

STANDING UP FOR CLEAN WATER

Tokata Iron Eyes grew up with the Missouri River. She and her friends rode their bikes to the river's shore when they were kids. On summer days, they swam.

Then, in the spring of 2016, Tokata learned that the river might be in danger. Plans were moving forward to build an oil pipeline under the water. The

pipeline would transport 20 million gallons of oil a day from North Dakota to the cities of the Midwest.

The planned route for the pipeline—called the Dakota Access Pipeline—ran just half a mile from Tokata's home on the Standing Rock **Reservation**.

The plans had the pipeline crossing land that Tokata's tribe—the Sioux [soo] Nation—consider **sacred**.

Furthermore, the pipeline put their water supply in danger. An oil leak could ruin

the drinking water for Tokata's community and millions of other people. Tokata was only 12 at the time, but the situation worried her. Fortunately, she got a chance to fight back.

A Fight for Rights

Tokata's school asked her to speak out against the pipeline in a video. She immediately agreed. The video caused people around the world to pay attention.

By fall, thousands had come to Standing Rock to protest,

VOCABULARY

reservation: an area of land in the U.S. that is set aside as a place for Native Americans to live

sacred: highly valued and important, especially for religious reasons

diverse: different from each other

environment: the natural world

brutal: very cruel or harsh

DIGGING IN
Bulldozers called earthmovers are used to dig holes for oil pipelines.



How one teenager became a leader in the fight against an oil pipeline—and a battle for Native American rights.

BY TOD OLSON

VIDEO

GO TO
WEB VIEW



USING HER VOICE

Tokata, now 17, has fought to protect Native American land.

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THE CAMP AT STANDING ROCK

Tokata and thousands of other people camped out at Standing Rock to try to stop the pipeline.

camping in tents and teepees for months. Tokata and her parents often participated in the protests.

Tokata had never been around such a **diverse** group of people, and she felt uncomfortable at first. But she slowly began to make friends, and she started to see the world in a different way.

To the protesters, the pipeline was not only a threat to the Missouri River but also a part of a long history of attacks on Native people and their land. “It was a fight for rights,” Tokata explains. “It was a fight to protect my heritage and my way of being.”

A History of Conflict

For centuries, Native people have been fighting to protect their way of life. In the early 1800s, all the land around the Missouri River belonged to Native Americans—but then white people began moving

west. Farmers wanted land to grow crops, and miners came to dig for gold. They forced Native Americans off their land, often by using violence.

Native Americans fought for their land, but the U.S. Army forced them to give in. The government pushed Native groups onto reservations, such as Standing Rock. On the reservations, people no longer had land to hunt on. And children went to government-run boarding schools where they were forced to speak English.

Tokata was taught this history by her parents when she was young. The pipeline is part of that history, she says.

Tokata as a kid at a protest with her mom



It threatens Native land, yet Native people weren’t involved in the decision to build it. “You have to understand the history to understand what’s happening now,” she says.

A New Path

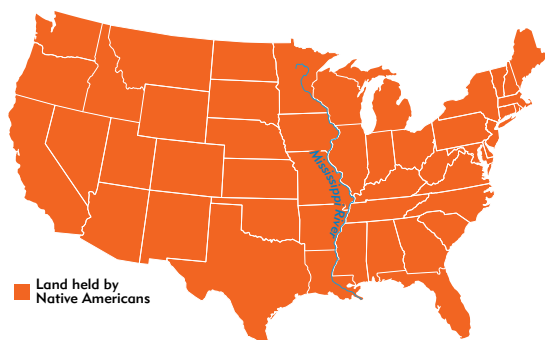
In the end, the protests failed, and bulldozers went to work. Since May 2017, oil has been flowing under the Missouri River—but that could change. A study about the pipeline’s effect on the **environment** was ordered by a judge.

Tokata hasn’t given up. She has traveled the nation giving speeches about Native rights and the environment. Now she’s taking a break to start college, where she’ll study to be a filmmaker. She wants to create films that show “the strength and beauty of being a Native woman.”

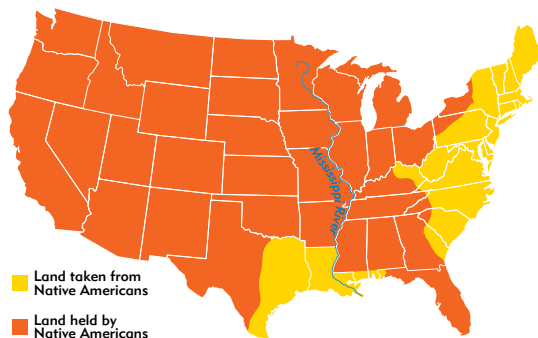
And she plans to keep working for a healthier planet. “We need to figure out how to leave a better world for our children,” she says. •

Fighting for Native Land

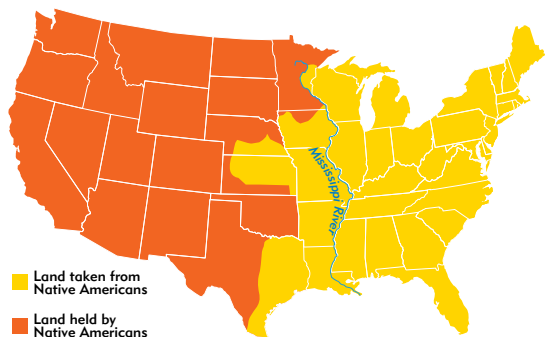
When white people came to America, they violently forced Native American people off their land. These maps show how that land was taken.



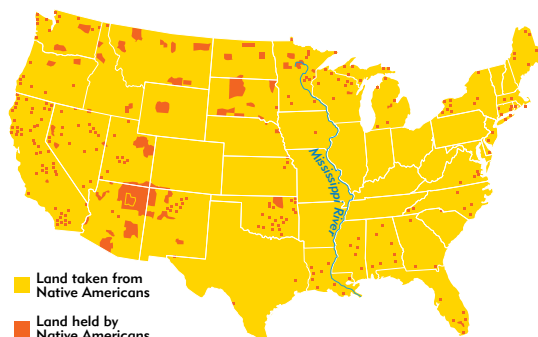
AMERICA IN 1600 When Europeans first arrived in America in 1607, Native Americans had already been living here for thousands of years. Hundreds of established tribes lived all over the continent.



AMERICA IN 1775 In 1775, white people who had come from Europe fought for their freedom from England. By that time, they had forced most Native people out of the eastern states. As more white people arrived, thousands of Native people were killed.



AMERICA IN 1850 Once they won their freedom, these new Americans started moving west. Congress passed the Indian Removal Act in 1830 to open land for white settlers. The law allowed the government to push all Native people to a piece of land west of the Mississippi River. The journey was **brutal**, and thousands of Native Americans died.



AMERICA TODAY After 1850, the new Americans started moving west of the Mississippi River. Native people fought a series of wars to protect their land, but they lost—and were forced to move to reservations. Today, only 56 million acres of land belong to Native people. In total, that's about the size of Minnesota.

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