



# Political Journey

*to North America*





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## Introduction

In autumn 2019, we – the youth group of the Escola de Esperança Project – made a political education trip to the USA. Now we are back, full of new experiences, gratitude and ideas for the future. In this report, we want to share with you what happened on our trip.



### On the trip were

-  Mante Kleinhammes (12)
-  Anita Holzmüller (13)
-  Arion Lütcher (15)
-  Camillo Faber (16)
-  Silvio Mockert (16)
-  Mara Bähr (17)

Accompanied by Nora Czajkowski, Eiko Goldbeck and Simon du Vinage



### Why Political Journeys?

Political journeys are an essential part of the concept of the Escola da Esperança. In our Traveling School, the younger children explore our region and other countries in Europe. The teenage students venture further into the world; for them the political journeys are part of their initiation into adulthood.

The Traveling School is an important element of our school as it makes it possible to experience many things we learn about on a practical level, in real-life situations,

where they can be internalized more easily. Shorter and longer trips bring us into contact with people and cultures, allow us to learn geography, to research history on-site, to learn languages efficiently, to explore living spaces and biodiversity, as well as – for older children – to recognize the different political contexts around the world and the pervasive system of global capitalism. Additionally, traveling offers opportunities for character building: dealing with new impressions, coping with new situations and traveling with a group. This often leads to developmental leaps that are made possible by these complex and intense experiences.

“An understanding and knowledge of the diversity of human cultures is essential to make inter-cultural communication and cooperation possible. We live in a world situation that urgently calls for new ways of securing our environmental, economic and social livelihoods. Sustainability and global cooperation are more necessary than ever for the future of humanity. Education has to make people fit for the future, able to survive. It should make connective thinking, discernment, and direct experience possible; it should convey joy and hope for the future. The development and implementation of innovative forms of learning with future-oriented content is not just a pedagogical question, but has long since become a political question, if not a question of

“Our schools would need to be transformed into biotopes of learning, in which young people inspire and unfold curiosity and enthusiasm and responsibly shape their world. Learning, freed from hierarchical teaching, must become a creative exchange among learners. What is important for those who create the 21st century is not what they have learned by heart, but what they have acquired independently.” - Gerald Hüther

survival.” – Escola da Esperança Concept

For young people, these types of journeys serve as a stepping-stone to adulthood. They also support the development of their global awareness and help them to find direction for their commitment for the world.

The idea is that they travel to countries where they get an insight into issues concerning the environment, our socio-political context and the economic crisis and to visit local projects which, through intelligent answers and practical help, spread hope in their region. Together with local cooperation partners, our young people find ways to help in a meaningful and sustainable way and get an impression of how the transition to a peaceful future could be made.

Over the past few years, it has become increasingly clear how much the development and path of young people has been influenced by the great learning effect of these trips. They come back with an increased curiosity to learn, active participation in discussions and questions in class. The experiences they bring are the perfect complement to the existing curriculum and are designed in such a way that they support the overarching learning objectives.



## What was the idea/inspiration?

Since 2017, activists, community leaders, Indigenous youth and elders have been meeting annually in Tamera, in solidarity with what was initiated in the #NoDAPL movement in Standing Rock. This was a Water Protectors Camp in 2016/17 that connected almost 100 different Indigenous tribes from around the world and that created a powerful form of combining prayer and activism which they called “Sacred Activism.” The annual meetings developed into the “Defend the Sacred Alliance.” In their manifesto, they write: “We are a global alliance connected through prayer, mutual support, cross-cultural healing and common actions. We come together in the spirit of sacred activism to catalyze the regenerative system change and to protect the sacredness of all that lives.”

Tokata Iron Eyes, a young activist from Standing Rock, has been part of our annual youth camp since 2017. She reported very movingly about her life as an activist and what it means to grow up as a young girl in a reserve. This sparked a great interest in us, the desire to get to know each other and to deepen the cooperation further. That was the spark for our political journey. The following report consists of extracts from the final reports of the participating young people and does not claim to be complete. Rather, it wants to give an insight into the experiences of the young people.





