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End of the Line: The Women of Standing Rock

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End of the Line: The Women of Standing Rock

Abstract

This is a film review of *End of the Line: The Women of Standing Rock* (2021), directed by Shannon Kring.

Keywords

Native Americans, Standing Rock, Dakota Access Pipeline

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End of the Line: The Women of Standing Rock (2021), dir. Shannon Kring

In early 2016, the controversial Dakota Access Pipeline was approved. Intended to run from North Dakota through Illinois, the pipeline was originally planned to pass through Bismarck, North Dakota. After vehement local resistance, the Bismarck government struck down the proposal due to concerns over the safety of the local water supply from the Missouri River. As an alternative, the construction of the pipeline was rerouted through the Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Nation's (SRST) reservation lands, guaranteed by the Treaty of Fort Laramie. This was miles downstream from its original location but far clear of Bismarck's waterways. The rerouting of the pipeline through Standing Rock lands initiated immediate opposition from the tribal government and the larger community. The primary reasons for this were similar to those touted by Burleigh County but in addition, the SRST claimed the pipeline violated treaty agreements held with the United States government, encroached on the tribe's political sovereignty, endangered the community, and jeopardized sites sacred to the Lakota and Dakota people. Some of these places

included ancestral burial spots. Ultimately, the tribe's federal court challenges against the pipeline's construction were rejected.

What began as a community led, grass-roots movement against the pipeline quickly garnered the support of a vast intertribal coalition of North American Indigenous communities, including international Indigenous groups who traveled to Standing Rock to serve as "water protectors" in resisting the pipeline. Director Shannon Kring's *End of the Line: The Women of Standing Rock* follows the accounts of Indigenous women from the beginning of the protests and the making of Sacred Stone Camp (Ijyaŋ Wakháŋagapi Othi) which became the nerve center of Indigenous resistance against the pipeline. The site of the protests and encampment as understood through the stories of these Native women is more than a political protest. Rather, Standing Rock became a *place* of spiritual resistance to colonial subjugation. The camp itself is the traditional name of the location given to it by Lakota people far before the colonial era. *End of the Line* details how women across many Native spiritual traditions have always played central roles in maintaining and upholding the practices of their societies. Although this film thoroughly establishes the historical and political context for understanding the events at Standing Rock, the totality of its message is that it would not have been possible without the spiritual support and guidance of Native women. The women showcased in this documentary include profiles of Lakota, Dine (Navajo), and Ho-chunk (Winnebago) and Anishinabeg (Ojibwe, Ottawa, Pottawatomie) women, among others.

When understood as an act of spiritual resistance and renewal, Standing Rock is not a recent development in Indigenous history. In previous and equally dire conditions faced by Tribal Nations, women have often taken the lead in revitalizing and preserving beliefs and ceremonies. As an example, during the height of religious and social oppression from assimilationist federal

governmental policies throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Native spiritual systems wobbled on the brink of extinction. The Inípi Káğa (purification lodge) of Lakota people was at one time a ceremony practiced primarily by men, not as a result of a strict social taboo but rather by the choice of women within the society. As many Native communities faced similar crises, it was the collective decision of Lakota women to bring these healing ceremonies back to the people when Lakota communities were being afflicted by a cascade of social ills.

End of the Line: The Women of Standing Rock demonstrates that the bedrock of traditional Lakota beliefs are found among the women of the society. Women protect these ways and distribute the spiritual teachings to each facet of the community. This film's production began as a crowdfunding campaign via Indiegogo, and similar to the communally oriented nature of Sacred Stone Camp itself, the film delivers the meaning of the cause to viewers in such a way that by the conclusion it is apparent that it is not just the words and motives of a single individual that provide the impetus with Indigenous spirituality, but the collective, empowered voice and unity of women as a whole in Native societies.