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people's trade routes over the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. The time frame originally posed for the Bering Straits entry was 5,000 years ago, but archaeological evidence has steadily increased the time of habitation in the hemisphere, to a present estimate of 20,000 years. But, it's likely more ancient, considering the highly developed civilizations and advanced agriculture developed in South America, Mexico and North America.

S.Q.: Do you think the standard narrative of U.S. history reflects an enforced silence on indigenous genocide? What happens when we break that silence?

R.D.O.: Yes, the standard narrative has avoided dealing with genocide; one recent book by a notable U.S. historian elaborates on the many atrocities committed against native people, but argues that there was no genocide, and calls the process "ethnic cleansing." However, more radical historians, following Howard Zinn's lead in his "People's History of the United States," do acknowledge genocide. However, as with Zinn, it seems more of a way of doing away with the "Indian question" than tackling the nature of settler-colonialism and its effects on the current United States. It's posed as more a moral question, loaded with guilt, rather than a historical question with consequences.

S.Q.: You mention Truth and Reconciliation hearings in your book – something I'm familiar with in the context of South Africa and Rwanda. What do you think this process could look like in the North American context? Are there any positive signs that it could happen?

R.D.O.: There are many moves toward apologies and pleas for reconciliation, but not so much truth-telling. The Boarding School research projects in the U.S. and Canada are the most important initiatives. For the past 35 years, indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere and the Pacific and Arctic have been documenting historical and contemporary genocidal practices of governments at the United Nations. There's certainly enough material and expertise available to hold formal hearings, and in Guatemala they did take place, with actual charges and trials of genocide resulting.

S.Q.: There have been many campaigns recently to support indigenous resistance to environmental destruction: the Seminoles in Florida are fighting a new fossil-fuel power plant, tribes in Washington are fighting coal and oil trains, and last year we saw an eruption of tribes physically closing shipping routes to the Alberta (Canada) Tar Sands fields. What opportunity do you see in these alliances? Does it reflect a broader movement for indigenous sovereignty, or could it turn into one?

R.D.O.: These campaigns are vitally important, and the alliances that are evolving are extraordinary – nothing like it since the early 1970s. For indigenous peoples, it's a matter of survival, and sovereignty is essential to survival, but the settler population, or at least the youth, is realizing that it is a matter of their survival



Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz

PHOTO BY BARRIE KARP

"From the beginning of colonialism some five, six centuries ago, those first hit by the brunt of it and survived – the indigenous peoples of the Americas – have always known that it wasn't only about their own survival, but also the survival of humanity, of all life and sustenance."

as well. No people in the world have fought as hard and long for survival as peoples as North American indigenous peoples; they have a lot to teach others, and their leadership, finally, in the climate movement is a turning point.

S.Q.: Public lands in the United States were often created out of land recently stolen from indigenous peoples, and environmental protection since then has often retained an amnesia about this history. What would you say to people who assert that environmental needs are our top priority, and that these are too pressing for us to worry about indigenous issues?

R.D.O.: Public lands, especially national and state parks and wilderness areas are all stolen from native peoples, and these are sacred lands. There can be no separation between restitution of lands and self-determination for indigenous peoples and protection of the environment. Such protection comes from relationships, not stewardship.

S.Q.: Is there a connection between the disruption of indigenous cultural patterns and the disruption of the Earth's biological patterns?

R.D.O.: The system of capitalism that developed in Western Europe through the accumulation of wealth in plundering the Americas and Africa (colonialism) is the same force that has destroyed the ecologies of the planet and now threatens all species, including humans. Indigenous peoples warned of this from the beginning of the onslaught up to the present. The environmental movement (and other social movements) in North America needs to pay attention to and learn from the indigenous people's insistence on land restitution and indigenous self-determination.

S.Q.: As your book documents, U.S. policy toward Native Americans has often moved from direct assaults on their existence to the strange idea that the U.S. government is now "protecting" them. You talk about the modern period of "termination" that began in Oregon with the Klamath tribe, where the government essentially declared that they'd cared for Indians long enough and were no longer going to extend their "generosity." Could you explain this policy of termination and the effects it had on indigenous peoples? How did people fight back?

