

State Violence as White Backlash to the Land Back Movement

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Introduction

“Flexing where you from when that shit stolen land
Pull up to the Capitol with murder plans
Signed the Constitution with some bloody hands
Fuck your business plan, this our people’s land.”¹

Thus raps Indigenous artist, political activist, and musician, Xiuhtezcatl, in his single, “Take It All Back.” These lyrics capture not only the framework and history fueling the growing Land Back movement, but also the irony of white backlash movements, generally. Central to American white supremacist ideology is the belief in the “chosenness” of the Anglo-Saxon people and their manifest destiny. These nativist and ethnocentric ideas are so fundamental to American white supremacy that they constitute a civil religion of sorts. To be American is to buy into the rhetoric that the land the United States is built upon is a predestined gift from God.² Yet, as Xiuhtezcatl points out, the sense of pride and moral superiority deeply held by white supremacists is founded upon lies. The land America was founded upon was not a gift from God; it was stolen from Indigenous people through treachery and violence, and the main culprit of these crimes is the U.S. government itself.

This article focuses on the use of state power against Indigenous peoples’ fight for sovereignty. I specifically look at the recently popularized Land Back movement’s demands for land reparations and cultural sovereignty, and how the United States government has responded with backlash rooted in white supremacy. My overarching goal is to demonstrate how state power used against Indigenous movements is a form of white supremacy by examining the

patterns, both historical and contemporary, used by the U.S. government to strip Indigenous nations of their autonomy. I first focus on the nature of the Land Back movement, including its origins and objectives. I then examine three case studies on the use of state power against Indigenous nations: the Black Hills protests, the Dakota Access Pipeline protests, and the conflict between Oklahoma's Indigenous peoples and Governor Stitt. In my examination, I explain what took place during these protests and backlash movements. I argue that the use of state power in these cases upholds white supremacy through backlash, focusing on the specific implications of each of the three cases.

Throughout this article, I use the term “white supremacy” to refer to systemic forces that create, perpetuate, and reinforce a racial hierarchy that places white people at the top. Spears writes about the way this racial hierarchy intersects with other systems of oppression to become the “central organizing logic of western modernity.”³ White supremacy as a system “seeks to universalize—as it differentiates; it seeks to be totalitarian; it infuses and co-constitutes political economy, power-holding and deployment, along with wealth distribution.”⁴ Perhaps the most daunting aspect of white supremacy is its pervasiveness; whiteness is regarded as the norm and standard. Previous literature has argued that because American society is steeped in whiteness, it becomes invisible.⁵ Increasingly, however, scholars are coming to understand that “many whites also possess a sense of racial identity and are motivated to protect their group’s collective interests and to maintain its status.”⁶ Examinations of the history of white supremacy and its persistence today, like the ones presented in this article, shed light on white people’s investment in white supremacy.

What is the Land Back Movement?

The use of the phrase “Land Back” is a literal demand. As the official movement’s website puts it: “LANDBACK is a movement that has existed for generations with a long legacy of organizing and sacrifice to get Indigenous Lands back into Indigenous hands.”⁷ The movement seeks to right wrongs committed against Indigenous people, beginning with restoring sovereignty of Indigenous lands back to the Indigenous groups they belong to. Indigenous activists recognize that Indigenous identity is inextricable from land— to be Indigenous is to have been in this place and on this land before colonizers forcibly seized it. The movement aims to decolonize land, dismantle white supremacy, and overcome systems of oppression. Though it focuses on Indigenous land reparations, the movement is a political framework for collective liberation. Organizers seek justice not only for their own group, but for all groups that experience active oppression under white supremacy. The Land Back movement is unique in its breadth; it is a unifying movement for all Indigenous groups throughout the world to fight for the particular reparations they are owed.⁸

