

## Adopting Journalism for Social Justice

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Cover photo by Mark Maxey, Aida Camp, Palestinian Refugee Camp, graffiti on the Israeli Separation Wall.

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## 15 is too young for life without parole, especially if you're innocent

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LITTLE, Okla.—“Daddy, I didn’t do it,” said Robert Mitchell to his father. Robert didn’t blink an eye when he answered Charles “Gabby” Mitchell’s question. Had Robert Wayne Mitchell, 15 years of age on September 4, 1992, murdered 90-year-old neighbor Myrtle McGeehee? The boy did not lie, but Oklahoma justice fell short for this Native Indigenous Seminole lad.

### A boy grows up in Indian Country

Little, Oklahoma, is a rural, sparsely inhabited community in the northern part of Seminole County. It sits some 16 or 18 miles due south of Prague, Okla., on the Interstate 40 corridor. If you drive along Oklahoma Highway 99-A you see run-down, some abandoned, mobile homes, a few dilapidated barns, and a few nicer homes. Most houses are square Indian homes sitting on the Seminole Nation boundary. The only school is Strother, which has very few students compared to most metropolitan schools.

Robert had grown up around his paternal grandmother, Lottie Mitchell, who mostly spoke the Seminole/Creek language. Robert would have to

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answer in English very slowly or she would not understand. For any young Indian boy, the tribal stomp dances and church meetings are the only social outlets. Tribal stomp dances for the Mississippian Mound tribes are an ancient ceremony. A central fire sets in the middle of three willow branch brush arbors. The arbors are sitting areas for boys and men in the West, North and South. The East is open. The fire is lit promptly at sunset and stays lit till sunrise. The men lead the tribal language songs with women keeping time with turtle shell shakers laced around their legs. They dance counter clockwise with 5-10 minute songs all throughout the night. This is the custom Robert grew up with at the Snake Creek stomp grounds.

Robert was raised traditionally by his father, Charles, and grandmother Lottie. His maternal grandfather, Tony Hill, was a traditionalist medicine man. Being raised traditionally hinges upon respecting elders, using cedar and sage for prayers, and respecting all of life. Especially all things created by the Creator, as traditionalists say instead of God, Buddha, Brahman, etc. Creator is the one who started all of life.

Robert would be described as a well groomed, shy, but respectful young man. In fact, the respect for elders would play a role in his relationship with the nonagenarian Myrtle McGeehee. “Many times he would mow her yard, get her mail, or do other kind of tasks,” Pearl Seaboy, Robert’s younger half-sister says. “He would open doors for elders, say yes ma’am or no sir; he was what you would call a traditional teenager in Indian circles.”

Robert met his first girlfriend, Beatrice Fry, while attending several stomp dances. In her affidavit to the court in 1992, she states:

“I met Robert in May of 1992 but I’ve seen him before at an indoor stomp dance at Glenpool (Okla.). He asked my name—well, his cousin asked my name. I couldn’t tell my name because I was a shy person. In May I saw him at Arbeka stomp ground and I told my cousin, Zoe Tiger, to go ask if his name is Robert.”

They exchanged addresses and began to write to each other. Over a short course of time, through letter writing, the two young Indigenous teenagers were “going together.” With Robert’s calling card, Beatrice was able to call long distance to speak with him. They would end their phone calls by saying “I love you” to each other.

Lottie Mitchell would spend quality time with her grandson Robert. She and his father taught him the essence of traditional Indian ethics. His family, and even friends at school, would describe him as shy, timid, and highly respectful. Though Robert learned the Seminole/Creek language and was able to understand what his grandmother said, he would respond in English. It was a symbiotic relationship: Especially in Oklahoma Native families, elders and grandparents raise and educate the children. It is customary for grandchildren to be around their grandmother often. Respect of elders, taking care of family first, and learning cultural ceremonies: These were a daily part of Robert's life.

On September 4th, 1992, Robert's entire understanding of life would collapse around him. The incident would haunt him for over 25 years: The murder of his next-door neighbor, Myrtle McGeehee, would not only affect Robert, but his whole family enclave forever.

### A tragic miscarriage of justice

"Guilty!" would ring out upon the ears of a hushed courtroom a year later, on September 23, 1993. "I could not understand or figure out how my 17-year-old son is guilty," Charles Mitchell says. Robert Mitchell was just as confused. "I mean, there was no evidence produced except a sock with one speck of blood on it," Charles states. Even the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation (OSBI) agent, Bruce Richard Spence, said that he could not conclusively state anything. A miscarriage of justice happened that day upon yet another Indigenous Indian in Oklahoma. So many errors played a role in Robert's conviction.



*Robert Mitchell's father, Charles, during an interview with People's World. | Mark Maxey / PW*

"My mother, Lottie, if she had trouble sleeping would wake Robert up to sit with her on the front porch," Charles Mitchell says. "On that night, they saw a light on at Myrtle's house, and she (Lottie) asked Robert to go check on her. Robert told me he walked over the road and down the north side fence line to walk up Myrtle's driveway." A walk so familiar to Robert

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from his many times going over to assist her. Yet this walk tonight forever changed history for this 15-year-old boy. When he peeked into her window he saw her lying on the floor surrounded by blood.

“This is where it gets very confusing,” Pearl Seaboy exclusively said to People’s World. Pearl is Robert’s half-sister, ten years younger. She also grew up away from Robert, which is typical for many Indian families with step-children. “Some of the newspaper accounts say Robert walked into the house,” Pearl explains. “Yet Robert has always told me, he just peeked into her window. And it is so traditional in Robert’s response to call Ms. McGeehee’s son first.”

Many of the details of what occurred that September night are cloudy on numerous points. The murder, where Robert was living with his grandmother next-door, took place on sovereign Indian land. It falls under the jurisdiction of the federal government. Tribal lighthorsemen arrived at Lottie’s residence, asking to fetch Robert for the local Wewoka, Okla., sheriff. They spoke so fast, that in her lack of fully understanding English Robert was snatched away by the tribal police. They drove him to McGeehee’s house about 70 yards from Lottie’s house. Robert was kept in the sheriff’s car for 11 hours with no guardian or attorney present.

“I was called at work to come home in the early hours that night,” Charles Mitchell said. “When I came home and my mother explained what was happening, my first thought was to call an attorney.” The attorney told me “to go over and ask if they were going to charge him, and if not that he must be released.”

Earlier in the night, Robert was at a stomp dance until around midnight. “He went with the Miller family who lived nearby,” Charles states. “The Millers were members of Snake Creek Baptist Church where we attended too. They also took Robert, as the two older sons, helping Robert learn of his culture at stomp dances.”

For 11 hours Robert would sit in the back seat of the sheriff’s car with no water, no food, and no legal representation. Once Charles stated his demands, the Assistant District Attorney filed charges. Robert was whisked away to sit in a jail cell, all alone, and quite perplexed. A May 16, 1993, report from the Seminole Producer beautifully describes his situation inside a cell.



During the course of leading up to trial, many bizarre truths would bring Robert's situation into a whirlwind of confusion. First, the only evidence—which proves nothing—was a drop of blood on Robert's sock that he wore September 4th, 1992. "The OSBI agent stated on record that he could not specify if the fractional droplet of blood was human or animal," Pearl Seaboy states. "Later DNA analysis would prove that it did not belong to Ms. McGeehee at all. They never found to this day the murder weapon."

"The sheriff arrived at my house, went through Robert's belongings and took my hunting knives as evidence," Charles said exclusively to People's World. "Later I checked the court files and evidence and there is no search warrant at all." The knives would prove that they had not been used in the stabbing death of Myrtle McGeehee. "The whole time it seemed they were pinning it all upon my boy while never really looking for the rightful suspect."

"They even drug the pond behind Robert's home and found nothing," Pearl Seaboy states. "It amazes me why they never followed up with trying to find the person responsible."

Charles said around 2 am Lottie noticed a light on and asked Robert to go see if anything was wrong. "I asked Robert later before the trial exactly how he walked to McGeehee's home. Robert looked me in the eye without blinking and said how he walked. And he said he didn't do it." In the Seminole Producer October 28, 1992, Charles said this: "Any 15 year old boy accused of this crime would run. He didn't run, went and called (McGeehee's) relatives. He didn't run and he didn't know what was going on until they accused him."

Charles also knew it was not possible for Robert to do this. "In the past, when he done something wrong, he'd run," Charles says. On this occasion, though, "he looked at me just like he always does, straight at me, and said, 'Dad, I didn't do it.' He didn't even blink an eye."

The light next door was bright, as though it could be made by a car. Both Lottie and Robert saw the bright light, saw a car, and heard the dogs barking. No investigation into this car nor any other suspect other than Robert was investigated.

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“There was no evidence at all during this trial, just an old sock with untold origins of the drop of blood,” Charles states. “They never allowed Robert’s legal investigators into the house for their own investigation or scientific examinations.”

Robert Mitchell even submitted his own affidavit asking for specific requests. The requests are well within the bounds of a defendant’s right, but were ignored by the courts. Some of the requests were for police county logs, arrest reports, and the court order for his investigators to enter the victim’s home. Yet these legal requests would fall upon deaf ears.

Even more bizarre is the role of William Peterson, the district attorney at this time in Seminole County. Peterson is the DA in John Grisham’s book *The Innocent Man*. Peterson has convicted many innocent persons during his career. His role in Robert’s conviction is on very shaky ground. Several persons wrongly convicted by Peterson have been subsequently released.

Robert was released after 90 days held at a juvenile detention center. “He was so happy to be out, but you could tell all this was affecting him,” Charles sighed. A note that the family has held on to speaks of the nightmares Robert suffered.

The only evidence entered by Peterson in the trial is one sock, with questionable data on whose or what type of blood it is. No murder weapon was found. No other leads that the defendant’s family or attorney provided were ever checked out. In fact, in an affidavit by Minnie Mitchell, Robert’s step-mother at the time, she even questions why the prosecution won’t allow a lie detector test that Robert sought. Robert also had been at a stomp dance at the time in question when the murder took place. How a jury could find this mild-mannered teenage Indigenous boy guilty defies logic.

An ordinary, breezy autumn Oklahoma night. Dogs barking, a car pulling away from the neighbor’s house. An elderly lady’s house lights on around 3 am. A quick peek into a window to check on her. Local sheriff’s office investigating upon sovereign Indian land instead of federal presence. And a 15-year-old boy’s life is forever and traumatically changed.

**A sister’s love could free him**

## Mark Maxey

“I just want to know the truth, the real killer is out there,” Pearl Seaboy states. “My brother has been in prison for 25 years as an innocent man.” Pearl is now seeking Indigenous support for her brother’s Post Conviction Relief hearing on May 9, 2018.

Her tireless work not only seeks justice both for her brother Robert, but for the family of the victim. “I mean, the real killer is out there: This case needs to be solved with a real investigation,” Seaboy pleads. “There are so many unanswered questions and so much is wrong with the case. It is just wrong to convict an innocent 15-year-old boy.”

Yet the family of the victim has pursued Seaboy for her actions on behalf of her brother. “I had to go to the police and report the threats and harassment her family has given me.” Pearl’s determination to release her brother and reopen the investigation is a daily job for her. She exhibits a true warrior spirit. “I want these questions answered, especially who really did kill Myrtle McGeehee.”

“The Innocence Project wants to look into my brother’s case. They have two other cases similar to my brother’s which would be beneficial for all,” Seaboy tells People’s World. “Many Indigenous youth and adults are always getting treated wrongfully by the justice system. Someone needs to speak up for these forgotten warriors.”

A Post Conviction Relief hearing is a method for legal relief after a conviction above and beyond the appeal process. This allows a collateral challenge to a judgment of conviction that might have been finalized in the course of a normal appellate review process.



*A rural road in the town of Little in Seminole County, Oklahoma. | Mark Maxey / PW*

Robert is challenging his conviction of CRF-1993-00100 in Seminole County in Oklahoma. The hearing will be held in Wewoka,

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Okla., at 2:30 pm on May 9th, in front of Judge George W. Butner. AIM-Indian Territory and Red Dirt Defense will be there along with other Indigenous individuals and groups. The event is strictly for support, it is not a protest.

Pearl Seaboy said, “Robert has held on to his innocence this whole time. So on May 9, we are asking everyone to pack the courtroom and courthouse in support of Robert.” The plan, she goes on to say, is to show the legal system we will not take any more harassment, bullying, injustice toward our people, our children, to stand up for our constitutional rights and to make sure the law—the justice system, DA, Assistant DA and cops—are adhering to them as well.

This is not the first time Seaboy has had issues with the legal system. She has witnessed first-hand the kinds of abusive tactics law enforcement uses on Indigenous and other persons of color. The Prison Policy Initiative in 2010 reports by racial/ethnic group the numbers per 100,000 people as follows: 767 were white/Caucasian, 1876 were Hispanic, 3796 were African American, and 1059 were American Indian/Alaska Native. By far, persons of color are more likely to be incarcerated in Oklahoma than people who are white.

The FBI, BIA and DEA began to stalk and follow posts on Pearl’s Facebook page. One of her “friends” on Facebook used to be incarcerated and knew her brother Robert. “I mean, I don’t judge, I just accepted the friend without even really knowing or talking with the person,” Seaboy states. “Yet I was approached by these agencies in a very intimidating manner.”

In a room all alone with the three agents, they began to drill and question Pearl. “They wanted me to take drugs inside a prison and try to find out who the ringleader was. I never used drugs nor been involved in anything like what they proposed. All this intimidation based upon a social media friendship without me really being real-life friends.”

The FBI, DEA and BIA even went so far as to state that if Pearl tried to visit her brother in McAlester State Prison they would arrest her. “This is why the May 9th event is so important to me. People don’t know how the police and agencies harass and use power over persons of color,” Seaboy said.

“There was a lot of racism going on in Oklahoma toward Indians back in

1992 and 1993. There still is racism going on. It is the continuance of the genocide perpetrated upon my people for centuries,” Seaboy states.

Seaboy concluded the interview on several points. First, DA William Peterson has abused his power before in prosecuting innocent persons. He also said before the trial that he would be seeking the death penalty. This type of behavior before a trial taints the jury trial. “I have questions and so does my family that were never answered in 1993. Evidence was not collected and they convicted my brother wrongfully,” Seaboy said. “I want to show the judge on May 9th that my brother has a support system. All Indigenous people showing up will show the support my brother has.”

## Robert Mitchell case: Delayed justice might be the answer

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WEWOKA, Okla.—As Charles Mitchell hung his head in sweltering heat outside the Seminole County Courthouse, he wept. “I was so glad to see him, just to be a few feet away,” he sobbed. “But it hurt so deeply to see him sitting by himself in chains.”

Robert Mitchell was brought to Wewoka jail mid-afternoon on Tuesday, May 8, for his Post Conviction Relief hearing. Twenty-five years ago he sat inside a cell there. Surely this was disquieting for him. Twenty-five years ago, he was 15 years old.

Robert’s step-sister Pearl Seaboy used social media for Indigenous people to come out to support Robert. About 65 folks from all over Oklahoma came to Wewoka at the Seminole County Courthouse. Wewoka is about 16 miles due south of I-40 and about 30 miles southeast of Prague, Okla., on Highway 56. The Natives there lined the court to an overflowing capacity. The 65 were all in pews with only 14 of the murder victim’s family members. The police expected something, with their 11 officers placed all over the court. Yet the Native people silently were there for Robert. Robert smiled knowing he finally had folks behind him.

Pearl Seaboy said, “I actually seen him walk in the courthouse downstairs. I just stood there and watched till he got on the elevator. I waved and he smiled and I wanted to cry, but I was happy he was there for his own hearing. It’s just hard knowing they took 25 years of his life.”

I can tell you I caught myself fighting back tears, as I saw Robert sitting in a bright orange jumpsuit. Big black lettering on his back stated: INMATE. So degrading. In my mind, I reviewed the pictures of him at 15 years of age, and now today he’s 41. So much of his life has been stolen from him.

In my previous article, I mentioned the Miller family who had taken Robert under their wing with his traditional and spiritual training. Members of the Miller family who took Robert to many a stomp ground were present at the hearing today. “My mom that was sitting beside me was Carol Miller,” said a Miller family spokesperson who asked to remain anonymous due to her job security. “We are the Miller family that you wrote about in your article. My mom and dad kept Robert. He went to stomp dances with us. We are the family he was with when he was away from his dad and grandma. You know, it is so emotional for me,” she admitted about being there and seeing Robert again.

The hearing started about 3 pm on Wednesday, May 9th. Robert’s attorney, D. Michael Haggerty III, at the beginning asked for a sidebar with the Hon. Judge George W. Butner and District Attorney Paul Smith, who was the Assistant DA during the original 1994 trial. The discussion reverberated softly off the granite walls for what seemed to be thirty minutes.

Around 3:30 pm the discussion ended. The judge told Robert Mitchell and the 80 people in the courtroom that a new trial would be held.

A KFOR television reporter stated, “Now, the family is hoping some recent United States Supreme Court rulings can help get him released.” Such rulings, said DA Paul Smith, stipulate “that life without parole was not appropriate punishment for juvenile killers.”

The only evidence—a bloody sock and shoe—were never tested for DNA.

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“There was no DNA evidence, you know, there was so much that was missing from his original hearing and why he got such a harsh punishment at the age of 15,” said Seaboy.

A pre-trial hearing is set for June 13, with a new trial to begin in November.

Seaboy told People’s World that Robert’s attorney would now for the first time be able “to review Robert’s Juvenile Court evidence file.”



*Robert Mitchell arrives at the Seminole County Courthouse in Wewoka, Okla. for his hearing, May 9. | Marx Maxey / PW*

My first article brought some challenges off of social media. Zzfaf on Reddit stated:

“The Seminole Producer newspaper had a big article on it April 29th.

Kids bloody footprints were near body. His shoe had her blood on them as well as a rag in his laundry basket. His socks had a bloody knife imprint wiped on them. His story changed with each new piece of evidence. Frankly the comments saying 15 year olds don’t know right from wrong are just BS. For those wanting him released, let him live next door to your grandmother this time.”

Charles Mitchell said exclusively to People’s World, “No, that is not correct. I was at my boy’s trial, and the only evidence admitted was a sock with speck of blood.”

“First I’ve heard of it, and it’s not truthful,” Seaboy said. She was speaking to the remarks of a bloody rag found in a laundry basket and his sock having a bloody knife imprint. “What they said is just not the facts.”





*Local supporters of Robert Mitchell outside the Seminole County Courthouse in Wewoka, Okla., May 9. People's World reporter Mark Maxey is at center with raised fist. | People's World*

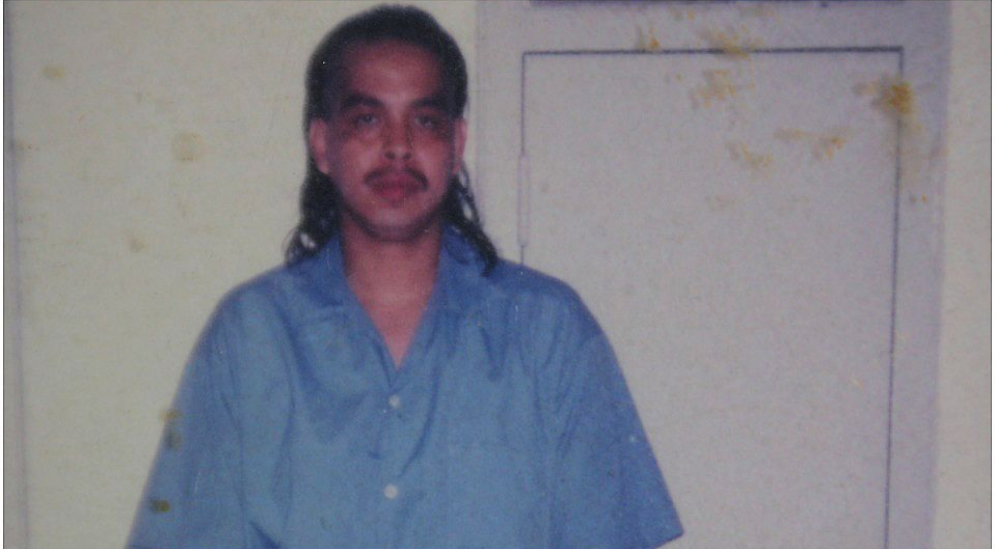
This People's World reporter is investigating the discovery evidence with the Seminole County Court Clerk's office.

The Evidence Facts of Conviction has yet to arrive at press time. Robert's father, Charles, stated once again that the only evidence entered in the trial was a sock.

People's World will be at the hearing in June and the subsequent new trial. With over 60 Indigenous folks engaged, a fresh air of justice is in the air for a wrongfully convicted Indigenous man. Robert Mitchell has had a quarter-century of his life stolen from him. Freedom is the first step of healing.

## Robert Mitchell: Indigenous teen robbed of 25 years and counting by racist justice

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LITTLE, Okla.—“My attorney was sleeping during the DA’s questions and I had to shake him awake twice,” Robert Mitchell related exclusively to People’s World. Mitchell’s life was ripped away at the tender age of 15, and now at 41 years of age, he is seeking justice.