## Preparation

*Tamera, Portugal*

Preparing and planning the trip together was an important part of the learning process, which started about a year before the actual trip.



Mara

The political trips are made so that young people, from a certain age, can get out of their everyday life and see a completely different part of the world. So you can really get to know other cultures, lifestyles and nature. In addition, you also get to know some of the problems that our world has today and a chance to deal with them actively. We have the chance to get to know projects that are really working on alternatives and give hope.



Mante

Before we left, we had an intensive preparation period of three weeks in which we learned a lot about the Indigenous culture of North America and generally about American history. During this time, we were told about one of the many “Trails of Tears.” At the beginning of the 19th century, thousands of Indigenous people were expelled from their homeland and placed in reservations, often hundreds of kilometers away from their homeland. Thousands died on the way. That was strong for me because I could imagine how horrible it would be to be driven away from your homeland.



Arion

In the first week, we had history classes about the United States. One thing I found very shocking was for example to hear about when the Europeans conquered the country and drove out the Indigenous people and killed a huge number of them. Exact numbers are difficult to estimate. But before the Europeans came, there were between 2 and 18 million Indigenous people from different cultures living in what is now the United States. In 1890, after the brutal European conquest, genocidal violence and the introduction of epidemics, only 250,000 survived.

In the second week, we were told more about the different cultures of the Indigenous peoples of North America. Here, the most horrible thing to hear was that the Indigenous children were sent to boarding schools and that they were no longer allowed to speak their language but only English. They had to behave and look like the other children. Many of them were only allowed to leave again when they were 18 years old. When they got back home, they hardly remembered their parents and could no longer communicate because they had been forbidden to speak their mother tongue.

All that was done so that the Indigenous culture died out, which almost worked, because the children were so traumatized that they no longer wanted to speak their language and became totally withdrawn. After that, they no longer knew what to believe, what they were taught at boarding schools, or what they had learned from their parents.

In the third week, we took the time to prepare our presentation on Tamera, to introduce our group and our community on the trip. That was definitely a good thing, because even though I live in Tamera, it is not very easy to give a presentation about it.



Mara

In our preparation, we also dealt with the creation story of the Haudenosaunee tribe. I liked it much more than the one we know. I immediately saw that this culture has a completely different foundation of faith. The core of the story was about human cooperation with all living beings. And that it is about the one who gives the most and not who owns the most. I like this thought a lot. And I noticed that in Standing Rock, wherever we went, we were greeted very lovingly and were given many presents.



Anita

On October 24th, my alarm clock rang at 4.30 am and suddenly I realized, "It's starting now!" I had been excited before, but I still couldn't actually grasp it. But when I was on the way to the airport, I was caught by a wave of excitement. And yet I knew I was ready and that I was traveling in a group where I felt safe. And the journey started...



"We have the chance to get to know projects that are really working on alternatives and give hope."



## Simi Valley

California

The first stop on our trip was Simi Valley, a small town near Los Angeles. Here we spent our first week with Lori Woodley and her family. Lori is a youth worker and head of the organization “All It Takes.” From her network, she invited three young people and a youth worker and we used the first week to get to know each other and our respective work in the different places.

We were received incredibly warmly by Lori and it was the ideal place for us to arrive in America and to start to make friends.



Anita

Simi Valley is surrounded by mountains, and we walked up into them in the first few days. We could see the many houses in the valley from above. I noticed that there were many houses with large green gardens and pools, but the landscape around the valley was very dry. Political journeys usually go to crisis areas and although one would not think that California is a crisis area, I realized what an ecological crisis this country is in. I noticed that we humans keep forgetting that we are actually part of nature and that we are also responsible for maintaining it.