The NDN Collective, an Indigenous activist organization, published a manifesto that gives insight into the aims, objectives, and philosophical framework of the Land Back movement. Among these is an orientation toward a symbiotic relationship with the earth. Because of this orientation toward mutual healing and belonging with the earth, Indigenous activists fight for land reclamation not out of a sense of entitlement to land ownership, but as a means of protective stewardship. The movement recognizes that the decolonization and liberation of people must also include decolonizing and liberating the earth. We as humans cannot be free while the earth dies. For this reason, Indigenous activism goes hand-in-hand with climate activism. Indigenous activists fight not only for sovereignty over Indigenous lands, but also fight to protect its resources, including clean water and air. Thus, Land Back is about

collective liberation holistically— of all people, land, animals, and resources that have been exploited and harmed through colonization. Further, it is about Indigenous cultural sovereignty. As the manifesto professes, the Land Back movement “is the reclamation of everything stolen from the original peoples: land, language, ceremony, food, education, housing, healthcare, governance, medicines, kinship.”⁹

Through social media and maintaining a strong online presence, Indigenous groups have been able to spread more awareness and gain allies in their efforts. In Fall 2021, the hashtag, #LANDBACK, trended as social media users demonstrated their solidarity with Indigenous activists.¹⁰ Though recent awareness of the Land Back movement may lead some to believe that it is a new liberation movement, it is important to remember that the fight for decolonization has been taking place over generations. The Land Back movement builds on Indigenous philosophy, rhetoric, and activism that Indigenous people have been utilizing for centuries in their struggle for collective liberation.

White Backlash Case Study: Black Hills protests

The Black Hills of South Dakota have been a central battleground of the Land Back movement for generations. This land originally belonged to the Dakota, Nakota, and Lakota nations and is considered sacred as it is the center of the Lakota cosmos.¹¹ Many Indigenous tribes have lived on the land for centuries and shared it peacefully; in the Lakota language, the Black Hills are a sanctuary named “The Heart of Everything That Is.”¹² The importance and sacredness of the Black Hills cannot be overstated.

Starting in 1846, tensions between white settlers and the Indigenous peoples of the Great Plains began to rise due to competition for resources, land, and freedom of movement. Conflicts between Indigenous nations were also heightened during this time due to the arrival and

movement of white Americans through the land. In an effort to find peace, all but three of the Indigenous nations of the Great Plains met with representatives of the United States government in September 1851 to sign a peace treaty: The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851, otherwise known as the Horse Creek Treaty. In this treaty, the Indigenous nations agreed to peace with one another, set up specific territorial boundaries, and recognized the right of the United States government to build roads and military posts within their respective parts of the Black Hills territory. In return, the United States government agreed to protect tribes from American citizens and pay the nations \$50,000 annually for ten years as reparations for any damages or harm incurred prior to the signing of the treaty. The Indigenous nations of the Great Plains mostly met their terms of agreement, living in peace for about a decade. However, the U.S. government failed to protect Indigenous people, resources, and hunting grounds from white settlers moving through the Oregon Trail. Additionally, the federal government made only one payment of \$50,000 to the nations, failing to uphold its promise.¹³

Because of this broken agreement following the 1851 treaty, Indigenous nations of the Great Plains were at war with white settlers and with each other for years. The 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie sought peace once again. In this treaty, the Black Hills were recognized as Lakota land and part of the Great Sioux Reservation.¹⁴ This meant that the Black Hills were set aside to be used exclusively by the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota people. In 1874, General Custer violated this treaty, leading an expedition of gold miners into the Black Hills to search for the precious resource. Upon discovering gold in the Black Hills, a gold rush occurred as more and more white miners trespassed on Lakota land in their pursuit of financial gain. The Indigenous hunting grounds and sacred land were desecrated. The U.S. Army moved into the territory to protect miners and proceeded to attack groups of Indigenous people who were rightfully hunting using

their designated hunting grounds. Conflicts continued until 1877, when the United States once again seized the Black Hills from the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota peoples. Native activists have been fighting for their land back ever since.¹⁵ In 1980, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota people, stating that the United States government had illegally seized the Black Hills, and awarded over \$100 million to these peoples. The Indigenous nations have repeatedly refused the awarded money, stating that the Black Hills were never for sale and instead demanding that the land be restored to them.¹⁶ No amount of money can repair the damage done. As Lee Brightman, the Lakota founder of United Native Americans, puts it, “we want payment for the Black Hills, for all the minerals mined, for the timber taken out. And we want our sacred mountains back.”¹⁷