Previous articles by this author gained information by interviewing his sister, Pearl Seaboy and his father, Charles Mitchell. This time, for the first time, Robert got to tell his side. Interestingly, at no time before, even back in 1994, was he ever given a snowball’s chance in hell to tell his own story. Extensive investigative journalism for the past month has turned up enough solid proof that he is innocent and railroaded by the then Assistant District Attorney Paul Smith, who is now DA for Seminole County, Oklahoma.

Smith is now part of the State’s response to Mitchell’s Post Relief Conviction hearing taking place in 2018. Sloppy police work, shoddy reports, and unreliable information were used to convict an innocent Indigenous teenager in 1994. The whole trial transcript reeks of constitutional rights violations, illegal actions by the DA and ADA, and a

racist community railroading yet again another Indigenous youth.

“I tried to fire my attorney then, Pyron, three times, but the judge never allowed it,” Mitchell said. “As well the DA Peterson came to my cell, where I had no legal representation, nor parents present, and asked me to drop the filing of Bill of Particulars for my preliminary hearing.” The DA at the time, William Peterson, used devious actions upon a naive innocent teenager with no clue what was happening. “An attorney at the time, who is now a judge, said if he had gone to a preliminary hearing, more than likely he would have been found innocent, as there is no ounce of evidence in the file,” Mitchell sighed.



*The Mitchell home. | Mark Maxey*

Mitchell did request evidence on February 18, 1993, but again his request fell upon deaf ears inside the Seminole County justice system.

“Neither my attorney nor the judge allowed my investigators to review the crime scene. By the time this came up, the crime scene had been demolished,” Mitchell said of constitutional rights violations by Seminole County justice system.

“I had requested a lie detector test, and both my attorney and DA would not allow it.” Robert’s stepmother, Minnie Mitchell, at the time submitted an affidavit to this effect as well.

When the police confronted Robert’s grandmother, asking if they could take him away to question him, she reportedly said yes. However, she only spoke Muskoke (Muscogee) or Seminole and hardly understood any English. “Yes, my grandmother (Lottie) spoke native tongue first, she had a hard time understanding any English,” Robert said, in an exclusive telephone interview. “She would always speak in her native tongue to other Indigenous persons. She constantly would say ‘huh’ when they spoke

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English,” Robert said. In a previous story, her son, Robert’s dad, Charles, stated the same thing. “My mom did not speak much if any English, and she sure did not understand it (English) that much,” Charles stated to People’s World. Robert Mitchell was held, questioned and detained in the backseat of a police car with no guardian nor any attorney present for approximately 11 hours.

The Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation filed this report in the case. Yet on the witness stand, the OSBI agent testified that there was just a trace of unrecognizable blood which he was not able to conclusively say was human or animal. During the course of leading up to the trial, many bizarre truths would bring Robert’s situation into a whirlwind of confusion. First, the only evidence—which proves nothing—was a drop of blood on Robert’s sock that he wore September 4, 1992. “The OSBI agent stated on record that he could not specify if the fractional droplet of blood was human or animal,” Pearl Seaboy states. “Later DNA analysis would prove that it did not belong to Ms. McGeehee at all. They never found to this day the murder weapon.”

As well, Robert was charged with burglary, but in the testimony from the transcript, no one can say if anything was missing. The OSBI also did not test the substance of what they claim was blood on the shoe worn by Robert, they simply assumed. The agent testified further that no fingerprints could be established as those of Robert Mitchell inside the house.

The local Seminole Producer newspaper interviewed Robert on May 16, 1993. In the article, Robert describes a person and a car that were seen leaving the scene of the murder. At no time did the police or anyone follow up on that. And the fact that her house was burglarized months before the murder, no one ever followed up on that either.



Lottie Mitchell. | Photo courtesy of the Mitchell Family.

“I am wanting my story, from me, out to the public through the media,” Robert Mitchell said. “I want People’s World to be the first media source, and then all media from there. Never before has my story been written about. For so long my legal counsel has not wanted media attention, but I’m innocent.”

A 15-year-old boy was held in the back of the police car for 11 hours with no guardian nor attorney present. Multiple written testimony was taken under duress. Mitchell’s own investigators were not allowed access to the crime scene for their own scientific investigation. He asked the courts to fire his attorney at least two documented times, all of which was never allowed. Dubious private words with the DA Peterson led to this case going straight to trial when obviously a 15-year-old is not capable of legally agreeing to it. A known person running away from the house where the murder happened and getting into a Ford vehicle was never investigated. All this and so much more illustrates how an Indigenous child was railroaded with a miscarriage of justice.

## Robert Mitchell: In my own words, I just want my freedom!

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McALESTER, Okla.—“I only want my freedom back,” Robert Mitchell wrote. In an exclusive letter sent to People’s World, Robert finally speaks out from prison. “Again thank you for putting my story out there. I do not want to disrespect the victim’s family,” Robert reiterated as he only desires to be free.

In the letter, he describes being raised by his paternal grandparents, Chester and Lottie Mitchell. He grew up in Little, Oklahoma. Little is a rural, sparsely inhabited community in the northern part of Seminole County. It sits some 16 or 18 miles due south of Prague, Okla., on the Interstate 40 corridor. If you drive along Oklahoma Highway 99-A you see run-down, some abandoned, mobile homes, a few dilapidated barns, and a few nicer homes. Most houses are square Indian homes sitting on the Seminole Nation boundary. The only school is Strother, which has very few students compared to most metropolitan schools.

Robert explains growing up around stomp grounds and learning to lead songs during the ceremonies. For any young Indian boy, the tribal stomp dances and church meetings are the only social outlets. Tribal stomp dances for the Mississippian Mound tribes are an ancient ceremony. A central fire sets in the middle of three willow branch brush arbors. The arbors are sitting areas for boys and men in the West, North and South. The East is open. The fire is lit promptly at sunset and stays lit till sunrise. The men lead the tribal language songs with women keeping time with turtle shell shakers laced around their legs. They dance counter clockwise with 5-10 minute songs all throughout the night. This is the custom Robert grew up with at the Snake Creek stomp grounds.

“I met a Native stomp dance leader, he gave me a stomp dance tape that played clear stomp dance songs. He said, ‘Just play and listen’ and in one year he will expect me to lead my songs at the grounds,” Robert wrote. “After 1 year, I felt ready. All the free time I had, I listen to that tape, even walking in the woods behind my grandmother’s home where I go fishing, or just walking in the woods. I was always listening to that tape.”

Robert describes the Miller family who lived nearby as taking him to stomp dances and church each Friday through Sunday. He would spend the nights with them as they had children near his age as well. This reinforced his knowledge of the language and culture of his Indigenous lineage. “Every year from when I was 10 years of age till 14 years old, I stayed with Alan Miller and his family,” Robert said. He goes on to say that these experiences between May through September are where he learned to respect elders. “What I mostly learned from all the elders is respect and patience. I truly respected all elders. I helped them, listen to them, and learned from them.”

Growing up was harsh on Robert. “My grandma and dad didn’t have much money to buy me good (rich) clothes. I had to do odd jobs, like mowing grass, cleaning yards, selling can good. That was my way of getting good clothes or having spending money,” Robert stated.

The night of September 4, 1992, changed Robert’s life forever. “I was on the phone that night with my girlfriend, Beatrice, discussing where we could be going and what grounds was dancing,” Robert emphatically said. “Her stomp grounds was dancing that weekend and asked if I wanted to stay with her and her mother. I said yes, but would have to ask my grandmother.” He goes on to describe how his grandmother came into his room to say dogs were barking towards the dirt road in front of their house. “I told her I did not see anything and she laid back down. A few minutes later the dogs start to bark again but not just our dogs, but the neighbor’s dogs started barking too,” Robert wrote.

“My grandmother called for me, and when I got to her room, she told me she saw a bright light on back of Ms. McGeehee’s home. She told me to check on her,” Robert said. Robert walked over and knocked on her door, but no answer came. “Her reading light was on but she wasn’t sitting in her chair. I looked into her window but no sign of her. I turned (flash) light on and shined through but nothing.”

“I walked toward back of her home when I noticed items on back porch stairs. I got closer and noticed her back door open, I turned flashlight off and walked in,” Robert described. “I turned to right and in her kitchen, she was laying on floor between table and cabinets. I walked around table toward her head, I asked her she was hurt. All I heard was her gasping for

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air.” That was when he heard a noise in the backrooms and he quickly exited and returned home.

“When I told my grandmother what I seen she said for me to call her (Ms. McGeehee’s) son. I called her granddaughter but got no answer. So I called her son and I told him what I saw and for him to come ASAP,” Robert said.

The rest of his letter, which you can read here, reiterates what has previously been reported. At no time did the police or Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation follow up on leads given pointing to an intruder and car driving away. Instead, the police and justice system framed and railroaded a 15-year-old Indigenous boy for a murder he is innocent of.

Robert states honestly, “Do I hate the victim’s family? No, I don’t. Do I forgive them? Yes, I do! I hold no hard feelings toward anybody. That’s not how I was raised. I just want my freedom!”



## Picking up sticks and stones at Woody Fest 2018

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Woody Guthrie Folk Festival, Facebook.

OKEMAH, Okla.—“I am out to sing songs that will prove to you that this is your world and that if it has hit you pretty hard and knocked you for a dozen loops, no matter what color, what size you are, how you are built, I am out to sing the songs that make you take pride in yourself and in your work,” Woody Guthrie said<sup>1</sup>. “And the songs that I sing are made up for the most part by all sorts of folks just about like you.”

In the hometown where Woody grew up, Okemah, Okla, each year around his birthday the Woody Guthrie Folk Festival<sup>2</sup> takes place. It’s sorta an old hippie crowd along with progressive young persons desiring to connect to Woody’s spirit. His guitar proudly embossed the words, “This machine kills fascists.” Woody’s songs and spirit embraced common working people, unions, and civil rights. Now in its 21st year the festival still draws thousands to Okemah to listen to bands, musicians, poets, and dreamers

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.inspiringquotes.us/author/5490-woody-guthrie/songs>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.woodyfest.com/>

## Adopting Journalism for Social Justice

for a better tomorrow.

“My first year playing Woody Fest, well, come to think of it, it was the first festival,” Joel Rafael<sup>3</sup> explains, “I did one of the songs from Woody’s songs that had not been recorded. It was about a lynching in Okemah. So I came to Okemah for the first time to sing about a lynching in Okemah.” The lynching was the Laura Nelson<sup>4</sup> and family, which happened a few years before Woody was born. The song, Don’t kill my baby and my son, is a haunting melody to Woody’s words<sup>5</sup>.

During one of many festivals Joel’s played, a woman of color sat in the audience. Joel was playing at the Crystal Theatre and singing, Don’t kill my baby and my son. A few rows back from where this woman of color was sitting, someone muttered the “n” word directed at her. Jordan Maran Pitzner is from southeastern Wisconsin and was that Black American, as she describes herself. “Couple of things going on, Woody’s song about Laura Nelson and her son<sup>6</sup> that took place here in Okemah,” Jordan says. “Joel was singing this song, and a couple of rows back, I know the “n” word was uttered. It was directed at me, because the song was being sung, and clearly, I was Black, and this small-minded individual saying as if I did not belong there. He wanted to make me feel bad about being a Black woman, as this song was being sung.”

“Joel is an awesome human being. I thanked him for that song,” Jordan continued. “I shared my experience.” Joel took that experience and turned it into the song . “Which this song made me feel like I did belong at Woody Fest.” This song of Joel’s shows how the spirit of Woody Guthrie is still part of the work of these artists—writing songs about ordinary people and their experiences of life.



Crys Matthews. Woody Guthrie Folk Festival, Instagram.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.peoplesworld.org/article/folk-singer-goes-360-for-woodyfest-2018/>

<sup>4</sup> [www.stmuhistorymedia.org/the-lynching-era-the-tragic-hanging-of-laura-and-l-d-nelson/](http://www.stmuhistorymedia.org/the-lynching-era-the-tragic-hanging-of-laura-and-l-d-nelson/)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LyMC6E-6YII>

<sup>6</sup> [http://woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/Dont\\_Kill\\_My\\_Baby\\_and\\_My\\_Son.htm](http://woodyguthrie.org/Lyrics/Dont_Kill_My_Baby_and_My_Son.htm)

“This year it was awesome to see a first at the festival when another person of my heritage was a performing artist (Crys Matthews<sup>7</sup>),” Jordan<sup>8</sup> said exclusively to People’s World. “That was awesome to hear such profound things on the current state of affairs through her music.”

Jordan first came to Woody Fest in 2009 when she married a man who was a festival goer for years. “As a kid, I have sung This Land, by Woody. In my late teens, I heard Arlo Guthrie and his message. The name of Guthrie represents ideals that are a part of what I believe in,” Jordan said. To Jordan coming to Woody Fest has nothing to do with ethnicity but rather the singing, sharing of messages, in line with Woody. That is what it is for many festival goers.

Butch Hancock<sup>9</sup> has been a stable participant of Woody Fest for years. His style of playing and words mimic the simplicity of Woody’s message. His 20-year-old son, Rory Hancock, literally grew up coming to Woody Fest each year. Now Rory is a performer himself and may appear shy, but his virtuoso guitar playing is phenomenal. His mother says Rory plays under the main performer never to upstage them but can play so much more than he shows.



Rory Hancock<sup>10</sup> talked exclusively to People’s World: “I grew up in Terlingua, Texas. I imagine my family brought me here as a child, but I am more aware of being here for the past ten years,” Rory said. “I grew up with what my dad was playing and the other musicians that hung around.”

“The late night jams are very important to me and being a part of other artists jamming. The piano was my first instrument, and dad had me perform with him about seven years ago. Performing with my dad has given me an edge to

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<sup>7</sup> <https://crysmatthews.com/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1KyXrLt5a05lrf7FCId0O0hZmdV0Eoazc>

<sup>9</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Butch\\_Hancock](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Butch_Hancock)

<sup>10</sup> <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1fJWLxxtQnC7DFO35iIZ1IEzaZ1j73-OF>

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stage time,” Rory said.

“Woody’s vocabulary influenced me a lot. Woody in a way may seem quick, rapid, but there is something inspirational. A simple man with his guitar playing songs from his soul,” Rory stated.

David Amram<sup>11</sup> is one of the best known names of participants through the years of Woody Fest. He also has helped mentor young players through the years and Rory is one of them.



Joel Rafael, Woody Guthrie Folk Festival, Instagram.

Part of the Saturday tradition is the Mary Jo Guthrie Pancake Breakfast. Mary Jo Guthrie<sup>12</sup> is Woody Guthrie’s youngest sister, who still lives in the Okemah area. Joel Rafael tells the story on his connection to Rocky Road Tavern where the breakfast is held each year. Butch Hancock was one of many musicians joining Rafael this morning. This was a memorable Saturday breakfast as it landed upon the July 14th (Bastille Day) birthday of Woody Guthrie.

Saturday was a special day for the presentation of Si Kahn’s Mother Jones in Heaven<sup>13</sup>. This is a one-actress musical play about the life of Mother Jones<sup>14</sup>. Vivian Nesbitt<sup>15</sup> was so wonderful as Mother Jones, you would forget this is a play and think you were listening to Mother Jones herself speak. You hear Mother Jones say, “The working class lives with danger every day.”

This statement may be truer now than it was a hundred years ago. Nesbitt portrays the life and thoughts of the outspoken rabblouser believably. When Mother Jones tells of her husband, George Jones, and her three kids dying of yellow fever, you cringe in your seat. Her pain is felt by all. John

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<sup>11</sup> <https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B-u7sT5jKBbIdDBmV3JDdWdQOFk>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.voicesofoklahoma.com/interview/guthrie-mary-jo/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://motherjonesinheaven.com/>

<sup>14</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary\\_Harris\\_Jones](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Harris_Jones)

<sup>15</sup> <http://viviannesbitt.com/index.html>

Dillon<sup>16</sup>, music director, plays beautifully with his guitar to Nesbitt's singing. The songs are poignant, accurate and thought-provoking. The play leaves the audience with that radical notion that they can change the future. It is a message that Woody would have believed in wholeheartedly.

After the play the actress and musicians joined by a few others sat for an open Q & A. Specifically, in alignment with Woody and Mother Jones, the focus was upon union organizing. Joining Vivian and John Dillon were Tom Breiding<sup>17</sup> and Dan Navarro<sup>18</sup>. Breiding is a musician in residence with the United Mine Workers of America, and Navarro is vice-president of Screen Actors Guild (SAG-AFTRA) for recording artists and singers. All four spoke on how the unions have been a positive force for them and their art. They also spoke on the current move in America, in the new post-Janus era<sup>19</sup>, to bust unions. They are speaking all over America to help reinforce union memberships just as Mother Jones and Woody Guthrie did.

Each year many trek to rural Oklahoma to Okfuskee County for Woody Fest. Hippies, progressives, old, young, come to hear songs of unions, true democracy, worker rights, and civil rights. It is comforting to see the huge crowds with good beliefs come together to listen to socialist music. All the songs and all the performers weave a thread of continuous evocations of Woody. Woody said, "One day we'll all find out that all of our songs was just little notes in a great big song!"

You can read Woody Guthrie's first Daily Worker column here<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.standingoproject.com/artist/johndillon/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.tombreiding.com/about/>

<sup>18</sup> <http://w.dannavarro.com/dannavarro/bio.html>

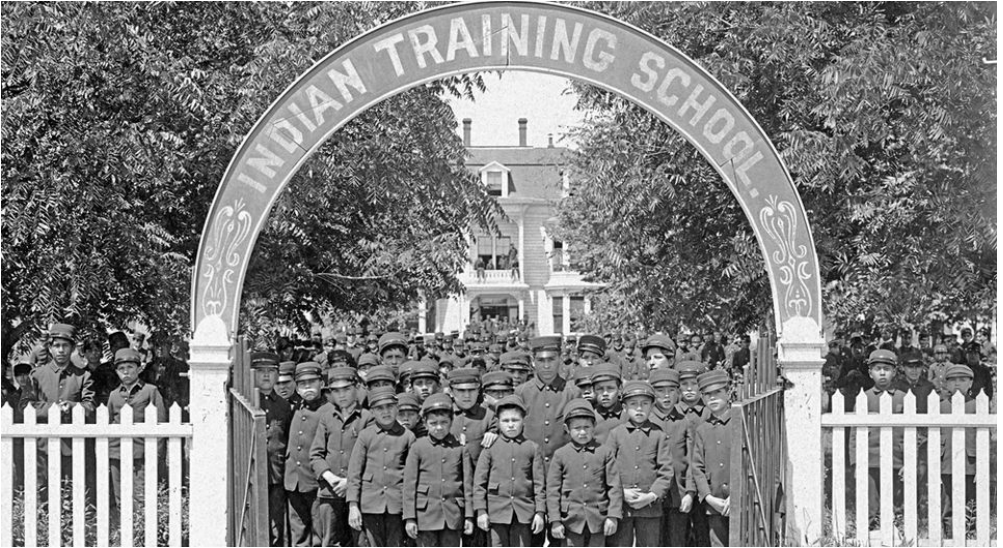
<sup>19</sup> [www.peoplesworld.org/article/labor-after-janus-unions-have-experienced-worse/](http://www.peoplesworld.org/article/labor-after-janus-unions-have-experienced-worse/)

<sup>20</sup> [www.peoplesworld.org/article/woody-guthrie-s-first-daily-worker-column-woody-sez-the-national-debit-is-one-thing-i-caint-figger-out/](http://www.peoplesworld.org/article/woody-guthrie-s-first-daily-worker-column-woody-sez-the-national-debit-is-one-thing-i-caint-figger-out/)



## As Indigenous people have long known, child separation is an American tradition

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*Students standing at the entrance of the Chemawa Indian Training School in Salem, Ore. Undated. | Oregon Historical Society Research Library*

“Shit, my sister and cousin cried for days because of that. They were traumatized,” Leonard Peltier recalled, speaking of how he, his sister Betty Ann, and cousin Pauline Peltier were forcefully removed from his grandmother by the government and sent to boarding schools as children.

“Pauline was so traumatized she has never fully recovered,” the political prisoner<sup>21</sup> said in an interview with People’s World. “You know, brother, I didn’t come to prison to become a political prisoner,” Peltier pointed out, “I’ve been part of the resistance since I was 9 years of age.”

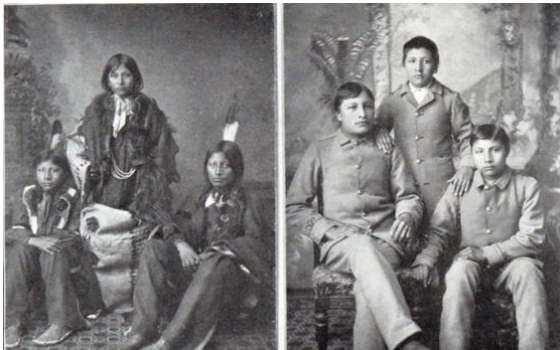
The recent tragedy created at the southern border by President Trump, in which immigrant children have been cruelly torn away from their families and held essentially as political hostages<sup>22</sup> has many Americans saying, “This is not what America is about. This isn’t what our country does. These are not our values.”