Arion

Lori Woodley was one of the people who helped us a lot to make the trip possible. For example, she lent us a camper van for the road trip we were planning to do. In Simi Valley, everything was different from home, for example almost everything is bigger. You just had everything you needed and more. Three other young people came to Lori and we did different things with them. One of them was Will BrownOtter. He is from Standing Rock and is 19 years old. I found his story very exciting! He told us that he ran 500 miles with a few other teenagers. They ran from Standing Rock to Omaha Nebraska to draw attention to the Dakota Access Pipeline and to file a petition. That changed him a lot. During the race, he thought a lot, had deep spiritual experiences and realized what his culture really meant and how he was proud to engage for his people.









## All it Takes

*Canyon Creek Retreat Center, California*

Part of our stay in California was participating in one of Lori's "All it Takes" youth trainings. Together with 100 other young people between the ages of 12 and 15, we spent 4 intensive and educational days that gave us a moving insight into the lives of many young people in America.



Anita

"All It Takes" is a camp which is primarily designed to strengthen the leadership qualities of young people, so that they start to become self-confident and aware of what is going on in the world. And also that they can start talking about their problems, traumas and feelings. Many of them have never been in such spaces before. During these days, I saw many who really enjoyed working in a group and telling the others how they were doing, and also very clearly saying when something was too much for them.

What I saw in many teenagers was that they had experienced strong things and sometimes did not have a simple situation with their family. And instead of talking about it, they build a thick protective wall of ego and coolness. There were really many with a strong story who didn't have an easy life, and it was so good to see some of them opening up slowly, starting to trust and talk.



One very moving activity we did in which I could see this opening was "Cross the Line." We were in a room separated by a line in the middle. Everyone was on one side and questions were asked. Whenever we answered yes, we would cross the line. The questions started with: "If you've ever felt alone, you should go to the other side." It got more and more intense and personal, until the question was who had tried to commit suicide before. I was shocked when more than half went to the other side. Half of 100 children had tried to end their lives before they had really started. It was sad to see how desperate the young generation is and I started to ask myself what needs to be changed to give them a happy and fulfilling life.





## Ojai Foundation

California

The first stop on our road trip was an afternoon at the Ojai Foundation, a non-profit training center and partner project of Tamera. There we met Sharon Shay Sloan and Brendan Clarke who gave us a brief introduction to the place, its history and work. Here we also met our long-time friend Sam Deboskey, nature guide and experiential teacher, who accompanied us on our road trip to Standing Rock for a week.



Mara

We had a solo time in the land where we could sit alone in nature and connect with the land. It was just beautiful for me and I was suddenly so grateful for the beauty of nature and the calm that it radiates. Suddenly I saw so many beautiful details that I would otherwise never notice when I'm in my normal state of life, where you don't focus on them. For example, the many ants, who diligently carried away their leaf pieces. It was also a moment when I really realized once again how absurd it is what humanity is currently doing with nature. It is simply unbelievable that we are destroying the beauty and basis of life for all that lives, including us humans, for money and a certain standard of living. I could have sat there forever. It was our first solo time in nature during this trip, later we did it more often and I enjoyed it every time.



"I kept this image that nature is always behind me for the rest of the trip and always felt it when I went into nature."



Anita

Two years ago, there was a fire in Ohaj and they had already started to rebuild everything, but you could still see the burned spots. I thought it was great that they did not give up and that they saw the fire as a sign, because the fire did not burn the sacred places and altars, but mainly the houses. So now they concentrate more on the spiritual work.

In solo time, I sat under a tree and could see the small village in the valley in front of me, where it was loud and cars were driving, and then I could feel behind me the healthy and strong nature that gave me strength. I kept this image that nature is always behind me for the rest of the trip and always felt it when I went into nature.





## Road Trip

### *California to North Dakota*

From Ojai, we traveled for 7 days through Nevada, Arizona, Utah, Wyoming, and through South and North Dakota to Standing Rock. It was a journey from warm summer temperatures into winter, snow and minus 10 degrees Celsius. It was a trip with many different impressions, in which we mainly had an intensive community time together in our camper van.