In 1924, sculptor John Gutzon de la Mothe Borglum, was commissioned to carve a monument into the Black Hills, and thus the carving commonly called Mount Rushmore was born. Borglum was the original sculptor behind the Stone Mountain Confederate Monument, where he developed the skills and experience necessary for his work on Mount Rushmore. Borglum himself was known to have been involved in KKK politics, attended Klan rallies, served on Klan committees,¹⁸ and was a “good friend” of D. C. Stephenson.¹⁹ The carving into Mount Rushmore depicts George Washington, who advocated for “the total destruction and devastation” of the Iroquois,²⁰ Thomas Jefferson, who was a key player in Western expansion and the acquisition of Indigenous land,²¹ Abraham Lincoln, who ordered the execution of 38 Dakota people in the largest mass execution in U.S. history,²² and Theodore Roosevelt, who once said, “I don’t go so far as to think that the only good Indians are the dead Indians, but I believe nine out of every ten are.”²³ Thus, the United States not only violated Indigenous nations’ rights

by seizing their land, but violated the sanctity of the Black Hills by commissioning a white supremacist to enshrine a memorial to white supremacy and colonization into the mountainside.

Today, Land Back activists continue to fight for the restoration of the Black Hills to their original stewards— the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota nations— and have gained more recognition and support after the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020. On July 3, 2020, Donald Trump made a trip to Mount Rushmore for a reelection rally. Land Back activists with the NDN Collective took the opportunity to protest by setting up vans to block the road leading to Mount Rushmore and the rally. The activists cooperated with the local sheriff’s department to ensure a peaceful protest. They wore traditional eagle feathers, beat drums, and claimed that those attending the rally were trespassing on Indigenous land.²⁴ The National Guard, dressed in riot gear, confronted them along with Trump supporters yelling, “go back to where you came from.”²⁵ The National Guard dispelled pepper balls to push the protestors back. In the end, twenty activists were arrested for their involvement in the protest, with one facing charges of up to seventeen years in prison.²⁶ While all of this was taking place, Trump delivered a speech inside the national park in which he stated, “our nation is witnessing a merciless campaign to wipe out our history, defame our heroes, erase our values, and indoctrinate our children.”²⁷ The Trump campaign also coordinated a fireworks display at the rally, raising concerns from Indigenous activists about the health of the Black Hills and the potential for forest fires.²⁸

Implications of the Black Hills Backlash

The Black Hills protest and the long history leading up to it is steeped in cultural clashes over the United States’ continued attempts to celebrate white supremacy on Indigenous land. From the white settlers to the rallygoers, the events surrounding the Black Hills demonstrate an important point: who matters to the United States government? Who does the state protect?

When a conflict occurs, which side does the government take? Time and time again, the answer is clear: the United States prioritizes and furthers white interests above Indigenous sovereignty.

Three patterns emerge when examining exactly *how* the U.S. has upheld white supremacy throughout the history of Black Hills conflicts. The most persistent vehicle for furthering white interests is under the guise of law and order. In a settler-colonial state like the United States, this automatically creates a power imbalance as the colonizer is able to set the parameters for the legal system and decide what actions performed by which people fall within its bounds, and what actions performed by which people are outside of its bounds. For example, conflict between the Indigenous peoples of the Great Plains was seen as a breach of the Fort Laramie Treaties whereas white settlers entering territory belonging to the Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota people to extract resources was not deemed a punishable offense. Another clear example of the use of law and order to further white supremacy is the arrest of Indigenous protestors but not Trump-supporting counter protestors. Further, we see that law and order are maintained through armed force and violence, whether that be the local law enforcement agency, the National Guard, or the Army itself. This is another colonizing tactic as the law is depicted as a peaceful, nonviolent, civilized, and distinctly Western approach to maintaining order, yet we observe how peaceful protest is met with and escalated by state-sanctioned violence in an effort to uphold the law.²⁹

