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Dakota Access Pipeline

The Dakota Access, an Energy Transfer Crude Oil Company subsidiary, is establishing an underground oil pipeline in the United States. The company announced the \$3.78 billion project in July 2014, and between August 2014 and January 2015, informational hearings began. The pipeline begins at the Bakken oil field in North Dakota and moves through South Dakota and Iowa ending in Illinois at the oil tank farm. However, the pipeline has attracted significant controversy, protests, and public scrutiny regarding its potential effect on the environment and its necessity. The protests have involved Native Americans in the Dakotas and Iowa including tribes such as Sioux and Meskwaki tribal nations.

Recent events on the Dakota Access Pipeline demonstrate that the Army Corps of Engineers have denied the company a permit for the construction of an important section of the pipeline. This comes as a great victory for the Native Americans and other protesters after months of demonstration. The decision stops the construction near the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation. The Army Corps intends to provide an Environmental Impact Statement with public analysis and input. The tribes are concerned with the impact of the project on the sacred sites, with the desecration of these ancient regions causing significant harm on the Standing Rock Sioux tribe. The main reasons for the project's opposition were that the construction threatens the way of life, people, land, and water associated with the tribes. The Sioux tribe argues that the

pipeline is a threat to the economic and environment well-being of the tribe. It would damage ancient sites of great religious, cultural, and historical significance (Rott and Peralta 3).

The pipeline has attracted significant scrutiny and press coverage with major headlines focusing on fossil fuels, protest, water, and issues to do with tribal sovereignty. However, beneath all these aspects lays the problem of Indian religion and traditions. Images over the sprawling town of tents in the demonstration camp are individuals immersed in prayers. The \$ 3.8 billion project, currently more than half way to completion would pass through four states carrying about 570, 000 barrels of oil daily. While the Energy Transfer Partners argue that the pipeline would result in thousands of employment opportunities during the construction and tax revenues after completion, the Native tribes are concerned with religious rights and significance. The route would bring the pipeline near the Standing Rock Sioux reservation within half a mile. However, the tribes believe that the project has already destroyed ancient sacred sites and there is a probability it would pollute a vital water source, the Missouri River.

The images and language of the protesters, specifically the Native American tribes tend to demonstrate various elements that have characterized these tribes throughout history. The tribes involved in the demonstrations view themselves as “protectors” of the environment, and thus the project tends to inhibit the objective of the peoples as environmentalists. The term "protectors" shows the significance of the land to the different tribes, especially is religious importance. In the Camp, a Ponca woman can be seen singing with a sacred pipe, with a group of Native American gathered around her. Consequently, an indigenous elder stood close by with an eagle staff by his side. The stick is a sacred prayer symbol. The different images from the protests illustrate that these events are more than a meaningless demonstration. The religious portrayals highlight the religious significance of the environment. In Black Elks Speaks, one of Black Elk’s visions

incorporate a prophecy of oneness, which is indicated by various symbols including the sacred hoop, the flowering stick, the giant white wing, and the sacred pipe. The sacred pipe represents the power of peace, and the white giant wing represents endurance and courage (Neihardt 220).

It is imperative to argue that it is vital to acknowledge the religious beliefs of the Native Americans as a critical component of understanding the factors behind the demonstrations. The protesters claim that the construction will disturb burial grounds and sacred lands. The sacred areas are set aside from the disturbance of humans. The sacred lands are set aside for two primary purposes including for human remembrances such as battle and burial site, as well as for the divine dwelling. In the “Black Elk Speaks,” John Neihardt demonstrates the positive correlation between various aspects of the tribal lifestyle, including religion, environment, and the people. In the Black Elks Speaks, the visions illustrate a consistent relationship between these factors through environmental elements including color, weather conditions, flora, and fauna. The aspects of the environment involved in the Dakota pipeline is intertwined with the Native communities religious beliefs. The people believe that the tribal gods created every aspect of nature. In this way, his environment and man are intertwined and thus must develop mutual understanding and respect due to their link to the gods and point of origin (Neihardt 222).

The religious beliefs of Native Americans have a positive correlation with the environment. According to the Black Elk Speaks, the people must respect the environment. The theme of unity is the most vital element in the tribes’ religious beliefs. For example, tribes such as the Lakota Nation stress the relationship between the people and the environment. The Dakota Access Pipeline has brought together communities from different tribes due to the divine implication of the project as it poses a threat to the unity between the people and the environment.

Work Cited

Neihardt, John G. *Black Elk speaks: Being the life story of a holy man of the Oglala Sioux*.

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Rott, Nathan and Eyder Peralta. "In Victory for Protesters, Army Halts Construction On Dakota

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