

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America.

This art of Hunkpapa Lakota leader Sitting Bull acknowledges the 150th anniversary of the Battle of the Little Bighorn (or Greasy Grass) on June 25-26, 1876. Word of the defeat by Lakota, Cheyenne and Arapaho warriors of the U.S. Army Seventh Cavalry reached newspapers in the East, as the U.S. was celebrating its 100th birthday.

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OUR PEOPLE, OUR RECOVERY

THUNDERMAKER

CULTURE * HEALING * SUBSTANCE USE & MENTAL HEALTH WELLNESS*

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Thundermaker Wellness remains steadfast in its mission, serving tribal nations as a resource for culturally grounded care. As behavioral health systems grow, and cases of substance use and mental health issues continue to rise, Thundermaker offers a solution as big as the problem.



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"It is time to stop talking about the problem & start working towards a solution."

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Glossary

LETTER FROM THE CHIEF EDITOR.....	PAGE 4
WHAT IS RESISTANCE?.....	PAGE 5
WATER PROTECTORS WERE RIGHT.....	PAGE 6
PRIDE AS AN INDIGENOUS MOVEMENT.....	PAGE 8
IT STARTED WITH BABY VERONICA.....	PAGE 11
THE WOMEN OF WOUNDED KNEE.....	PAGE 14
RESISTING THROUGH ACTION.....	PAGE 16
RECLAIMING IDENTITY AS RESILIENCE.....	PAGE 18
BOOK BLURB.....	PAGE 19
SPIRIT, RESPONSIBILITY, & A WAY OF LIFE.....	PAGE 20

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Graphic by Willard Malebear Jr.

LETTER FROM THE CHIEF EDITOR

Resistance and resilience

BY ROBERT PILOT
Chief Editor

In 1980, The Circle was founded as a way to share “news from an American Indian perspective”. One month before The Circle turned 46, in February 2026, the board made the strategic decision to put the publication on hiatus. The news and publishing industries have shifted so radically since The Circle was founded, and it was time to take a beat to see what the future might have in store for this community newspaper. In this era where resistance and resilience is as important as ever, the board decided to hire me as Chief Editor and I’ve brought on a team of folks to help bring about the changes needed to keep The Circle vibrant and relevant.

The history of this publication spans from journalism on treaty rights, local and national current events, political struggles, cultural teachings, and has featured voices of the many

community leaders who have built the storied legacy of Native American activism that continues to this day. The Circle covered the Water Protector Movement at Standing Rock, and had we been around 150 years ago, I’m certain we would have covered the triumph of the Battle of the Greasy Grass. We exist to uplift the stories of resistance and resilience that Native communities are still generating today.

Mainstream media has covered our communities incompletely and often inaccurately for as long as mainstream media has existed. The Circle was founded on the conviction that the answer to that failure was not better outsider coverage. The answer was Native journalism, produced by Native journalists, answerable to Native communities. We will be continuing that legacy for as long as the community wants us around.

We cover the stories that matter to the people we serve: treaty rights, sovereignty, health, education, the arts, the land, the water, youth,



and elders. We do it with the same rigor and the same standards as any serious news organization, because our readers deserve nothing less.

We are excited to relaunch The Circle as an online hub for Native news, and The Circle Magazine as a quarterly lifestyle publication featuring in-depth journalism on Native issues, comics, op-eds, and arts and cultural content. The strategic decision of the board to pause and to invest in revamping the paper for the next era speaks to the resilience of this organization.

The Circle exists because Native American communities deserve journalism that treats us as full human beings with complex lives, not as subjects of outside curiosity or the objects of policy concern. We hope you’ll join us in this next chapter, whether as a subscriber, community journalist, advertiser, or a booster.

Pinagigi. Wopida. Miigwech.

About the Author

Robert Pilot, a St. Paul resident and enrolled member of the Ho-Chunk Nation, has more than a decade of experience in Native American media.

Pilot is the founder and host of Native Roots Radio, a program he launched on AM 950 in January 2017 alongside his wife, Wendy Pilot. Native Roots Radio has expanded to 30 community radio stations across the country, primarily in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

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COMMUNITY ACTIVISM

What is resistance?

BY JOE HOBOT

For The Circle

During an episode of the 2009 documentary *We Shall Remain*, the Ojibwe elder Naawakamig ("At the Center of the Universe") – whose English name was Dennis Banks – reflected on the horror of being kidnapped and shipped off to a boarding school at a very young age. In particular, he relayed the experience of speaking his birth language whenever possible with the other youth who were also being held captive there. Though only five years old, he courageously defied an "English-only" rule that was enforced through the cruel use of corporal punishment by their sadistic school masters.

"They just started using English. You could not use any other language. And we just whispered: pass the bakawezhigan, the bakawezhigan. (Pass the bread over)."

- Naawakamig ("At the Center of the Universe" aka Dennis Banks)

Whether he was aware of it or not at the time, his and the other children's actions were straightforward in their conception, and purposeful in their application. Defying the rules, he relied on what he believed to be the truth and then chose to act in a manner consistent with that belief. Over time, he and the other children were able to secretly keep their language alive while simultaneously denying the oppressive forces aligned against them from achieving their aim – albeit at great cost. The more they spoke Ojibwe, the greater the odds were that they would face severe repercussions. However, the odds were equally as great that their language would not be extinguished within them. Through this seemingly simple yet courageous choice, Naawakamig and his counterparts embodied a form of sovereignty to be heralded, and which others define as resistance.

For those of our community who count themselves grateful that the Ojibwe language and the traditional practices of the Anishinaabe people survive to this day, we can take inspiration from a dining table full of five-year-olds doing the best that they could just to survive. Through the choic-

es made by these little ones, through their expression of free-will, they became an example for us in the here-and-now as to how we too can oppose the forces of the unjust. Although the circumstances have changed, the threats posed to us today remain frighteningly similar. Like them, we currently live in a time fraught with its own oppressive machinations intent on subjugating the masses to the will of a privileged few. Much of the dominant culture is seemingly trying to reinvent itself as one big boarding school for the world's entire population. Reaching through the mists of time, these children are showing us the way, and it couldn't be simpler...

For reasons that have yet to be fully revealed, the beginning of 2026 saw The Creator once again choose Minneapolis as the focal point for everyone's attention. In yet another public display, and for the second time in six years, the citizens of our city returned to the streets in defense of our own liberty. There in the center of this center, the resistance found a cache of spiritual underpinnings from the actions of the Urban Indigenous community. Radiating ever outward from the nexus point of the Pow Wow Grounds coffee shop and the Native American Community Development Institute (NACDI), our people once again put in the work to ensure that our community members were safe and accounted for. Food distribution, safety patrols, ride sharing, and wellness check-ins on neighbors were all coordinated from this location. Others throughout the city did much the same for themselves. Collectively, Minneapolis and many across the state of Minnesota became galvanized in this collective effort.

Standing in opposition to our people's freedom was a large, anonymous, militarized, occupying force running amuck through our neighborhoods. Masked and heavily armed, these agents of the federal government were openly terrorizing our neighbors, kidnapping them in broad daylight, and on two occasions, murdering them in cold blood on our city's snowy streets. What we had at our immediate disposal was our free will and creative energy to endure this onslaught until it finally

abated. When antagonized with this bleak reality, we ultimately were confronted with a choice, and so we chose not to be idle, not to sit cautiously on the sidelines. Instead, we chose engagement, we chose to act. Not out of any need for self-aggrandizement, and certainly not for publicity or fame, but rather out of a shared purpose of mutual self-preservation.

Our collective resistance was public, it was vocal, and it was visceral. Most notably, our actions caught the imagination of free societies writ large. As a result, the events in the Twin Cities were broadcast across all media platforms. Every side of the political spectrum tuned in. We were live simultaneously on Fox News, CNN, MSNOW, Facebook, and Instagram. Legends of the recording industry wrote songs about us. Solidarity protests broke out in cities across the United States as well as on the opposite sides of the oceans that bookend Turtle Island. There upon streets that predated the very founding of the American republic, people chose to speak up and demonstrate in defense of freedom. Our people from freezing cold Minnesota had become one with planetary consciousness. What followed in the wake of our collective decision to act was the eventual strategic retreat of ICE, the termination of their leadership, and the ultimate defeat of Operation Metro Surge.

Now that a handful of months have gone by since this trauma, perspective has started to emerge within our reflections. The questions now surfacing from participants, elected officials, and witnesses alike are not so much trying to determine why these actions had come about but more relating as to how we decided to go about it the way we did. Namely, what is the nature of an "effective resistance" in the twenty-first century? How did Minnesotans harness this energy so effectively and in a way that allowed us to prevail? Finally, how does a community sustain such "resistance" in the face of a long, twilight struggle that ebbs and flows between crisis points so long as the oppressor remains in power? For the voices that were captured on the various media

STANDING ROCK

Water Protectors were right

A look back 10 years after the Water Protector movement at Standing Rock

BY NICK ESTES

For The Circle

The Water Protector movement at Standing Rock in 2016 was never merely a local protest against a pipeline—it was a struggle for the future of the planet. Looking back a decade later, the stakes of those encampments at the confluence of the Missouri and Cannon Ball rivers feel even more monumental. And despite what has often felt like a series of setbacks since then, the Water Protector movement marked a paradigm shift.