The second pattern is the U.S. government's repeated violations of its agreements with Indigenous nations. The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851, the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie, and the July 3 protest are all examples of agreements that the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota peoples respected and the United States government violated. The Indigenous peoples of the Great Plains entered into contracts with the United States, adhering to the government's processes and terms. They followed the Western concepts of law and contract, and in good faith went through

American systems. They attempted to follow the rules set out by a system imposed on them just to have it proven time and time again that following the law is only required of nonwhite people. In the push to maintain white supremacy, the law can easily be shirked off and contracts broken if they put white interests at risk.

A third pattern that can be observed from an analysis of the Black Hills protest and history is a tension between whose rights are protected and whose are not. Here we see a violation of Indigenous people's right to land, right to protest, and right to religion. The Lakota's right to the Black Hills cannot be denied as even the United States Supreme Court has ruled in the Lakota's favor. Yet, the federal government has made no progress toward rectifying its mistakes and restoring sovereignty over the Black Hills to the Lakota. This stands in stark contrast to how the United States worked to maintain white settlers' land claims. Though there was no basis for white settlers to stake a claim to the Black Hills, the United States protected them and supported their use of the land. Again, this shows how the law can be manipulated as a tool for white supremacy.

Furthermore, because the Black Hills are considered sacred to the Lakota, denying their right to the land has implications for their freedom of religion. These are central tenets of the Land Back Movement; the movement fights for a literal restoration of the land, and also fights for Indigenous sovereignty in their cultural and religious traditions. Because of the intricate ties between land, culture, and religion, denying Indigenous people their land also denies them their traditions. Yet, when Indigenous people organize to fight for what they are owed, they are met with violence and arrests, violating their rights to peaceful protest. Rights to land ownership, religion, and protest matter most when they uphold white supremacy, and appear to not matter when they would protect Indigenous sovereignty. Ultimately in its dealings with the Lakota

people and the Black Hills, the United States has cultivated an environment ripe for white supremacy while hiding Indigenous people, history, and protest.

White Backlash Case Study: Dakota Access Pipeline

The Dakota Access Pipeline protests started in April 2016 and lasted for approximately one year until the pipeline's completion and operation. The construction of the pipeline was continuously protested by environmental activists and Indigenous activists alike, claiming that the environmental impact of the pipeline had not been adequately studied. The pipeline runs through land that is only half of a mile from the Standing Rock Reservation. Further, Indigenous activists claimed that the construction area is sacred burial grounds for Indigenous peoples. Activists argued that the construction of the pipeline would impact the drinking water of the reservation and disturb the burial sites of the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota nations. Camps and tents were set up in North Dakota near the construction sites as protestors prepared for a long battle.³⁰

Over the many months of protest, hundreds of protestors were arrested, but a few incidents in particular stand out. On September 3, 2016, protestors clashed with private security guards from Energy Transfer Partners, the company responsible for the construction of the pipeline. The security officers used pepper spray on protestors and some protestors were bitten by the company's guard dogs. The Morton County Sheriff's Department sided with Energy Transfer Partners, stating that the protestors trespassed on private land.³¹ This encounter served as a catalyst for heightened tensions and future clashes as North Dakota's governor called in the National Guard for assistance on September 8.³²

