**Mass Media Has Failed Us—Once Again**

Today’s headlines about CNN commentator Donna Brazile’s leak of debate questions to presidential candidate Hillary Clinton underscores once again the entanglement of mass media with the institutions of power. Hiding behind “balance,” CNN instead pandered to both parties. Brazile was CNN’s link to the Democratic power base, while Corey Lewandowski has given them access to the renegade Republican, Donald Trump. Lost in this power grab was any attempt to provide news.

CNN stands out for its transparent attempt to partner with power centers. The embrace of power by other arms of mass media is less obvious but no less present. A striking case in point is the current fight against the Dakota Access Pipeline at Standing Rock.

**The Worst Mass Media Failure This Season? Standing Rock**

If you only read mass media, you probably have not seen or heard anything about the Standing Rock story. Briefly, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers granted a permit to Energy Transfer Partners LLC to construct a pipeline designed to run from the Bakken oil fields in North Dakota to a port in Patoka, Illinois. The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe has protested that the pipeline will pass through (and destroy) burial sites and other sacred grounds, as well as contaminate their reservation’s drinking water if it breaks. They are being joined by climate change activists who also protested the Keystone Pipeline, and are against any effort to increase production and use of fossil fuels.

In August 2016, the Standing Rock tribe called on Native Americans around the country to join them at a camp on their reservation. Over 1000 Native Americans arrived at the camp in September, joined by climate change protesters. On Saturday September 3, pipeline workers attacked protesters. On September 8, Democracy Now’s Amy Goodman was issued an arrest warrant for criminal trespass in the course of her reporting.

Goodman’s arrest made news at mass media outlets, but only because they shrink from the arrest of any journalist. Despite that arrest, the protest has received almost no mass media coverage (except a [CNN story](http://www.cnn.com/2016/10/29/us/dakota-pipeline-standing-rock-sioux/index.html) that incorrectly suggests the majority of Standing Rock Sioux don’t want the protesters there).

**Independent News Outlets on the Forefront**

The mass media has failed to cover Standing Rock. Why? Is it because Native Americans don’t make up a large percentage of their viewing audience? Because North Dakota is an underpopulated state without a large market? Or because corporate and mainstream party political interests did not want media to draw mass attention to this protest in support of Native rights and against fossil fuels?

While mass media was silent, independent and community media have stepped up. Local indigenous media outlets including [CBCNews](http://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous)[, Indian Country Today](http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/), and [Red Power Media](https://redpowermedia.wordpress.com/) were early to the scene, telling their own stories. What must become better known is how well independent news has covered the Dakota pipeline story, starting before the current protest even assembled.

**Truthout** has covered the Standing Rock reservation since 2011, with stories on the tribe’s housing shortage as well as its efforts to revitalize the Lakota language. [Starting in May 2016](http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/35859-lakota-lead-the-fight-against-the-dakota-access-pipeline), Truthout has published 79 stories on the Lakota efforts against the Dakota pipeline.

**Democracy Now!** has a long history of covering Native American movements. They first reported on Standing Rock [on August 18, 2016](http://www.democracynow.org/2016/8/18/stopping_the_snake_indigenous_protesters_shut), and Amy Goodman went on site by September 4.

**Yes! magazine** got on the story in August 22, 2016, with [3 Reasons the Standing Rock Sioux Can Stop the Dakota Access Pipeline](http://www.yesmagazine.org/people-power/3-reasons-the-standing-rock-sioux-can-stop-the-dakota-access-pipeline-20160822). They have since published 36 stories on the protest, including several from Lakota leaders.

**In These Times** started publishing original reporting on the Dakota pipeline in August. On October 17 they came out with a six month investigation into [police killings of Native Americans](http://inthesetimes.com/features/native_american_police_killings_native_lives_matter.html), a related story that underscores the continued abuse of Native peoples as well as Native lands.

Along with these outlets, there has been terrific reporting on the Standing Rock protests by [Colorlines](https://www.colorlines.com/articles/icymi-company-behind-dakota-access-pipeline-suing-tribal-chairman), [AlterNet](http://www.alternet.org/environment/clear-evidence-emerges-outrageous-militarized-police-collaboration-mining-companies), [High Country News](http://www.hcn.org/articles/dakota-access-pipeline), [Mother Jones](http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/10/standing-rock-protests-pipeline-police-tasers-teargas), [Grist](http://grist.org/justice/after-525-years-its-time-to-actually-listen-to-native-americans/), [Earth Island Journal](http://www.earthisland.org/journal/index.php/elist/eListRead/standing_rock_notes_from_the_field/), [The Real News Network](http://therealnews.com/t2/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=31&Itemid=74&jumival=17545), [The Laura Flanders Show](http://www.lauraflanders.com/?video=hAZEZa3yd6s), [Free Speech Radio News](https://fsrn.org/2016/10/crow-creek-sioux-cut-ties-with-south-dakota-over-police-deployment-to-pipeline-protests/), [Public News Service](http://www.publicnewsservice.org/2016-09-14/environment/colorado-groups-join-national-pipeline-protest/a54028-1), [New America Media](http://newamericamedia.org/2016/10/the-american-people-are-paying-attention-to-indian-country---why-doesnt-congress.php), [Waging Nonviolence](http://wagingnonviolence.org/feature/support-standing-rock-confront-means-live-stolen-land/), and [The Nation](https://www.thenation.com/article/this-isnt-the-first-time-cowboys-have-tried-to-plunder-640-million-acres-of-public-land/), among others.

**The Power of Independents**

Independent news outlets cover stories like Standing Rock because they don’t owe anything to corporate owners or advertisers. They don’t need to prop up the major political parties because they have no favors they need granted from politicians. All independents need is support from their communities.

For that reason, independents are on big stories far sooner than mass media, stay with them longer, and often go deeper. They prove that journalism has a strong future—if we are willing to support it.

If you care about journalism, stop getting your news from Google and Facebook, from cable TV or corporate radio. Instead, seek out and find a couple of independent news sites that cover stories that interest you. Read them, tweet them, and give them your support.