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<sup>21</sup>[www.peoplesworld.org/article/indigenous-activist-leonard-peltier-speaks-with-peoples-world/](http://www.peoplesworld.org/article/indigenous-activist-leonard-peltier-speaks-with-peoples-world/)

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.peoplesworld.org/article/free-trumps-child-hostages/>

The reality, however, is that this country's government has done a lot of this in the past—from Native children separated from their families and sent off to Christian boarding schools to African children stolen from their parents during slavery and more.



*Three Lakota boys before and after their admission to the Carlisle Indian Boarding School in Pennsylvania. | Wikimedia Commons*

For Indian children, the boarding school experience began in 1860, when the Bureau of Indian Affairs established the first such institution on the Yakima

Reservation in Washington state. The idea for such schools was devised by well-meaning middle class ‘reformers’ in the east like Herbert Welsh and Henry Pancoast, who had founded the Indian Rights Association to advocate for treaty rights after visiting Sioux agencies in Dakota.

“The goal of these reformers,” according to Northern Plains Reservation Aid<sup>23</sup>, “was to use education as a tool to ‘assimilate’ Indian tribes into the mainstream of the ‘American way of life’.” The thought was that Indian children, by being placed into boarding schools, would absorb an appreciation for private property, material wealth, the Protestant work ethic, and monogamous nuclear families.

White men’s beliefs and social principles were thus equated with progress, and the task of ‘civilizing’ Indians required surrounding them with these value systems.

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[http://www.nativepartnership.org/site/PageServer?pagename=airc\\_hist\\_boardingschools](http://www.nativepartnership.org/site/PageServer?pagename=airc_hist_boardingschools)

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*Church-run boarding schools were not just a U.S. phenomenon. Here, a class in penmanship is underway at the Red Deer Indian Industrial School in Red Deer, Alberta, Canada, in 1914 or 1919. | United Church of Canada Archives*

Again, Northern Plains Reservation Aid: “Boarding schools were the ideal instrument for absorbing people and ideologies that stood in the way of Manifest Destiny”—the 19th century notion that the United States was destined by God to expand its rule westward and spread capitalism and democracy over the entire North American continent.

The boarding schools were the educational arm of this effort, intended to assimilate each generation of Indian youth into white society. Along with learning English, arithmetic, science, and history, there were also the equally important aspects of ideological and cultural re-education. “Indian youth would be individualized. Religious training in Christianity would be taught. The principles of democratic society, institutions, and the political structure.... The end goal was to eradicate all vestiges of Indian culture.”

Early reformers used their religious beliefs to justify their Manifest Destiny perspective. It overflowed into Congress, which passed Manifest Destiny-themed bills. Indigenous people, meanwhile, were on the receiving end of this religious zealotry. Rape, abuse, kidnap, murder, and genocide were the end results for them. The recent quoting of Biblical scripture by Attorney General Jeff Sessions<sup>24</sup> to justify the stealing of immigrant children from their parents shows that this ideology is still very much alive among at least some sectors of the U.S. government.

Many Indigenous Nations and citizens believe that nothing has changed in over 400 years. The government is still using faith to justify its actions.

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<sup>24</sup>[www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/06/16/jeff-sessions-bible-romans-13-trump-immigration-policy/707749002/](http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/06/16/jeff-sessions-bible-romans-13-trump-immigration-policy/707749002/)



This author's recent story about Jim Wikel<sup>25</sup>, a Seneca-Cayuga tribal member and environmental activist in Oklahoma, also reflects the outcome of government boarding schools, which amounted to forced segregation of Native children from their families and community. Brutal beatings and the forced loss of culture<sup>26</sup> for Wikel's maternal grandparents at the hands of government boarding schools is why his family didn't discuss their heritage when he was growing up.

As mentioned, the goal<sup>27</sup> of Indian boarding schools was to "assimilate" Native Americans into "white" culture. The early goals of Christian reformers very quickly got wrapped up into a strategic plan of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the agency which had governmental oversight of the tribes. The culturally abusive tactics used in the schools were part of a bigger "colonization" strategy.

Wikel described how his grandfather was sent off to the Seneca Boarding School in Wyandotte, Indian Territory (now Oklahoma) in 1905 when he was only five years old. He was held at the school until he was 14. "Afterwards, he never spoke the language or went to ceremony again, and he never taught any of that to his kids," Wikel said. "He drank himself to death when he was 43 years old."

As the long-time U.S. Indian Service teacher and agent Albert H. Kneale<sup>28</sup> noted in his 1950 autobiography *Indian Agent*, the U.S. Government "went on the assumption that any Indian custom was, per se, objectionable, whereas the customs of whites were the ways of civilization."

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<sup>25</sup>[www.peoplesworld.org/article/indigenous-rights-and-environmental-rights-overlap-in-tar-creek-oklahoma/](http://www.peoplesworld.org/article/indigenous-rights-and-environmental-rights-overlap-in-tar-creek-oklahoma/)

<sup>26</sup>[www.peoplesworld.org/article/join-us-tuesday-to-discuss-modern-genocide-in-south-dakota/](http://www.peoplesworld.org/article/join-us-tuesday-to-discuss-modern-genocide-in-south-dakota/)

<sup>27</sup> [www.nativepartnership.org/site/PageServer?pagename=airc\\_hist\\_boardingschools](http://www.nativepartnership.org/site/PageServer?pagename=airc_hist_boardingschools)

<sup>28</sup> [http://www.californiaindianeducation.org/indian\\_boarding\\_schools/](http://www.californiaindianeducation.org/indian_boarding_schools/)

## Adopting Journalism for Social Justice



*Small Sioux children just before they were taken from their families and sent to a boarding school in 1897. | Library of Congress.*

Trump’s disastrous immigration policy of today reflects the same ideology that has been deployed as a weapon against Indigenous cultures from the 1600s to the present. He denounces immigrants as rapists, killers, and animals—implying they must all come from an inferior culture. When his supporters claim that detained children are better off in detention than they were with their parents, the belief in (white) American society’s superiority is on full display.

Capitalism is still playing into the mythology of white Manifest Destiny, which goes back to the earliest colonial settlements. Trump’s policies are aimed at stoking the racist anger and resentment of his mass base, but they reflect the interests of the same oligarchy that Sen. Bernie Sanders assailed in his bid for the presidency. In every way, the current administration’s policies show favoritism to those at the top and seek any way possible to divide those outside the ranks of the super-wealthy.

Trump and his team’s “law and order”<sup>29</sup> framework is the same one articulated by President Richard Nixon in the late 1960s and more subtly invoked by Presidents Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton as they ramped up the drug war and fueled massive prison expansions during their times in office. We jail and separate families at the border to deter illegal immigration just as we jail and separate poor families<sup>30</sup> within our country because they can’t afford bail or proper legal representation.

Major organizations and coalitions across the country, among them the National Indian Child Welfare Association<sup>31</sup>, demanded the Trump

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<sup>29</sup>[www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/michelle-alexander-a-system-of-racial-and-social-control/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/michelle-alexander-a-system-of-racial-and-social-control/)

<sup>30</sup>[www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2018/06/19/separating-families-border-illegal-immigrant-undocumented-column/711086002/](http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2018/06/19/separating-families-border-illegal-immigrant-undocumented-column/711086002/)

<sup>31</sup><https://www.nicwa.org/>

administration end the forced separation of children and families at the border. NICWA said that the policy would not be over until every child is reunited with their parents safe and unharmed. [Editor's note: As this article was going to press, a federal judge in San Diego ordered<sup>32</sup> the immediate halt of family separation at the border and gave the government 30 days to reunite all separated children and parents.]

Most Indigenous people are all too familiar with the processes and actions that lead up to genocide<sup>33</sup>; they've experienced it for over 400 years. They also see the progression of steps that the Trump administration has been taking in its demonization and dehumanization of immigrants. They recognize some of the same tactics from that old playbook.

They don't want to see history repeating itself.

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<sup>32</sup>[nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2018/06/judge-reunite-migrant-families-in-30-days-end-separations.html](http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2018/06/judge-reunite-migrant-families-in-30-days-end-separations.html)

<sup>33</sup> <http://genocidewatch.net/genocide-2/8-stages-of-genocide/>

## Oklahoma toil and soil run in my veins

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*Downtown Broken Arrow, deep in the heart of Indian Territory (present day Oklahoma) in 1902, five years before statehood. | Broken Arrow Historical Museum*

PADEN, Okla.—“We came over in a covered wagon. Daddy drove the horses, and my sisters and I rode in the back,” Ora Myrtle Smith Maxey, my paternal grandmother, told me as a child. She was nine years old when her family left Mountain Home, Ark., to head to Broken Arrow, Okla., a 228-mile journey in a covered wagon. Her mother, Hettie Ora Smith, had died of TB just a few months before. Her grieving father picked up his girls and moved away with other relatives to farm in new territory.

The Smith family—James Leer and daughters Thelma, Ora, and Bernice—landed in Broken Arrow, about 14 miles due southeast of Tulsa. Broken Arrow had first been settled by the Muscogee and Yuchi citizens when it was Indian Territory. It was later incorporated as a city in 1902, about five years before statehood.

Ora was born in 1909. She first arrived into Broken Arrow around 1919. She spoke of her family, including her sisters, working with her dad on the Frates Orchard. It was located around present-day 91st Street and 129th

Street. The farm was about half-a-mile from my home to the east. The Frates family owned an orchard and farm that James Leer Smith ran. I was told he worked hard and took pride in the work done by hand. That farm flourished under James's watchful care.

The boiling hot summer temperatures in Broken Arrow in the 1920s were in the upper 80s to 90s. Humidity has always been high during the summers too in Oklahoma. Yet the strength of my family's heritage showed through in the endurance to keep a farm thriving. Water or lemonade were the only drinks to quench the thirst. The hardworking patriarch was James, my great-great-grandfather. He was born in 1879, in Arkansas, and passed in Broken Arrow in 1950, at age 70.

Not really sure, but family talk says James met Johnnie Irene Bagwell on the farm. James and Johnnie Irene married. They had two other kids, Lori Carole, born in 1936, and James Roy, born in 1938. So James and Johnnie Irene married sometime in the mid 1930s. It had to be tough raising kids, and my grandmother suffered the death of her husband in the midst of the Oklahoma dust bowl<sup>34</sup>.

Broken Arrow in the 1930s was thirty years old, with a bank, barbershop, grocery store, hardware store, and a few other things. One of the annual highlights of the townfolk was Rooster Days<sup>35</sup>. As an adolescent, it was one of my grandmother Ora's favorite times. Mostly because by then they had the "Old Timers' Luncheon." She would always visit with traveling-in friend Dora. Wish I could remember her full name, but she was something of a dear friend to Ora. They used to write letters and mail them. That was the early beginning of texting; it was called the U.S. Postal Service!

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<sup>34</sup> [http://www.americaslibrary.gov/es/ok/es\\_ok\\_dustbowl\\_1.html](http://www.americaslibrary.gov/es/ok/es_ok_dustbowl_1.html)

<sup>35</sup> [tulsaworld.com/archives/history-of-annual-rooster-days-festival-unfolded/article\\_d82eca1e-5b81-57b0-b5d3-5d9e50169080.html](http://tulsaworld.com/archives/history-of-annual-rooster-days-festival-unfolded/article_d82eca1e-5b81-57b0-b5d3-5d9e50169080.html)

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*James Leer Smith with his second wife, Johnnie Irene, in 1950, shortly before his death. | Mark Maxey*

Grandmother Ora married a telephone lineman, Clarence McCullick, and they had one child, my aunt Barbara. Clarence died on August 1, 1931, when he accidentally touched an electrical wire while working on a telephone line. With her settlement from the phone company Ora bought 80 acres not far from where her father James had worked the Frates farm. Surely this time of grieving was hard, as she and my aunt moved in temporarily with her father and stepmother. My aunt was a newborn child when her father died.

Now comes the interesting thing about small towns and rural settings. Dating and finding a spouse are not so easy. The ratio of abundance just doesn't pan out. Ora's sister, ten years younger, Bernice, was dating Simeon Maxey. He had a brother, Israel, who went out on a double date with Ora. Not only did Ora and Israel get married, but so did Bernice and Simeon. So many of my cousins are double cousins.

It gets troublesome for me to figure out, but when my mom married my dad, her family lineage crossed into the Smith family through a cousin. But that story is later.

Ora and Israel, after marrying, had my father. So this new family was living a farming life on Ora's 80 acres. Israel, as told by several family members, did not adopt Barbara. Not because he didn't want to—in fact he did desire to. Ora wanted Barbara to carry on her father's last name. My dad was about 4 or 5 years younger than Barbara.

Now my granddad used to be wild. He was a whiskey-drinking 20-something. He used to go to Cain's Ballroom in Tulsa, which was owned by Bob Wills<sup>36</sup>, a western swing bandleader and singer. Frequently, Israel would drink and sit with Pretty Boy Floyd<sup>37</sup>, the outlaw.

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<sup>36</sup> <http://bobwills.com/>

<sup>37</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pretty\\_Boy\\_Floyd](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pretty_Boy_Floyd)

Ora, being the devout Southern Baptist lady, told Israel he would have to stop his boozing—which he did, never taking a drink again. He would always say he was honoring his wife by not drinking.

Israel and Ora started a milking farm and raised chickens and pigs. Israel sold the eggs to Bama<sup>38</sup> Pie company in Tulsa. The milk was sent to Page Milk company. The spokesperson for Page Milk was none other than the singer Patti Page<sup>39</sup>. Patti was originally Clara Ann Fowler, but changed her name to reflect her sponsor, Page Milk.

Israel loved his cows—some say he loved them more than humans! My grandfather never was an interpersonal kind of person. His demeanor was hard work and making money for his family. Just like Ora’s father, Israel had a work ethic that was passed down to all of us grandchildren.

You could hear Israel call for Ora, by yelling loudly, “Hey, widow woman.” Or he would just say, “Woman!” He was gruff, but he had a tender heart. It was just his demeanor. Ora was a strong woman who frequently said, “Israel! Hush!” He would merely grunt but stop.



*PW contributor Mark Maxey, March 2018.*

He could be an ornery man some days. Especially when his grandson, not to be named, of course, cut his hair with scissors while he took a nap after lunch. I climbed up on the toilet to get a mirror, and woke him to show him my handiwork.

His lungs let out a terrifying yell, and Ora came in and swooped me behind her. She said, “Israel, don’t touch my grandson!”

Israel built his own barbed wire fence using wood tree posts, a wire stretcher, and fence building tools. That fence was straight, tight wire, and hardly ever broke. He would also have a yearly garden, for fresh food. He would work from 5 in the morning till about 7 or 8 at night. He was

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<sup>38</sup> <http://www.bama.com/>

<sup>39</sup> [taylornews.org/news/2013/01/17/remembering-patti-page-and-her-connection-to-coffeeville/](http://taylornews.org/news/2013/01/17/remembering-patti-page-and-her-connection-to-coffeeville/)

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strong, dedicated, and worked the land.

These are the stock I come from, the Maxeys and the Smiths. Strong dedicated workers, who loved the land and were its caretakers. Today's world seems so foreign to me. And the constant abuse of our natural resources makes me wonder what type of land we are giving the next generation.

Tragedy as a child, and as a newly married woman—Ora would be a strong female figure in my life. In those days, hard times and sadness could toughen you up. I come from a family on both sides of honorable, rugged people who honor and respect women.

Maybe we should go back in time and pick up those traits and that character.



## Family pow wow: Spirit of my youth

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*Butch McIntosh at the Pow Wow of Champions hosted by The Intertribal Indian Club of Tulsa at the QuikTrip Center in Tulsa, Okla., Aug. 11, 2007. | Brandi Simons / AP*

LAWTON, Okla.—Colors of beaded regalia swirled in the rhythm of the sacred drum beating as the singers pray for our people. This past weekend, I attended the Yellowfish Family Pow Wow in this town. Lawton is about one-and-a-half hours southeast of Oklahoma City and home to Fort Sill army base. The family pow wow was started in the 1970s when relatives returned from the Vietnam war. It has been a Memorial Day weekend tradition ever since.

In all my travels with pow wows across the state of Oklahoma, this one most reminded me of my youth in Broken Arrow<sup>40</sup>, Okla. Broken Arrow was a bedroom community about 14 miles southeast of Tulsa. When the Muscogee founded a new community in the Indian Territory, they named it after their old settlement in Alabama. The town's Muscogee name was

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<sup>40</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Broken\\_Arrow,\\_Oklahoma](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Broken_Arrow,_Oklahoma)

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Rekackv (pronounced thlee-Kawtch-kuh), meaning “broken arrow.”

Our Yuchi/Muscogee family would participate in the pow wow held at the armory coordinated by Jess Haikey. Jess was part of the Broken Arrow Indian baseball team in the late 1920s. He worked with my paternal grandfather, Israel Maxey, who lived a few acres behind our home. The boom boom boom sound of the drum reverberating off the steel structure of the armory: You could feel the drum beats under your feet. The late humid summers of Oklahoma would filter through the open doors.



*Lesharo Wildcat, 3, of Pawhuska, Okla., at the Pow-Wow of Champions hosted by The Intertribal Indian Club of Tulsa at the QuikTrip Center Tulsa, Okla., Aug. 11, 2007. | Brandi Simons / AP*

It was a social but also spiritual event for us in those days of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Jamie K. Oxendine<sup>41</sup> says of pow wows, “Many ceremonies and customs were outlawed during the reservation period. The Grass Dance, being more social, was one of the only events allowed. As so many Tribes were pushed together, it soon was clear and necessary to transfer the traditions of the Grass Dance between tribes. ‘Inter-Tribalism’ began to emerge with the sharing of songs, dances, clothing, food, and art. Gift giving and generosity became integral aspects of these early festivities and they are still with us today.”

For me, the pow wow summers in Broken Arrow were exciting. I would see my great-grandmother Neosho Brown Maxey come visit us along with her sister, Alice Perryman. I would sit on my great-grandmother’s lap with Alice sitting by. I would hear stories of their youth and of my great-great-grandfather Sam Brown. Alice did not wear dentures, and when she laughed, her face opened up with glee and her face radiated joy. These memories are part of my tribal history and culture.

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<sup>41</sup> <http://www.powwows.com/history-of-the-powwow/>

My cousin Jane Breckenridge has kept my family's allotted<sup>42</sup> land alive to this day. Her Euchee Butterfly Farm<sup>43</sup> is on my great-grandmother's land where her house used to sit. On her website, she writes about our family's history<sup>44</sup>:

“The Euchee Butterfly farm was established by the heirs of Neosho Parthena Brown, a Native American woman of Euchee and Creek descent, on the original 160-acre allotment deeded to her in 1899 by the United States Government. It is one of the last intact allotments in Oklahoma and stands as a reminder of the tragic history of what was once known as Indian Territory.

“Neosho was the daughter of Samuel W. Brown, Chief of the Euchee Tribe. The Eucheas, also known as the Yuchis, are one of the most mysterious and ancient cultures in North America. Historical records show that when the Cherokee and Creek people first arrived in the southeastern United States, the Euchee were already well-established. When asked where they originated, the Eucheas would answer, ‘We come from far away. We are Children of the Sun.’

“Adding to the mystery was their strange and completely unique language which bears no resemblance in vocabulary or linguistic structure to any other language in the world, and is today preserved by just five remaining fluent native speakers. In the late 1700s, some of the Euchee bands joined the Muscogee (Creek) Confederacy, comprised of 48 other autonomous tribal towns, each maintaining political autonomy and distinct land holdings. Euchee people were considered as one town within the Confederacy, and to this day they are still federally recognized as Muscogee (Creek) citizens.”

I do have a memory of Neosho wearing the turtle shell leg shakers<sup>45</sup> as she danced during some of the songs. I heard the drum beats and songs in our ancient language, accompanied by the shhh shhh shhh of the shakers.

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<sup>42</sup> <http://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=AL011>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.nativebutterflies.org/>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.nativebutterflies.org/history>

<sup>45</sup> [tulsaworld.com/archives/turtle-shells-vital-for-dancers/article\\_c2e67bfa-42c5-5258-9b5f-8b1c41f6cb11.html](https://tulsaworld.com/archives/turtle-shells-vital-for-dancers/article_c2e67bfa-42c5-5258-9b5f-8b1c41f6cb11.html)

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When intertribal songs<sup>46</sup> are sung, all dance styles, all ages and genders participate, and Indian as well as non-Indian may enter the dance. Those were my favorite, as I got to join my great-grandmother and other relatives in dancing. The other times I was either running around with relatives or kids my age, getting sweaty and excited to finally be able to be on my own. In Indigenous settings, kids are allowed to be kids, and some mischief is permitted. Families share stories of old and catch up on what is new with everyone.