Mante

With the huge camper van from Lori, we drove 2500km from California to Standing Rock, North Dakota. It was a great time when we saw a lot of impressive nature. It was also a very exciting group experience because we just lived in a camper van for six days and got to know each other a lot better, both our strengths and our quirks. I learned about myself that in some places I could help more, cooperate more and think more for the whole group.

The whole time was a very good but also intensive community experience for the whole group. We have all learned to look more for where we can help, to notice that we don't leave all our stuff lying around everywhere, to take care of each other, to help that everyone is doing well and much more.



Camillo

On the third day we visited Bryce Canyon, a wonder of nature, where we spent a whole day and then took a tour of the sand and clay towers. In the evening I went to a good viewpoint with Eiko. It was freezing cold, but the night was very quiet, you only heard the wind rushing through the trees and the bizarre clay formations. There was a very special calm.







## Standing Rock Reservation

*North Dakota*



Mara

On the evening of November 11th, we arrived at Fort Yates, Standing Rock on the land of La Donna Bravebull Allard and her and Teena Pugliese received us very warmly. After a long drive, we fell into warm beds with lots of thick blankets in well heated yurts that had been prepared for us.

In Standing Rock we spent an incredibly moving week, full of new impressions and people who gave us a deep insight into their culture and history. We have a huge thank you for making it possible!



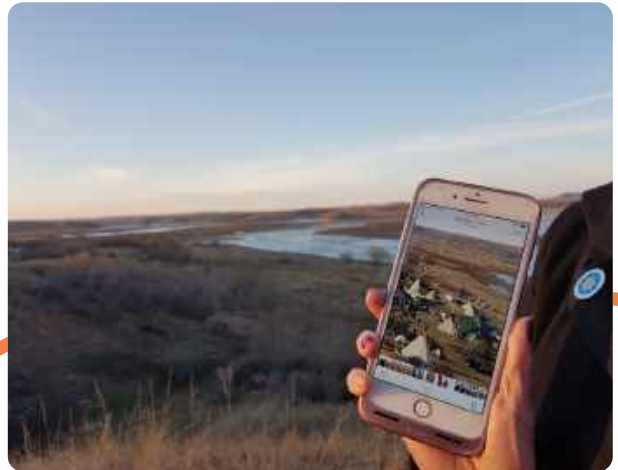
Mante

Every day we met new interesting people with whom we could exchange ideas. I really liked it to meet people who actually experienced the things that we learned about in our preparation time. For example, we met a woman who had been to boarding school. The children of the different tribes had to go there and were not allowed to speak their language and were taught English. The children were usually brought there at the age of 8 and were usually only allowed to return at the age of 18. You could actually call it cultural genocide because their culture was taken away and then they were taught another religion by the whites. I could hardly imagine that.

When we arrived at Teena and La Donna's place, we were greeted warmly by the two and I felt at home immediately. Teena had prepared a program for us for the whole week and was very caring all the time. Through these two, we really got a deep insight into life at Standing Rock, which is otherwise not so normal and easy to understand. I'm really grateful for that. We experienced so many different things that week, met new people and wherever we went, everyone was super open and friendly to us. That made me very happy. On the very first day, we learned from Denise McCay, one of the Elders, how to make traditional bracelets from small pearls. It was not that easy but it was really fun. In the meantime, she shared a lot of her wisdom with us. For example, how important it is to love yourself first so that you are able to love others too.

**"You could actually call it cultural genocide because their culture was taken away(...)"**







Arion

This week was full of impressions. We were at a public hearing about the Dakota Access Pipeline, where they now want to pump twice as much oil. The hearing was 12 hours long, but actually lasted longer. At the beginning I didn't find it so interesting, it was about all kinds of technical details that I didn't really understand and therefore couldn't really listen to. But towards the end when John Eagle, the first witness for Standing Rock, spoke, I suddenly understood everything and found it very interesting. He changed the whole mood in the hall because he simply told a story about himself and his people that was so moving that even one of the judges had tears in his eyes.

