

# THE SURROUNDED: #NoDAPL AND GEOGRAPHIES OF INDIGENOUS RESISTANCE

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"Come on. Big village. Be quick. Bring packs [of ammunition]."

General George Armstrong Custer's last known communiqué, June 25, 1876

"The very earth seemed to grow Indians, and they were running toward me in swarms, and from all directions... My only hope was to get out of the woods, where I would soon have been surrounded, and gain some high ground."

Marcus A. Reno's official report on the Battle of the Little Bighorn, July 5, 1876

Thousands of Natives and non-Natives have encamped along the Mni Sose, the Missouri River, in coalition with the Oceti Sakowin, the Great Sioux Nation, at Cannon Ball, North Dakota in the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation for what is being called the largest gathering of Indigenous Peoples in North America in more than a century. It is truly historic. The camp intends to stop the construction of the 1,886-km (1,172-mile) Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), which would transport almost half a million barrels a day of highly volatile crude oil from North Dakota's Bakken oil fields across vital water supplies. Since April 2016, the original Sacred Stone Camp has expanded into several larger camps and spread across the land along the pipeline corridor west of the river. So far, the Water Protectors (as the demonstrators prefer to be called) and the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe have halted construction under Mni Sose. Meanwhile, construction continues everywhere else. This essay considers the broader geopolitical implications of what is being called the #NoDAPL movement. #NoDAPL is about more than mainstream climate justice and environmentalism.

The Native is usually cast as surrounded by the settler, bounded within highly restrictive and ever-diminishing territories that are under constant surveillance and assault. Indigenous peoples removed or dislocated from (and sometimes even within) their homelands become fugitives made "criminal" and targeted not because of an essential culture, religion, or way of being, but because of *where* they are. Geography is fundamental to the colonial project. Where Indians are *is* who they are, to paraphrase the late Patrick Wolfe. By default, Indigeneity is a condition of fugitivity. Natives are imagined as always on the lam from progress and civilization, as much as they are thought to have disappeared or in a constant state of disappearing. Although it is primarily attached to place, indigeneity is also constantly made into wanton unbelonging because of relentless acquisitive settler incursions into Native lands — incursions meant to enclose, kill, remove, dispossess, and disappear. Natives are made outlaws because they obstruct, stand in the way, and have always self-defended and protected against unrestricted trespass. We might imagine the settling of this land now called North America as entailing a steady stream of mass settler hordes — the vanguards of capital, privatization, and containment — laying siege to Indigenous peoples and their lands and condemning them to perpetual retreat, eternal disappearance, and bare survival.

The #NoDAPL encampment at the Standing Rock to stop DAPL, however, compels us to reconsider the popular view of Natives under siege. Instead, we might view settler society as besieged. From this vantage, we can see how the settler secures himself against what he cannot entirely control or manifest: the total disappearance of Indians and their territory. #NoDAPL reveals the Indian Problem is out of control.

*The fort is under siege.* What surrounds the settler's fort erupts into open rebellion. Armored personnel tanks, Blackhawk helicopters, and low-flying drones rumble across the prairies to quell the uprising. Panicky, trembling fingers rest on loaded assault rifle and shotgun triggers aimed at elders, women, children, and Water Protectors who are armed only with flags and pipes loaded with red willow bark. The protectors sing for the water as they attach their bodies to heavy machinery and Caterpillar earthmovers to stop DAPL construction, especially under Mni Sose, the major freshwater source for millions of humans and countless nonhumans. Private DAPL security sets attack dogs on the bodies of the unarmed. North Dakota law enforcement issues felony arrest warrants for adults and children. Almost a hundred have been taken into police custody. Concrete barriers manned by the North Dakota National Guard, veterans who performed similar duties in Iraq and Afghanistan, halt and redirect flows of traffic in and out of the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, a place originally established as a prisoner of war camp to confine and contain the renowned Lakota leader Tatanka Iyotake, Sitting Bull, and his people, the Hunkpapa Oyate. In 1890, Indian police assassinated Sitting Bull for refusing surrender. Mace and teargas now scorch the eyes and lungs of the peaceful protectors whose ancestors' fugitive faces once filled nineteenth century WANTED posters. Their crimes? Self-defense and refusal to surrender.