Each pow wow the host family will provide the evening meal. Indian fry bread<sup>47</sup> is a staple. Sofke<sup>48</sup>, grape dumplings, potatoes, beans, and tea would be served. The meal gathering words in Muscogee were called out, Hompvs vtes, come eat! My grandfather Israel said as long as I knew those words, I would never go hungry!

Numerous Saturday nights were filled with my dancing, eating, and running around the Broken Arrow Armory, special moments with my great-grandmother and my grandfather. All this remembrance rushed past my mind this past weekend. The Yellowfish pow wow in Lawton made me realize how much I miss my youth with my relatives.

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<sup>46</sup> <https://powwow-power.com/powwow-dancing/>

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/frybread-79191/>

<sup>48</sup> [indiancountrymedianetwork.com/news/traditional-foods-for-modern-indians/](http://indiancountrymedianetwork.com/news/traditional-foods-for-modern-indians/)

## Sovereignty runs deep in farewell to Indigenous warrior Sugar Montour

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*Mark Maxey / PW*

“I need a ride to New York for a funeral,” my friend stated. “In the middle of a Nor’easter?” I replied. “Yes, I would not ask if it was not important,” said my friend.

In my Indigenous culture when an elder asks, there is only one reply: Yes! So on a Friday night, we set out on a 28-hour journey to Akwesasne, New York. The Kanien’kehá:ka<sup>49</sup>, as they refer to themselves, are the colonized name we know as Mohawk. They are the most easterly people of the Haudenosaunee or Iroquois Confederacy.

This would be my first time around these people and under a unique situation. However, their power with sovereignty is to be respected. In college around 1990, I remember in our American Indian Student

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<sup>49</sup> <http://www.mohawknation.org/>

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Association at University of Oklahoma we talked of the Oka<sup>50</sup> occupation.

The Oka Crisis<sup>51</sup>, as it was called, on its face seemed to be a politicized protest. However, the underlying truth was the expression of the sovereignty of the Haudenosaunee people. The proposed expansion of the golf course and condominium developments was on disputed land and Haudenosaunee burial grounds. The “warrior” class of the Haudenosaunee was rising up yet again. Many other Indigenous supporters<sup>52</sup> joined in the protest in Oka.

A unique video on the 25th anniversary<sup>53</sup> was produced in 2015.

The core issue in North America, Canada included, was lands given to Indigenous people. The treaties signed by both Canadian and American governments gave specific land masses. Yet through time and dishonoring the treaties most of the lands were taken away from the Indigenous people.



Mark Maxey / PW

The use of treaties in one essence was the recognized sovereignty of the

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<sup>50</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7yP3srFvhKs>

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/oka-crisis/>

<sup>52</sup> [nvdatabse.swarthmore.edu/content/peace-camps-quebec-and-manitoba-support-mohawks-oka-crisis-canada-1990](https://nvdatabse.swarthmore.edu/content/peace-camps-quebec-and-manitoba-support-mohawks-oka-crisis-canada-1990)

<sup>53</sup> [kairoscanada.org/watch-the-video-25-years-later-impacts-of-the-oka-crisis-the-1990-occupation-of-kanehsatake-kahnawake](https://kairoscanada.org/watch-the-video-25-years-later-impacts-of-the-oka-crisis-the-1990-occupation-of-kanehsatake-kahnawake)



Indigenous nations existing within but separate from the government signing the treaties. The Indigenous nations have always held on to their sovereignty to self-govern outside the mandate of the government their sacred areas exist upon. When they express this inherent right it always has been met with militarized intimidation.

It's the same struggle that Hispanics in America are experiencing with ICE agents in America. As an example, the Southern Poverty Law Center reports of "a video<sup>54</sup> showing at least two Border Patrol agents physically tearing Perla Morales-Luna out of her daughters' arms and pushing her into a U.S. Customs and Border Protection vehicle."

Betty Lyons, president of the American Indian Law Alliance and a citizen of the Onondaga Nation, authored an op-ed for The Guardian. In it she states:

"As Indigenous Peoples, we know our history and we know our relatives. Many so-called 'undocumented' people are in fact Indigenous Peoples, children of Original Nations with a millennial history of travel across the continent to trade and engage in ceremonial obligations at sacred sites of their traditional territories before the U.S. existed."

"Dividing families is something we cannot imagine doing to others because we have been through this pain many times at the hands of the same government." Deporting persons who are "undocumented" is failing to recognize the history that the USA is a settler nation. You can't deny that the families the U.S. government is spitting up long predate our contemporary system of documentation.

This is the same issue the Haudenosaunee fought for in 1990. If we do not honor the treaties, the worth of the parchment they were written on is simply zilch. It was an honor to witness this sovereignty up close and personal with the final journey of warrior Arthur "Sugar" Montour<sup>55</sup>. Sugar had said, "I refuse to buy my own land back. But I will pay white people to leave it."

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<sup>54</sup> [buzzfeed.com/adolfoflores/a-video-shows-border-patrol-agents-pulling-an-undocumented?utm\\_term=.wbzw5rdnKw%23.sob3qdzNZ3](https://www.buzzfeed.com/adolfoflores/a-video-shows-border-patrol-agents-pulling-an-undocumented?utm_term=.wbzw5rdnKw%23.sob3qdzNZ3)

<sup>55</sup> [northcountrynow.com/obituaries/arthur-b-akwirainton-montour-45-akwesasne](https://northcountrynow.com/obituaries/arthur-b-akwirainton-montour-45-akwesasne)

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John Kane, “Let’s Talk Native<sup>56</sup>”, speaks with the remembrance of Sugar<sup>57</sup>. Many of the men who came to pay respect for this fallen brother were his Sundance brothers. In fact, the friend I drove up for this ceremony is a Pipe holder and Sundance Chief.

The final journey ceremony varies from people to people but some are similar. The body is held in view with family and friends sharing in the wake time. We arrived around 9:15 pm Saturday for the wake after leaving 6 pm Friday night from Oklahoma.

Sugar Montour lay inside an immaculate cedar casket dressed in traditional Akwesasne clothing with traditional items. I spent some time with Sugar telling him how I respected his warrior essence and being a dear friend to my friend. I honored his resistance and vowed to carry on my own de-colonization and resistance that Sugar stood for.

Paul Delaronde<sup>58</sup> led the ceremony Sunday in an overflowing crowd of folks filling every room and garage in his mother’s house. Delaronde spoke in the traditional language. The Kanien’kehá:ka people express their culture still today due to their relationship to the concept of sovereignty.

Upon closure, the Sundance brothers were outside drumming and singing one last time for their brother Sugar Montour. It had begun to snow and much snow was falling down. The pallbearers carried Sugar one last time down the sidewalk to an immaculate deep purple two horse-drawn carriage. The carriage would bring Sugar down the driveway and across the street to the family burial plots. He would be laid next to his father, who past a few months back.

As the purple carriage bore the body down with the snow falling you could hear the two dogs whining, for they knew what this day meant. The people followed somberly, quiet behind the carriage.

Once the casket was lowered into a freshly dug hole, a Haudenosaunee man led out a blood-curdling war cry addressing the other past warriors that one of their own was crossing over. Delaronde concluded the

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<sup>56</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/letstalknative/>

<sup>57</sup> [soundcloud.com/john-kane-11/lets-talk-native-210-3918?utm\\_source=soundcloud&utm\\_campaign=share&utm\\_medium=facebook](https://soundcloud.com/john-kane-11/lets-talk-native-210-3918?utm_source=soundcloud&utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=facebook)

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J2V62K8Zu1g>



ceremony in the native language. As mourners walked, they grabbed a handful of dirt and dropped it upon the casket as a final act of the ceremony. A relative who was dressed traditionally sang a haunting honoring song at the end. She stood strong amongst the 60-80 foot tall pine trees. Snow was falling down as we honored one last time Sugar Montour.

The sovereignty was expressed in traditional ways upon the sacred old land in the native language. You can't get more sovereign than this. I was blessed to be there and witness this.

## Florida prisoners on strike, demand locked-up voices be heard

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*Inmates work to clean up an oil spill in Michigan in 2010. | California Prison Network*

Prisoners in Florida began a month-long strike protesting involuntary servitude on Jan. 15, commemorating Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday. American slavery may have officially ended in 1865, but a loophole in the 13th Amendment, passed that year, allows it to continue up to the present day for people incarcerated in the United States.



*Operation PUSH supporters march in San Francisco, Jan. 15. | San Francisco Bay Area Independent Media Center*

Florida prisoners were among the mostly African-American inmates put to work without pay to clean up the toxic spill caused when BP (British Petroleum) spilled 4 million

barrels of oil in the Gulf Coast in 2010. The company refused to hire fisherman who had lost their livelihoods as a result of the spill. About 4000 Florida inmates within the state's Department of Corrections (DOC) are involved in producing picnic tables and park benches. Prison labor provides free work for Florida's Department of Transportation. The state collects \$10.45 per hour for the prisoners' work, which takes the place of almost 900 non-prisoner workers, according to [prisonlegalnews.org](http://prisonlegalnews.org)<sup>59</sup>.

Florida has 100,000 prisoners in 145 prisons, according to the coordinator of the Gainesville, Fla., chapter of Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee<sup>60</sup> (IWOC). The prisoners call their movement #OperationPUSH. "The fact that [they] got to a place they felt empowered enough to create #OperationPUSH, and put it out there to reach out to us—that alone spoke volumes about the work that's been done nationally and locally that made this possible," she explained to People's World in a phone interview. She requested her name be withheld to protect her ability to visit prisoners.

Planning for the strike began around last Thanksgiving. An anonymous letter was sent to the Campaign to Fight Toxic Prisons<sup>61</sup> (FightXPrisons) and the Gainesville branch of the Industrial Workers of the World<sup>62</sup> (IWW). IWW union members got involved with the issue of prison labor, carrying forward their traditional support for workers other sectors of the formal labor movement have tended to ignore.

The prisoner workers sent out an SOS message to fellow prisoner workers and supporters:

"We are currently forming a network agency within D.O.C. We are asking all prisoners within the Department of Corrections to take a stand by laying down starting January 15, 2018, until the injustice we see facing prisoners within the Florida system is resolved."

The prisoner workers also called on supporters as well as religious groups to "come together on the same page" demanding: payment for labor

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<sup>59</sup> <http://prisonlegalnews.org/>

<sup>60</sup> <https://incarceratedworkers.org/campaigns/operation-push-florida-prison-strike>

<sup>61</sup> [fighttoxicprisons.wordpress.com/2017/12/06/fl-prisoners-announce-operation-push-starting-jan-15-to-cripple-prison-system/](http://fighttoxicprisons.wordpress.com/2017/12/06/fl-prisoners-announce-operation-push-starting-jan-15-to-cripple-prison-system/)

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.iww.org/>

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“rather than the current slave arrangement”; “ending outrageous canteen prices”; and reintroducing the possibility of parole which Florida has currently eliminated.

Reports came in from various inside persons saying some of the original inside prisoner organizers were transferred to Solitary Units, called SHU, before the strike began.

The prisoners also stated, “Operation PUSH: Every Institution must prepare to lay down for at least one month or longer: No prisoners will go to their job assignments. Our goal is to make the Governor realize that it will cost the state of Florida millions of dollars daily to contract outside companies to come and cook, clean, and handle the maintenance. This will cause a total BREAK DOWN. In order to become very effective, we must use everything we have to show that we mean business. This is our chance to establish UNITY and SOLIDARITY. This is the strategy of Operation PUSH! A voice locked up is not a voice unheard!”

Since Jan. 15, the strike has gained the support of rallies in cities and towns across America and over 200 endorsers<sup>63</sup>, including Angela Davis, a longtime prisoner-rights leader. “There’s no better way to keep the legacy of Dr. King alive than by supporting the prisoners’ strike,” Davis said. “And I’m especially thinking about the fact that on the day that he was assassinated he was actively supporting the strike of sanitation workers here in the South in Memphis, Tennessee.”

A group of Haitian<sup>64</sup> prisoners sent a letter of support charging that the Florida prison system “use[s] all immigrants for free Labor and then deport[s] them.”

The news story took on national and international proportions. Over 40 news<sup>65</sup> outlets carried the story from In These Times, Democracy Now, Newsweek, Teen Vogue, and The Guardian, to just name a few. The name of the strike even trended Twitter with #OperationPUSH.

How did this strike become an international story?

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<sup>63</sup> <https://t.co/GVjdn4DyN2>

<sup>64</sup> [fighttoxicprisons.wordpress.com/2017/12/28/a-statement-from-haitian-prisoners-supporting-operation-push/](http://fighttoxicprisons.wordpress.com/2017/12/28/a-statement-from-haitian-prisoners-supporting-operation-push/)

<sup>65</sup> [docs.google.com/document/d/1j4x0lhugD5ZZQYTujx814XCrya49J1XXjHOO3kDZPwA/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1j4x0lhugD5ZZQYTujx814XCrya49J1XXjHOO3kDZPwA/edit?usp=sharing)

First, after IWOC and FightXPrisons received the message, it was verified through SPARC<sup>66</sup> (Supporting Prisoners and Real Change). The local organizer with IWOC in Gainesville reached out to their community for assistance. Between IWOC and FightXPrisons<sup>67</sup> the outside work was started to support the inside prisoners.

It's Going Down<sup>68</sup>, another prison abolitionist group, tracked the events for the day. One protester in Florida was arrested<sup>69</sup>. The 19-year-old girl was from Dream Defenders. Video from the Dream Defenders protest<sup>70</sup> was live-streamed. A moving story behind #OperationPUSH was related by the Gainesville IWOC coordinator. "I was sitting on my couch writing letters to prisoners when I saw their letter. That the prisoners knew enough to reach out to me. They knew the foundation I had done in prison work." She went on to explain how she first got involved in prison activism 20 years ago: "My kid's father caught a twelve-year bid in a Florida prison," she revealed. "I wanted to help prisoners by getting their voices out, by creating literary magazines and prisoners' support. From that, it progressively turned into prison abolition work."

The history of the abuse of the language in the 13th Amendment to condone prison labor is not well known, although it recently achieved some renown through 13th, a 2016 American documentary film by director Ava DuVernay. Passed in the aftermath of the Civil War, that amendment to the Constitution prohibits slavery and indentured servitude—"except as a punishment for crime." Reversing the hard-won freedom of formerly enslaved people, many states soon began classifying certain "crimes" as felonies, thus facilitating the imprisonment of many thousands of people—especially people of color—in order to extract their labor for free. And as convicted ex-felons, upon release they permanently lost their right to vote.

The strike is ongoing for another three weeks. More events will be popping

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<sup>66</sup> [facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=135282407143263&id=133851070619730](https://facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=135282407143263&id=133851070619730)

<sup>67</sup> <https://fighttoxicprisons.wordpress.com/>

<sup>68</sup> <https://itsgoingdown.org/solidarity-grows-florida-prisoners-launch-operationpush/>

<sup>69</sup> [facebook.com/1744188675811724/photos/a.1758755974354994.1073741829.1744188675811724/2065903640306891/?type=3&theater](https://facebook.com/1744188675811724/photos/a.1758755974354994.1073741829.1744188675811724/2065903640306891/?type=3&theater)

<sup>70</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/DreamDefenders/videos/1420065291435779/>

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up in the next week. A national call to Florida Department of Corrections will be announced next week by IWOC.

Follow the details at [www.incarceratedworkers.org](http://www.incarceratedworkers.org).

## Corporations and governments collude in prison slavery racket

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*In this Feb. 1, 2012 photo, inmate William Adams, of Hazlehurst, Ga., sews a laundry bag while working in a garment shop at Coxsackie Correctional Facility in Coxsackie, N.Y. New York prisons instituted a mandatory work program in the early 1990s and most of their 56,000 inmates have jobs, earning as little as 10 cents an hour. | Mike Groll / AP*

Whose money is it? Many departments of corrections (DOCs) supplement their state budgets with business deals. These deals mean free or under 50-cents-per-hour use of prison workers. It's a billion-dollar industry that many Americans know nothing about.

Over 50 prominent American corporations have been exposed for using prison laborers to reduce their payroll costs over the last several years. Prior to 2016, organic grocery giant Whole Foods sold a \$12-a-pound bag of tilapia that was labeled "from sustainable American family farms." This family farm was actually Colorado prisoners making 74 cents a day<sup>71</sup> or less. And their fancy goat cheese? The goats and milk were produced by

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[71news.vice.com/article/whole-foods-expensive-cheese-and-the-dilemma-of-cheap-prison-labor](https://news.vice.com/article/whole-foods-expensive-cheese-and-the-dilemma-of-cheap-prison-labor)



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the same prisoners. Whole Foods saved money and the Colorado Department of Corrections likely made a bundle.

Some McDonald's crew member uniforms are made by prisoners making even less money<sup>72</sup>—a lot less—than the ones who wear the uniforms. Walmart has been known to buy produce from prison-run gardens. Female inmates in South Carolina have in the past sewn intimate apparel for Victoria's Secret. In fact, whistleblowing<sup>73</sup> inmates were placed in solitary confinement when they exposed that they had been told to remove "Made in Honduras" labels and replace them with "Made in America" labels. In 1993, AT&T laid off thousands of union employees in call centers to be replaced by a prisoner answering<sup>74</sup> call center. Those prisoners made less than \$2 a day.

The website<sup>75</sup> of Buycott, which encourages consumers to make sure the companies they shop with match their principles, lists many surprising American companies who have relied on exploited prison labor. They include: Abbott Laboratories, Autozone, Bank of America, Bayer, Cargill, Caterpillar, Chevron, Costco, John Deere, Eli Lilly, GlaxoSmithKline, International Paper, Johnson & Johnson, Sears, Koch Industries, Mary Kay, Merck, Motorola, Pfizer, ConAgra Foods, Starbucks, United Airlines, UPS, Verizon, Wendy's. When you purchase products from these companies, you might be unknowingly participating in the prison labor system.

On a side note, but worth mentioning: The hidden fact is that just ten companies own the world markets for most of the products we use in our homes everyday. Many of the corporate titans of the Trump era (and within his administration) are essentially the same exploiters who have dominated our economy for the past century. Yet what is more pronounced today is that some of those companies are exploiting prison workers by using a loophole in the 13th Amendment<sup>76</sup> to the U.S. Constitution.

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<sup>72</sup>[aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/09/slavery-prison-system-170901082522072.htm](https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/09/slavery-prison-system-170901082522072.htm)

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<sup>73</sup>[motherjones.com/politics/2008/07/what-do-prisoners-make-victorias-secret](https://motherjones.com/politics/2008/07/what-do-prisoners-make-victorias-secret)

<sup>74</sup><https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/news/1993/apr/15/att-exploits-prison-labor/>

<sup>75</sup>[buycott.com/campaign/companies/504/boycott-companies-that-use-prison-labor](http://buycott.com/campaign/companies/504/boycott-companies-that-use-prison-labor)

<sup>76</sup>[peoplesworld.org/article/florida-prisoners-on-strike-demand-locked-up-voices-be-hea](http://peoplesworld.org/article/florida-prisoners-on-strike-demand-locked-up-voices-be-hea)

[rd/](#)



A recent National Review<sup>77</sup> article by Chandra Bozelko speaks directly and personally about prison slavery. “Getting Congress to amend the tax code and define even unpaid prison labor as employment in the coming session would trade the language of oppression—calling what inmates do slavery—for the language of power—calling their activity employment—and change prisoners’ mindsets and views of themselves,” she writes. “In addition to changing prisoners’ self-concept, allowing them to collect unemployment benefits can change their ability to support themselves when they leave custody and help them remain law-abiding and free.”

Prison Policy Initiative<sup>78</sup> lists state by state the average prison worker’s wage. In several states—mostly in the South—prisoners receive absolutely no pay for jobs they may do. In some others, they may earn up to \$56 a month for a full-time 7-hour-a-day job. The most well-paid may break \$100 a month, again, for a full-time job. And these numbers, in many cases, are going down, not up.

Mark Salay of KWBU says, “The use of prison labor, and its meager compensation, has long been a contentious issue. But while it is private prisons that get a lot of media attention<sup>79</sup> for their for-profit business model, wages for the incarcerated in public and federal prisons, which hold the vast majority of inmates, have declined over the past two decades.”

The nation’s incarceration rate has spiked as much as 500 percent<sup>80</sup> in the last 40 years, driven in part by the War on Drugs and bipartisan “tough-on-crime” policies. While the prison population has skyrocketed, government funding for housing the prisoners has not kept up. That has forced the incarcerated to help pay for the high cost of their imprisonment through steep fees. Coupled with low or in some cases non-existent wages, that has left inmates in destitute conditions over the course of their sentence.

