

Akicita Winyan (Warrior Women) of Standing Rock

The camp at Standing Rock grew from a few hundred families in the summer of 2016 to over 12,000 people in early December. Strategically naming themselves as "water protectors," they developed an entirely peaceful small city complete with various councils, security, multiple kitchens offering free food, a school, direct action training and art house, full medical facilities, legal support and a media tent. It grew exponentially and remarkably without centralized leadership. What has been virtually absent from the current media coverage and commentary is any recognition of the deep historical and symbolic importance of the Standing Rock Nation. In fact there have been over 2,000 journalists and independent filmmakers sign in at the media tent over the span of six months but none of them have explored the direct historical underpinnings of this current movement.¹ Following the occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973, the elders determined that they should take their struggle to the international level beginning with founding conference of the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) in June of 1974 at Standing Rock. IITC returned to Standing Rock in the summer of 1977 before going to Geneva in September to organize indigenous peoples' globally eventually resulting 40 years later in the passage of the United Nations' Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).² The core group of Lakota women leaders behind these historical events are the same ones running the show now.

The camp has been set up several miles from the changing front lines where the Energy Transfer Partners owned Dakota Access Pipeline has been laying pipe for the oil they intend to transport to the Gulf of Mexico by drilling under the Missouri River adjacent to the Standing Rock Nation's land. Based on the legal status of the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty, the land ETP is drilling under is unceded treaty land illegally taken through flooding by the US Army Corp of Engineers as part of the 1950s Pick-Sloan Act to create hydro-electric power profits for private

¹ I served as a media coordinator during my time on site and handled the data entry and decisions about who accessed camp and over time developed an orientation for journalists with no experience in or familiarity with Indian Country. The media coordination was originally handled by the Indigenous Environmental Network and was later in November taken over by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe.

² See Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, Beacon Press (2015).

companies.³ This mid-twentieth century land theft was devastating to an entire generation and proved to be the original instigation to activism for the Native elder women who went on to found the American Indian Movement and are still active as leaders in Standing Rock.

Tribal elders and young Native women have created a community at Standing Rock that is *the* place to stand up for constitutional rights, human rights, protect the environment and rebuild traditional kinship structures. Most critically, Standing Rock shows that Native land is a sovereign place of refuge where "everyone is welcome as long as they are water protectors." Over 400 Native Nations demonstrated the power of indigenous sovereignty by officially greeting and pledging solidarity with the government of Standing Rock. This has never happened since Tecumseh organized distinct tribal peoples to stand together against white settlement. Indian Treaties are the unrecognized law of the land and it might just be the most powerful organizing tool for 21st Century activism and resisting Trump's agenda.

I have working relationships with all of the women critical to a Standing Rock oral history project from twenty years of experience in community-based scholarship in the Red Power Movement. In the past four months, I have made frequent trips to Standing Rock and have been assisting in coordinating the media and fundraising while off-site. A handful of the women who are leading this effort, have been standing at the front lines of indigenous activism since the late 1960s. These elder women, including Madonna Thunder Hawk, Phyllis Young, Margie Bowker, Bernie Lafferty, LaNada Means War Jack, Mabel Ann Eagle Hunter, Jeanie Roach, have been involved in community based organizing since the Red Power Movement when they were constituents of groups such as the American Indian Movement, founders of Women of All Red Nations and Black Hills Alliance, and part of the International Indian Treaty Council.

³ See Michael Lawton, *Dammed Indians Revisited: The Continuing History of the Pick-Sloan Plan and the Missouri River Sioux, 1944-1980*

Additionally, there is a contingent of young women, many daughters but not all, who have been mentored by these elders including Chas Jewett, LeAnn Eastman, Wanikiya Loud Hawk, Waste Win Young, Tipizwin Young, who have been on the ground organizing and nearly all have been arrested in various actions as water protectors against the pipeline. Finally, there is the establishment of the International Indigenous Youth Council by a group of young women who started the freedom run to Washington, DC to in June of 2016 and who kicked off the entire movement. These youth, including Jasilyn Charger, Bobbi Three Legs, Caro Gonzales, Malia Hulleman, have worked with the elders but also embrace more contemporary forms of organizing that includes two-spirit, third gender, and gender queer individuals.

Not only will we be able record the history of events known only to the Standing Rock community who have lived there by conducting filmed oral histories, but also we will be able to work in partnership to see that these histories are used locally by the women as needed in line with Indigenous research methodology. The Schlesinger Library oral history collection is the ideal repository for interviews with activist women of color. Mohawk activist Katsi Cook's interview in the collection is one of the better models for indigenous women's organizing. The Black Women's Oral History Project is another excellent example of how to create excellent, historically based interview questions. I hope that it would be possible to organize community events connected to the Warrior Women of Standing Rock Oral History Project.