2016 was a presidential election year defined by a profound national identity crisis, one that has had dire consequences for Indigenous people and for those who do not fit the mold of what counts as “belonging” to this country.

In the twilight months of the nation’s first Black presidency, a horrified public watched livestreamed images of militarized police unleashing spectacular violence against Water Protectors, deploying water cannons in freezing temperatures, attack dogs, tear gas, and concussion grenades. Democratic Party leadership had just crushed a populist left-wing insurgency that promised a path toward political change, offering instead a dynastic neoliberal war hawk—Hillary Clinton—as Obama’s successor. Meanwhile, a neofascist movement set its sights on something far larger than the White House: it sought to turn back the clock of history itself, returning the country to the halcyon days of white supremacy.

Soon after the outcome of the 2016 election, the ideological battle lines crystallized in the contrast between two slogans. On the frontlines of the Dakota Access Pipeline, Indigenous-led resistance looked forward, chanting what sounded like a planetary ultimatum: “Mni Wiconi! Water is life!” For there to be a future at all, Water Protectors had to confront the literal dinosaurs of the fossil fuel industry, forces intent on blocking

the social and economic transformations necessary to survive ecological collapse. On the other side stood Donald Trump’s nostalgic call to “Make America Great Again.” After Trump came Joe Biden’s less inspiring declaration that “America’s back,” alongside his reassurance to wealthy donors that under his presidency, “nothing will fundamentally change.” Indigenous people sought to move toward a more livable future for everyone, but billionaire America had other plans.

Looking back, neither party offered a fundamental departure from the path of climate ruin and war. What remained on offer was either the same empire or a more openly menacing version of it. What followed were more wars, a pandemic that killed millions, a Palestinian genocide, and the continued rise of global temperatures. Indian Country fared no better. The last decade of alternating Democratic and Republican leadership has also seen a precipitous decline in life expectancy for American Indians, falling from about 71 years to roughly 65, with some states like South Dakota reporting a median age of death of just 58. If those numbers were reported for U.S. adversaries such as Iran, Russia, or China, war hawks in Washington would already be calling to carpet bomb those responsible “back to the Stone Age” or overthrow the “authoritarian” regime in the name of human rights. But this is America. In true American excess, instead of meaningful change we get the short-sighted spectacle of election cycles that generate billions of dollars, sums exceeding the GDP of some nations. Such corporate party politics make long-term thinking and planning nearly impossible.

Anniversaries often seem arbitrary, whether marking a decade since the most significant Indigenous movement of a generation or commemorating 250 years since the founding of a settler republic built on genocide and the enslavement of entire peoples. Measuring progress within such timeframes can also feel futile. After all, Water Protectors were unable to stop the

Dakota Access Pipeline. And despite the abolition of slavery and the enfranchisement of formerly excluded populations, the problem of American empire has only expanded to a planetary scale, with more than 800 overseas military bases spanning the globe and the United States remaining one of the world’s leading drivers of fossil fuel extraction and the climate crisis.

We are living in a moment of terrible danger, and the challenges facing this generation are daunting, to say the least. But the Water Protector movement at Standing Rock teaches us to have a deep historical perspective and to take the long view, like our ancestors before us.

When I decided on the title for my book *Our History Is the Future*, which places the Water Protector movement at Standing Rock in historical perspective, my intention was to show how Indigenous peoples and, more specifically, the Oceti Sakowin were future-oriented. The revelation came to me when studying the Ghost Dance movement that spread like wildfire across our reservations during one of the darkest chapters of our history. While most histories emphasize the murderous outcome of the Ghost Dance movement—the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890—the visions, prayers, and prophecies embedded within it speak of the revitalization of Indigenous life and the return of the human, plant, and animal relatives taken from us. Our ancestors did more than die and suffer; they also dreamed and fought for an Indigenous future, and they did so in ways that we may never fully understand or appreciate.

This year also marks the 150-year anniversary of a U.S. military defeat by a Cheyenne-Arapaho-Lakota alliance. Accounts from that day show the U.S. military, under the leadership of George Armstrong Custer, dying while fleeing from superior Indigenous forces. The loss at the hands of people the United States called “primitive savages” remains both an embarrassment to the nation and a source of pride for Indigenous

people.

As Lakotas, we grow up with a pantheon of heroes like Tasunka Witko (Crazy Horse) and Tatanka Iyotake (Sitting Bull), who defeated the U.S. military but were later killed by their own relatives. Their lives and deaths are lessons for us today about the external and internal nature of our subjugation.

It would be wrong, however, to say the best days of our people are behind us or that they matter only to those of us born Lakota. While we look to the past for lessons, the Water Protectors' call to fight for the Seven Generations to come is an act of solidarity with future relatives we do not yet know and a world we do not yet inhabit. This call has been taken up by and for people from all walks of life. And there are measurable gains from this movement. A 2021 study by the Indigenous Environmental Network found that Indigenous-led resistance against carbon extraction and infrastructure challenged one-quarter of carbon emissions from Canada and the United States.

Indigenous people, though small minorities within both states, punch well above

their weight class when it comes to climate justice. Because of the costs imposed by Standing Rock on the fossil fuel industry, corporations and local governments have become more hesitant to push through unpopular extractivist and carbon infrastructure projects, given the enormous expense of raising a police army to crush Indigenous resistance. They now have to think twice.

The recent Lakota-led actions against drilling at the sacred site Pe' Sla in He Sapa, the Black Hills, led the mining company to withdraw its project. And the Indigenous patrols against ICE terrorism in the Twin Cities showed that Water Protectors moved the frontline from rural to urban geographies and that land defense also included protecting one's neighbors from federal invasion and occupation. Being a Water Protector is about being a good relative.

The Lakota elder and AIM activist Madonna Thunder Hawk once told me that she gave her life to the movement—participating in every major Red Power action from Alcatraz in 1969 to Wounded Knee in 1973 and even Standing Rock in 2016—to be a good ancestor to future generations.



Water Protectors were right. We must have solidarity with the ancestors of the future by being good relatives and doing what's right today.

About the Author

Nick Estes is an enrolled member of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe and is an Associate Professor of American Indian Studies at the University of Minnesota. He is the co-host The Red Nation Podcast and author of the award-winning book *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance* (Haymarket, 2024).



PRIDE MONTH

Pride as an Indigenous movement

BY ALFRED WALKING BULL

For The Circle

Wowitan Wašte Yuha po! Happy Pride!

While so much of this year has been fraught with crises, rapid response, and protecting our neighbors from federal occupation and kidnappings, June is an opportunity to remember the history of the people who created the networks, resources, and relationships that made it possible to resist authoritarianism. For many, understanding how Two-Spirit people and communities have been on the forefront is an important way to tap into strength and resilience for the days and months ahead.

The first gathering of Two-Spirit people was held at the Minneapolis American Indian Center in 1987, organized by American Indian Gays and Lesbians founded by Richard LaFortune, and called "Basket and the Bow: A Gathering of Lesbian and Gay Native Americans."

It was one of the first times in modern history where a group of queer Indigenous folks had gathered on a national stage. Three years later in 1990, the Third Annual Intertribal Native American, First Nations, Gay and Lesbian American Conference took place in Winnipeg, Manitoba where community leaders introduced the first catch-all term, Two-Spirit, to represent the feminine and masculine spirit identities and roles.

Throughout the years, Two-Spirit leaders would continue to play an active part in organizing community through crisis after crisis.

The Minnesota Indian AIDS Task Force was also created in 1987 to help those impacted by the AIDS crisis. It grew and expanded its services to meet the needs of our communities and is now known as Indigenous People's Task Force, led by Two-Spirit elder Sharon Day.

In mid-May, a group of Two-Spirit people (myself included) were honored to give a grounding at the first Transgender Law Center conference in Minneapolis. Day and Candi Brings Plenty, the founder of the Two Spirit Nation camp, rendered a song and a poem for the assembled room of Transgender, Queer, and Nonbinary leaders from

across the country to ground them in whose land they came to visit.

The Transgender Law Center is currently led by the first Native executive director, Shelby Chestnut (Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes of Fort Peck). The law center was founded in 2002 and has become the largest trans-specific, trans-led organization in the United States. The center advocates and litigates transgender issues ranging from employment, prison conditions, education, immigration, to healthcare.

When we were approached to welcome and ground conference attendees, it was a matter of respecting protocol and being unafraid to tell the truth about our communities. There was no one better qualified than Day and Brings Plenty to welcome and ground our guests.

Brings Plenty is Oglala Lakota from Oglala, S.D. and was instrumental in establishing the Two-Spirit Camp at Standing Rock in 2016 No DAPL protest and spiritual encampments. At the time, she organized 2SLGBTQ+ Indigenous activists from around the country and from within the local tribal communities to re-enforce a shared spiritual identity and for younger Two-Spirits to know they have a place and have always had a place in tribal societies.

"We've had young ones come out to their families by saying, 'that's my camp, I belong there,'" Brings Plenty told me in 2016.

These are histories that are important to share, even in these times of crisis and political upheaval, simply because for so many nations and communities, Two-Spirit history is often the first to be hidden for the sake of protecting our relatives.

