AWAKE, A Dream from Standing Rock

**Release date:** April 22, 2017 (USA)
**Genre:** Documentary
**Screenwriter:** Floris White Bull, Myron Dewey, and Josh Fox
**Directed by:** Josh Fox, Myron Dewey, and James Spione
**Length:** 1 hour and 24 minutes
**Rating:** NR

**SYNOPSIS**

*AWAKE, A Dream from Standing Rock* is a documentary about the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) and how Native Americans and their allies came together to stand in the path of an oil pipeline construction site near the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation (which connects North and South Dakota).

The film opens with Floris White Bull sharing a Lakota prophecy that warns the Black Snake would bring death and destruction to Mother Earth and sacred sites. She remarks, “It would be the youth who would rise up, behind them mothers would rise, and behind them the warriors would rise . . . we, the seventh generation, are given the task of defeating it.” She reminds us that we are all guests on Mother Earth: “Will you awake to see the gathering of nations—all races—all faiths? Will you wake up and dream with us? Will you join our dream? Will you join us?”

The pipeline, owned by the Texas-based developer, Energy Transfer Partners, would carry hundreds of thousands of barrels of crude oil a day through 50 counties in four states—from western North Dakota through South Dakota and Iowa, ultimately connecting to an existing pipeline in Patoka, Illinois. Native American groups hold that the pipeline would run under a Missouri River reservoir called Lake Oahe, would jeopardize the primary water source for the reservation, and would denigrate and damage Sioux Nation burial sites near the lake, violating tribal treaty rights.

**CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT THEMES IN THE FILM**

- Common Good
- Community and Participation
- Caring for Our Common Home
- Solidarity
- Water as a Human Right
- Nonviolence
- Speaking Truth to Power

**OFFICIAL FILM TRAILER**

The film chronicles the protests against building the DAPL with demonstrations commencing in April 2016. This first protest was a handful of people praying in a camp on the reservation, but then grew to include hundreds, sometimes thousands, of peaceful activists—indigenous youth, faith leaders, veterans, actors, students, and elders. In December 2016, President Obama stopped the construction of the pipeline temporarily and called for a full environmental impact study. For the protectors of this land and its water, this was considered a bold victory for the rule of law and for the people. On his second day in office, President Trump ordered the Black Snake forward, overturning the will of the people and the rule of law itself. In mid-February 2017, the drilling began again. Nothing could be done to stop it.

The documentary includes disturbing footage of peaceful protesters carrying signs, “Water is life,” and being shot with rubber bullets, tasered, and blasted with water cannons in freezing temperatures. Yet all maintain a peaceful presence throughout the struggle to stop the pipeline and protect the land of the Sioux Nation where they have lived for centuries. We witness how nonviolence and prayer can unite people to work for the common good.

_AWAKE, A Dream from Standing Rock_ captures the story of Native-led defiance that forever changed how we protect clean water, our environment, and the future of our planet. The film has been described as a “lesson in resistance.” It serves not only as a wake-up call, but also as a call to action. White Bull says: “I am not dreaming. I’m awake. I have been woken by the spirit inside me that demanded I open my eyes and see the world.”

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

- What comes to mind when you hear the word “water?” What is the main source of your drinking water? Do you think your friends and family know the source of their drinking water? Would it make a difference if they knew the water came from sacred lands?
- How will the pipeline endanger the Standing Rock Sioux tribe’s treaty rights, sacred sites, and water?
- If the Dakota Access Pipeline or a similar pipeline were planned to go through your community, how would you respond? Would you ever join a protest camp like the one at Standing Rock Sioux Reservation? Why or why not? Describe an issue or event that would motivate you to protest around the clock, outside, regardless of the weather.
- Solidarity and standing with others in their struggle are central themes in Catholic social thought. What were some concrete examples of solidarity in the documentary? What do you see as appropriate ways for non-Native allies to support Indigenous peoples in their struggles?
- Those who joined the Sioux Nation to prevent the construction of the DAPL have become known throughout the globe as water protectors. Do you think they are justified in fearing that the pipeline could contaminate the water supply? Why or why not? Give an example to support your response.
“Although our camp is gone, our spirit is not broken. It is stronger than ever. It has spread throughout the land, throughout the world, like cottonwood seeds in the wind. What started in Standing Rock is now all over the world, the battle wages on. Protest camps are being built to fight pipelines and fracking across the globe—all over the world, water protectors and land defenders are rising up. We are planet protectors now, global protectors and we will wake up millions more.”

—Floris White Bull, Lakota Water Protector

• Many of the water protectors at Standing Rock chanted, “Water is Life.” What does that phrase mean to you?

• Care for creation is at the heart of Catholic social thought. The film provides examples of those who commit to protecting water, even when it is dangerous to do so. In what ways did the protesters at Standing Rock resolve to protect Mother Earth? How does your faith call you to be a steward and a protector of Mother Earth and her natural resources?

• What did you learn from the nonviolent action of the Standing Rock movement? Is there an issue you’re particularly passionate about? How could you raise more awareness about that issue?

• Can you think of two examples of how the United States government has failed to honor treaties with American Indian tribes in the past? How has their human dignity been disregarded? How did this past history influence the action of the Standing Rock protesters today? What struggles, other than an oil pipeline adjacent to their land, do the people on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation face?

• The Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) is now fully built, following President Trump’s executive order to expedite its completion. Do you think it is too late for the United States government to navigate a just and equitable solution to the conflict over the pipeline? Explain.

• What is the power of collective action? What are the risks involved in standing up for what you believe in? How can you draw daily inspiration and strength from movements like #NoDAPL as we try to change other irresponsible and unsustainable oil and gas projects around the world?

• Many have noticed the similarities between the pictures of protesters being hosed and attacked by police dogs in Birmingham in the 1960s during the Civil Rights Movement and images of the DAPL protesters being tear gassed and having dogs unleashed on them by private security companies. Do you agree that both experiences were attempts by those in power to intimidate, anger, and discourage the protesters?

FAITH IN ACTION

• Divest from Dakota Access Pipeline: Take your money out of banks that fund oppression of native people.
  Go to: DefundDAPL.org.

• Support the Water Protectors Legal Fund: honorthecearth.org.

• Support the PTSD/Healing Support Lakota Way Healing Center: lakotaway.org.