

Treaty defenders face off against Trump at Mount Rushmore

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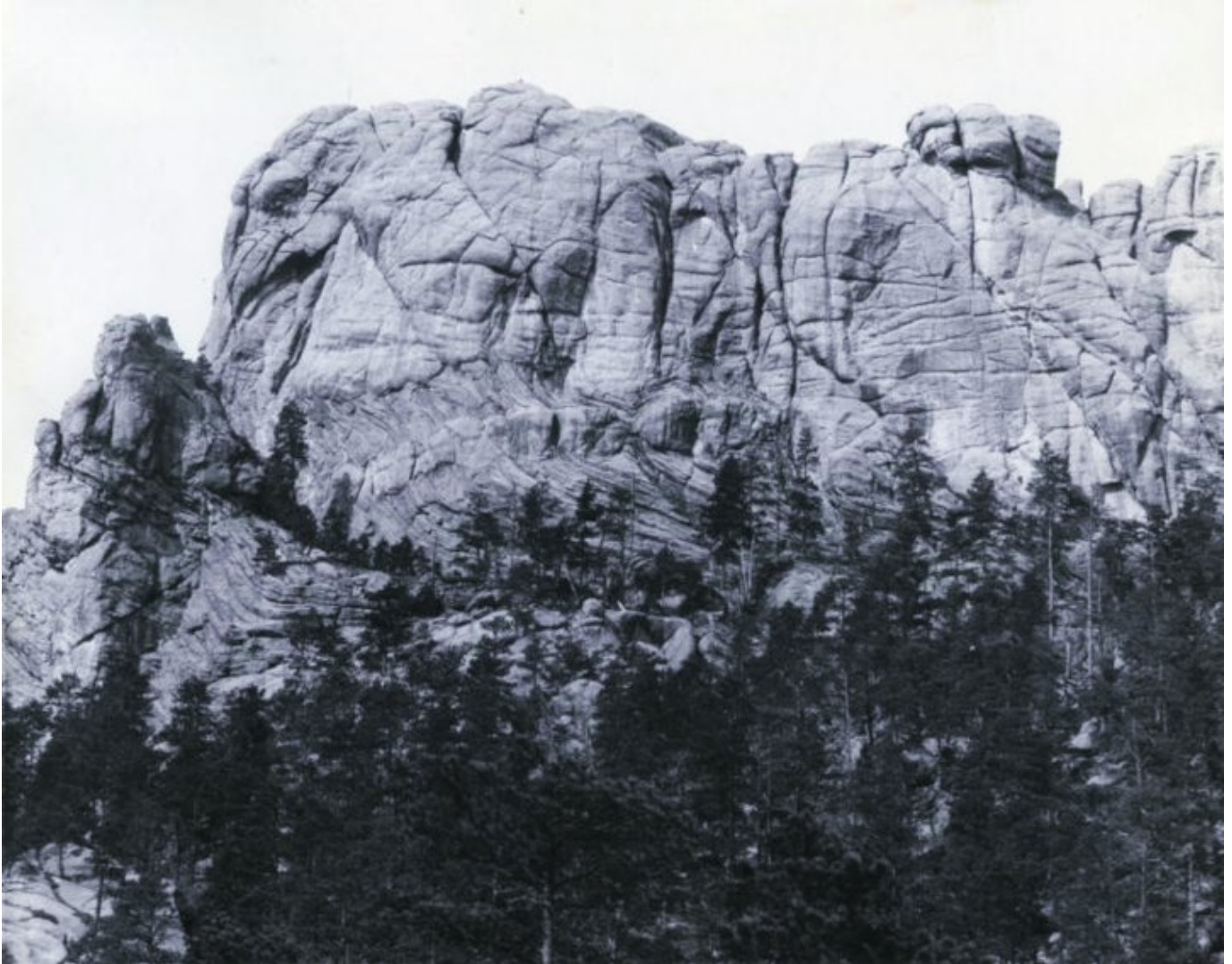
Indigenous land defenders blockade highway to Mount Rushmore, June 3. Photo: Indian Country Today

On July 3, more than a hundred Indigenous and allied land defenders stood for hours and blocked a South Dakota highway leading to Mount Rushmore in advance of a scheduled speech and rally by President Donald Trump at the U.S. national monument carved into stolen land. Led largely by Lakota and other Native youth, the heroic defenders faced off against police in riot gear in front of them.

The treaty defenders parked white vans across the road to ensure the road would stay blocked for some time even after they were arrested. They later removed the wheels, climbed on top of the vans, and shouted, “Land back!” Several were arrested. Through it all, they also were confronted by rabid Trump supporters who were angry that they were not able to get through to attend the rally.

Nick Tilson of the NDN Collective said the group had “reclaimed the road,” which is on stolen treaty land. “We don’t need them to give us permission to do this on our land.”

Krystal Two Bulls said, “We need to be bringing out the roots of what we’re talking about. This country was founded on white supremacy,” including the genocide of Native people and slave labor of Black people.



The Six Grandfathers before it was defaced.

Trump's rally in the Black Hills was a direct attack on Lakota and other Indigenous people who hold the area sacred and hold clear treaty rights to the area, just as his visit to Tulsa, Okla., near the Juneteenth holiday was a clear attack on Black people.

Mount Rushmore — known as the Six Grandfathers — is part of the sacred Black Hills. The U.S. has refused to honor treaties for the area since gold was discovered there in 1874 by an Army expedition led by Gen. George Custer. Uranium was later

discovered and mined by corporations.

In the 20th century, the Six Grandfathers were defaced when the Mount Rushmore monument to white supremacy was created by a Klu Klux Klan member. Two of the presidents carved into the mountain were slave owners (Jefferson and Washington), another (Lincoln) approved the hanging of 40 Native men in the largest mass execution in U.S. history, and the last (Theodore Roosevelt) was an imperialist and staunch believer in white racial superiority. All four presidents held anti-Native and other racist views.

The treaty defenders demanded that Mount Rushmore be removed and the Black Hills returned to the Lakota. In advance of Trump's rally, Oglala Lakota tribal chair Bear Runner publicly said that the people did not give permission for Trump to enter into the Black Hills.

Like many other Native people, Bear Runner believes that Mount Rushmore needs to come down. "I don't believe it should be blown up, because it would cause more damage to the land. But there are other methods to take down the monument that would have less environmental impact."



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