For my part at the Transgender Law Center's conference, we remembered Savannah Williams, the Bois Forte descendant Two-Spirit transwoman killed in 2023, while also giving a brief history of this place from Bdote, to Owamni Yomni, to Franklin Avenue, and how Two Spirit/Queer and Indigenous people have been at the forefront of fighting against colonization, settlement, police violence, and federal occupation. I reminded folks that Two Spirit, Winkte (Lakota/Dakota), Nádleehí (Dine), Queer, Trans, Nonbinary, Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual In-

digenous people have always existed and always will.

But more than the cognitive dissonance of reminding others that Two-Spirit/Queer Indigenous folks have led since time immemorial, it was an opportunity to welcome guests to this sacred place.

During the conference, I also met J.C. Fairbanks, an Anishinaabe Two-Spirit who leads the Twin Cities Indigiqueer Organization. The terminology of Indigiqueer also represents an evolution and respectful divergence from Two-Spirit's more spiritual and culturally-grounded identity that may include ceremonial or spiritual significance within any tribal community. Not all LGBTQ+ Indigenous folks identify as Two-Spirit but most LGBTQ+ Indigenous folks can identify as Indigiqueer if they so choose.

Getting to speak with him and learn about his efforts to bring community together through cultural work and beading was inspiring because when our communities can find commonalities, we're better equipped to show up in solidarity with others.

When we talk about solidarity, so much of the effort is put on folks on the margins to make themselves understandable to the mainstream. For Queer/Trans/Nonbinary and Indigenous people, we know that so much of our history and movement is based in protecting our people while simultaneously strategizing survival. For many of us, the idea of trying to make that existence understandable for others is more work than most have the energy to do. In these moments when we can find commonality among our communities on the margins, however, is when we build power and solidarity in honest and open ways.

In most Indigenous cultures or tribal nations, we have a shared respect for wisdom and age that keeps us grounded in care for the future as well as the present. Of course, not all people who are old are elders and not all elders are wise, but wisdom and age are how we pass along information from one generation to the next.

For some in the Queer communities, age and wisdom might not always be the highest value when we're trying to survive from day to day, or build power from one election

cycle and legislative session to the next. We might be tempted to stay rooted in the immediacy of right now that we never have time to look back and learn in order to cast a vision for the future.

One need only remember that an entire generation of gay and transgender folks—from across the globe—were claimed during the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and 1990s to understand, that in many ways, the current generation of elder queer people are among the first, out generation of queer elders who are learning how to pass along their wisdom as they go. As Indigenous people, we have much to teach our relatives. Where we share purpose and relationship is in celebrating how proud we are of our achievements.

Pride is one value that's universal to both Queer and Indigenous communities. Whether it's the evening grand entry at a powwow or the runway of the ballroom, how we express pride in ourselves, our friends, our families (by blood or by choice), and our communities is always a significant affair. How often have both people heard from white, straight, cisgender, or Christian folks that we're too loud, too raucous, too too much? It's because the shine of our

pride blinds them with jealousy.

June is a month-long celebration for many communities because it marks points of uprising, liberation, and victory. June-teenth marks the final enforcement of the Emancipation Proclamation that freed enslaved Black people in Texas. For Queer/Trans Black folks, this time is also a period of belonging and celebration.

Lakota Victory Day (June 25-26) commemorates the Battle of Greasy Grass (Little Bighorn), so for me as a Sicangu Lakota winkte, it reminds me that I come from fighters and relatives who continue to show up for our shared survival.

And June 28 marks the first day of the Stonewall Uprising where 2SLGBTQ+ patrons of the Stonewall Inn rose up against police intimidation and brutality in New York City. It would lead to the modern 2SLGBTQ rights movement under the banner of Gay Liberation. Those moments were also just starting points for so many in our communities.

The work of Two-Spirit/Indigiqueer leaders in Minneapolis and across the region and country is unique because it tends to bring communities together in new ways that serve to inspire.

To that point, Twin Cities Pride awarded Nick Metcalf as the BIPOC Leader of the Year in May for all the work he's been doing to organize Two-Spirit folks in Minneapolis, as well as for his history in working with Roxanne Anderson to establish the Power to the People Stage where BIPOC and grassroots community and entertainment are celebrated during the Pride Festival in Loring Park. For that, we can all be proud.

To learn more about the Transgender Law Center, visit www.transgenderlawcenter.org. To learn more about the Twin Cities Indigiqueer Organization, visit www.twincitiesindigiqueer.org. To learn more about the Two Spirit Nation, visit www.thetwospiritnation.org. And to stay connected with the Indigenous People's Task Force, visit www.indigenouspeoplestf.org. Connect with me at hoyekiyapi@hoyekiyapi.com.

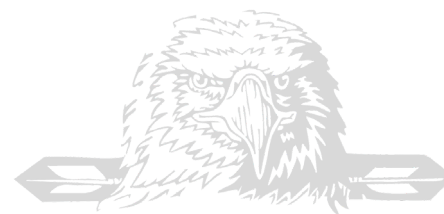
About the Author

Alfred Walking Bull (Sicangu Lakota, they/he pronouns) is a former journalist, storyteller, fundraiser, and organizer from the Rosebud Sioux Tribe who's 12 years into recovery. Alfred is a Queer/Two Spirit, Indigenous person living in unceded territory of his Dakota relatives in Bde Ota Otunwe.



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A LIFE OF ACTIVISM

It started with Baby Veronica

BY TARA HOUSKA
For The Circle

It started with Baby Veronica.

Here was a Native baby, who a non-Native couple had paid many thousands of dollars to adopt.

Here was a Native father, handed legal papers in a parking lot before his military deployment to Iraq. Dusten Brown thought he was signing his parental rights over to his child's mom. He wasn't. Here was that Native father, fighting for his daughter as soon as he landed overseas. He fought for over two years before the non-Native couple was court-ordered to let Dusten have his child.

And here was the non-Native couple, the Capobiancos, on NPR, on Dr. Phil, on every program that would listen to their claims to Baby Veronica, to their fight for her against her tribe and her deadbeat father, to their fears and their pain, to the wrong being done to them. As a brand-new law school graduate, fresh out of interning for the Indian Child Welfare Law Center in Minneapolis – an incredible, dedicated team of people who fight tirelessly for Native families – it seemed an open-and-shut case under the terms of the Indian Child Welfare Act.

The fight went all the way to the Supreme Court. Dusten lost Baby Veronica. Baby Veronica lost something else.

My understanding of how it all worked shifted. The media shaping a narrative, the inherent bias and in-grained anti-Indigenous racism, immense privilege, the legal gymnastics to get to a conclusion as old as co-lonialism. I was already angry at the world, then this.

I was angry for the loss of a before glimpsed in the spaces between strip malls and box stores, the slices of green that sometimes held a rabbit or two, a chickadee still singing surrounded by hot pavement. Angry for hurt manifested in sick lands, in constant struggle. Here was the family trauma. Here was the drunk, the mal-adjustment. Here was the stereotype, the mystic, the erasure. My great-grandmother was a full-blooded Cherokee, did you know? Well,

here was the mix-blood princess, somehow walking and talking and enjoying the miracles of modernization, but somehow ungrateful for a world of bottled water.

Fighting for our existence

It was mascots after that. I moved to Washington, D.C., and learned the ropes of the system I studied. I watched Native leaders speaking for our children, for our land and waters. One afternoon, as the sun shone on the oak desk I occupied, I wrote a letter to the Department of Health and Human Services. The agency was taking 85 cents on the dollar of funds allocated to teen suicide on the reservation. 85 cents eaten by the federal government for overseeing the spending of that dollar.

One of the internet tabs I'd pulled up in my re-search covered a string of teen suicides, the youngest was 12 years old. I put my head on my desk. The sun bounced off the plush office carpet.

One afternoon, I was standing in line to buy lunch. The place was running a "Redskins special". An Indian head stared from a promotional poster on the wall. He stared from the back of a man's coat in front of me. He stared from the wrapper of my sandwich. I thought of the heartfelt testimonies I'd heard at the Capitol, the hope in tribal voices asking for that which was al-

ready owed and agreed to. I thought of our stubborn exist-ence, alongside a flourishing class steadily consuming ecosystems and millennia of balance in just a few centuries. "What are you?" I'd been asked over and over again from childhood on. "How much?" inevitably followed. The Redskins special stared.

Those first few articles I wrote were driven by desperation. Surely there had to be another way to help. If enough people knew, if education changed, if the right eyes saw the story. If they knew, surely they would never mine Oak Flat. Oak Flat is a sacred place, holding voices and stories spanning generations, carrying its own place in Apache lifeways and coming-of-age. If people only knew how hard Dusten fought for his baby, they would understand a grave injustice occurred. They would realize Native people are still here, stewarding and protecting cultures and languages, as we have since time immemorial.

More articles followed. Then I was in organizing spaces, attending my first demonstrations on lunch breaks, on weekends. There were tipis on the National Mall and a coalition fighting Keystone XL; I pushed for every last pro-bono minute possible. I was meeting Natives across Turtle Island through social media who were also speaking out.



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Fighting injustices and advocating for better representation

A crew of us learned how to trend on Twitter. How to help beat a drum carried by generations of activists. They'd fought against the dehumanization of Native mascots going back to the 1960s. While the U.S. finally saw blackface largely maligned, Native mascots held on, entertaining the masses. "I'm honoring you," says the guy in the turkey feather headdress. "Let's have a little powwow," says the woman in the power suit. "This is our history," says the Eagle Scout leader.