Another thing I thought was very cool was that we went to a sweat lodge. I will never forget this experience! It was so hot, but also so powerful and so special that we were allowed to do it with various tribal representatives who sang really loud. And then you should always pray really hard. It is very different from a sauna; it feels much hotter because it is so humid and you sit so close together that you can hardly move.

William Brown Otter, the young man from Standing Rock, whom we met in the first week at Lori's, came to the campfire on the last evening. It was nice to see him again. There was a very interesting conversation with him. The first part was about the hearing and what they would do if the amount of oil was doubled anyway. William said that he sometimes loses hope for a peaceful path to victory and then thinks that the only way is to fight. You saw his great determination to change something. He even said that he would die for it because it would be the greatest honor for his people. It was shocking for me to hear that. Then Nora said that she understands him, but she doesn't think that they have a chance this way. And that it's all about staying peaceful and finding out how

you actually want to live. This is where you should invest your energy and not in the fight against something. Afterwards, William thanked us for our thoughts and said that it is actually a better picture to stand up for life, and that sometimes he just doesn't know what to do. So I was able to understand even more in what kind of situation the young people live and grow up in Standing Rock.



Camillo

One topic that had captivated me very much in the preparation period were the protest camps in Standing Rock. I really wanted to know more about the resistance camps that took place in 2016/2017 against the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, which was to be laid right through the reserve.

Of course, we had heard a lot about the camps in preparation, but when we were there and saw everything with our own eyes, all the people who participated, the stories, the energy that you felt, that was something again totally different.

For me, the protest camps were not



just camps to stop the construction of the oil pipeline. They also stand for the Indigenous people's daily struggle with society. Not just in Standing Rock, but worldwide. It is terrible that people die on the reservation, that it is dangerous to be out alone at night, that many people take drugs.

How could this happen? Who is the destroyer of this culture?  
I know there are people who benefit from this drama. Why do they do that?  
Because of money!

It's good for me to have seen it all, but dealing with this knowledge is not easy. "Water is life." Many people do not know how serious this sentence or the situation in the world is. That there are many people, countless children, who are dying and meanwhile other people wash their cars with good drinking water every other day.

I realized a lot in Standing Rock. The destruction and injustice, the badness that exists in the world. And that does not mean that one should be depressed now because the reality is so sad, on the contrary, one should get up now and do something, build hope, because without hope nothing works.

"It's good for me to have seen it all, but dealing with this knowledge is not easy."





## Three Creeks

*Owens Valley, California*

The last stop on our trip was Three Creeks, a beautiful location in the California mountains, and a long-standing partner project from Tamera that regularly hosts vision fasts and council trainings. There Gigi Coyle, council trainer, activist and elder led, with elements like council, solo time and other creative forms, a deep after space and reflection time with us.



Anita

When we came to Three Creeks from Standing Rock after the intense time, I was able to breath out again, a bit like in the Ojai Foundation.

It was an oasis in the middle of the mountains. Nature was just stunning. The water that flowed in the streams, the trees with their beautiful green leaves and the birds that started chirping early in the morning made me feel at home and gave space to think about the whole trip. During that time I did a lot of journaling to process what I had heard and seen.

I felt that nature was alive, listening to me and sometimes answering me.

We did a solo time twice where we went into nature for half an hour and thought about what we gave and received on the trip. I found it very important to thoroughly think about that.



Mara

I am super grateful for this beautiful place and the people who look after it. And for the fact that we were accepted there and that we were allowed to spend our last days there as a reflection time.





## Incorporation Time

*Tamera, Portugal*

After five weeks of travel, we came back home and spent another week together as a group. During this time, the young people wrote their final reports on the trip, we took time to hear from each other what the trip was like for us and we also invited the parents, some teachers and interested people from Tamera for a first report. It was a successful transition from five intensive weeks of travel to home.



Mara

I am so happy that we as a group could stay together and arrive together for this week. It feels so normal now to be with the group all the time. And it became clear to me for the first time that I never felt alone for the entire five weeks on the trip. It might have been a lot at times, or you might have been annoyed by something, but this feeling of belonging and never being alone is so good. I am very grateful for that.