Twenty-seven people were arrested by local authorities on October 12, 2016, marking the beginning of mass arrests that continued to take place until the pipeline's completion.³³ On one

day alone, over 140 protestors were arrested. Police and soldiers dressed in riot gear used pepper spray and tear gas, fired bean bags, and set up long-distance acoustic devices with high-pitch tones to disperse protestors. Helicopters, airplanes, and military trucks were also employed at different points to maintain control of the land and construction project.³⁴ Protestors reported that in the winter months, water was sprayed at them in below-freezing temperatures, putting them at risk of hypothermia. Amid the protests, legal battles ensued, and the project was halted multiple times, including when the Army Corps of Engineers paused construction to do a more thorough environmental impact analysis. On January 24, 2017, shortly after taking office, former President Trump signed an executive memorandum instructing the Army to expedite the approval process for the remainder of the pipeline's construction, resulting in its completion in April 2017.³⁵

Implications of the Dakota Access Pipeline Backlash

An analysis of the Dakota Access Pipeline backlash brings to light many of the same patterns discussed in my analysis of the Black Hills backlash, though the use of state violence is more persistent and evident in this case. This specific circumstance highlights how even when rights to Indigenous land are respected, these rights only go so far. By approving the construction of the pipeline only half of a mile away from the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota reservation, the United States, while technically upholding the Indigenous nations' rights to their land, interfered with the degree to which the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota nations are able to live on it. The quality of life that the Indigenous people are able to enjoy is diminished.

As environmental activists pointed out, the construction of the pipeline put the land's resources at risk. The potential for leaks in the pipeline or accidental spills would have lasting ecological damage on the surrounding area, including Indigenous land. Specifically, environmental activists worried that the pipeline would result in unsafe drinking water in the

area. The Land Back Movement's manifesto states that the demand for Land Back is not only about the land itself, but also its resources.³⁶ Indigenous nations have a right to the resources their land provides, and the construction of the pipeline put their resource sovereignty at risk. Further, Land Back prioritizes the collective stewardship of the land. As previously discussed, Land Back is oriented toward mutual healing and belonging with land. Indigenous activists fight for land reclamation as a means of protective stewardship not only for their people, but for the land itself. The movement recognizes that the decolonization and liberation of people must also include decolonizing and liberating the earth. Because of the potential environmental impact of the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, Land Back activists viewed it as their duty to care for the land by fighting the construction of the pipeline. As it turns out, activists were correct about the pipeline's environmental devastation; it leaked oil into the surrounding area at least five times within its first six months of operation.³⁷

Another issue shown in this case study is how the state interferes with Indigenous rights to practice cultural and religious traditions. Leaders from the Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota nations protested the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline because it was built on sacred Indigenous burial grounds. While not an area technically owned by the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota nations, it holds significance to them and, arguably, ought to belong to them. Denying the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota access to their burial grounds, disrupting the grounds with the construction of the pipeline, and ultimately wreaking environmental devastation on these sacred grounds are all attacks on Indigenous cultural and religious sovereignty. Understanding the philosophical and political frameworks these Indigenous groups operate from illuminates the importance of their fight for land reclamation and the multitude of ways in which being forcibly disconnected from their land interferes with their cultural and religious sovereignty. Throughout

clashes between Land Back activists and the state, the state has repeatedly expected Indigenous nations to operate on the state's terms, from its framework, and using its systems. Little effort has been made to understand the distinctions in how the Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota govern themselves and orient their lifestyles in order to find an arrangement that takes these differences into account. This points to great issues endemic to the settler-colonial state. Not only does the state colonize land, but it also puts systems and frameworks into place that ultimately violate the rights and traditions of the colonized.

One last pattern of white backlash movements can be observed in a case study analysis of the Dakota Access Pipeline protests: the state's role in perpetuating capitalism as a colonizing tactic. Here, we see the violation of Indigenous land, culture, and religious sovereignty as a means to extracting resources for the settler-colonial state. The United States government provided legal and military support to Energy Transfer Partners because of its dependency on the oil industry. This close relationship is rooted in both the financial gain of the oil companies and the economic success of the United States, as it benefits from oil extraction at home instead of importing oil from abroad. This relationship between the state and American economic interests in the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline mirrors the relationship between the state and white settlers in the Black Hills backlash. White settlers invaded Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota land in search of gold and received military protection after the onset of a gold rush. Subsequently, the state provided legal protection through the seizing of the Black Hills from the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota because of the large amounts of gold found. Again, this demonstrates how the state is implicated in furthering American capitalism by protecting the economic success of white Americans over the rights of Indigenous nations. The state upholds capitalism that is ultimately rooted in white supremacy.