Alongside the National Coalition Against Racism in Sports and Media (NCARSM), I organized the first major protest at FedEx Field, home of the then Washington Redskins, as a full-time first-year lawyer in D.C. The team's then-owner held one-square mile of the roads around the stadium, so I found a church willing to let us use the tailgating lot they normally rented out. The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) donated t-shirts and a charter bus that we coordinated to pick folks up at the National Museum of American Indian Art (NMAI). The Washington Post ran a few stories. A bomb threat was intercepted, the day of our march, at the tailgating lot.

Most fans stared or pointedly looked away. Some screamed profanities and jeered. A group of Latino men wearing floor-length headdresses war whooped in our faces. "Squaw!" burst out the window of a passing bus.

I learned a lot that day. Always print an itinerary for a scheduled demonstration. Or some random person will show up, get all of the details, and voilá, the work is theirs. And while that might grate the nerves, credit is never the name of the game, respect carries much further. Don't forget to bring a speaker and a mega-phone. I can't tell you how many protests and direct actions I've been to with a whole plan, all of the signs, people, water and a backup plan running smoothly with nothing but time and sun because the megaphone was the lowest priority. Shout out to Peter Landeros of AIM, for the amp, mic, and back-of-his-pickup-truck stage he pulled together that day at FedEx Field. Shout out to Norma Renville and Clyde Belcourt, for gently and pragmatically showing me a new kind of ropes, and for all their good work over decades.

I also learned that most people are generally okay and ignorance is not the same as

racism. Nonetheless, nostalgic racism and unintentional racism are both still racism. There's a reason the administration making memes of locking up crying brown people specially wants to bring back the Redskins logo and mascot. There's a reason they fight tooth and nail to keep tomahawk chopping and wearing Natives as a costume.

The ripples continue

To let us go means asking why. It means seeing us as real living people, then and now. Real people brutally and systematically brought to the edge of extinction, to homelessness in our own land. Romanticizing us, turning us into a plaything and family lore erases the living, breathing survivors today and the reality of what our families survived.

When LaDonna Allard went live on Facebook and asked people to come help her fight for the land, I heard her. There were youth running from Standing Rock to D.C., videos of a standoff between police and horse riders in the prairie. Brave women jumping a fence to stop the machines. A new path emerged, and I followed it back to the land.

The lessons of Standing Rock are too many for this limited space, for this limited life. They continue to manifest, to reverberate from the energy brought from all over the world. Some of the matriarchs of that moment in time have left this plane of being, others continue to stand up and speak out for what is right. LaDonna Allard. Joye Braun. Debra White Plume. Olowan Martinez. Your ripples continue. Other leaders, land defenders, knowledge keepers who held the temporary society on the prairie that formed with so many nations represented have walked on, leaving footsteps for all of us to find.

I walked away from that fight in mourning, in confusion, in upset and joy and loss. Those first few months were rough, to say the least. We aren't healed, it wasn't perfect, we didn't stop the Dakota Access pipeline from being built, but we created something that was real and alive. Something felt whenever our people come together, at a campfire, a ceremony, a gathering with intention. Something bigger than a single fight to defend the land and water, bigger than any one solution or perspective. Something that sustains.

Years of lodge have taught me to always consider vibrational energy, the movement of thoughts, voices, songs, prayers, hearts,

all of it. At one point the NoDAPL camps next to the Missouri River were one of the larger populations in North Dakota. The movement was nonstop, for months, from all corners of Turtle Island and beyond. What vibrations did we create?

It's been a decade since the ground fight against Dakota Access Pipeline. Other land defense camps, dedicated efforts, movements have unfolded and continue. Fossil fuel companies, their funders and insurers, their shareholders and backers no longer summarily dismiss Indigenous resistance. The oligarchs funnel money into creating their own "movements", their own campaigns to get another mega yacht and another nail in the coffin of our species over the finish line.

Not backing down

Here in my people's treaty territory, the oligarch assessment looked like establishing a task force upfront; a coalition of federal, state, and private actors to ensure the completion of the Line 3 tar sand pipeline through our wetlands and rivers. It looked like lawn signs and billboards touting "Minnesotans for Line 3" and slews of local opinion pieces in community newspapers, alongside Enbridge-sponsored events complete with free t-shirts. It looked like creating an escrow account overseen by the state and funded by the private company, to pay over \$8 million for the training and militarization of rural police forces and the state Department of Natural Resources (DNR). It looked like a local sheriff fighting one of the camps through easements, and telling us our driveway wasn't a driveway anymore, so we couldn't drive into our camp (long story short, he lost that fight).

It looked like over a thousand arrests and over half a dozen river drilling operations repeatedly suspended and delayed, as land defenders continued the work of movement building and inspiring courage, during the height of the global COVID pandemic shutdowns. To put it in context, 700 people were arrested fighting Dakota Access Pipeline, the drill under the Missouri River never ceased. Years later, the diversity of tactics continued growing and so did the diversity of folks who answered the call to throw off apathy and stand up for the land. The ripples continue.

Hope can feel hard to find, in the bottled water world of distraction. For almost three years, much of the world has watched the

decimation of an entire society and people, the livestreaming of a reality that breaks the mind as so-called leaders remain silent or openly support the ongoing crimes against all of humanity. The oligarchs have bought up the media and press, they've shifted algorithms and utilized vast state and institutional authority mechanisms to suppress and repress resistance to the status quo. Their onslaught of daily news pushes to numb us to the taking of human rights, to further isolate us into obedience and complicity.

But here are a new generation of student activists, taking significant personal risks for children and people they will likely never meet. Here are neighborhoods across Turtle Island, building networks to protect at-risk community members from being disappeared, keeping people housed and fed, showing up at detention centers full of Indigenous peoples, despite a level of violence that has repeatedly included public killings.

Here are a brave group of young land defenders, taking personal risk in the face of an all-powerful surveillance state and chasing a graphite mining company off Pe'Sla in the Black Hills. Oglala Lakota Nation Youth Council wrote, "As Lakota youth, we understand that the future of our Nation will not be secured through dependence, but through the restoration of our language, ceremonies, kinship systems, and our sacred relationship with the land. We are

not waiting for change; we are organizing, mobilizing and reclaiming our role as caretakers of our people, our culture, and our homelands."

Here are a steadfast crew of Native women, reclaiming land in an urban center and creating space for Indigenous voices to be seen, heard, and valued. "Right now we are living in hard times, yes, but as Indian people we've been living in hard times since colonialism stepped foot on our land," said Maggie Lorenz, Wa-ka Tipi Awanyankapi. "The most important thing we can do is support one another. Be kind, be good relatives, help our elders and young ones... the songs, the ceremonies, our sacred places. These are the things that will keep us going."

Here are tribal nations forming an MOU across an international border to defend the Boundary Waters from sulfide mining. "Gakjiwanong will be asserting, exercising, and protecting our rights [and] sovereignty as a Nation," said Chief Carrie Atatise-Norwegian of Gakjiwanong First Nation, in the heart of the Boundary Waters-Quetico wilderness. "We are all stewards of our lands, protectors of our people, water, and resources."

Here is a First Nations woman, sailing in a flotilla to break a blockade held by a military power that has killed tens of thousands of civilians in just a few years. "Despite Israel occupation, apartheid, and genocide, Gaza has given more to us than we could ever give to Gaza," said Mskwaasin Agnew, Salt



River First Nation. "Gaza lit a fire within our hearts and reignited a revolution across the world. None of us are free until we are all free."

Here are people across the world, standing up in the face of it all and still choosing to do what is right. The children, the winged, the swimmers, the crawlers, the four-legged, the forests, the prairies, the desert, the rainforest, the mountains, the glaciers, the oceans, the web of life – they deserve no less.

About the Author

Tara Houska (Couchiching First Nation) is a mother, sundancer, Mide, land defender, and attorney. She is the founder of Giniw Collective, an Indigenous women and two-spirit led effort committed to environmental justice, decolonial praxis, and life in balance.

Headshot by Nedahness Greene.

Coloring design by
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Photo by Dawnee LeBeau

Stephanie Autumn to the right of her movement mentor, Madonna Thunder Hawk, at a celebration featuring the Women of Wounded Knee exhibit at the Minneapolis American Indian Center, Oct 5, 2025.

EXHIBIT

The women of Wounded Knee

In 2023, the Warrior Women Project launched the Honoring the Women of Wounded Knee exhibit to mark the 50th anniversary of the 1973 occupation. That 71-day standoff became a defining moment in the long struggle for American Indian self-determination and a global symbol of Indigenous resistance and resurgence. Yet dominant historical narratives have largely overlooked the women who shaped and sustained it.

Honoring the Women of Wounded Knee foregrounds the forgotten Indian women leaders at the center of this iconic resistance—and their fights for self-determination before and since. Drawing on two decades of oral history interviews and a rich body of archival material, it offers an immersive look at how Indian women forged a self-governing community and made self-determination real.