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<sup>77</sup> <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/443747/prison-labor-laws-wages>

<sup>78</sup> [https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/wage\\_policies.html](https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/wage_policies.html)

<sup>79</sup> [www.npr.org/2016/08/25/491340335/investigation-into-private-prisons-reveals-crowding-under-staffing-and-inmate-de](http://www.npr.org/2016/08/25/491340335/investigation-into-private-prisons-reveals-crowding-under-staffing-and-inmate-de)

<sup>80</sup> <http://www.sentencingproject.org/issues/incarceration/>

## Adopting Journalism for Social Justice

“The cost of living goes up every year on the outside and they don’t just account for that in prison,” said Cole Dorsey, an organizer for the Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee<sup>81</sup> (IWOC), an offshoot of the Industrial Workers of the World union.

IWOC allies itself with prisoners and states on their website:

“Prisoners are some of the most exploited workers in the country. There are very few safety regulations and no worker’s compensation for injury on the job. While in prison, [prisoners] try to earn money to support their families, themselves and pay victim restitution yet these wages prevent them from that.”

IWOC says it is working to abolish prison slavery and argues the current corrections system “does not correct anyone or make our communities safer.”

An honest and heartfelt discussion on exploiting prison workers is necessary for any true change to happen. Amending the 13th Amendment as it relates to prison slavery is a must. Becoming aware of the plight of these exploited workers by society is another.

Only ten corporations control most of the household brands we all buy<sup>82</sup>.

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<sup>81</sup> <https://incarceratedworkers.org/>

<sup>82</sup> <http://www.convergencealimentaire.info/map.jpg>

## Navajo Nation stands up to USA

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*In this July 20, 2015 file photo, Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye talks with community members during a public meeting in Shiprock, N.M. | Jon Austria / The Daily Times via AP*

PADEN, Okla.—“Stop giving federal rights to the states that were formed after our Treaty of 1868,” says President Russell Begaye, Navajo Nation. “If you are moving forward with this reorganization, tribes must be involved.”

Begaye was speaking of the Bureau of Indian Affairs<sup>83</sup> attempt to realign 13 regions in response to Pres. Trump’s executive order demanding a massive overhaul of the federal bureaucracy. This means the BIA might be reorganized under unified boundaries with other federal agencies, such as the Bureau of Reclamation or Bureau of Land Management.

The Interior Department’s initial proposal was drafted under some pushback from state governors. It clearly breaks the Navajo nation into

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<sup>83</sup>[nativenewsonline.net/currents/navajo-nation-reaffirms-opposition-to-bia-reorganizatio](https://nativenewsonline.net/currents/navajo-nation-reaffirms-opposition-to-bia-reorganizatio)  
[n/](#)

## Adopting Journalism for Social Justice

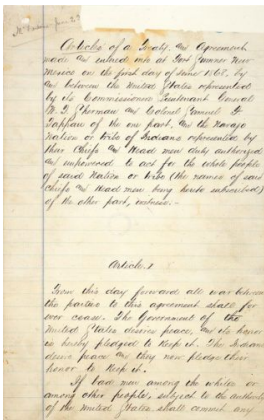
two regions and combines Navajo communities among other tribes and pueblos in these regions. Tribal leaders spoke up against the BIA for moving forward with this proposal. They vehemently condemn the plan as it favors states over tribal nations.

This happens on the heels of the Navajo nation commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Treaty of 1868. This treaty has been called the “Old Paper”<sup>84</sup> or Naal Tsoos Sani in Dine Bizaad, the Navajo language.

President Begaye says, “It’s not just a historical relic. It’s a living document,” adding, “it’s a contractual agreement with the U.S. government and the Navajo nation.” The Navajo protected their land mass against Mexican and New Mexican slave traders and livestock raiders. Once the U.S. Army arrived, between 1863 and 1866 they marched over 11,000 Dine people over 400 miles. They settled on a desolate reservation at Bosque Redondo in New Mexico. The Navajo is the only Indigenous nation to use a treaty to escape<sup>85</sup> removal and return home.

The signing of the treaty is celebrated every year on June 1.

University of New Mexico associate professor Jennifer Nez Denetdale<sup>86</sup> says the fabric of the Dine is woven within the stories of the Longest Walk. She has collected many oral histories, including from those who say women were key to convincing both their tribal leaders and General William T. Sherman to allow the return to the homeland.



*The Treaty of 1868, the “Old Paper.” | National Archives, Washington, D.C.*

She spoke to the Smithsonian<sup>87</sup> and said, “By honoring the treaty we also remember the struggles of our ancestors and we honor them for their persistence and their perseverance. They had a lot of courage.”

<sup>84</sup>[smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/old-paper-navajo-nation-treaty-1868-lives-american-indian-museum-180968235/](https://smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/old-paper-navajo-nation-treaty-1868-lives-american-indian-museum-180968235/)

<sup>85</sup> <http://nmai.si.edu/nationtonation/navajo-treaty.html>

<sup>86</sup> <http://americanstudies.unm.edu/people/faculty/denetdale.html>

<sup>87</sup>[smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/old-paper-navajo-nation-treaty-1868-lives-american-indian-museum-180968235/](https://smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/old-paper-navajo-nation-treaty-1868-lives-american-indian-museum-180968235/)

The United Nations has always upheld the honoring and protection of sovereign rights with treaties. In 2013, Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, issued a statement for International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples.

“Even when signed or otherwise agreed more than a century ago, many treaties remain the cornerstone for the protection of the identity, land, and customs of Indigenous Peoples, determining the relationship they have with the state. They are thus of major significance to human rights today,” she said.

Indian Country Today<sup>88</sup> reports, “The spiritual aspect of treaty-making escaped the United States government, history tells us. The U.S. federal government entered into more than 500 treaties with Indian nations from 1778 to 1871; every one of them was ‘broken, changed or nullified when it served the government’s interests,’” Helen Oliff wrote in *Treaties Made, Treaties Broken*<sup>89</sup>.

Many tribal nations and the Longest Walk for Treaties by the American Indian Movement<sup>90</sup> in the 1970s and still today push for Indigenous education on the intrinsic value of treaties. One main reason is that the original treaties recognized the Indigenous nations as sovereign and separate from the United States. Basically, “the US agrees that tribes are legitimate nations<sup>91</sup> that exist independently of the US government and are capable of entering into agreements and running their internal affairs without US government intervention.”

The fight continues, including for some of the northern Ojibwe<sup>92</sup> bands in Minnesota to protect hunting and the water protectors.

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<sup>88</sup>[indiancountrymedianetwork.com/news/politics/honor-the-treaties-un-human-rights-chiefs-message/](http://indiancountrymedianetwork.com/news/politics/honor-the-treaties-un-human-rights-chiefs-message/)

<sup>89</sup> <http://blog.nrcprograms.org/treaties-made-treaties-broken/>

<sup>90</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American\\_Indian\\_Movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Indian_Movement)

<sup>91</sup>[broken-treaties-opportunity-race.tumblr.com/post/38660400455/why-do-old-treaties-still-matter-today](http://broken-treaties-opportunity-race.tumblr.com/post/38660400455/why-do-old-treaties-still-matter-today)

<sup>92</sup>[indiancountrymedianetwork.com/news/politics/treaty-rights-battle-links-hunting-and-oil-pipelines-in-minnesota/](http://indiancountrymedianetwork.com/news/politics/treaty-rights-battle-links-hunting-and-oil-pipelines-in-minnesota/)

## Adopting Journalism for Social Justice

Senator Bernie Sanders said, “Time and time again, our Native American brothers and sisters have seen the federal government break solemn promises, and huge corporations put profits ahead of the sovereign rights of Native communities. I will stand with Native Americans in the struggle to protect their treaty and sovereign rights.”

John Kane of Let’s Talk Native<sup>93</sup>, was talking of sovereignty and identity recently. He stated it’s not that we merely exist as an American of Native descent. But rather a Native who lives in America. The emphasis of identity is that of being Indigenous not as an American.

“Tribal Nations are governments,” President Russell Begaye said. “We are political entities. We are not a race in the eyes of the federal government nor have we been throughout history.”

One has to look no further than Donald Trump to see the concern. His administration<sup>94</sup> recently claimed that tribes are a “race” and not a sovereign nation. History might just slap Trump in the face.

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<sup>93</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/letstalknative/about/>

<sup>94</sup> [politico.com/story/2018/04/22/trump-native-americans-historical-standing-492794](http://politico.com/story/2018/04/22/trump-native-americans-historical-standing-492794)

## Filming ICE raids: A guide to available resources for the community

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*This Feb. 7, 2017, photo released by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement shows foreign nationals being arrested during a targeted enforcement operation. | Charles Reed / U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement via AP*

Any grassroots organization can bring immediate positive change to their local community. Especially with ICE raids and police abuses, knowing how and why to film is important. Video can bring down impunity. Grassroots filming can add pressure for democracy in any community.

WITNESS<sup>95</sup> held a webinar with the Immigrant Defense Project<sup>96</sup> (IDP) on the rights and importance in filming ICE raids. These two groups hosted organizers from Make the Road New York, National Day Laborer Organizing Network<sup>97</sup> (NDLON), Equality for Flatbush, and Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI) back on July 18th for the second webinar in their series

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<sup>95</sup> <http://www.witness.org/>

<sup>96</sup> <https://www.immigrantdefenseproject.org/>

<sup>97</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/NDLON/>

## Adopting Journalism for Social Justice

#EyesOnICE: Community Responses and Organizing Tactics. You can view the training here<sup>98</sup>.

These groups are documenting and organizing around encounters with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and shared their approaches, challenges, and vision for a way forward. As ICE expands the deportation system and priorities for deportation, communities and grassroots groups like these continue to lead the way—fighting back, challenging mainstream narratives, and documenting abuses.

David Abud, an organizer with National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON), shared a video<sup>99</sup> showing the positive work NDLON does. His campaign focused on the arrest of Romulo Avelica Gonzalez<sup>100</sup>. You can hear the wailing of his 11-year-old daughter in the video. “Every time I watch this I cry,” Abud said. “We wanted to film so as to let folks know what really goes on with trauma and incarceration. It affects families every day. It shows how egregious ICE and the police really are.”

Imani Henry of Equality for Flatbush, works on anti-police repression, affordable housing and anti-gentrification in the Flatbush and East Flatbush communities of Brooklyn, N.Y. He spoke on the importance of a rapid response team. “We are the police accountability in our community,” Henry said. “The community is diverse with Caribbean, Latino, and Asians. We are an immigrant workers community. We know how many police murders take place. We try to work with immigrant issues and protecting their rights. Anti-gentrification is so prevalent.”

You can view their first webinar #EyesOnICE: Know Your Rights and Practical Tips for Documenting ICE here<sup>101</sup> (also available in Spanish<sup>102</sup>). Presentation slides from the webinar are also available to download and use in your own community work. WITNESS’ library also has many useful tools<sup>103</sup>.

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<sup>98</sup> [https://www.mediafire.com/folder/r1wo80xecq8qm/Immigration\\_Webinars](https://www.mediafire.com/folder/r1wo80xecq8qm/Immigration_Webinars)

<sup>99</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aB7-b4a\\_Kqw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aB7-b4a_Kqw)

<sup>100</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDHM7Ef59FQ>

<sup>101</sup> <https://youtu.be/O1GiAURuNPc>

<sup>102</sup> <https://youtu.be/K2t4iAZEARQ>

<sup>103</sup> <https://library.witness.org/>



For general Know Your Rights information on encounters with ICE, check out IDP's website<sup>104</sup> (available in multiple languages) or this tip sheet<sup>105</sup> for Filming ICE in English or Spanish.

### Featured Organizations on the webinar:

Make the Road New York<sup>106</sup> builds the power of Latino and working-class communities to achieve dignity and justice through organizing, policy innovation, transformative education, and survival services. Their model integrates multi-issue, multi-generational organizing—on workers' rights, tenants' rights, LGBTQ justice, youth power and policing, public schools and education justice, immigration justice, and climate—with an array of wraparound services that create a space of safety and support for entire families.



*Eight-year-old Khloe Marogi, of West Bloomfield, Mich., wears a t-shirt with her detained father's photo on it at a rally outside the Patrick V. McNamara Federal Building, June 16, 2017, in Detroit to protest Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids in which 114 Iraqi nationals in Metro Detroit were detained. Her father, 50-year-old Dorid Marogi, a Catholic Chaldean who has lived in the U.S. since he was 2 years old, was detained during ICE raids of primarily Chaldean immigrants and is facing*

*deportation. | Tanya Moutzalias / MLive Detroit via AP*

National Day Laborers Organizing Network (NDLON<sup>107</sup>) improves the lives of day laborers in the United States. To this end, NDLON works to unify and strengthen its member organizations to be more strategic and effective in their efforts to develop leadership, mobilize and organize day laborers in order to protect and expand their civil, labor and human rights. NDLON

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<sup>104</sup> <http://immdefense.org/ice-arrests>

<sup>105</sup> <https://library.witness.org/product/filming-immigration-and-customs-officials-ice/>

<sup>106</sup> <http://www.maketheroadny.org/>

<sup>107</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/NDLON/>

## Adopting Journalism for Social Justice

fosters safer, more humane environments for day laborers, both men and women, to earn a living, contribute to society, and integrate into the community.

Equality for Flatbush<sup>108</sup> is a people of color-led, multi-national grassroots organization which does anti-police repression, affordable housing and anti-gentrification organizing in the Flatbush and East Flatbush communities of Brooklyn, N.Y.

Black Alliance for Just Immigration<sup>109</sup> (BAJI) educates and engages African-American and Black immigrant communities to organize and advocate for racial, social and economic justice. Local BAJI organizing committees in New York, Georgia, California and Arizona build coalitions and initiate campaigns among communities to push for racial justice. At the local and regional level, BAJI provides training and technical assistance to partner organizations to develop leadership skills, works with faith communities to harness their prophetic voice, and initiates vibrant dialogues with African Americans and black immigrants to discover more about race, our diverse identities, racism, migration and globalization. BAJI's flagship project is the Black Immigration Network (BIN), a national alliance that brings together black-led organizations and programs to advance just immigration policies and promote cultural shifts our communities need. The BIN kinship provides a safe, communal space for diverse black communities to connect, engage and advocate for equality and justice for all.

We hope these tools will be useful in documenting and combating official and governmental abuse in your communities.

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<sup>108</sup> <http://equalityforflatbush.tumblr.com/>

<sup>109</sup> <http://blackalliance.org/>

## Indigenous rights and environmental rights overlap in Tar Creek, Oklahoma

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*A sign that reads "Don't Put Lead In Your Head" is placed on the main street going through Picher, Okla., Feb. 12, 2007. The town is at the center of the Tar Creek Superfund site. All its residents were ordered to evacuate by the EPA in 2009. | Brandi Simons / AP*

GROVE, Okla.—“Our existence is the resistance,” Jim Wikel, Seneca-Cayuga tribal member here told People’s World in an exclusive interview. Wikel was speaking of Native environmental issues at the 19th National Environmental Conference<sup>110</sup> at Tar Creek, in late September, in Miami, Oklahoma. Miami is northeast of Tulsa near the Kansas-Missouri border. It has been the home site for the conference the past 19 years, and this year’s theme was “Climate of Denial.”

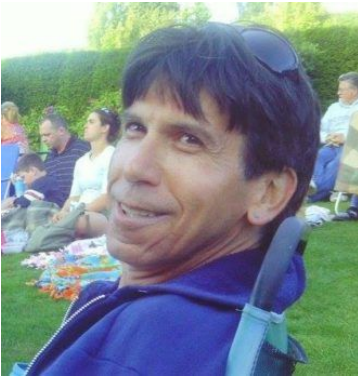
Tar Creek is a United States Superfund site where years of lead and zinc

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<sup>110</sup> <http://leadagencyredirect.weebly.com/>

## Adopting Journalism for Social Justice

mining produced uninhabitable conditions. It sits on the traditional lands of the Quapaw Nation. After suffering for years from contaminated water, lead poisoning of children, and sudden sinkholes, the town of Picher, Oklahoma was completely evacuated on orders from the Environmental Protection Agency. It was declared the worst site in EPA history. Picher is located at the northeast border of Oklahoma and Kansas on Highway 69 and is today a ghost town, permanently quarantined.



*Jim Wikel, member of the Seneca-Cayuga Tribe in Oklahoma.*

Decades of racist policies on the part of the government and the mining companies which leased their land left the people of the Quapaw Nation exposed to acid mine water, chemical poisoning, and underground sinkholes that threatened to swallow their homes. The 2009 documentary *Tar Creek* by Matt Myers<sup>111</sup> brought their story to a wider audience.

It was in this context that the attendees of the Tar Creek conference met.

### Destroying the land, erasing culture

The story of how Wikel came to be a participant at the Tar Creek gathering is a unique one. In his early life, Wikel had no regard for the environment, but like an Indian medicine wheel, his life has now evolved full circle.

“I was involved in the Standing Rock<sup>112</sup> pipeline protest last year,” Wikel told *People’s World*. Standing Rock in North Dakota was the site of the water protectors’ protest last year. “In Oklahoma, I’ve been involved with Oka Lawa Camp which is now Good Hearted People Camp<sup>113</sup>,” Wikel said.

The camp is located in Harrah, 22 miles due east of Oklahoma City. “The conference wanted me to speak on pipelines,” he said, “but it is much deeper than that.” A previous speaker had assailed the government use of

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<sup>111</sup> [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1478433/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1478433/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1)

<sup>112</sup> [peoplesworld.org/article/confrontation-on-the-northern-plains-native-americans-fight-to-stop-dakota-access-pipeline/](http://peoplesworld.org/article/confrontation-on-the-northern-plains-native-americans-fight-to-stop-dakota-access-pipeline/)

<sup>113</sup> <https://www.waterislifemovement.com/good-hearted-people-camp/>

eminent domain to steal land, and said that not stealing land would be the American way. Wikel disagreed: Looking at history, stealing land, he said, actually is the “true” American way.

“The American people from day one have taken land and exploited the natural resources for profit since they set foot on this continent,” Wikel continued. “Indigenous rights and environmental rights are the same if you ask me.”

“My mother, from Grove, Oklahoma, was Seneca-Cayuga, and my father was non-native. However, they moved to Washington state where I was born. I knew I was Indian but we never talked about it.”

Brutal beatings and the forced loss of culture<sup>114</sup> for his maternal grandparents at the hands of government boarding schools is why his family didn’t discuss their heritage when Wikel was growing up.

The goal<sup>115</sup> of Indian boarding schools was to “assimilate” Native Americans into “white” culture. It was a plan by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the agency which had governmental oversight of the tribes. The culturally abusive tactics used in the schools were part of a bigger “colonization” strategy.

Wikel described how his grandfather was sent off to the Seneca Boarding School in Wyandotte, Indian Territory (now Oklahoma) in 1905 when he was only five years old. He was held at the school until he was 14. “Afterwards, he never spoke the language or went to ceremony again, and he never taught any of that to his kids,” Wikel said. “He drank himself to death when he was 43 years old.”

“My mother was in Chilocco Indian School in Newkirk, Oklahoma, north of Oklahoma City on the Kansas border, when she 16 and 17. She had experiences there that I never knew about until about six years ago.” Wikel said his mother had become pregnant there with his older half-sister. When she was born, the baby was sold on the human trafficking market to a white family.

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<sup>114</sup>[peoplesworld.org/article/join-us-tuesday-to-discuss-modern-genocide-in-south-dakota/](https://peoplesworld.org/article/join-us-tuesday-to-discuss-modern-genocide-in-south-dakota/)

<sup>115</sup> [nativepartnership.org/site/PageServer?pagename=airc\\_hist\\_boardingschools](https://nativepartnership.org/site/PageServer?pagename=airc_hist_boardingschools)

## Adopting Journalism for Social Justice

“This trauma has carried through my family. Last year, at the age of 56, during our Green Corn Ceremony<sup>116</sup>, I was given my Seneca-Cayuga name. I am the first one in my family since my grandfather to have a traditional Indian name.”

“I truly assumed my true identity, when I was given my name. Two months later, I went to Standing Rock Reservation.”

During Wikel’s youth, he had run-ins with the law and dealt with addiction issues. “My mom and dad split up when I was thirteen. My dad stayed in Washington while my mom, my two younger sisters, and I stayed in Oklahoma. Not coincidentally, this was when I began to use drugs and drink alcohol. When I was 19, I went to Washington to live with my dad,” Wikel said.

Wikel said after he moved to Washington he worked in the timber industry, decimating natural resources. “This was during the 1980s, which were the last years of the unrestricted logging of the old growth forests of the Pacific Northwest. During these years, I was drinking heavily as well.

“The type of logging I was involved in was clear-cut logging, usually on steep slopes. We decimated whole ecosystems that will never again be seen in our lifetimes. We destroyed groves of huge old cedar trees,” Wikel said.

“These groves were sacred to the tribes of the Northwest. In the late 1980s the so-called spotted owl controversy<sup>117</sup> began to make the news. Environmentalists were calling for the curtailing of harvesting old-growth timber. Massive rallies were held in the timber towns of the Pacific Northwest. A popular bumper sticker that was seen on the pickup trucks of loggers throughout the Northwest read, “Wipe your ass with a spotted owl.”