R.D.O.: The U.S. Congress Termination Act of 1953 is an instance of official genocidal policy, which actually falls under the 1948 U.N. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The official appointed to implement termination was Dillon S. Myer who had been in charge of the wartime relocation and incarceration of U.S. citizens of Japanese descent. It was a two-pronged plan, using the carrot and the stick. First, the most economically self-reliant Native nations, including the Klamath and the Menominee (Wisconsin) were instantly terminated, their reservations and governments dissolved. Those terminated quickly fell from prosperity to impoverishment, set upon by predatory corporations.

The other part of the plan was one of enticement, called Relocation, which was voluntary and targeted young singles and couples, the expectation being that with only old people left to die off, and the young people assimilated by the exciting urban world of consumer abundance and entertainment, the reservations would simply disappear. It didn't work out that way. Instead, the burgeoning Civil Rights movement offered new methods of resistance to the "urban Indians," who at any rate never divorced themselves from their families and communities back home. The result was the National Indian Youth Council and a little later the American Indian Movement, the Survival for American Indians and many other organizations. In 1974, following Wounded Knee, the Termination Act was rescinded, and the reservations that had been terminated were reconstituted, although irreparable damage had been done.

S.Q.: The Activist Group "Yes Men" recently made national headlines by impersonating State Department officials and telling weapons contractors that the government was going to start purchasing renewable energy from reservations – which would be fully owned and controlled by First Nations. What was your reaction when you saw that stunt? Do you think it's viable?

R.D.O.: Yes, it was interesting that the weapons contractors found the idea attractive. My reaction to the stunt was "why not?" It's a perfectly viable idea. I don't know of any concrete plans in the works, but I know it's implied in indigenous aspirations, not only in North America, but the rest of the Americas. The real utopists are those who believe that capitalism can be reformed.

S.Q.: You write about "the American way of war" – one based on unlimited violence and the total destruction of the enemy. You write

that this was alien to indigenous peoples, and that warfare for them was highly ritualized and involved quests for personal glory, but resulted in few deaths. Why is this important to recognize? Do you think examining the war against Native Americans can affect our willingness to mobilize for war today?

R.D.O.: The first way of war, which became the U.S. way of war, was formed in the 13 British colonies with settlers forming militias to terrorize the indigenous peoples, destroying their villages, food stores and fields, killing everything that moved. That phrase, "kill everything that moves," was openly used by commanding officers in Vietnam and is taken for granted in other U.S. irregular wars, that is, counterinsurgent wars and wars of occupation since the founding of the U.S. to the present. I think that embedded in the texture of U.S. patriotism, which centers on reverence for the military, is the settler-colonial mindset of extermination. And, I do think that if people become conscious of this, including those who serve in the military, many would recognize the truth and be repulsed.

S.Q.: What are your thoughts on the Idle No More movement?

R.D.O.: Idle No More is an amazing movement, surging from the grass roots of First Nations in Canada and spreading over the continent, emulated around the world. It was theater at the onset, but has continued as a strong and constantly growing base, spawning many projects.

S.Q.: Do you see energy from Idle No More coming in to the United States?

R.D.O.: Yes, Idle No More infused energy into the Native movements in the United States. Many locales now have INM representatives who network with their counterparts in Canada and each other. INM fused Indigenous sovereignty and environmental issues like nothing had before. I thought this was visible in the glorious Climate Convergence in New York in September 2014. And it gave more visibility to the "Cowboys and Indians" alliance in the Northern Plains in opposition to the Keystone pipeline.

S.Q.: You emphasize in your book that the survival of indigenous peoples in the United States testifies to successful cultures of resistance – that without it, they would not have survived so many repeated attempts at assimilation and genocide. What does it mean to participate in a culture of resistance, and what responsibility do we have to support such resistance?

R.D.O.: From the beginning of colonialism some five, six centuries ago, those first hit by the brunt of it and survived – the indigenous peoples of the Americas – have always known that it wasn't only about their own survival, but also the survival of humanity, of all life and sustenance. They have continued to resist and to survive, but they cannot overcome and transform without the mass of humanity being involved. Everything now is about survival, so it's not so much a question of supporting indigenous resistance, as joining it.