Rather than presenting a single, linear narrative, the exhibit shares the lived experiences of 12 women directly involved in the occupation, all of whom are narrators in the Warrior Women Project Oral History Archive. Each narrator appears on a life-size panel (3 by 7 feet) with a short biography and a personal account of the occupation. Accompanying tablets play clips from their interviews, letting visitors hear the women in their own voices.

One of those women is Pat Bellanger. A co-founder of the American Indian Movement (AIM) and Women of All Red Nations (WARN), Bellanger is remembered for her decades of Native education and family advocacy in the Twin Cities. She grew up on the Leech Lake Reservation before moving to Minneapolis, where in 1972 she helped establish Heart of the Earth Survival School. As the first survival

school of its kind, Heart of the Earth worked with parents and surrounding Indigenous communities to bring traditional values, languages, and history into the classroom, revitalizing Native lifeways and empowering a new generation.

Less well known is the role Bellanger played in coordinating the occupation from Minneapolis. The exhibit reveals how, in the lead-up to Wounded Knee, Pat was working out of AIM's central office, juggling three phones on her desk. One call came from Gladys Bissonette, a Lakota first-language speaker on the ground. "We need help," Bissonette said. "We need you AIMs to come down here." Bellanger mobilized that support, and throughout the occupation she served as a nodal point in AIM's national communication network, and organized and transported food and medical supplies.

Stephanie Autumn, now based in Minneapolis, was just 19 when she joined the occupation. One of the younger people inside Wounded Knee, she served on the security team and helped run communications, including efforts to organize cease-fires. The experience reshaped her life. Born in Arizona to a Hopi father and a mother of Irish descent, Autumn was placed in foster care from the age of nine, and felt unsure about her identity as an Indigenous woman. At Wounded Knee, Stephanie reconnected with her culture and tradition and experienced ceremonies for the first time. "Before I went to Wounded Knee, I had never witnessed people who were willing to lay down their life because they loved their people... because they loved the land. The blessing was that I was able to witness it. I was able to see it, hear it, feel it. And when you're able to witness that type of cour-

age, that type of love, it forever changes your life."

The exhibit's power lies in the connections it draws between these individual lives. Moving among the panels, audiences encounter a web of familial, political, and spiritual relationships that bound these women together and sustained their communities. Collective leadership and interdependence, the exhibit shows, were foundational to both survival and self-determination.

"The Warrior Women Project exhibit is a groundbreaking triumph in oral storytelling," says poet and educator Mark K. Tilsen (Oglala Lakota). "It feels like you're inside an interactive chapter of Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*. As a student of our resistance and Lakota culture, I often find the voices of matriarchs absent. No longer. Even someone like me, who grew up in the movement hearing these anecdotes at my mother's table, was surprised to hear new stories told with such vitality."

Since launching in 2023, the exhibit has traveled to 28 venues across five U.S. states and four countries, reaching more than 6,000 visitors.

Alongside the full-size banner exhibit, Warrior Women Project has produced a printable poster version that has become a key classroom resource for teachers covering the history of Red Power, from California to Minnesota. UC Berkeley's High School Ethnic Studies Initiative spotlighted it as a model of best practice for teaching the subject at secondary level. Anna Reid, an English and journalism teacher at The Blake School in Minneapolis, described the effect on her students:

"[The exhibit] created conversations across departments and among teachers about how we teach the history of Wounded

Knee. It made Native students feel seen and heard. Students were able to make connections to the lessons they learn about critical thinking, questioning power structures, and the power of individuals to stand up to injustice. Honestly, it made teenagers feel empowered and more able to see their own power. It also enabled some students to see ways to channel anger and frustration they feel about hierarchies they see in their own worlds."

Beyond educational settings, communities across Turtle Island have made the exhibit a tool for their own organizing, learning, and convening, and a focal point for events tied to their present-day struggles. In October 2025, it was on display at the American Indian Center on Franklin Avenue for an honoring of another of the matriarchs it features, Madonna Thunder Hawk. Stephanie Autumn and Lisa Bellanger, Pat Bellanger's daughter and a community activist, were among the more than 100 people who gathered. Reflecting on the exhibit, Stephanie said, "In the United States of America, we talk about freedom. But at Wounded Knee, we were free. We didn't have to answer to the United States government. We didn't have to answer to anyone except for our own people or our own life ways and for what we believed in."

Just a few days later, Warrior Women Project's exhibit was displayed at Grandmother's Fire, a conference on Native reproductive justice organized by the Native American Women's Dialogue on Infant Mortality (NAWDIM). The gathering drew 100 birthworkers and health-care workers to address disparities in maternal and infant mortality. Those present drew on the lessons of Red Power matriarchs to inform their own

organizing around Native birth equity.

Most recently, in March 2026, the exhibit came to the MHealth Fairview University of Minnesota Medical Center for Women's History Month, in a collaboration between the hospital's Indigenous Healing Circle and Warrior Women Project. Heather Maracle Fahey, who manages Indigenous Relations and the Native Health Equity Program at Fairview, first encountered the exhibit at Grandmother's Fire. Hearing the matriarchs share

their stories from Wounded Knee, she says, "connected the dots for me about the relationship between a healthy Mother Earth, who takes care of the people, and a healthy mother who takes care of her children."

The experience was "one of those things you will never forget," and it prompted her to bring the exhibit to Fairview as both a learning opportunity for staff and a welcoming space for Native relatives seeking care. "We wanted to lift up the voices of the matriarchs," she says, "as



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part of the work we are doing at Fairview to address improved care for our mothers and babies."

Pat Bellanger would have been proud. The same matriarch who juggled three phones in AIM's Minneapolis office during Wounded Knee spent

the decades that followed responding to Native health crises in the Twin Cities, working for the Indian Health Board and, in 2003, co-founding the Native American Community Clinic in the Phillips neighborhood. By the time of her passing in 2015, "Grandmother AIM," as she was

widely known, had spent more than half a century insisting that Indigenous self-determination and well-being were inseparable.

The Warrior Women Project is an intergenerational collective of activists, scholars and media makers committed to recover-

ing and sharing the stories of Warrior Women who fought for Indigenous self-determination and cultural survival during the Red Power movement.

For more information about the Warrior Women Project, visit warriorwomen.org/wk50.

COMMUNITY ACTIVISM

Resisting through action

BY ARVINA MARTIN

For The Circle

It's almost cliché to say at this point, but the last year has been trying, at best, and devastating at worst. Whether it is the rising costs of gas, food, and housing, or the attacks on citizens and immigrants alike by federal agents, our world feels unstable, and unmanageable. So many of us are working hard to make ends meet, and are cutting back on important, but necessary things, like health insurance, in order to make sure we can still live, in case of job loss, or massive expenses incurred after things like home or car damage after extreme weather events. These new realities are can impact our mental health in a negative way that most of us don't even realize until we are in crisis.

I'm Arvina Martin, Hoocak raašra Hohapjikerega hiigaire (My Ho-Chunk name is Hohapjikere, Lightning in the Distance). I grew up in Madison, WI, with my parents and my younger sister. I am an enrolled member of the Ho-Chunk Nation, and am also Stockbridge-Munsee through my dad. My sister and I were usually either the only two Native kids or two of the very few Native kids at school while growing up. When I was in elementary school, my dad was former Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson's advisor on Indian policy. This was the 1980s, during the height of the Walleye Wars, and there was much unrest happening up north, when Ojibwe people exercised their treaty-protected rights to spearfish. This was the first time I really remember paying attention to an issue in the news. I remem-

ber hearing about the intimidation Ojibwe fishers experienced, and worrying about my dad's safety when he was on the road. It was also the start of my interest in our government, politics, and how we needed leaders who listened to our voices all throughout the state.

Since then, I graduated from Dartmouth College, and started my career. I remember the support I had received from my tribe, from the Madison Indian Community, and of course, from my family. I knew that it was my responsibility to use what I had learned to help the communities who supported me throughout my education. My parents, Buck and Karen Martin, were also incredible role models, as people who worked to help uplift and support Native people throughout their own careers. My dad continued his work, finishing his career as a lobbyist for Stockbridge-Munsee, and my mom served in several roles including as a legislator and as the Executive Director of Health and Social Services for the Ho-Chunk Nation. They showed me how to engage, and how to serve our communities in a good way.

I started my own work in politics as a communications intern with the Democratic Party of Wisconsin, and quickly became paid staff, as the American Indian Outreach Director during the 2012 recall of former Governor Scott Walker. That started me down a path I'd always wanted to pursue, one that allowed me to work in Native communities across Wisconsin, making sure that anyone who wanted to vote was empowered with the information, and the documents they'd need to cast their ballot,

and to get involved in campaigns for public office. I wanted then, and still want now, for us as Native people, and Native Nations, to continue to grow our political power, by consistently showing up to vote, holding our elected officials' feet to the fire when they do not act in our best interests, and to become involved in issue advocacy and candidate campaigns.

How does all of this relate to protecting one's mental health during these unprecedented times? Being involved in political campaigns became my way of fighting back — against policy, and personalities who continue to put our best interests on the back burner, and are actively working in ways that make our lives more difficult, and more expensive. I am a middle aged, queer, Native woman, existing in a country whose leaders increasingly enact legislation that specifically harms me, and those I care about.