Wikel recalled, “A radical environmental group called Earth First! began to protest logging operations. Members of the group would chain themselves to logging equipment, block logging roads, plant railroad spikes in trees, and even lived in the forest canopy in an effort to stop logging. We made

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<sup>116</sup> <http://teacherlink.ed.usu.edu/tlresources/units/Byrnes-celebrations/corn.html>

<sup>117</sup> [seattletimes.com/seattle-news/spotted-owl-became-symbol-in-1990s-controversy/](http://seattletimes.com/seattle-news/spotted-owl-became-symbol-in-1990s-controversy/)

fun of them and called them dirty hippies.”

Wikel remembered when on group of protesters came to his worksite. “One woman looked at what we were doing and wept. I could not understand why she was weeping. Today, I understand why she was weeping.

“Cedar was like buffalo to Native Americans in this area,” Wikel explained. “They made clothing, built canoes, and created houses out of cedar.”

“It was a protester that made me think about what I was doing,” he said. “I was stunned that she was crying,” he remembered, but that moment eventually evolved into his own awakening.

“Getting sober, getting in touch with who I was as an Indian, that is when I awoke. I think that my shift of consciousness began when I got sober in 1991. That was when I began my journey to myself.”

Wikel said that about a decade ago, during a sweat lodge ceremony, he felt called to move back home to Oklahoma. It was two years ago that he finally moved to Seneca-Cayuga Nation headquarters in Grove.



*The abandoned Main Street of Picher, Okla.  
| Sue Ogrocki / AP*

“I have been learning our language and participating in our ceremonies, which are all about being grateful to the Earth and to the Creation for our sustenance. Last year, at the age of 57, I received my Indian name, which further helped to ground me in my identity as Ogwehoweh, as one of The Original Beings,” Wikel said.

In his middle age, Wikel said it was the youth which inspired him to become an activist. “It was the young people of Standing Rock that first went to Washington. The young people did that.” Youth from the Standing Rock Reservation were the first to speak to Congress about protecting the water.



## Adopting Journalism for Social Justice

“It was the young Chahta [Choctaw] youth that started Oka Lawa, which became the Good Hearted People Camp,” Wikel explained.

Good Hearted People Camp<sup>118</sup> is a symbiotic community for water protectors and land protectors, a place, according to Wikel, to de-colonize and indigenize. “Even some of the younger ones desire to build and live there.”

Wikel was right that it goes much deeper than simply speaking up about pipelines. He was right: “Our existence is our resistance.”

“I think that the more I know myself as Ogwehoweh, as a Human Being, the more I am connected to Mother Earth and the more I am connected, the more I want to protect our Mother for our future generations.”

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<sup>118</sup> <https://www.waterislifemovement.com/good-hearted-people-camp/>



## Oklahoma Imam says coexistence the only way to peace in Jerusalem

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*Israeli police at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, August 3, as Muslims rushed to pray at the site for the first time in more than a week. | Mahmoud Illean/AP*

OKLAHOMA CITY, Okla.— Dr. Imam Imad Enchassi<sup>119</sup>, the senior imam at the Islamic Society of Greater Oklahoma City (ISGOC<sup>120</sup>), says imams in the West like him could play a helpful role in resolving the Al-Aqsa Mosque clashes in Jerusalem. Following an alleged gun attack in the area on July 14, Israeli police decided to bar Palestinian men below the age of 50 from entering Jerusalem’s Old City and Al-Aqsa, one of Islam’s holiest sites.

The shooting attack left the assailants, three Palestinian citizens of Israel, and two Israeli border police officers dead. World leaders<sup>121</sup> have weighed in on the violent clashes, with most pushing Israel not to restrict access for worshippers. Israel initially responded, however, by deploying at least

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<sup>119</sup> <http://www.isgoc.com/site/abouttheimam/>

<sup>120</sup> <http://www.isgoc.com/>

<sup>121</sup> [aljazeera.com/news/2017/07/world-reacts-israel-palestinian-fallout-al-aqsa-170721042743627.html](http://aljazeera.com/news/2017/07/world-reacts-israel-palestinian-fallout-al-aqsa-170721042743627.html)

3,000 troops across Jerusalem's Old City to enforce the ban.

After nearly two weeks of protests during which at least six Palestinians were killed, more than 1,300 injured, and over 300 arrested, the Al-Aqsa Mosque was re-opened to worshippers of all ages on July 28. Recently installed surveillance cameras and metal detectors<sup>122</sup> were removed from the entrances of the compound, but tensions remain high.

### Multi-faith cooperation

“Worldwide, [Muslim] sermons focus on the importance of Aqsa Mosque,” Enchassi said in a recent interview with People's World while he was traveling in Lebanon. “Today, as I listened to an ‘uncensored’ sermon here in Lebanon, I realized that our imams in the West are more qualified to approach this subject, objectively, scholastically, and most importantly Islamically, in a hate-free way.”



*Dr. Imam Imad Enchassi, the senior imam at the Islamic Society of Greater Oklahoma City.*

The sermon, he said, “was full of hate.” Enchassi believes that imams in the West, because they have experience operating in multi-faith societies, may have a role to play in helping lower the intensity of the religious battles going on in the Middle East.

Many of those fights play out between predominantly Jewish Israel and the majority Muslim societies of Palestine and other Arab countries. Unlike religious leaders in either of these two places, imams like Enchassi are accustomed to being in the minority and have altered the way they operate.

“I do think Western imams who already have a healthy interfaith relationship with Jewish Rabbis can intervene successfully. Our scholarly

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<sup>122</sup>[aljazeera.com/news/2017/07/israel-removes-al-aqsa-security-installations-170726230915578.html](http://aljazeera.com/news/2017/07/israel-removes-al-aqsa-security-installations-170726230915578.html)

and objective views are useful,” he said. Voices committed to peaceful negotiation and co-existence like his, though sometimes hard to come by, are needed if the conflicts around holy places like Al Aqsa are going to be resolved.

## Divided Jerusalem

The Al-Aqsa Mosque is the third holiest site in Islam and is located in the Old City of Jerusalem. In 1538, walls were built around Jerusalem under Suleiman the Magnificent. Today, those walls define the Old City, which has been traditionally divided into four quarters—known since the early 19th century as the Armenian, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Quarters.

While the entire site on which the golden-domed mosque sits, along with the Dome of the Rock<sup>123</sup>, the seventeen gates<sup>124</sup>, and four minarets<sup>125</sup>, was itself historically known as the Al-Aqsa Mosque, today a narrower definition prevails. The wider compound is usually referred to as al-Haram ash-Sharif (“the Noble Sanctuary”), or the Temple Mount<sup>126</sup>. It has been venerated as a holy site for thousands of years by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

In more recent times, the year 1967 is the reference point for understanding the disputes around the Temple Mount area. At the end of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, the armistice split Jerusalem into two pieces. From that time until 1967, western Jerusalem was under Israeli authority, while Jordan controlled the eastern section of the city. In this Jordanian sector was the Old City, where some of the most important Jewish, Muslim, and Christian religious sites were located—including the Temple Mount.

But following the Six-Day War of 1967, which pitted Israel against Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, the whole of Jerusalem fell under Israeli control. Thirteen years later, Israel codified its annexation of East Jerusalem,

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<sup>123</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dome\\_of\\_the\\_Rock](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dome_of_the_Rock)

<sup>124</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gates\\_of\\_the\\_Temple\\_Mount](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gates_of_the_Temple_Mount)

<sup>125</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minarets\\_of\\_the\\_Temple\\_Mount](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minarets_of_the_Temple_Mount)

<sup>126</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temple\\_Mount](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temple_Mount)

combining the two halves into a single Israeli city. This declaration by Israel remains disputed, however, as the country's occupation of East Jerusalem is considered illegal under international law. For its part, Israel says that undivided Jerusalem will be its capital, while Palestinians say that East Jerusalem is to be the capital of their future state.

### **Growing up in the camps in Beirut**

Enchassi grew up in the Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut, Lebanon. His experiences as a child, surrounded by war and conflict, have shaped his passion as an adult for promoting unity and understanding.

When asked about living through the 1982 genocidal massacre in Sabra and the Shatila refugee camp [carried out by the fascist Lebanese Phalange party with the collusion of the Israel Defense Force that blocked escape], Enchassi said, “Sometimes, I think God exposed me to so much hatred and violence so that I can be a voice for love and peace.”

He believes the generation of religious leaders now in positions of influence in the region are unable to step back from those kinds of experiences and bring themselves to negotiate with those they see as oppressors.

“The current imams in the Middle East are too close to the situation to not react but emotionally. However, reacting emotionally is rightly so.”

Casualty counts rise, as do the number of “martyrs”

The Communist Party of Israel<sup>127</sup> (CPI) reported that on July 24 a Palestinian was shot in the head during clashes in the Jerusalem-area town of Hizma. The Palestinian Ministry of Health reported him to be in critical condition. According to the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS), approximately 1,090 Palestinians were injured in the first days after Israeli authorities installed the metal detectors, turnstiles, and security cameras at the al-Aqsa compound.

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<sup>127</sup> <http://maki.org.il/en/?p=12193>



*Southern aerial view of the Temple Mount, Al-Aqsa in the Old City of Jerusalem. | Andrew Shiva / Wikipedia (CC)*

PRCS statistics indicated that 29 Palestinians were wounded, some seriously, by live fire. Some 370 were injured with rubber-coated steel bullets and, 471 suffered from tear gas inhalation. More than 200 were “physically assaulted, burned or run over” during clashes with Israeli forces.

Following a visit to Jerusalem, Aida Touma-Sliman<sup>128</sup>, a member of the Israeli Knesset, said, “The right-wing government is seeking to escalate the situation. The drastic steps it is taking are unprecedented and gravely harm the way of life of Palestinian residents of the occupied city of East Jerusalem.” Touma-Sliman is a member of the Hadash, a coalition of the Communist Party of Israel and other left groups.

Her party<sup>129</sup> is also reporting that the Palestinian assailant who murdered three Israelis from the Solomon family in the West Bank settlement of Halamish on Friday night had posted on Facebook nearly 90 minutes before the attack that he was “going to die for Al-Aqsa.”

In the hours preceding the attack, 20-year-old Omar el-Abed posted on Facebook: “I am writing my will and these are my last words. I am young, I have not yet reached the age of 20, I have many dreams and aspirations. But what life is this, in which they murder our wives and our youth without any justification. They desecrate the Al-Aqsa mosque and we are asleep, it’s a disgrace that we sit idly by.”

He continued, saying to those who have weapons “but only take them out for weddings and celebrations: Are you not ashamed of yourselves? Why

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<sup>128</sup> <http://maki.org.il/en/?p=12158>

<sup>129</sup> <http://maki.org.il/en/?p=12176>

won't you declare war for God? They have closed Al-Aqsa mosque and your weapons are still."

### **"The present situation is about occupation"**

In 1947, the boundaries set when Britain left Palestine gave well-defined areas of land ownership to Palestinians. Through the years, Israel has encroached and taken land illegally from them. Current maps reflect 75 percent less<sup>130</sup> Palestinian land than given by the UN in 1947.

"Let's be honest, this present situation [Al-Aqsa] is about occupation," Enchassi argues. "The Palestinians desire their own recognized state. One person, one vote."

While in the West Bank in June, 2015, for two weeks, this author saw how Israel's occupation impacts human rights for Palestinians. Israel controls their right to travel, their water supply, and the building of their homes. Such heavy-handed oppression is the fuel for intense anger and helplessness on the part of Palestinians.

The movement of all Palestinians is maniacally controlled by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). Sometimes, soldiers hold Palestinians for up to 12 hours when they simply want to walk to Jerusalem (less than a mile) to purchase food. I witnessed the IDF bringing bulldozers into the West Bank. The reason stated for bulldozing a Palestinian home was often that that the occupant had no building permit. The demolition often occurred while the Palestinian homeowner waved his or her supposedly missing permit in front of the bulldozer.

Many Palestinian Muslims approached me with smiles, thanking me for coming. But they all said, "Please tell your government not to fund weapons used against us."

In 2016, the U.S. finalized an agreement for \$38 billion in military aid to Israel over the next 10 years. According to a New York Times article, on the day following the agreement, President Barack Obama renewed his call for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and argued that it was crucial to Israel's security, using the completion of the new military aid agreement as an occasion to prod Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

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<sup>130</sup> [http://www.sott.net/image/9591/israel-palestine\\_map.jpg](http://www.sott.net/image/9591/israel-palestine_map.jpg)

on the long-running dispute.

With Donald Trump's ascension to the White House, that strategy has been terminated.

Only a few months ago<sup>131</sup>, he heralded a "new day" in U.S.-Israeli relations, seeking to bridge the distance that had developed between Obama and Netanyahu. Trump says his administration and Israel will be so close that "no daylight" will appear between the two.

With the U.S. now once again so firm in its uncritical embrace of Netanyahu's right-wing government, it is getting harder to see how good faith international negotiations can proceed. And it seems a formula for pushing even more Palestinians to react, as Enchassi says, "emotionally," rather than cooperatively to the situation around them.

The Palestinians are defenseless against the martial law enforced by Israel. They are denied a nation and citizenship rights by the policies of the Israeli government.

Dr. Enchassi's idea of a cooperative, multi-faith approach by Western imams may be part of the way forward. But any resolution needs to be between Palestinians and Israel. Meddling by the U.S. on behalf of Israel not only impinges on Palestinian sovereignty; it makes peace impossible.

Barbara Russum<sup>132</sup> contributed to this article

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<sup>131</sup>[thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/foreign-policy/320296-trump-heralds-new-day-for-us-israel-relations](http://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/foreign-policy/320296-trump-heralds-new-day-for-us-israel-relations)

<sup>132</sup> <http://www.peoplesworld.org/authors/barbara-russum/>



## Indigenous prisoner shot by police in Nebraska, denied proper medical care

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*21-year-old Micah Taylor wants to use music to help bring healing to other childhood victims of abuse and neglect. | Photo courtesy of the Taylor Family*

“I hurt every day, waking up with my neck swollen,” Micah Taylor, 21 years of age, said inside Douglas County Department of Corrections (DOC), Omaha, Neb. “It has been hard for me to sleep, and I have missed two doctor’s appointments. I need help immediately!”

Taylor was shot<sup>133</sup> in the neck by an Omaha policeman on March 8, 2018. The medical care unit of the Douglas County DOC failed to take Taylor for his March 26th follow-up appointment with his surgeon, Dr. Langenfeld at the General Surgery Clinic.

Micah Taylor, Santee Sioux and Salvadoran, is currently facing charges in Douglas County, Omaha. At age 2, he had already been in 15 foster family homes, before being adopted by DeAnna Taylor. She has raised Micah and included plenty of opportunities for him to learn about his culture. “I know from the scars I have, my mom [before being adopted] used to put her cigarette out on my arm,” Micah told People’s World via telephone. “I may

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<sup>133</sup> [indianz.com/News/2018/04/05/young-santee-sioux-man-shot-by-police-of.asp](http://indianz.com/News/2018/04/05/young-santee-sioux-man-shot-by-police-of.asp)



not have conscious memories of all those 15 foster homes before DeAnna adopted me, but I know from my PTSD I was abused very much,” he says.



*Micah Taylor at the time of his arrest. | Photo courtesy of the Taylor Family*

DeAnna states, “He was totally brutalized if not emotionally tortured by the Sarpy County Juvenile Court system from 14 years of age to 18 years old. Stealing the rest of his childhood by locking him up and threatening to send him to Arizona.”

“I was originally put into the CARE system for shoplifting around age 14,” Micah said on the phone call. CARE, which stands for Children At Risk Education<sup>134</sup>, is a Sarpy County program which places adolescents with community monitors as an alternative to incarceration after a first or minor offense.

“I was sent to my dad, DeAnna’s separated husband, but all he did was give me up to the state.” The juvenile system went on to place Micah under house arrest for simple infractions like dropping grades or skipping classes. “They threatened to send me to a boys’ boot camp in Arizona for 12 months, but DeAnna really talked to the judge. What she said helped so many teens later in the CARE system, for they quit sending kids to Arizona.”

Nebraska has a history of dealing out harsh treatment and deception in the incarceration of Indigenous persons and people of color. A previous story by this author spoke to some of those abuses<sup>135</sup>. The mayor of Omaha was even pushed to create a Native American Advisory Board<sup>136</sup> last year after the death of Oklahoman, Zachary Bear Heels.

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<sup>134</sup> <https://goo.gl/xfC23N>

<sup>135</sup> [peoplesworld.org/article/tribes-mental-illness-safety-course-may-deter-police-shootings/](https://peoplesworld.org/article/tribes-mental-illness-safety-course-may-deter-police-shootings/)

<sup>136</sup> [usnews.com/news/best-states/nebraska/articles/2017-07-13/omaha-mayor-pushes-ref-orm-after-native-american-mans-death](https://usnews.com/news/best-states/nebraska/articles/2017-07-13/omaha-mayor-pushes-ref-orm-after-native-american-mans-death)

## Adopting Journalism for Social Justice

In May, several rallies<sup>137</sup> were held to bring more awareness to the abuses perpetrated upon Indigenous persons by the police. A May 12 rally<sup>138</sup> at the state capitol of Lincoln also shed light on more abuses. “Nebraska doesn’t care about its native people,” said Leo Yankton, who organized the “Justice for Natives” rally. “I don’t plan to be silenced,” he said. Speaking of the bullet still lodged in Taylor’s neck, Yankton said, “If we don’t ask tough questions of police, like how it was that an unarmed man who attempted to flee was shot in the neck, who will?”

“I respect what Yankton said on my behalf,” Micah told People’s World. “But the reason I was driving away, the cop had already shot me in the neck, and I feared for my life. I really thought they were trying to kill me, another Indigenous male in Nebraska.” The body cams, if there are any, have yet to be released to his attorneys by police.

“Over the weekend, Omaha World Herald ran a story by Todd Cooper about the gross negligence of Correct Care Solutions, contracted by the county for medical care,” DeAnna states. “I am worried about the lack of medical care knowing that Correct Care faces numerous lawsuits over deaths and lack of care. A nine millimeter bullet is lodged in his spinal column, and I am extremely concerned for the health and well being of my son.”

Inside Douglas County DOC in the past year, over 12 inmates have had life-threatening medical issues and did not receive proper medical attention. One person died.

AP<sup>139</sup> writes that negligence and malpractice claims have been filed against Douglas County and the jail’s Tennessee-based medical provider, Correct Care Solutions<sup>140</sup>. The contract company has come under scrutiny for inmate deaths and alleged poor treatment nationally, including lawsuits over six deaths in Colorado jails and some in Washington state.

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<sup>137</sup> [indianz.com/News/2018/05/14/we-do-not-go-away-native-community-prote.asp](http://indianz.com/News/2018/05/14/we-do-not-go-away-native-community-prote.asp)

<sup>138</sup> [ketv.com/article/native-leaders-rally-for-justice-on-capitol-steps/20672951](http://ketv.com/article/native-leaders-rally-for-justice-on-capitol-steps/20672951)

<sup>139</sup> <https://apnews.com/48a70553a2b54df3a75892a7b2819182>

<sup>140</sup> [usnews.com/news/best-states/nebraska/articles/2018-05-21/douglas-county-medical-provider-sued-over-jail-medical-care](http://usnews.com/news/best-states/nebraska/articles/2018-05-21/douglas-county-medical-provider-sued-over-jail-medical-care)

AP further states that the claims filed by Omaha attorneys Thomas White and Benjamin White outline more than a dozen Douglas County inmates allegedly denied proper treatment for their maladies, including a stroke, chlamydia, and a broken hip.

Micah contends that medicines prescribed to him by the emergency room doctor were not dispensed when he was moved back to the Douglas County DOC. Not only has he been denied medicines, but the medical care professionals inside the jail have failed to take him to two scheduled follow-up appointments.

DeAnna further states, “On May 20, 2018, Micah was told by the jail medical office that he is going to have to live with a bullet in his neck for the rest of his life and take Tylenol.”

Dr. Laralyn RiverWind, in a letter, has “contacted the City of Omaha as a courtesy measure to strongly urge them to provide an immediate standard of care medical attention to an inmate named Micah Taylor.” She wrote that, “Having reviewed his medical records and having worked in the past for a considerable amount of time in the legal profession assessing the potential merit of medical malpractice cases, I can assure you that the care that Micah Taylor has received to date is substandard and places Omaha’s municipality at risk.”



*Micah Taylor. | Courtesy of the Taylor Family*

She had been awaiting a response, holding off on sharing the information to the media—until now. Dr. RiverWind is an ambassador for the Northern Arawak Tribal Nation<sup>141</sup>, co-founder and vice-president of FireKeepers International<sup>142</sup>, and founder of HeartCrossers<sup>143</sup>, a suicide prevention program.