White Backlash Case Study: Gov. Stitt & Tribal Gaming Compacts

Kevin Stitt, a businessman and political outsider, won Oklahoma's 2018 gubernatorial race for the Republican party. Stitt's election relied on aggressive campaigning, securing the Republican nomination by aligning himself with Trump's policies, coming down hard on immigration, focusing on state budget issues, and calling into question other Republicans' allegiance to Trump.³⁸ After taking office, one way that Stitt started tackling the Oklahoma state budget was by targeting the largest source of income for Indigenous nations in Oklahoma: gaming casinos.

Over sixteen years ago, the state of Oklahoma reached an agreement with Indigenous nations to establish gaming compacts in an effort to incentivize the development and growth of the gaming industry. These compacts give tribes exclusive rights to operate casinos. In exchange, anywhere from four percent to ten percent of the revenue is paid to the state. In 2019, this agreement generated over \$2 billion, \$150 million of which went directly to the state of Oklahoma.³⁹ Most of this state revenue is used to fund public schools and infrastructure. The boom of this industry has led to the construction of over 130 casinos across the state and the Indigenous nations are now the third-largest employers in the state.⁴⁰

On July 8, 2019, Stitt published an opinion article in a Tulsa newspaper calling for the gaming compacts to be renegotiated. Stitt stated that the compacts would terminate in the new year unless the state and tribes could reach a new agreement that "reflects market conditions for the gaming industry seen around the nation today."⁴¹ He cited Oklahoma's exclusivity fees as the lowest in the nation and discussed bringing them up to be on par with other states at twenty to twenty-five percent of revenue—a huge increase from the previous agreement.⁴²

The Indigenous nations were caught completely off-guard by Stitt's op-ed. As far as they were aware, the agreed-upon gaming compacts were set to renew on January 1, 2020. This put the nations in a bind as Stitt's article implied that any casinos that did not negotiate a new compact would suddenly be operating illegally on January 1, 2020, even though the original compact clearly stated that "the compact shall automatically renew for successive additional 15-year terms."⁴³ Further, Brad Henry, a former governor of Oklahoma who was involved in the original gaming compact negotiations, sided with the Indigenous nations, stating that the intention behind the original agreement was that it would automatically renew in order to protect the state from having tribal leaders attempt to negotiate lower exclusivity rates after the growth of the industry.⁴⁴ Many tribal leaders found it offensive that the governor would threaten Indigenous businesses and attempt to begin negotiations with sovereign nations through an opinion article in a local newspaper instead of communicating directly with representatives of the Indigenous nations.⁴⁵

Instead of acquiescing to Stitt's terms, the Choctaw, Cherokee, and Chickasaw nations filed federal lawsuits against the governor and state. A legal battle ensued with lawsuits and counter-lawsuits. U.S. District Judge DeGiusti continuously ruled in favor of the Indigenous nations, stating that the gaming compacts renew automatically. Stitt's counter-motions were thrown out of court after being found to not have any real basis, and his petition for a rehearing was denied. Ultimately, Stitt cost Oklahoma taxpayers \$1.5 million in legal fees through his attack on Indigenous businesses.⁴⁶