I also think it's good and important that we have time to reflect and write down the things that were important to us and our thoughts so that we don't just forget them and immediately return to our daily life.

I hope that we will continue to do a lot together in the group in the future and that it will not simply dissolve again.



Camillo

I think a political trip has to have consequences. You see and learn so many new things and this information must then be implemented, for example in projects, and the knowledge and experiences have to be passed on.

This trip was an experience for my future life. I changed on this trip. The way I look at situations and other people has definitely changed and I think that says a lot.

Before the trip, it was often difficult for me to build motivation for the things I find important. Things I've wanted to do for quite a while but never found the motivation for. Now after the trip I found it.

I have seen that what I choose in my own life and what I do is important! I can only say that it was a great experience for me and that I will never forget this trip.





Silvio

For me, a political journey is like a traveling school in which you learn things that can be applied in life and through which you gain important experiences.

Although I have known most of those who have been on this trip for years, I have got to know them and myself more deeply through our shared experiences.

In retrospect, this political journey was a very important experience in my life and shaped me in many different ways. Especially in Standing Rock I got to know perspectives and ways of life that have been passed down over thousands of years, that was a great gift. It was also exciting for me to observe that some things are sometimes similar to those in my community, Tamera.

Overall, this trip, through the many people we met and who want to change something positive in the world, gave me a lot of hope and motivation. And I hope that we also left a little bit of that for the people we met.



Arion

One thing that changed within me during the trip is that I have a greater awareness of how lucky I am and that there are a lot of people who have a hard time. We have heard many life stories from other young people, and most of them were not very beautiful. For example, they don't have everything they need, so some don't have enough food and water. Friends and relatives have already died of cancer or committed suicide. This even leads to the fact that children want to commit suicide themselves. And I always have enough food and water in Tamera, and nobody I know very well has died. I never ever thought about committing suicide.



Anita

And then, suddenly, the trip was over. Somehow time had passed quickly, and we still experienced a lot. I forgot a bit how what I was like before the trip because I just grew along, for example, I just so often spoke to people in English that it is much easier for me now.

I noticed that our youth group grew very close together on the trip and I can no longer imagine that it was different before.

The trip also showed me how important and good the work is that we do here in Tamera, and I can appreciate it much



Anita

more. I noticed what a gift it is to always have someone who is there for you, to be able to say how you feel and to simply have a supportive environment. I think to see that, I had to get out of Tamera and see a different lifestyle. For me, Tamera was pretty much everything I knew, and it was normal for me to live in community.

I also noticed that I now have much more of an impulse to stay in Tamera longer and to learn even more who I am before, if at all, I go to study in Germany.

I learned a lot on the trip:  
I got to know the luxurious lifestyle of many Americans, which was very cool for a week, but I can't imagine living that way all the time.

I saw that the people from the USA, although they always look very cool, actually often have a horrible background story and only build a protective wall around themselves. I got to know the descendants of the country's Indigenous people and saw how they live today. They often live in very difficult conditions and I would have loved to be able to immediately change their life situation.

Thinking that there are so many people who know how they live and don't even try to help them, I wondered how they are able to do that. How can you ignore how Indigenous people live today? By seeing how they live, I wondered how in the past the whites could just drive them away so cruelly and didn't understand that they were destroying a beautiful culture and the country.

I visited two Tamera partner projects and was so relieved to see that there are more people who share the same vision as we do.

I learned how challenging it can be to be with the same people for 6 weeks, but also how well you know each other

afterwards.

I am so thankful that I was able to be part of this trip and get an insight into the world.