I remember the day that the US Supreme Court struck down Roe vs Wade. It took me back to a time when I dealt with overwhelming pain, with no clue what was happening. I remembered how scared I was. I live with a condition called endometriosis, where the uterine lining fails to properly shed during menstruation, and the tissue attaches to other parts, usually in the pelvic cavity. It was one of the most painful experiences of my life. I was going to the emergency room every month because the pain was overwhelming. It took me a long time to get a diagnosis, and I was shuffled back and forth between doctors, some who didn't take me or my pain seriously. When I finally found a

doctor who listened to me, and immediately scheduled me for surgery, I cried. It was a relief to finally have someone offer me a solution.

After my surgery confirmed that I did, in fact, have endometriosis, she put me on a long term treatment plan, which included being put into medically induced menopause, and after was followed up with an intrauterine device. Stopping my menstruation was what allowed my body to heal, and I've been almost completely free of symptoms for over a decade. But now, with *Roe v. Wade* struck down, it is clear that women's reproductive health care was officially under attack. And, we quickly saw that ending access to birth control was next on the agenda. Decisions regarding my, and millions of others' health were now potentially not just going to be made with our medical providers, but also with Congress, the US Supreme Court, the President, as well as their equivalents in state government. That makes for a crowded doctor's office. And what will happen if I can no longer access the one thing that keeps me out of the emergency room every month? The prospect was, and remains, terrifying. I'm even more worried for all the young women, like my daughter, who can make their life plans without worrying about pregnancy, or if they'll be able to access treatments for the many conditions that birth control and abortions treat.

I started getting scared. Well, MORE scared is probably more accurate. Suddenly, the future that I had previously anticipated seemed to be fading away. And it made me anxious. My depression grew. In addition to making sure I leaned on my mental health providers, I was documenting my feelings, so I could talk about them when I met with my therapist. But that wasn't enough. After spending so much time working in politics, both on the campaign side, as well as the policy side, I knew that I had skills that I

could put into practice to help correct this race to the bottom. And I knew that actively working towards the future that I wanted to see would help me feel like I wasn't just letting things happen all around me without pushing back.

In my last job, I was the Executive Director of an organization that trains Democratic women and nonbinary folks to run for office. I led trainings that taught our participants how to run for office, making sure they were exposed to all parts of a campaign — from all that needs to be done before you announce your campaign, to things like raising money, public speaking, and how to reach voters. I also created a training I called "Tribes 101," and made it a required part of the program. The training covered the concepts of Tribal Sovereignty, Indian Law, and the government-to-government relationship with Tribes, and mobilizing Native people on and off-reservation. It was important to me to make sure that the future elected officials that I was training had this knowledge, and had a basic understanding when working with Tribes and Native people. I also was able to train more than twice the number of Native women than the program had trained in its previous 14 years. Not to mention adding more Trans women and nonbinary folks that are now ready to run for office.

These potential candidates all are ones that I believe in, that are authentic in their values, and truly want to put the work in to improve things for all of us. I'm very proud to have played even a small part in their future service, and that makes it a bit easier to manage when it seems like everything is spiralling out of control.

Getting involved politically has kept me going through this terrifying time. It makes me feel a little less despondent to see the amazing people who I've worked with, as elected officials, candidates, staff, and vol-



unteers, all coming together to help us get closer to our shared vision for the future. Being able to see that there are others who care as much about their fellow Americans, and citizens of the world, as I do, makes it easier to look forward with hope.

Being proactive during this time can take so many shapes. Maybe your version of getting involved means knocking doors for a candidate you believe in. Or contacting your elected official who supports dangerous legislation. So many people in Minnesota lived this earlier this year by looking after their neighbors when they were at risk of being abducted by ICE agents.

Service to others truly makes a difference. Helping each other, directly, or indirectly, gives us more influence over what political leaders do in our names, and more ownership over the process that so often seeks to keep us out of the conversation.

Finding your place in the system tells those who want to exclude us that we will not let them do it without a fight, and that they need to truly listen to, and act on our beliefs, words, and opinions in order to be successful.

That is the kind of impact that those of us who are compelled to contribute are desperately looking for, when so many of us are struggling and hurting. It gives us hope that we'll soon see better days, and ultimately what gets us to that better reality.



The Circle

NATIVE AMERICAN NEWS AND ARTS



COMMUNITY ACTIVISM

Reclaiming identity is resilience

BY NIKKI LOVE
For The Circle

As NDNs, this year marks at least three major collective historical triggers for us. The 250th anniversary of the United States of America. 150 years since the Battle of Greasy Grass (Custer's Last Stand). A decade of Native-led resistance against the Dakota Access Pipeline in Standing Rock. As NDNs we balance these historical triggers with the daily occurrences of #MMIR and the drug overdoses overwhelming our urban and Rez communities alike. Not to mention the ongoing flashbangs of a colonial system still hellbent on our erasure while praising our resilience. I think many of us have heard at one time or another that, "Natives are the most resilient people on earth." What's their working definition of resilience? How much suffering we can endure? And for how long?

Some Native people hate being called resilient because western frameworks have used this word as a tool to normalize, and even romanticize, oppression. People praise our strength while ignoring the ongoing conditions producing exhaustion, addiction, fear, grief, lateral violence, despair, and suicide. This is so they don't have to take accountability. For them, NDNs who achieve visibility or success within capitalism become the ultimate underdog trope in America. Some of us even feel "special" as the system that has oppressed our generational bloodlines deems us worthy of respect, love, and admiration.

This way of life is anathema to our Indigenous values and worldviews that say we are sacred and loved before we produce anything at all. That we belong to Creator and each other. This is the beginning of our identity. So, we need to reframe the very meaning of resilience away from western standards rooted in our survival metrics and productivity towards what really matters to us as Native people. We can start by wholesale rejecting the lie that resilience is, "picking yourself up by your own bootstraps." This society designed resilience to exist in isolation, but we know that real resilience is interdependent and requires relationships.

In the last year alone, I've been told I'm resilient (or strong) more times than I can count. I've just lost four close family members—all prematurely. June 11 marks the one-year anniversary of my only sister's suicide by hanging. Last month, we lost my brother-cuz to cirrhosis. In between, I've suffered acts of violence. And, I've come to the aid and sat with many others going through these exact same things. What we need to tell each other is, "You deserve safety, rest, healing, and thriving," not, "Look at how much suffering you can endure and still be successful."

Dani, nishime, my little sister, my "ma-koonz" or tiny bear. Her death wasn't her individualized failure or a lack of resilience. It was a civilizational wound. Her death represents what happens when people are disconnected from their inherent worth and sense of belonging. My sister had earned the highest levels of western validation. She was a Stanford alum on a Gates Millennium Scholarship. That didn't heal her deep wound and fractures around her own identity, worthiness, and love. It never could. This is a painful example I share from time-to-time within the small circles of philanthropy that I'm a part of. Her proximity to whiteness and western success was never her worth and it certainly wasn't her liberator. The goal for us as NDNs has never been upward mobility. Assimilation is not safety for us. My sister is proof of that.

Ultimately, Dani didn't see herself as worthy of love. She didn't see herself through my eyes, the eyes of her children, or the many people she impacted on the Bois Forte Rez and across Greater Minnesota. She was a profound writer, and I have most of her recent journals and AA 12-step workbooks. In Step 4, you make a list of all the people who have wronged you and who you hold a grudge against. Of the fourteen pages, only one page comprised grievances committed by other people. The rest was all about herself.

It still deeply hurts to know that she saw herself as the sum of her addictions or worst deeds when she was one of the most open-hearted souls you'd ever encounter.

It also deeply hurts to know the role lateral violence had in this view of herself. Some of the people who continue to remind me a year later how much they loved her and how important she was are the very ones who devalued her "muchness," her joy, her uniqueness, her emotionality, or tried to shame her for mistakes or lifestyles they were living themselves.

None of us can go back in time, but we can learn, adapt, and move forward in a good way. When I think of my sister, I think that resilience can look like us living in every attempt to reclaim our inherent worth and connections. Native people loving each other back into existence. And, as a friend recently said, giving people their flowers while they're still alive. We can redefine resilience for ourselves and others as, "The continued fight to remember ourselves as lovable, sacred, worthy, and relational even after generations of systems were designed to fracture exactly that."

It's important to remember that resilience is a learned skillset, not an innate trait or something you're simply born with (as I used to believe). It requires behaviors, thoughts, and actions that can be developed over time through practice and support. This is one of the biggest calls-to-action we have right now: We can come together and teach each other how to be resilient. How to love unconditionally. How to operate in a spirit of non-offense. How to control our historical and daily triggers so they don't control us.

It's been nothing short of an honor to reimagine Tiwahe's Oyate Leadership Network to meet this call by offering experiential learning communities to connect back to our original identities, teachings, and practices. And to heal the wounds that what western science and medicine cannot. In *The Body Keeps The Score*, Dr. Van der Kolk illuminates how western science can't treat most of our trauma-based mental health issues, "No doctor can write a prescription for friendship and love. These are hard earned capacities."

We can coalesce around embodied practices that reinforce our real identities—be-

cause resilience from trauma is not our real identity. Like most Indigenous paradigms, Dakota and Anishinaabe identity comes from the land as an active, living intellect. Our identity starts first with Creator. Being in creation and on the land is where we learn how one's identity connects to the existence of others around us. Two of our Oyate facilitators, who are also Southside community members, describe land as self-identity (inset).

