

Book Review: *Standing with Standing Rock: Voices from the #NoDAPL Movement* - Edited by Nick Estes and Jaskiran Dhillon

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Native Voices, Visions, and Movements Rewriting History

Stories are important; the stories that we tell ourselves about who we are and the stories that are told about us. How stories are told can flatten experiences, limit responses, create panic and foreclose difference. And because the way we tell stories is often impacted by limited perspective, by our physical, socio-cultural and geopolitical space, it is crucial to create platforms for multiple voices to be heard, spaces that can hold nuance and complexity and where homogenizing narratives are disrupted; *Standing with Standing Rock: Voices from the #NoDAPL Movement* is a beautiful example of such a space.

This anthology pulls together key conversations on native dispossession from contact to the present and highlights the various ways indigenous nations have organized and resisted imperialist powers. A central theme that connects a number of the essays and poems pertains to how indigenous nations have understood the land and the larger biosphere in terms of interconnectedness and relationality as opposed to settler states' use and abuse of the natural environment for capitalist expansion. While settlers embarked on initiatives that both discursively and materially invisibilize and dispossess indigenous nations, the contributors collectively insist on centralizing indigenous sovereignty and black and brown collectives (in and

beyond the United States) to world history- how they have and continue to pave ways for just futures. This approach of discussing different sites which are historically constructed as discrete (that is, indigenous dispossession, the black struggle, occupation of Palestine, for example) is how they create a context for understanding the resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) at Standing Rock- not as unique but following in the long tradition of resistance, activism, and transnational solidarities. The book is, therefore, a counter map of the struggles for sovereignty, decolonization, and environmental justice against what Tracy Voyles terms *wastelanding*. They insist, 'water is life' and decolonization cannot be imagined outside of environmental justice.

Standing with Standing Rock makes clear that environmental racism/injustice is not just about the land itself- the impact on the bodies of indigenous, brown and black people was made a central site of unpacking the function of environmental violence. The structural and cultural targeting of urban communities and the subjection of their bodies to toxic waste dumps and sanctioned state violence for example, derive from racialization, especially if we consider who has access to clean air, water and food. Bodies are therefore articulated as part of the critical geographies of environmental justice as they telescope the range of risks involved in environmental racism. Essays such as *Badass Indigenous Women Caretaker Relations*, *This Fight has Become My Life* and *it's Not Over, Water is [More Than] Life* show how the land/territory is intimately tied to the bodies of especially the non-white population that remains under the colonial regime. By engaging in the decolonial practice of mapping the necessary entanglement of the land with bodies, they are able to show how DAPL and native dispossession writ large operate in tandem with various forms of gender-based violence, including sexual violence. As much of the content and context of the text comes from embodied knowledge, the

text disrupts the construction of indigenous people as lacking intelligence- bringing into sharp focus how deeply theoretical and future-oriented they have always been. There is an incredible awareness of the centrality of the land for sustaining human and non-human life and the text showcase the creative strategies that have been deployed to fight oppression and outright refuse assimilation into the white settler nation-state.

Thus, #NoDAPL is positioned as an accumulation of liberatory strategies over a century. While the harm wrought by the settler state forms a substantive part of reflections in this text, the text is especially attentive to the pathways for liberation/ decolonization that center environmental justice, care, community, and education. This pathway includes coming to terms with the ‘past that is not past’, and recognizing how different struggles are bound up even if the relationship to the settler state is not identical. A critical intervention then is bringing into focus how relations of power are occluded when violence and dispossession are interrogated or narrated in their singularity, that is, single frame analyses work to preserve the status quo. Unsettling the hegemony requires tracing and articulating how what happens in Palestine and what happens in the US are rooted in the same colonial logic - this opens possibilities for solidarity in decolonial efforts. Numerous essays showed how when people see themselves in others they are spurred into action- even when they did not set out to be activists and organizers. The anthology not only indicts western academe for failing to draw critical connections, but it offers through *#NoDAPL Syllabus Project* at least one possibility for how the academy can attend to material and discursive dispossession. Academics have an ethical responsibility to bring structural analysis to bear on the colonial system that is the root of dispossession everywhere.

I was particularly struck by the skillfulness of various contributors in situating Donald Trump Presidency and resulting policies- not as a diversion from U. S. values but firmly within a longer history of U.S racial terror and the attendant forms of sexism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, Islamophobia and other state-sanctioned violence. Narratives of economic growth and civilization have long been deployed to ‘justify’ the violence occurring across several processes and periods including slavery, settler colonialism, expansionism, reconstruction, occupation, and various wars including in Vietnam and Iraq, South Korea etc. Thus the wake-up call that his presidency supposedly signals as a departure from a ‘moral past’ that both liberals and conservatives have argued to have lost in the face of Trump’s ascendancy did not exist. Trump’s ascent was simply the unmasking of the afterlives of racial slavery and U.S expansionism. The book, particularly *Wake Work Versus Work of Settler Memory* open space to consider the revisionist history that located former president Obama’s two-term presidency as a sign of our arrival in a truly post-racial era. Importantly, their analyses expose how the Obama administration was complicit in narrating American hegemony as manifest destiny and through (neo)liberal policymaking continued the racialization and dispossession of various populations including black people in and beyond the borders of the United States.

Standing with Standing Rock is a reflection of the energy, tenacity, will and community that it calls attention to as a defining feature of indigenous life. It weaves different theoretical frameworks, disciplines, methodologies, methods, genres, and voices to re-narrate various herstories- from the place of women and youth on the frontlines; indigenous sovereignty vis-a-vis treaties, the manipulation of social, political and juridical systems for neoliberal

interests; construction of criminality toward capitalist ends and more importantly the ways the dispossessed have always managed to be here.