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<sup>141</sup> [http://www.northernarawaktribalnation.com/about\\_us](http://www.northernarawaktribalnation.com/about_us)

<sup>142</sup> <http://www.firekeepersinternational.com/>

<sup>143</sup> <https://heartcrossers.org/>

## Adopting Journalism for Social Justice

Micah has a business called “Stepping Stones Consulting,” which he envisions as a means of leaving a “footprint of love” in the Native community through comforting the most vulnerable children. Sexual and physical abuse or neglect can be healed, he believes, by providing musical instruments to Native American foster children who have been traumatized. Micah purchased used guitars, wind instruments, and keyboards for seven months, and his first gift was to Chief Joseph of FireKeepers International.

Micah testifies that it was playing the guitar that allowed him to heal from his childhood abuses. Micah was suicidal when he received a guitar as a gift from a family friend. He writes poetry and music and sings a little. “Music heals the soul,” says Micah, and since it worked to help him, he wanted to give other Indigenous children a chance to effectively soothe their own souls.

Immediate requests from various local and national programs are demanding that Micah Taylor get the medical care he should be provided. A support page<sup>144</sup> for Micah has been set up on Facebook for him.

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<sup>144</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2200223810212999/>

## Tribe's mental illness safety course may deter police shootings

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*At the funeral for Ma-hi-vist Goodblanket, his grandmother pays her last respects. | Courtesy Melissa Goodblanket*

VINITA, Okla.—“They [police] murdered our son,” says Melissa Goodblanket<sup>145</sup>. One tribe in Oklahoma is trying to prevent this from ever happening again. Law enforcement engagement with persons with mental illness may be safer due to Native American tribal programs. Despite attempts by the Trump administration to cut monies for Indian Health services, the Cherokee nation is leading by example far above what Trump’s administration is proposing.

Federal grants<sup>146</sup> supplied to the Cherokee Nation allow for training for local law enforcement, youth workers, and health officials with mental illness first aid in crisis situations. With over 5000 instructors nationwide, the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma has six.

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<sup>145</sup>[america.aljazeera.com/articles/2016/2/22/oklahoma-killings-native-americans.html](http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2016/2/22/oklahoma-killings-native-americans.html)

<sup>146</sup>[cherokee.org/News/Stories/20180409\\_Cherokee-Nation-provides-mental-health-first-aid-training](http://cherokee.org/News/Stories/20180409_Cherokee-Nation-provides-mental-health-first-aid-training)

Against a history of numerous reported deaths of Native persons with mental illness, many more could be averted by this training. The Cherokee Nation said, “More than 20 people from Cherokee Nation Health Services and surrounding health care agencies were involved in the most recent training in Vinita. During the 8-hour course, participants memorized a 5-step action plan and were taught how to identify mental health risk factors, offer support and be effective communicators.”

CNN<sup>147</sup> reported Native persons are killed by police at a higher rate than other minorities, as confirmed by data compiled by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Benjamin Whiteshield was killed by Oklahoma police in 2012. “According to the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation, his family had brought him to the local police station because he had been “acting delusional.” Police said he was holding a wrench and was shot in the mouth after a confrontation with an officer.

Al-Jazeera<sup>148</sup> in 2016 said, “After family members of several Native Americans with mental illness asked authorities for help, their relatives were later killed by law enforcement. The scenario has played out in Custer County and elsewhere in Western Oklahoma at least three times in recent years.” Eighteen-year-old Mah-hi-vist Goodblanket was killed after his parents call 911 while he was in the midst of a mental episode. “The family wanted help from medical personnel and law enforcement calming down Mah-hi-vist. But it did not work out that way. Instead, lawmen shot and killed Red Bird. The young man’s tragic fate highlights a series of deadly Oklahoma incidents in which mentally ill Native Americans encountered law enforcement officers who, campaigners and relatives say, are not trained properly in how to deal with them.” The parents say the police murdered their son.

Oklahoma Native Zachary Bearheels died after being tased 12 times<sup>149</sup> by police in Nebraska. The Washington Post reported in 2017, “After the electric shocks failed to incapacitate the 29-year-old man, an officer pulled Bearheels to the ground, grabbed his ponytail, and dragged him to the police car, authorities said. Another officer punched him in the head

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<sup>147</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2017/11/10/us/native-lives-matter/index.html>

<sup>148</sup> [america.aljazeera.com/articles/2016/2/22/oklahoma-killings-native-americans.html](http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2016/2/22/oklahoma-killings-native-americans.html)

<sup>149</sup> [washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/06/12/a-mentally-ill-man-died-after-police-shocked-him-12-times-the-chief-wants-2-officers-fired/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.4ed190e3f68f](http://washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/06/12/a-mentally-ill-man-died-after-police-shocked-him-12-times-the-chief-wants-2-officers-fired/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.4ed190e3f68f)

repeatedly while the shocks continued.” Bearheels had a history with mental illness. Not only Native Americans with mental illness are killed by police in Oklahoma<sup>150</sup>. African-American Joshua Barre, age 29, was killed by Tulsa police in 2017 and he too suffered from mental illness. He was in a mental episode when he was shot dead. Tulsa World reported that tempers flared as an emotional crowd the police estimated at 300 people condemned the latest deadly police encounter in north Tulsa. Protesters chanted “F— the police” from behind crime scene tape and shouted obscenities at investigators.

Cherokee Nation Behavioral Health Special Projects Officer and certified instructor Tonya Boone has already led eight classes, including her most recent adult mental health first aid class at the Cherokee Nation Vinita Health Center. “I am honored to be part of the awareness movement of mental health issues,” Boone said. “I was certified in August of 2017 and have since certified around 150 individuals. The Cherokee Nation is also fortunate to have other instructors who are certified in a variety of the courses.”

Cherokee Nation Behavioral Health Clinic Administrator Joni Lyon said that for her team of certified instructors it is about more than training, it is about making a life-or-death difference on the ground. “We are invested in providing education and information for our communities regarding mental health and substance abuse,” Lyon said. “We want to ensure our communities are provided with appropriate information and education to assist persons seeking services in their community.”

Each of the five courses the Cherokee Nation teaches, funded through a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration grant and the Indian Health Service, teaches specific risk factors and warning signs of mental illness and how they relate to an emergency situation. Instructors can be certified in any number of the courses, and certifications must be renewed every three years.

Proposed federal budget cuts indicate a great deal about the priorities of the Trump administration: Spare nothing for the 1 percent, and the rest of the country be damned.

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<sup>150</sup>[tulsaworld.com/news/crimewatch/protest-erupts-after-authorities-kill-mentally-ill-man-carrying-knives/article\\_\\_aff3fcde-393b-5e87-a429-1b6ddeec66d.html](https://www.tulsaworld.com/news/crimewatch/protest-erupts-after-authorities-kill-mentally-ill-man-carrying-knives/article__aff3fcde-393b-5e87-a429-1b6ddeec66d.html)



## Woody Fest: Is this land made for you and me?

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*Don Conoscenti and Ellis Paul, two musicians at the festival. | Guy Zahller/woodyfest.com*

OKEMAH, Oklahoma - On a hot humid night in Oklahoma, feral cats were fighting in the alley; one could hear their screams. Two loose dogs sauntered over the hot asphalt road where hundreds of cars were parked. There was a two-block-long line of 40-80 year olds standing under the humid heat of an Okemah July night. All came to honor the spirit of Woody Guthrie. From July 12-16 hundreds of musicians, along with thousands of simple down-to-earth folks, are celebrating the 20th Annual Woody Fest.

In his blog, People’s World contributor John Pietaro<sup>151</sup> said, “The hot, dry plains of Okemah, Oklahoma, bore witness to the birth of Woody Guthrie. The area’s spacious straight configurations and windy hills shaped his formative years, spent in the company of the high-lonesome sounds of rural white America, the church and blues music of African American culture, and the customs, dialects, and plight of Native Americans. With the introduction of basic guitar, harmonica, and mandolin skills, Guthrie dealt with the pains and poverty of his young, tragic life through music.”

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<sup>151</sup> [peoplesworld.org/article/this-land-is-your-land-75-years-and-the-fight-s-still-on/](https://peoplesworld.org/article/this-land-is-your-land-75-years-and-the-fight-s-still-on/)



The festival began this year with a tribute honoring Jimmy LaFave who passed away in May, 2017. Jimmy had been involved with Woody Fest for years. On July 12, Jimmy's birthday, fellow musicians came to honor the Oklahoma Hall of Fame singer-songwriter.

John Fullbright sang Jimmy's song "Worn Out American Dream"<sup>152</sup>. The lyrics<sup>153</sup> dripped from Fullbright's interpretation, accompanied by a powerful voice and guitar. In those lyrics, it seemed like one could almost make out Woody's spirit:

"I see no refuge for the weary; I see no handouts for the poor; I see no sense of satisfaction; On all the ones who must endure; All the slings and arrows slandered; Against the face of the poor man's dream; All the rich circle in like vultures."

As Fullbright magnificently hammered that truth with his Grammy-nominated voice, I sat on the balcony soaking this all in. I sensed that he wished for us to keep struggling against the bourgeoisie. Woody wrote for the Daily Worker, the predecessor of the Peoples World, back in the late 1930's.

It was rather comforting seeing thousands of folks trek to Okemah every year to hear and honor Woody's timeless message. Eighty years later, Woody's lyrics are just as significant. His is the message of the worker's plight, the hardship of these true Americans not heard or seen by capitalists.

Celebrating the 20th annual event, the crowds still wanted to taste those words of Woody - played by common folks who were moved to pick up an instrument.

Like LaFave, many came with the experience of their own struggle to achieve an elusive American dream.

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<sup>152</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IuLFfRP1cxA>

<sup>153</sup> <https://www.musixmatch.com/lyrics/Jimmy-LaFave/Worn-Out-American-Dream>

## Adopting Journalism for Social Justice

Eighty-six year-old David Amram<sup>154</sup> still comes to Woody Fest out of respect for Woody. Amram is an accomplished composer, conductor and jazz fusion artist who weaves folk tales into symphonies. He's had a 70-year career playing with Woody, Pete Seeger, Arlo Guthrie and many others.

You can hear my interview with him here<sup>155</sup>.

"I remember during the Occupy days in New York we (Pete Seeger and Arlo Guthrie) were playing a benefit show," Amram stated. "Pete had just got a new metal cane. He said we all were going to walk out. Walk 40 plus blocks to Occupy in a park<sup>156</sup>. So here we were late in the evening - a large crowd following - and I on a whistle. I was like the pied piper."

Amram said Seeger's intention was peaceful protest. That is the spirit of Woody and why 20 years later Woody Fest is a destination. This is why Woody Fest is keeping folks mindful that we can change. The reason why we can change? Well because...

This land is your land, this land is my land.  
In the shadow of the steeple I saw my people,  
By the relief office I seen my people;  
As they stood there hungry, I stood there asking  
Is this land made for you and me?

(Woody Guthrie, This Land Is Your Land)

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<sup>154</sup> <http://david-amram.blogspot.com/>

<sup>155</sup> <https://goo.gl/yWhfxS>

<sup>156</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gkcu-PDJ9OY>

## Do we need prisons? Abolitionists ask us to think about that

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"Prisons do not disappear social problems, they disappear human beings. Homelessness, unemployment, drug addiction, mental illness, and illiteracy are only a few of the problems that disappear from public view when the human beings contending with them are relegated to cages."

*Angela Davis*



Angela Davis has long been a leader in the fight for U.S. prison reform. | blogspot

Prison abolitionists' work will be complete when prisoners walk out of open cell doors. Abolitionists strive tirelessly for a more merciful remedy<sup>157</sup> to crime. Even the socialist candidate Sen. Bernie Sanders<sup>158</sup> built part of his platform on prison reform. His message resonated with millions. This dialogue has led a resurgence of prison abolition grassroots organization.

Prison abolitionists<sup>159</sup> have always pointed out it's the poor who are imprisoned. "Prisons do not disappear social problems," says world-renowned activist Angela Davis, "they disappear human beings. Homelessness, unemployment, drug addiction, mental illness, and illiteracy are only a few of the problems that disappear from public view

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<sup>157</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prison\\_abolition\\_movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prison_abolition_movement)

<sup>158</sup> <https://berniesanders.com/press-release/ending-private-prisons/>

<sup>159</sup> <http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/davisinterview.html>

## Adopting Journalism for Social Justice

when the human beings contending with them are relegated to cages.”

“What we mean is that we want to end the whole system of mutually reinforcing relationships between surveillance, policing, the courts, and imprisonment that fuel, maintain, and expand social and economic inequity and institutional racism, “ Isaac Ontiveros<sup>160</sup> told Vice media. “So, not just prisons.” Ontiveros works for Critical Resistance<sup>161</sup>. Ontiveros goes on to indicate America has always used laws, statutes and policing policies to enforce racial inequities.

Under the Trump administration, Attorney General Jeff Sessions is going backward to a more draconian time<sup>162</sup> of prison incarceration. According to this Q&A interview<sup>163</sup> from Human Rights Watch, Sessions has directed the Justice Department to impose the harshest possible sentences.

San Francisco Bay View<sup>164</sup> is a national newspaper founded in 1976 for the Black community worldwide. Thousands of prisoners have subscriptions. Some of the paper focuses on prisoners and their abuse. Mary Ratcliff and her husband Willie bought the paper 27 years ago. Mary spoke exclusively to People’s World.

“It was not intentional, but glad we did it,” Ratcliff reflected. “It was in 1992 that right away we dropped off copies at the local county jail. It was during the height of mass incarceration.” The paper was being read by the families “in the hood” who had relatives in prison.

“The prisoners took the papers with them to prison,” Ratcliff stated. San Quentin was the first prison where their paper flourished. “One of our first contributors was a death row inmate. He wrote a political commentary for our paper.”

At the same time, Ratcliff and her husband had moved from Alaska to San Francisco for her to attend law school. “When I graduated I found my activism did not align with corporate law firms,” she said. They settled in

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<sup>160</sup> [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/nnqzp8/abolish-prison](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/nnqzp8/abolish-prison)

<sup>161</sup> <http://criticalresistance.org/>

<sup>162</sup> [npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/05/12/528086525/sessions-tells-prosecutors-to-see-k-most-serious-charges-stricter-sentences](http://npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/05/12/528086525/sessions-tells-prosecutors-to-see-k-most-serious-charges-stricter-sentences)

<sup>163</sup> [hrw.org/news/2017/06/20/q-us-attorney-general-jeff-sessions-policy-change-sentencing](http://hrw.org/news/2017/06/20/q-us-attorney-general-jeff-sessions-policy-change-sentencing)

<sup>164</sup> <http://sfbayview.com/>

a Black poor community. Community organizing was part of her history and played well there.

“We were able to organize and successfully shut down a power plant polluting our community. The city commission was not happy with us, but we succeeded. The community came together to get their voices heard.”

Ratcliff shared a poignant memory: “One night I sat up all night with a mother living on the same block and her child. They had a non-stop nosebleed due to the pollution.”

It was around then that another community organizer rented out the next door storefront. “Alicia Garza was next to us, and she later helped create Black Lives Matter.”

Many other prisoners began to write, too. In time their stories became the “Behind Enemy Lines” section in the paper. “The prisoners began to share observations revealing the abuses behind prison walls,” Ratcliff said.

San Francisco Bay View prints 20,000 copies of its 24-page newspaper, of which 3,000 are mailed to prisoners across the nation. “The cost is \$7,000 a month. We are hurting for advertisers and rely on donations, as my husband and I live off our Social Security,” Ratcliff tearfully stated. She is 78, and Willie, her publisher husband, is 86.

“We got letters from prisoners saying they were contemplating suicide,” she continued. “They came across the paper and are now organizing. That is rewarding, and acts as adrenalin in continuing this paper.”

The paper prints an inmate pen pal list. Prisoners are then able to connect with other prisoners in other states. And outside folks begin to correspond. In time they are organizing, too. The paper is a bedrock of prisoner organizing in America.

Ratcliff states, “A gang inspector in Pelican Bay hates the paper. He is frustrated that other prisoners and outside folks can connect for organizing purposes.” Chuckling, she said, “As if our paper is a security threat.” This reflects how important this paper is for actively participating in prison abolition work.

The amazing example of the work San Francisco Bay View does is the 2013 Pelican Bay hunger strike. NPR has an interview with some of the coordinators. Benjamin Wallace-Wells in that interview states, “I think it took a long time. These four men who led the hunger strike—Todd Ashker, [allegedly] of the Aryan Brotherhood, had the initial idea; Sitawa Jamaa, who is allegedly from the Black Guerrilla Family; and Arturo Castellanos, allegedly a senior leader of the Mexican Mafia; and Antonio Guillen, allegedly one of the three ‘generals’ of Nuestra Familia—they were put together in basically the same space years ago, in 2006, and it took five years for them come together.”

Mary Ratcliff says, “It was in 2013, due to a windfall, we were able to go from a 16-page paper to 24 pages.” San Francisco Bay View was able to contribute more space for the strike. Which helped inside prisoner organizing. “We were pleased to find outside readers appreciated the coverage. Many readers finally admitted they had family inside prisons. Through our paper, they were able to reconnect with loved ones.” The timing coincided with the public caring more and participating with prison abolition work.

Another informative prison abolition source is It’s Going Down<sup>165</sup>. While that site does not actively lead protests, it is the go-to organization for online news. They alert the activists about the hottest news and information.

The Industrial Workers of the World<sup>166</sup> started a committee, Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee (IWOC<sup>167</sup>), which works to educate, mentor, and support prison workers.

A very tight-knit networking group is Anarchist Black Cross<sup>168</sup>, which supports those imprisoned and struggling for freedom and liberty.

Michael Moore’s film *Where to Invade Next* includes a segment on humane prisons in Norway, asking Americans to reconsider if we really have all the best answers to crime, recidivism, and restorative justice.

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<sup>165</sup> <https://itsgoingdown.org/>

<sup>166</sup> <http://iww.org/>

<sup>167</sup> <http://incarceratedworkers.org/>

<sup>168</sup> <http://www.abcf.net/>

Many of the prison abolitionists are working on basic reforms<sup>169</sup>, such as:

**Substituting**, for incarceration, supervised release, probation, restitution to victims, and/or community work. **Decreasing** terms of imprisonment by abolishing mandatory minimum sentencing. **Decreasing** ethnic disparity in prison populations. **Improving** prison conditions. **Crime prevention** rather than punishment. **Abolition** of specific programs which increase prison population, such as the prohibition of drugs (e.g., the American War on Drugs<sup>170</sup>), and prohibition of sex work. Alcohol restrictions and gun control are other areas that need re-examination. **Education** programs to inform people who have never been in prison about the problems. **Fighting** individual cases of wrongful conviction.

Interest in community restorative justice is growing in communities around America. The National Institute for Justice<sup>171</sup> assists communities in this training. Prison overcrowding, as well as budgetary issues in many states, might bring prison abolitionists' goals closer to fruition. The rise in grassroots activist protests over these issues shows that the public is open to a new way for justice. In addition, cruel and unusual punishment in many states is being exposed more and more. This drives the growing activism within the prison abolitionist groups.

You may be asking if you should become involved in prison abolition work. Angela Davis said it best:

“If they come for me in the morning they will come for you at night.”

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<sup>169</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prison\\_abolition\\_movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prison_abolition_movement)

<sup>170</sup> [peoplesworld.org/article/the-two-reasons-jeff-sessions-wants-to-prohibit-pot/](http://peoplesworld.org/article/the-two-reasons-jeff-sessions-wants-to-prohibit-pot/)

<sup>171</sup> [nij.gov/topics/courts/restorative-justice/perspectives/pages/how-to-build.aspx](http://nij.gov/topics/courts/restorative-justice/perspectives/pages/how-to-build.aspx)

## “On a Knife Edge”: Coming of age on the Pine Ridge reservation

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*An action in Rapid City, South Dakota / Jacob Robinson*

A few weeks ago I talked to Leonard Peltier<sup>172</sup>, American Indian Movement (AIM<sup>173</sup>) member and political prisoner. He asked me to work with Eli Cane, producer of the film *On a Knife Edge*. After watching it eight times—yes, it’s that good—I fully understand Peltier’s desire for everyone to see this movie.

Eli Cane<sup>174</sup>, 2013 Peabody Award recipient, produced *On A Knife Edge*<sup>175</sup>, and Jeremy Williams directed. The Normal Life Pictures website summarizes:

“Set against a background of rising tension and protest, a Lakota teenager learns first-hand what it means to lead a new generation and enter adulthood in a world where the odds are stacked against him. Filmed over

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<sup>172</sup>[peoplesworld.org/article/indigenous-activist-leonard-peltier-speaks-with-peoples-world/](http://peoplesworld.org/article/indigenous-activist-leonard-peltier-speaks-with-peoples-world/)

<sup>173</sup> <http://www.aimovement.org/>

<sup>174</sup> [http://normallifepictures.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Cane\\_CV.pdf](http://normallifepictures.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Cane_CV.pdf)

<sup>175</sup> <http://normallifepictures.com/>



a five-year period, *On a Knife Edge* provides a privileged view into the interior world of George Dull Knife as he becomes politically active with the American Indian Movement, confronts the challenges of growing up on the Pine Ridge Reservation, and wrestles with accepting the leadership of his storied family from his aging father.”