For me, I understand being Anishinaabe as a living practice and way of life, not merely something I can inherit. This is why land is so critical to our identity. It requires our physical bodies to be on the land, enduring the cold, learning the migratory patterns, and working alongside our relatives. Spending time together.

Some other time, I can write more on

how embedded land and our lifeways are for our healing. I'd also like to go deeper on how our identities became fragmented in the first place—especially because identity fracture focused on relational and spiritual dislocation. It was the real Indian Removal.

For now, I am using my voice to call us all into the work of reclaimed resiliency – to step back into our true identities, reject the urge to be romanticized or let them attack our relationships with each other.

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Alder-ville First Nation Nishinaabeg), one of my favorite new authors, exceptionally identified our intimate relationships as the main targets of colonial violence, "Because when we're isolated, when we're fighting with each other, when we're paralyzed with anxiety, it's much harder for us (to be a force for change and good)."



About the Author

Nikki Love is Bois Forte Anishinaabe and the Executive Director of the Tiwahe Foundation. Nikki believes in Indigenous excellence and is passionate about proliferating our knowledge and practices. Philanthropy and the non-profit sectors desperately need our teachings on generosity and reciprocity.

BOOK BLURB

One year later, Sweetgrass and Soul Food is still setting tables

One year after its release, *Sweetgrass and Soul Food: A Memoir in Poems* continues to spark conversations about identity, resilience, family, and belonging.

Written by Marique B. Moss, an enrolled citizen of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation, African American writer, educator, and community organizer from Minneapolis, the collection explores Native American and African histories through poems centered on survival, healing, food, and cultural memory. Moss is also the owner of Mashki Studios, an Afro Indigenous led creative consulting and cultural arts studio and mutual aid hub.

Since its release, the book has found its way into libraries, classrooms, universities, independent bookstores, curated gift shops, and book clubs across the United States and overseas.

It has also inspired curriculum, workshops, and educational discussions. The collection reflects the resilience of Minneapolis's Native and Black communities and



the ways those communities have come together through experiences of unrest, healing, love, and resistance. Throughout its

pages runs a message that remains as relevant today as ever: we are still here.

Readers continue to connect with poems such as "Fake A** Frybread," "Snacktime Sovereignty," "Make It Home," and "The Things I Smudge For (Dating)," where meals, relationships, and cultural practices become expressions of memory, humor, resistance, and care.

This Juneteenth, Moss will celebrate the book's one year anniversary at Google's teaching kitchens in New York City, sharing poetry, sweetgrass tea, soul food, and traditional Hidatsa cornballs while cooking, demoing, and leading a conversation on culture, connection, and belonging.

Sweetgrass and Soul Food continues to reach new audiences, connecting readers through shared experiences of family, perseverance, and hope.

Hiraaguca hiro Mahahgua'ac!
We are still here. (Hidatsa language)

AMERICAN INDIAN MOVEMENT

Spirit, responsibility, & a way of life

BY RACHEL DIONNE-THUNDER

For The Circle

Tansi (hello). My given name is Rachel Dionne-Thunder and I am First Nations nehiyo Plains Cree Big Stone Cree Nation Treaty 8. My father is Jim Thunder and my mother is Echotah Adams. My paternal grandfather is Ned Gladue, my great grandmother is Margarette Grey Eyes, and my great great grandfather was Mookoomankachimmatat, a War Chief in Chief Big Bear's last camp. My father taught at Red School House in Minneapolis when I was a little girl. I grew up around movement people, ceremony people, wounded people, visionary people. I grew up hearing stories about occupations, resistance, survival, and what it meant to carry yourself as an Indigenous person in a world built on our disappearance.

To me, the American Indian Movement was never just an organization. It was a spirit. A fire. A responsibility to your people. A way of life. It was the understanding that our communities deserved protection, dignity, and sovereignty in a country that has spent centuries trying to erase us. That spirit shaped me long before I ever called myself an organizer.

I came into organizing first through student activism while completing my undergraduate and master's degree. I was young, angry, searching, and trying to understand where Indigenous struggle fit into the modern world. I threw myself into repatriation work throughout the Midwest, helping bring our ancestors and ceremonial items home. I worked on campaigns against racist school mascots and stereotypes that turned our people into cartoons while Native youth struggled to survive in systems designed to break them. I stood alongside resistance to extraction in Appalachia and learned quickly that the violence done to the mountains there was no different than the violence done to our lands anywhere else. Like many Indigenous people of my generation, Standing Rock changed me. Not because it was perfect. It was not. But because for a brief moment, thousands of our people remembered who we were in relationship to one another and to the land. The camp

became a living reminder that Indigenous resistance was not dead history trapped in photographs from the 1970s. It was alive. It breathed. It sang. It fought back.

Standing Rock also taught me difficult truths. Colonization does not only exist outside of us. It can live inside our movements too. Patriarchy. Ego. Control. Exploitation. Performative leadership. Lateral violence. Addiction. Spiritual manipulation. I saw people who spoke the language of liberation while reproducing the same systems of domination we claimed to fight against. I saw women overworked and silenced while men positioned themselves as warriors and leaders. I saw movements become brands. I saw people more interested in proximity to power than accountability to community. At the same time, I also saw some of the most beautiful acts of humanity I have ever witnessed in my life. I saw Native women holding camps together. I saw aunties feeding

thousands. I saw young people reconnecting with language and spirit. I saw people become sober. I saw people pray for the first time in years.

Around this same time, I became sober. Sobriety is resistance in Indigenous communities. Healing is resistance. In a society that profits from Indigenous death, dysfunction, incarceration, addiction, and hopelessness, choosing to heal yourself becomes political. Colonization attacked our bodies, our minds, our spirits, our kinship systems, our governance systems, and our relationship to the earth. Healing means rebuilding all of those things.

I began reconnecting more deeply with the American Indian Movement during this period. Through that work, I often felt closer to my father, who had passed away when I was in high school. There were moments during organizing, ceremonies, long drives, actions, and late night strategy meetings where I could almost feel him there beside me. Movement work became a way of carrying grief. A way of continuing a conversation interrupted by death.

In 2020, I became a Chapter Director under the American Indian Movement Grand Governing Council in Indiana and Kentucky.

During that time, I organized around Indigenous sovereignty, extraction, anti-racism work, and campaigns for Elder Leonard Peltier. Eventually I became the lead organizer for the Walk to Justice after receiving dreams and guidance in ceremony connected to Leonard. I brought those dreams forward and organized the walk that traveled to Washington, D.C. from Minneapolis, MN.

I witnessed incredible sacrifice and love from grassroots people on the ground. Ordinary Native people carried that walk across the country with blistered feet, prayers, food donations, and sheer determination. But I also began seeing deeper contradictions within movement spaces that I could no longer ignore. I realized that too many organizations and movement spaces had recreated pyramid structures that mirrored the same colonial systems we claimed to oppose. Leadership without accountability. Gatekeeping. Personality worship. Internal hierarchy.

I do not believe any one organization owns AIM. No one owns a spirit. No one owns Indigenous resistance. The movement exists across Turtle Island under many names, many nations, many teachings, many struggles. AIM belongs to the people who protect communities, feed people, defend land, and show up when the call comes. Some of the strongest Indigenous resistance work I have ever witnessed has happened far away from cameras, nonprofits, and official leadership structures. We also cannot speak honestly about Indigenous resistance without speaking about Anna Mae Aquash. Too often our movements speak about warriors while remaining silent about the women who were harmed within those same spaces. Anna Mae was brilliant, powerful, uncompromising, and deeply committed to Indigenous liberation, yet she became a victim not only of state repression but also of paranoia, patriarchy, and violence that existed within the movement itself. The FBI absolutely targeted AIM through surveillance, infiltration, and COINTELPRO tactics designed to create chaos and distrust, but we also have to be honest enough to say that not every wound was inflicted by the government alone. There were actions and

behaviors within AIM and within Red Power spaces that hurt people, especially women. There was misogyny, unchecked ego, lateral violence, and the romanticizing of male militancy while women carried the spiritual, emotional, and organizational labor of the movement. If we refuse to acknowledge that truth because it feels uncomfortable or dishonorable, then we learn nothing from our history. Accountability is not betrayal. Accountability is how movements survive. We dishonor our ancestors when we turn them into untouchable myths instead of human beings capable of both greatness and harm. If we truly believe in liberation, sovereignty, and healing, then our movements must be places where women are safe, where leadership is accountable, where thoughtful criticism is not treated as treason, and where we stop reproducing the very violence we claim to resist.

I do not say these things to attack anyone. I say them because our movements cannot survive on mythology alone. We cannot continue riding solely on the trauma and achievements of previous generations without adapting to the realities of today. Honoring our ancestors does not mean freezing ourselves in time. Tradition was never meant to make us stagnant. Our ancestors adapted constantly in order to survive. There is a place for everybody in today's movement. The frontline land defender. The artist. The medic. The organizer. The mother. The language teacher. The security team. The writer. The policy advocate. The ceremony person. The young people learning who they are. Resistance today requires strategy as much as symbolism. It requires healing as much as militancy. It requires community infrastructure, not just slogans.

