubbornly ignorant of Native culture. During the eleven-month history of the protest, several people were asked to leave Standing Rock for treating it as a partying site and for pushing their agenda over the concerns of tribal elders. Often these persons were mocked as the "festival kids" of Standing Rock, thus highlighting the reality that not all persons were there to support the movement or champion tribal sovereignty.

Finally, in terms of recent developments, I note that since the pipeline's completion, it has moved 500,000 barrels of oil a day from the Bakken Formation in North Dakota to refineries in Illinois. However, in late 2018, company spokespersons said Energy Transfer Partners is considering increasing the amount the pipeline can carry to around 600,000 barrels a day.⁶⁴ Obviously, this is a concern because increased flow means the increased potential for seepage, should a leak occur. According to Energy Transfer Partners it would take them approximately ten minutes to detect a leak and shut down the Dakota Access Pipeline should oil begin leaking into the North Dakota prairie or the Missouri River. The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe calls this reaction time unrealistic given that

in reality, oil pipeline leaks frequently don't even register with control systems and operators; a farmer will simply notice a growing stain darkening a remote field and call it in. According to records obtained by the tribe and its technical team, no one at the company would be able to tell something was amiss if less than 1 percent of the 600,000 billion barrels it transports each day was oozing out. That comes to 6,000 barrels.⁶⁵

With this, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe has renewed legal challenges against Energy Transfer Partners and the Dakota Access Pipeline. Specifically, the tribe is seeking to challenge the recent conclusion of federal officials that a spill would not greatly impact tribal populations. They have requested a halt to pipeline operations until a broader environmental review of the pipeline's impact on the tribe's culture, economy (as well as the feasibility of alternative routes) can be fully accessed. This new round of litigation is currently being reviewed by a federal judge and will likely take well into 2019 to resolve.⁶⁶ For now, the pipeline remains active.

In closing, I hope this work expands discussion on festivals as a socially meaningful form of collective action, community building, and social change. Additionally, please allow me to issue thanks to the community of activists and members of the Standing Rock Tribe for their kindness and hospitality. In the end, I agree with Standing Rock Chairman Archambault's words that "this is not the end but the beginning."⁶⁷ Mni Wiconi!

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