*The settler is outnumbered.* Nothing spurs the settler to violence like threats to his livelihood: his money and his private property. In this case, #NoDAPL threatens a \$3.7 billion pipeline project that would transport the highly lucrative Bakken oil across four states (North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, and Illinois) and under the Missouri River twice and under the Mississippi River once. Some of the world's poorest square off with the most powerful people on the planet who also wield the full force of the state to secure the passage of oil that would be shipped to Texas in the Gulf of Mexico for global export. The Morton County Sheriff's Department, however, feels outnumbered and unable to properly secure these valuable assets, the smaller pieces in the larger global supply chain of fossil fuels, because the pipeline trespasses into the surround and into contested territory. In this scenario, the police are always outnumbered because they are the violent arm of the minority, the surrounded, the settler, the owners of wealth and property. Like the surrounded, settler minorities besieged by the Black-led uprisings in Ferguson, Baltimore, and Charlotte, Morton County and North Dakota Governor Jack Dalrymple appeal to the force of law, the military, and national law enforcement agencies against the rebelling Natives and their friends. The Water Protectors are against the law because they are generating and enforcing a *different* law. Since the US refuses to obey Article 6 of its Constitution that says treaties "shall be the supreme law of the land," the Oceti Sakowin makes and enforces its own law while reminding the settler of his. That is the law of the 1851 and 1868 Fort Laramie Treaties that guarantee the Oceti Sakowin sole jurisdiction of the Mni Sose and the water. Hence the saying Mni Wiconi, or "water is life." Water protectors speak for the water since it cannot speak for itself. If it could, it surely would say, "#NoDAPL!"

*The fort is surrounded,* besieged by what encompasses it and by what it refuses to tolerate — a unified, nonviolent coalition of more than 300 Native Nations and countless non-Native co-conspirators. #NoDAPL is not geographically confined to Standing Rock but spreads like prairie fire across the global surround in the colonized spaces of Palestine, Indian Country, Turtle Island, the Indigenous Americas, and numerous US settlements and outposts. Even as the mainstream media largely ignores #NoDAPL, solidarity powerfully reverberates in the surround of empire. At Standing Rock, an estimated 7000 occupy land the US Army Corps of Engineers claims as its own. The Corps originally granted DAPL access to trespass the Mni Sose. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Corps' Pick-Sloan dams flooded more than 300,000 acres of land belonging to the Oceti Sakowin, the Great Sioux Nation, killing the river and its surrounding tributaries and bottomlands. The massive, earthen rolled dams fortify settler claims to the water. Thousands of Native families were forced from their homes — literally inundated by coeval settler laws of removal and termination that attempted to liquidate tribes and expel them into surrounding white-dominated border towns and urban centers. The laws and the dams sentenced them to exile. As a result of this usurpation, remaining "condemned" shoreline and an entire river became the exclusive domain of the Corps. To evoke Kahnawà:ke Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson, the refusal to accept the impossible condition of banishment and disappearance from one's homelands and outright dispossession structures the Indigenous political practice of return, restoration, and reclamation of belonging and place. "The Indians have returned and they brought their friends!" the Calvary scout exclaims to his superiors. We might call these *resurgent geographies* that expose the precarity of "settled" jurisdictions, boundaries, and borders.

*The fort is falling.* #NoDAPL represents emergent geographies of Indigenous resurgence. In their book *The Undercommons* (2013), Stefano Harney and Fred Moten ask us to "open the enclosure whose immeasurable venality is inversely proportionate to its actual size." Put differently, as we study and critique our own carceral world we must open and examine what we often view as the permanently enclosed, the forever entrenched — the life surrounding the fort, which is proportionately larger and far more numerous than the life in the fort beyond the dams, the pipelines, and the concrete barricades. In the case of #NoDAPL, the surround is Indigenous sovereignty and solidarity. It protects both Native and non-Native and does not enact the same violent exclusivities of settler possession and ownership. It reconnects Indigenous peoples to the land and demands from the non-Native and Native alike meaningful and just relations to the earth in what Yellow Knives Dene scholar Glen Coulthard calls a *grounded normativity*. The surround also invites and welcomes co-conspirators while simultaneously co-conspiring, imagining, and practicing unbound geographies of liberation. Resurgent geographies operate in radical solidarity with the global surround to bring down the fort, to free the land and the water, and to free the Oceti Sakowin from the settler's rule. At Standing Rock, that new world is mapping out its existence.

GUEST COLUMNISTS