Implications of Gov. Stitt & Tribal Gaming Compacts

The events that took place between Governor Stitt and the Indigenous nations of Oklahoma constitute a white backlash movement to the economic progress of Indigenous

communities. Indigenous people are the poorest racial minority group in the United States.⁴⁷ This is in large part due to the history of colonization and the seizing of Indigenous land by the United States government.⁴⁸ Williams et al. connect the history of lynching in the United States to public financial distribution within states, having a lasting impact on the financial and human capital of Black Americans. Further, they find that regions with a history of racialized violence correlate with economic inequality and lack of a social safety net.⁴⁹ The impacts of the history of racial violence found for Black communities could have similar implications for Indigenous communities. Governor Stitt's attempts to use policy to impede the economic progress and liberation of Oklahoma's Indigenous populations is a form of white backlash and serves to exacerbate the economic inequalities already observed in Indigenous communities. The governor's proposed renegotiations of the compacts came about because of the great success the Indigenous nations have experienced through the booming casino industry. Renegotiating the compacts so that the state gets a much larger percentage of the profits is a colonizing attempt rooted in the fear of Indigenous communities accumulating wealth and power.

Governor Stitt's threats to shut down casinos owned by Indigenous nations is also an attempted violation of Indigenous communities' freedom of livelihood. Similar to the other case studies examined, here we see the Indigenous nations abiding by the law and following the systems and processes in place to ensure the legality of their businesses. Yet, Governor Stitt's threats put their businesses at risk, which would have devastating effects for the Indigenous communities. After following all the necessary procedures, the Indigenous peoples should not have to fear having their sources of income taken away.

The implications of this case study mirror events discussed in the history of the battle for the Black Hills. With the rush of white settlers into the Black Hills in search of gold, the Army

began to penalize Lakota hunting groups that were rightfully using Indigenous hunting grounds designated to them by the United States government. However, because of the presence of white settlers, the Army deemed these hunting groups to pose a threat to the Americans. This resulted in the curtailing of hunting altogether, forcing the Lakota to rely almost entirely on the use of agricultural farming for their subsistence. The Lakota are traditionally nomadic hunters; therefore, the limitations placed on them by the Army kept them from their traditional livelihood.⁵⁰ Both in the conflict over the casino compacts and the Black Hills hunting grounds, we see limitations on Indigenous livelihood and their attempts to provide for their communities. This demonstrates the cyclical nature of colonization in addition to its persistence. The battles that Indigenous communities fought centuries ago are in many ways the same battles they continue to fight today.

Though there are similarities between the events that took place in Oklahoma and the other two cases examined, there are some ways in which this case is distinct. In both the Black Hills backlash and the Dakota Access Pipeline backlash, the use of state force and threat of violence were significant weapons utilized against Indigenous communities. In the case of Governor Stitt and his interactions with Indigenous casinos, the threats were not physical, nor was the state using literal violence to interfere with Indigenous affairs. When we think about what white supremacy looks like, we tend to conceive of looming physical threats. This case sheds light on the less conspicuous forms white supremacy can take through coercion. Instead of riot gear and tear gas, Governor Stitt employed the use of an op-ed in a local newspaper and legislation. Yet, the results of this less explicit form of white supremacy could have been just as devastating. In the case of the Black Hills hunting grounds, the use of violent white supremacy deterred the Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota from their livelihood. In the case of Oklahoma, the use

of nonviolent white supremacy could have had the same result. In both instances, Indigenous communities' ability to provide for themselves in the way they choose was put in jeopardy. Both cases demonstrate the colonization of livelihood and economic production.

The Oklahoma case leads us to consider that perhaps state violence is broader and runs deeper than merely the physical and tangible. In the case of the Dakota Access Pipeline backlash and the Black Hills backlash, violence is explicit and obvious. Yet, if policies, legislation, and even opinion articles can threaten Indigenous communities in the same way, are these forms of white supremacy not also imposing a form of violence on Indigenous nations? The end result, whether that be anything from hunger to environmental degradation, threatens the lives of Indigenous people. White supremacy can take on many forms, but the state's ability to enact it through legislation and policy is perhaps more menacing in both its inconspicuousness and its seeming insurmountability.⁵¹