In late 2022, after meeting my now husband Vincent Dionne, I moved to Minneapolis. That move transformed my understanding of Indigenous resistance yet again. I began organizing around environmental injustice in urban Native communities. Many people

imagine land defense only in remote forests, deserts, or pipeline camps. But there is also land defense in cities poisoned by pollution, over-policing, displacement, addiction, homelessness, and state violence.

Leaning into love with my husband taught me something different. It taught me that tenderness is also resistance. Choosing partnership, choosing softness,

choosing to build a family in a world that has tried to break Indigenous families apart for generations is its own form of sovereignty. In movement spaces we are often taught to harden ourselves, to survive at all costs, but love reminded me that survival alone is not enough. We deserve joy too. We deserve safety. We deserve laughter in the kitchen, tired mornings with children, quiet prayers together, and a future beyond constant survival mode. Loving him and becoming a mother grounded me back into the very thing all of this struggle is supposed to protect: life itself. I became a mother during this chapter of my life. Motherhood sharpened everything for me. Suddenly resistance was no longer abstract. It became deeply physical. What kind of world are we leaving our children? What does sovereignty actually look like for future generations? What good are our politics if our children cannot safely walk the streets, breathe the air, drink the water, or grow up connected to who they are?

That question pushed me toward public safety organizing and community defense work. During Metro Surge, when federal forces descended on our communities under the language of immigration enforcement and security, many of us understood immediately what was happening. Indigenous people know what state violence looks like. We know what raids look like. We know what family separation looks like. We know what criminalization looks like. We know what state sanctioned murder looks like. Borders themselves are colonial constructs imposed onto Indigenous lands that existed long before the United States. Migration is not new to this continent. Indigenous people moved, traded, traveled, and intermarried across these lands since time immemorial.

The criminalization of migrants is tied directly to the criminalization of Indigenous people, Black people, poor people, and land defenders. These systems are connected because settler colonialism is connected. Extraction is connected. The destruction



of the earth is connected to militarization overseas. The same governments and corporations profiting from bombs and war profit from pipelines, mining, prisons, policing, detention centers, and environmental destruction. Land defense is not separate from anti-war struggle. Water protection is not separate from public safety. Indigenous sovereignty is not separate from liberation movements around the world. The violence inflicted onto the earth always finds its way back onto human bodies.

People often ask why Indigenous resistance is radical. The answer is simple. We are radical because the conditions imposed onto our people are radical. There is nothing moderate about genocide. There is nothing moderate about stolen children, poisoned water, destroyed ecosystems, mass incarceration, murdered Indigenous women, or the ongoing theft of Indigenous land. But radical does not mean hopeless.

I believe deeply in Indigenous futures. I believe in rebuilding kinship systems. I believe in sobriety and healing. I believe in women-led movements. I believe in strong communities capable of protecting themselves. I believe in ceremony alongside political education. I believe in adapting while remaining rooted. I believe in Indigenous people reclaiming not only land, but imagination. Our ancestors fought to make sure we survived. Our responsibility now is not merely survival.

It is transformation.

The Circle

NATIVE AMERICAN NEWS AND ARTS

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HOBOT

From Page 5

platforms during the tumult, a simple yet steady refrain was recorded that provides some insight to these questions: these are our neighbors, so we chose to act. The oppressor was hoping we would take the bait so they could then crack down on us with greater lethality, so we chose nonviolence as our strategy. They wanted to hide their identities and their actions from the rest of the country, so we chose to be present and bear witness to their atrocities. Woven into these responses are the whispered voices of little Naawakamig and his tiny associates, who also simply made a choice.

Though Dennis Banks would go on to earn credibility and notoriety through his work as an adult in defense of indigenous sovereignty, it could be argued that his spirit of "resistance" was codified during the youngest and most formative periods of his life. His choice within that boarding school was predicated merely on a desire to survive - to eat some food - and his understanding of that which he believed to be true. This is what gave him the impetus to act. It was simply an expression of his free will - an action taken by the truly sovereign, that of the individual acting of their own volition. Although only a child at the time, his decision expressed a level of intellectual sophistication that adults can still learn from today. Naawakamig was not acting from a source point of ego, trying to establish himself as a leader of some sort. His was not an act of performative theater that we see all too often these days from "wannabe influencers" posturing with raised fists on social media, whose principal talents seem to be manufacturing narratives of altruism through the artful arrangement of selfies and the creative use of photographic filters.

Little Naawakamig just wanted to eat. He used the words that he had been taught and that he knew his counterparts could under-

stand. He chose to speak his language in spite of the fear generated by the oppressor.

On the streets of Minneapolis in the winter of 2026, amongst the fog clouds of tear gas and the piercing whines of shrill whistles, egotism and performative theater were all but absent. We just wanted to live free from harassment and violence. We just wanted to be able to go to work, go to the store, go to our homes freely and in peace. We just wanted to live our normal lives in the most normal of ways, and we wanted the very same for our neighbors.

In this sense our "resistance" did not necessarily require bold strategies, repetitive large gatherings of the masses, or continuously summoning massive waves to polling stations during every election cycle. It did not require rivers of resources flowing into the impacted areas. While all those elements are useful and many did actually manifest during Operation Metro Surge, the opposition in Minnesota found its wellspring in the humblest and most personal points of origin: within the spirit of the individual and their free will. Resistance will forever find its source point from how a person chooses to exercise their own personal sovereignty during points of crisis. We are all ostensibly born free and will remain free - including free to resist an oppressor - so long as we make the choice to do so. The actions taken after that choice is made are as varied as the myriad of individuals reflected in our communities - but those actions will stand out because they will be in clear opposition to the forces that actively seek to blot out our freedom.

Armed with this knowledge, future movements can easily be ignited through the simplest of means and sustained by the humblest of actions. By resisting fear, by resisting the temptation to retaliate through violent conflict, by refusing to submit, and by resisting the

very thought processes of the oppressor, we are in fact exercising our sovereign free will. We already possess the necessary power to do this, and we can enact it whenever we wish. We can choose to live with courage and reject fear. We can choose nonviolence as our preferred methodology and offer the other cheek when struck. We can choose to uphold personal freedom in all its forms. We can choose to adopt different values that are in opposition to the designs of would-be tyrants, and we can choose to live our lives openly in the face of the oppressor despite their heinous actions. All the power needed for liberation we already possess in the center of our being. It is up to us to make that choice to embrace it.

How then could someone define the "resistance" that began in Minneapolis during the first months of 2026? Truth be told, we were not really resisting anything. What took place was a sovereign people boldly expressing that sovereignty by merely choosing to live their lives free and on their own terms, and to protect their neighbors' rights to do the same. When contrasted against the acts of the oppressor, it does look an awful lot like "resistance". Yet through the right kind of eyes, it looks more like a free people exercising their free will through personal choice. Minnesotans just wanted to live their lives in peace. Naawakamig and the other children just wanted to eat. The real question is whether or not people understand where their freedom truly lies, and how they will then choose to live their lives in the heady days to come? If they can answer these questions, the concept of resistance becomes nothing more than a secondary feature of a larger groundswell of positive, proactive, creative energy - the kind that builds the world we desire. At the very least this is what I am choosing to believe, and I find it liberating to do so.

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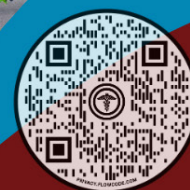


MENAANDAWIWE

"A Place Where Healing Happens"



Since 1971, the Indian Health Board has been a place of care, strength, and belonging for Native people in Minneapolis. Built by community and guided by tradition, we honor the generations who made this work possible. As we move into our new home, we carry their legacy forward, blending traditional healing, modern care, and a commitment to future generations.



Indian
HEALTH BOARD

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ART BY NICOLE BEANE

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SUMMER 2026
ESTABLISHED 1980

Seventy-third Congress of the United States of America;
at the Second Session,
and held at the City of Washington on Wednesday, the third
day of January, one thousand nine hundred and four.

AN ACT
To conserve and develop Indian lands; to extend to
Indians the right to corporate business; to extend to
Indians the right to credit; to extend to
Indians the right to vocational education; to
bring under the rule to Indians; provide for vocational education for
Indians; for other purposes.

acted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the
States of America in Congress assembled, That hereafter
no land or any part thereof shall be treated or set apart by treaty or
agreement with the Indians, Act of Congress, Executive order, pur-
chase, or otherwise, shall be allotted in severalty to any Indian.

Sec. 2. The existing periods of trust placed upon any Indian
lands and any restriction on alienation thereof are hereby extended
and continued until otherwise directed by Congress.

Sec. 3. The Secretary of the Interior, if he shall find it to be in
the public interest, is hereby authorized to restore to tribal owner-
ship the remaining surplus lands of any Indian reservation hereto-
fore opened, or authorized to be opened, to sale, or any other form
of disposal by Presidential proclamation, or by any of the public-
land laws of the United States: *Provided, however*, That valid rights
or claims of any persons in any lands so withdrawn existing on the
date of the withdrawal shall not be affected by this Act: *Provided*
further, That this Act shall not apply to any reclamation project here-
before approved by the Secretary of the Interior, on October 28, 1932, temporarily withdrawing lands
of the Papago Indian Reservation in Arizona from all forms of
mineral entry or claim under the public land mining laws, is hereby
revoked and rescinded, and the lands of the said Papago Indian