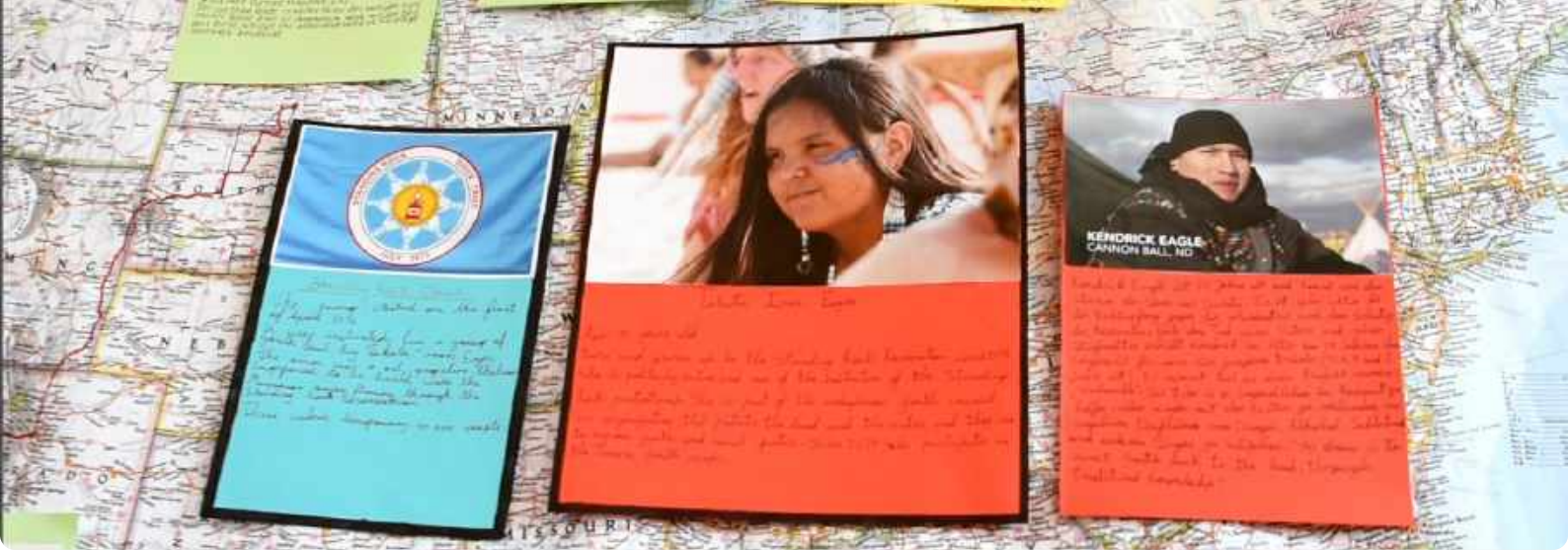
Thanks to the youth leaders who led us so beautifully through this time. And a huge thank you to the community in which I was allowed to grow up and which made it possible to realize the trip in the first place.

I also want to thank those we stayed with on the trip and who were so open and welcoming.

Thanks to the pilots who flew us safely every now and then.

And lastly, thanks to the fossil fuels who made it possible to cross the Atlantic and drive from Los Angeles to Standing Rock and back. I will plant a lot of trees as compensation 😊





## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank everyone who made the trip possible and enriched us with many gifts. The journey would not have been possible without you:

Lori Woodley  
 Dave Langendorff  
 Seppi Dabringer  
 Christine Powers  
 Gabe Powers  
 William BrownOtter  
 Rory Cumming  
 "All It Takes" Team  
 Kendrick Eagle  
 Sam Deboskey  
 Brendan Clarke  
 Sharon Shay Sloan  
 Teena Pugliese  
 La Donna Bravebull Allard  
 Tokata Iron Eyes  
 Michael Gayton  
 Malikye Gayton  
 Gloria White Bull  
 Haylee Rae Weddell

John Buckley  
 Phylis Young  
 Denise McCay  
 Indigenous Youth Council  
 Standing Rock  
 Sitting Bull Visitor Center  
 United Tribes College  
 Sacred Stone Community  
 Jared Galvin  
 Josh Diaz  
 Miah Canku Maza  
 Rannone Canku Maza  
 Dwayne Redwater  
 "Cricket"  
 John RedLegs  
 Gigi Coyle  
 Win Phelps  
 Kate Bunney  
 Tamera community