Conclusion

The state's backlash to Indigenous autonomy is white backlash. In the cases of the Black Hills protests, the Dakota Access Pipeline protests, and Governor Stitt's actions in Oklahoma, the state wielded its power to suppress Indigenous sovereignty. This is white supremacy, and the events that have taken place in contemporary American society are a direct result of the government's long history of taking action to further the interests of white people at the expense of Indigenous groups. Sometimes, as in the cases of the Black Hills protests and the Dakota Access Pipeline protests, the state's white backlash has been straightforward and violent. Other times, as is the case with Governor Stitt, the state's white backlash has been less obvious yet just as harmful. Xiuhtezcatl writes:

“This a motherfuckin’ war camp
I know they gon’ say they don’t want that

But they comin' straight for the land, for the place that we stand
So we taking it all back

Take it all back
Take it all back.”⁵²

He points out the state's claim to moral superiority through supposed nonviolence. The Army pushed Indigenous people out of the Black Hills after hunting groups were considered a threat. The National Guard was only called in after protestors were regarded as “rioters.” Oklahoma's gaming compacts were deemed unjust after the state realized it could benefit more. In each of these instances, the state can justify its backlash by demonizing Indigenous people and criminalizing their actions. While the U.S. government may claim to be seeking peaceful relations with Indigenous communities, its actions reflect animosity and hostility. An analysis of the history of the state's interactions with Indigenous groups reveals a pattern of broken treaties, physical violence, and attacks on Indigenous sovereignty and ways of life. How can such a persistent and dangerous cycle be broken? “Take it all back.”⁵³

Notes

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- ¹ Xiuhtezcatl Martinez, “Take It All Back” (Xochicuicatl Records, 2021).
- ² Ryan T. O’Leary, “From Anglo-Saxon Nativism to Executive Order: Civil Religion and Anti-Immigration Rhetoric.” *Politics and Religion* 9 (4). (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 771–93.
- ³ Anne Bonds and Joshua Inwood. "Beyond White Privilege: Geographies of White Supremacy and Settler Colonialism." *Progress in Human Geography* 40, no. 6 (2016): 720.
- ⁴ Arthur K. Spears, “White Supremacy and Antiblackness: Theory and Lived Experience,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 31, no. 2 (2021): 158.
- ⁵ Catherine Carstairs, "Defining Whiteness: Race, Class, and Gender Perspectives in North American History." *International Labor and Working-Class History* 60 (2001): 203.
- ⁶ Ashley Jardina, *White Identity Politics*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: New York, NY, USA : Cambridge University Press, 2019: 7.
- ⁷ NDN Collective. LANDBACK. NDN Collective, 2021. <https://landback.org/>.
- ⁸ NDN Collective, “LANDBACK Manifesto,” LANDBACK (NDN Collective, 2021), <https://landback.org/manifesto/>.
- ⁹ NDN Collective, “LANDBACK Manifesto.”
- ¹⁰ John Brenton Leverston, “From Isolation to Visibility: Social Media as a Tool for Native American Activists to Generate Support for their Social Movements,” (Master's thesis, Harvard University Division of Continuing Education, 2021).
- ¹¹ Nick Estes, “The Battle for the Black Hills,” High Country News, January 1, 2021, <https://www.hcn.org/issues/53.1/indigenous-affairs-social-justice-the-battle-for-the-black-hills>.
- ¹² Jodi Rave, “Why Native Americans Have Protested Mt. Rushmore,” History.com (A&E Television Networks, November 18, 2020), <https://www.history.com/news/mount-rushmore-native-american-protests>.
- ¹³ U.S. National Park Service, “Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 (Horse Creek Treaty),” National Parks Service (U.S. Department of the Interior), accessed December 9, 2021, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/horse-creek-treaty.htm>.
- ¹⁴ Throughout this article, I avoid the use of the name “Sioux” because it can be regarded as derogatory. In this instance, I use the term to reference the reservation because it is the official title listed in the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie.

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