

Statement on Standing Rock
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I've been putting together all of my thoughts about the trip to Standing Rock, and figuring out what to say. It's hard to put into words because the experiences there opened my eyes to a lot of things I didn't know that I didn't know, and some things I knew but didn't really get on a very deep level, and somehow words just don't seem enough.

First let me say that there is nothing really that can prepare you for seeing firsthand how ridiculously over equipped, over manned, and over militarized the police presence is. It is very, very disconcerting to exist in the camp, where at once you feel safe and welcomed, and this overwhelming sense of community, and yet at the same time are very conscious of the fact that there are constantly snipers on the ridge above you; helicopters and planes low buzzing the camp overhead; that your phone is something that can be accessed remotely to record and take your information, as well as infiltrators into the camps from DaPL . And, the police trying to gather information, and so you need to be constantly careful and aware.

It is one thing to be out in the world and know in the back of your mind that there are cameras out there watching all the time, but [it is] a completely different feeling knowing you are being watched and recorded all the time aggressively by a police force that lies about their actions and motivations. And yes, I would definitely consider watching police drones buzz prayer ceremonies aggressive behavior, as well as having ridiculously bright flood lights turned on the camp at night.

It's surreal and intimidating, and most definitely something you would expect to see on the nightly news taking place in one of those faraway places most Americans can't find on a map. Not here in the good 'ol USofA. And, the water protectors live it, every single day, and night. There are no alcohol, drugs or weapons allowed in camp. There is no rioting. There is no violence. It really and truly is a camp founded on prayer and ceremony. Every act, action or inaction that is done all day, every day is an act of prayer.

Unfortunately, the camps seem to be living under a lot of tension right now. Partly, I believe because of the extreme violence that continues to escalate and has occurred and there being a lot of people who are doing their best to deal with the trauma of that violence and heal. Partly because of the continued trauma of living in militarized zone, as well dealing with continued ambiguous threats from the governor, ACE, and police force. Another huge part of the tension comes from the presence of quite a few white "allies" showing up for a spiritual experience thinking this is some sort of photo op, or festival and offering nothing but disrespect to the indigenous people and the culture and history they live. Or thinking that the only way to serve is by participating in the direct actions, and refusing to help in any other way, when there is so much work of all types that is happening where help is needed.

Please know that the camps are not existing as getaways. It's not a vacation or festival. The indigenous people I met during my time there were so warm and welcoming, and kind and willing to be patient and explain and teach and let you in. But, if you are going to show up, be willing to work hard. Be willing to

realize that this is first and foremost an indigenous people's issue, and that you are a visitor and should fully respect the culture and home of those who you are visiting. Go with a willingness to listen, serve and work, or don't go. Be willing to be open. And, especially, be willing to check your ego at the gate.

There were times while I was there I felt very uncomfortable on a deeply personal level. What I thought I knew and felt about race and privilege and my own place in the every day and how it all fits into the big picture were very much challenged. What it means to serve another, my ideas of culture, and history, and community and the potential of what it means to be human all changed. Some things more than others, but there was a definite shift in it all, and I feel like I came back with my eyes open even wider. Maybe not with any answers, but a little closer to understanding maybe what the real questions are.

My advice would be that if this fight is calling to your heart, then go. Make it happen. Everyone there has other places they could be, family they are missing, things they are sacrificing, all for the greatest good. It is cold. Be as self-sufficient as possible, and be prepared. This fight is so incredibly important, and big and worthwhile. And if it's calling to you, but you can't physically go there, find ways here to contribute and participate. Don't ignore the calling.