The Dull Knife family<sup>176</sup> has a long history dating back to the 1873 Custer massacre. In fact, during the epilogue, George Dull Knife, filmed at the NO-DAPL<sup>177</sup> protest, says, “After the first night, you began to see a caravan of cars driving in. It was like it was during the 1973 occupation. It was the first time in 140+ years all six Council Fires came together,” he states. “The last time that happened was at Custer’s massacre in 1873.”

In 1879 a group of Lakota people including George Dull Knife’s great-grandfather attempted a 600-mile trek back to their homeland after the U.S government initiated a forced removal of tribes to Oklahoma.

Bringing home the harsh reality of the movie is the continuous punishing racism facing reservation life. Many scenes reflect the over 100 years of abuses with colonization and humiliation that Indigenous tribes still face today.

A brutal reality lives out on screen as the Dull Knife family deals with a young sibling’s suicide. During a drunk bender, Mary Dull Knife commits suicide. Suicide is the second-leading cause<sup>178</sup> of death on the reservation for Indigenous youth ages 15-22 years of age. Throughout the film, alcohol is discussed as George Dull Knife lead Oglala Sioux youth to stay away from it.

The Suicide Prevention Center states that the suicide rate for South Dakota young people ages 15 to 24 is double the average rate in the nation, and young American Indian males in South Dakota die from suicide at a rate that is four to five times the national rate.

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<sup>176</sup> <https://www.amazon.com/Dull-Knives-Pine-Ridge-Odyssey/dp/0803292945>

<sup>177</sup> [peoplesworld.org/article/pipeline-protest-now-a-city-of-4000-with-a-growing-infrastucture/](http://peoplesworld.org/article/pipeline-protest-now-a-city-of-4000-with-a-growing-infrastucture/)

<sup>178</sup> [youthtoday.org/2016/06/pine-ridge-suicides-highlight-stresses-on-native-american-youth/](http://youthtoday.org/2016/06/pine-ridge-suicides-highlight-stresses-on-native-american-youth/)

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During a high school class scene, another shocking reality hits home. The teacher discusses income. The average living wage she says in America is \$40,000. Her salary as a teacher is \$30,000. She then shows a graph reflecting the average annual income for the Pine Ridge reservation as \$2,600. This unfair situation is shown quite explicitly within the film.

During class, the teacher even discusses issues surrounding Sioux nation land sovereignty. She shows a map of the Fort Laramie treaty of 1851 “guaranteeing” the land mass given to the Sioux nation. A present day map, however, shows how much of the land has been stolen by individuals, cities and the U.S. government. Some have observed that this situation is eerily familiar to the plight of the Palestinians. “The white people will do anything and everything to keep us down,” George realizes. “The land, that’s what it’s always been about, always, it’s been like that ever since.”

It’s refreshing to see father, Guy Dull Knife, passing on traditional values to his 13 children—especially the significance of the sweat lodge. “It’s important for the kids to know who they are,” Guy states. “I have been using the sweat lodge since age 6,” George stated. (He is mostly 17-18 during the film.) “A sweat lodge is a place of prayer, it’s our way of praying.”

The Dull Knife family has generations of warriors protecting the people of their tribe. Guy instills in all the children the historical aspect, and that frames their present role today. George comes to realize that his great-great-grandfather worked and fought for the people of the tribe. His coming of age within AIM embraces his growth in accepting the Dull Knife legacy.

Several protests are shown with George leading and guiding the youth with the AIM-Grassroots division on Pine Ridge. The film has several scenes with teachings that Clyde Bellecourt<sup>179</sup>, co-founder of AIM, shares with the youth. It also has Dennis Banks<sup>180</sup> leading another protest.

George’s coming-of-age tale reflects the necessity to step up and be a warrior for his people. The mechanism for Indigenous people in America is through the American Indian Movement. “All my kids, as they got old enough, were brought up with the importance of AIM,” Guy Dull Knife

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<sup>179</sup> <http://www.aimovement.org/iitc/index.html%23CBELLECCOURT>

<sup>180</sup> <http://www.aimovement.org/iitc/index.html%23BANKS>

proclaimed. “They look at it as security for their family and elders of the tribe. Defending our people—children—to ensure they are not hurt.” Guy Dull Knife was part of the 1973 Wounded Knee AIM protests. During the “Reign of Terror” on the Pine Ridge Reservation in the early 1970s hundreds of elders were murdered for following their traditional lifestyle.

“You knock on the door. If they don’t answer you knock harder. If they still don’t answer you knock the damn door down and confront them,” Bellecourt says. He was discussing AIM’s ideas of confrontational politics with the youth.

George shares how it’s always about protecting the people. “All my ancestors did that. It was passed down generation to generation. My dad taught me, my grandfather taught my dad. It’s always been like that.”

The movie is powerful and superbly edited by Eli Cane. It shows the historical abuses the Sioux have suffered and reflects the warrior attitude for the survival of the people. And it shines a light on the younger generation coming into their own within AIM. It also is sad in that most people living in America are unaware of the survival plight of the Indigenous cultures still today on reservations.

Cane says, “When we began the film seven years ago, we didn’t expect to be filming with George for another five years. But this is a far more relevant moment for the film’s release than we could have anticipated.

“As racism and xenophobic rhetoric becomes policy, George’s search for courage and clarity in his struggle has become far more meaningful to audiences everywhere. On a Knife Edge is not an advocacy film; it simply provides a unique opportunity to hear the voices and perspectives of people for whom there are no sidelines; for whom resistance is a birthright.”

On a Knife Edge is edgy, colorful, truthful and eye-opening. This 89-minute movie really should be watched.

No wonder Leonard Peltier is asking all people to see it.

## Folk singer goes 360 for WoodyFest 2018

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Joel Rafael | Utopia Rossa (Blogspot)

OKEMAH, Okla.—“I picked out ten different songs, that Nora (Guthrie) showed me,” Joel Rafael related in an exclusive interview with People’s World. “These song lyrics were Woody’s own writing and never recorded.” Five of those songs ended up on Joel’s first of two albums of Woody Guthrie songs.

Joel Rafael and John Trudell’s band, Bad Dog, will be the opening feature band<sup>181</sup> at the 2018 Woodyfest<sup>182</sup> in Okemah, Okla., July 11-15. Okemah is Woody’s hometown, and this will be the 21st year of the festival.

“My first year playing Woodyfest, well, come to think of it, it was the first festival,” Joel explains, “I did one of the songs from Woody’s songs that had not been recorded. It was about a lynching in Okemah. So I came to Okemah for the first time to sing about a lynching in Okemah.” The

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<sup>181</sup> <https://www.woodyfest.com/wednesday/>

<sup>182</sup> <https://www.woodyfest.com/>

lynching was the Laura Nelson<sup>183</sup> and family, which happened a few years before Woody was born. The song, Don't kill my baby and my son<sup>184</sup>, is a haunting melody to Woody's words.

Joel Rafael<sup>185</sup> has been performing and playing for over fifty years, as his website states. He was raised in California and after a stint in Portland, Ore., landed back in San Diego County. It was there he met a lifelong friend in Jack Tempchin, Eagles band songwriter. He honed his craft at Blue Ridge Guitar shop as he began to play his songs in front of a real audience. Rafael's songs no longer reflected the idealism of teenage years but focused on his life, family and what he saw in the world.

On his two-CD Woody Guthrie song compilation is an original song of Joel's. The song Sierra Blanca Massacre<sup>186</sup> is about a bungled alien disaster<sup>187</sup>, which could easily be about the immigration issue in our country now. Rafael captured the spirit of Woody in this song and one can tell he is Woody's student. "I grew up in the 50s and 60s during the resurgence of folk music," Rafael states. "I kept hearing Dylan's name especially as it related to his paradigm of singer-songwriter theme. He was greatly influenced by Woody Guthrie." Joel sought out what he could of Guthrie and began to learn his music and instrumentation.

The late 1990s found Joel being invited to join Jackson Browne's Inside Recording<sup>188</sup>. According to Joel's website, he spent six years devoted to recording Woody's songs. Rafael found himself again touring the country, but this time as part of a road show of songwriters dedicated to presenting Woody Guthrie through his songs and prose. And it was time to return to his own songs, so with more than an album's worth of material, he went to Austin and put together 13 songs with a band of musicians who backed

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<http://www.stmuhistorymedia.org/the-lynching-era-the-tragic-hanging-of-laura-and-l-d-nelson/>

<sup>184</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LyMC6E-6YII>

<sup>185</sup> <http://www.joelrafael.com/biography.html>

<sup>186</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Idpkyf0QsB8>

<sup>187</sup> [nytimes.com/1987/07/03/us/18-aliens-trapped-in-a-boxcar-die-in-bungled-smuggling-attempt.html](http://nytimes.com/1987/07/03/us/18-aliens-trapped-in-a-boxcar-die-in-bungled-smuggling-attempt.html)

<sup>188</sup> <http://www.joelrafael.com/news/07.12.12.html>

## Adopting Journalism for Social Justice

Stillwater, Okla., native, and Austin icon, the late Jimmy LaFave<sup>189</sup>. The resulting *Thirteen Stories High* (2008) introduced a new musical collaboration embracing his original work and including the songs of Steve Earle (“Rich Man’s War”) and Jack Hardy (“I Ought to Know”).

The 2012 release of his eighth album *America Come Home* features the title track with Graham Nash and David Crosby. Throughout his career he has opened for Jesse Colin Young, Crosby Stills and Nash, Emmylou Harris, Jackson Browne, Joan Baez, and John Trudell, to just name a few.

His long friendship with Trudell<sup>190</sup> opened up a new performing project for Joel. John Trudell, a spoken word activist, helped lead the Occupation of Alcatraz Island in 1969 and was chairman of American Indian Movement from 1973-79. After hearing Trudell speak at Peace Sunday in 1982, Rafael became an advocate for Indigenous rights, sharing John’s words and following his trail for over twenty years until the two began regularly performing and eventually writing together.

Upon Trudell’s death in 2015, Bad Dog asked Rafael to carry on Trudell’s work by performing with them. The 2017 20th WoodyFest featured them at the Pastures of Plenty, which became a real show stopper. Jackson Browne<sup>191</sup> performed some benefit shows this past fall and winter with Joel and Bad Dog. Browne states, “The reason Bad Dog can perform John’s music so well is because of Joel Rafael. When you hear Joel and close your eyes, you hear John. Joel is gifted with a particularly resonant voice that belies his light physical stature. He’s very aggressive when he does John’s songs and has steeped himself in Americana and the music of Woody Guthrie. And, like me, he’s an old hippie who’s been around since the revolutionary changes that happened in the ’60s. So these concerts will be a great meeting of these two bands.”

You can listen to the full interview with Joel Rafael here<sup>192</sup>.

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<sup>189</sup> <http://www.jimmylafave.com/biography/bio.html>

<sup>190</sup> <https://www.johntrudell.com/>

<sup>191</sup> [sandiegouniontribune.com/entertainment/music/sd-et-music-jackson-browne-20180221-story.html](http://sandiegouniontribune.com/entertainment/music/sd-et-music-jackson-browne-20180221-story.html)

<sup>192</sup> <https://drive.google.com/open?id=16lAbKhtXUkcfM6b3Boi4duJNnJF8yV7N>

## US Denounces Human Rights

**Disappearing Palestine**

Support peace in the Middle East

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<http://www.movement4peoplesdemocracy.org>

“I want to make it crystal clear that this step is not a retreat from human rights commitments,” US Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley, told the media<sup>193</sup>. “On the contrary, we take this step because our commitment does not allow us to remain a part of a hypocritical and self-serving organization that makes a mockery of human rights.”

This was a joint statement made by Haley and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, on why the United States was removing themselves from the UN Human Rights Council, in June 2018. The Council was established in 2006.

“Let me be crystal clear, the US has been, always been, an abuser of human rights. Their manifest destiny themed ideology has crucified, burned, and killed persons of color since 1776”, Mark Maxey, National Coordinator for Movement 4 People’s Democracy said.

<sup>193</sup>[https://www.npr.org/2018/06/19/621435225/u-s-announces-its-withdrawal-from-u-n-s-human-rights-council?utm\\_campaign=storyshare&utm\\_source=facebook.com&utm\\_medium=social](https://www.npr.org/2018/06/19/621435225/u-s-announces-its-withdrawal-from-u-n-s-human-rights-council?utm_campaign=storyshare&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_medium=social)

## Adopting Journalism for Social Justice

Trump's disastrous immigration policy of today reflects the same ideology that has been deployed as a weapon against Indigenous cultures from the 1600s to the present. He denounces immigrants as rapists, killers, and animals—implying they must all come from an inferior culture. When his supporters claim that detained children are better off in detention than they were with their parents, the belief in (white) American society's superiority is on full display.

Early reformers used their religious beliefs to justify their Manifest Destiny perspective. It overflowed into Congress, which passed Manifest Destiny-themed bills. Indigenous people, meanwhile, were on the receiving end of this religious zealotry. Rape, abuse, kidnap, murder, and genocide were the end results for them. The recent quoting of Biblical scripture by Attorney General Jeff Sessions<sup>194</sup> to justify the stealing of immigrant children from their parents shows that this ideology is still very much alive among at least some sectors of the U.S. government.

Capitalism is still playing into the mythology of white Manifest Destiny, which goes back to the earliest colonial settlements. Trump's policies are aimed at stoking the racist anger and resentment of his mass base, but they reflect the interests of the same oligarchy that Sen. Bernie Sanders assailed in his bid for the presidency. In every way, the current administration's policies show favoritism to those at the top and seek any way possible to divide those outside the ranks of the super-wealthy.

The US Congress, and the whole government, is out of touch with reality. As it relates to Human Rights. "The UN Human Rights Council has always been a problem. Instead of focusing on real human-rights issues, the council has used its time and resources to bully Israel and question Israel's legitimacy as a sovereign state," Rep. Eliot Engel, the ranking Democratic member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, said in a statement<sup>195</sup> June 2018.. "But the way to deal with this challenge is to remain engaged and work with partners to push for change.

Let's talk openly and honestly about Palestine and Israel. Just look at these images on how Israel has usurped and stolen land from the Palestinian people. Israel has used the same manifest destiny ideology to

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<sup>194</sup>[usatoday.com/story/news/2018/06/16/jeff-sessions-bible-romans-13-trump-immigration-policy/707749002/](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/06/16/jeff-sessions-bible-romans-13-trump-immigration-policy/707749002/)

<sup>195</sup>[engel.house.gov/latest-news/engel-statement-on-planned-us-withdrawal-from-the-un-human-rights-council/](https://engel.house.gov/latest-news/engel-statement-on-planned-us-withdrawal-from-the-un-human-rights-council/)



go above and beyond the UN agreement signed in 1947. No wonder the US is in agreement with Israel, just ask any Indigenous Nation with a Treaty signed by the US and not followed by the US.

The struggles of the Palestinian people is real. A heavy aura of Zionist oppression was felt when I was in Palestine 2016. Ironic that in such a place where human history of a love revolution from God took place, such chaos explodes across the pristine landscape.

In 1947 the boundaries set in agreement with the Jewish Nation and Palestine gave well-defined area of ownership of land for the Palestinians. However, through the years Israel has encroached and usurped land illegally from the Palestinians. Presently the map reflects 75% less than given by the UN in 1947<sup>196</sup>. “Let’s be honest, this present situation (Al-Aqsa) is about occupation,” Imam Imad Enchassi says. “The Palestinians desire their own recognized state. One man, one vote.”

Theodor Herzl<sup>197</sup>, the father of political Zionism, outlined his vision for a Jewish state in his publication called *Der Judenstaat*<sup>198</sup> (The Jewish State), published in February 1896.

Ralph Schoenman, in his book, **The Hidden History of Zionism**, says, “the objective<sup>199</sup> of Zionism has never been merely to colonize Palestine - as was the goal of classical colonial and imperial movements during the 19th and 20th centuries. The design of European colonialism in Africa and Asia was, essentially, to exploit indigenous peoples as cheap labor while extracting natural resources for exorbitant profit.” You can read the full book online here<sup>200</sup>. This ideology was set forth in 1896 by Herzl. It became reality in 1947. Taking 51 years of indoctrination to see the rise of this racist mentality become a government of oppression, Israel. I am not being anti-Semitic because Zionism is a nationalist mentality, not a race of persons nor a religion. Zionism again is no different than the current rise of alt-right nationalism under the Trump administration.

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<sup>196</sup> [http://www.sott.net/image/9591/israel-palestine\\_map.jpg](http://www.sott.net/image/9591/israel-palestine_map.jpg)

<sup>197</sup> <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/Herzl.html>

<sup>198</sup> <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/excerpts-from-quot-the-jewish-state-quot>

<sup>199</sup> <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/mideast/hidden/ch02.htm>

<sup>200</sup> <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/mideast/hidden/index.htm>

## Adopting Journalism for Social Justice



*AIDA Camp, Palestine, Memorializing the children massacred in July 2014 (photo by Mark Maxey)*



*AIDA camp, Palestine, art graffiti on the WALL that separates Israel and Palestine (photo by Mark Maxey)*

President Trump heralds a new deal<sup>201</sup> with relationships with Israel. Trumps administration clearly impedes upon the democracy Palestine seeks. It is preferential treatment against the victims

(Palestine) from the oppression heavily used by the Israeli government.

While in Palestine (West Bank) June 2015 for two weeks I saw how Israel's occupation impacts human rights for Palestinians. Israel controls their movement, right to travel, water supply, and the building of their homes. This heavy handed oppression by Israel fuels the anger Palestinians have. Many Palestinian Muslims approached me with smiles thanking me for coming. But they all said, "Please tell your government not to fund weapons used against us." America gives Israel approximately 40 Billion<sup>202</sup>

<sup>201</sup>[thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/foreign-policy/320296-trump-heralds-new-day-for-us-israel-relations](http://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/foreign-policy/320296-trump-heralds-new-day-for-us-israel-relations)

<sup>202</sup>[nytimes.com/2016/09/14/world/middleeast/israel-benjamin-netanyahu-military-aid.html](http://nytimes.com/2016/09/14/world/middleeast/israel-benjamin-netanyahu-military-aid.html)

dollars a year. The travel of any Palestinians is maniacally controlled by the IDF. Sometimes IDF holds Palestinians up to 12 hours to simply walk to Jerusalem (less than a mile) to purchase food.

I witnessed the IDF bring bulldozers inside Palestine, West Bank. The reason was stated no building permit was issued, while the Palestinian was waving his permit in the air. The Palestinians are defenseless against the martial law enforced by Israel. Palestinians are denied a nation and citizenship rights by the Zionist policies of the Israeli government.

“The council ceases to be worthy of its name,” US Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley said, explaining the U.S. withdrawal. “Such a council in fact damages the cause of human rights.” What a line of bull manure that is. The US damages the cause of human rights daily.

Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch, said the U.S. focus on Israel’s treatment has actually caused American officials to lose sight of the good work the council has done elsewhere.

“The U.N. Human Rights Council has played an important role in such countries as North Korea, Syria, Myanmar and South Sudan, but all Trump seems to care about is defending Israel,” Roth said in a statement to NPR. “Like last time when the U.S. government stepped away from the Council for similar reasons, other governments will have to redouble their efforts to ensure the Council addresses the world’s most serious human rights problems.”

And Richard Gowan, a fellow at New York University’s Center on International Cooperation, told NPR’s Michele Kelemen that there is another potential issue muddying the waters of this decision: the recent condemnations leveled at the Trump administration’s immigration policies by international human-rights officials.

In a span of less than two months, U.S. officials have separated some 2,300 children<sup>203</sup> from their parents after they crossed the border into the U.S., according to the Department of Homeland Security. And the administration’s policy has attracted a sharp rebuke from the U.N. high

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<sup>203</sup>[npr.org/2018/06/19/621065383/what-we-know-family-separation-and-zero-tolerance-at-the-border](https://www.npr.org/2018/06/19/621065383/what-we-know-family-separation-and-zero-tolerance-at-the-border)

## Adopting Journalism for Social Justice

commissioner on human rights, Zeid Raad al-Hussein.

“The thought that any State would seek to deter parents by inflicting such abuse on children is unconscionable,” Raad al-Hussein said Monday<sup>204</sup>, in comments opening the 38th session of the Human Rights Council.

Trump and his team’s “law and order”<sup>205</sup> framework is the same one articulated by President Richard Nixon in the late 1960s and more subtly invoked by Presidents Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton as they ramped up the drug war and fueled massive prison expansions during their times in office. We jail and separate families at the border to deter illegal immigration just as we jail and separate poor families within our country because they can’t afford bail or proper legal representation.

Simply put the US has always been a denier of Human Rights. Organizations such as Movement 4 People’s Democracy<sup>206</sup> rallies support for true Human Rights. MPD brochure<sup>207</sup>, shows how they break through the chaff, the fascist walls of capitalism, and exposes the truth of Human Rights. The only reason the US left the UN Council for Human Rights, is because they are and support others that trample human rights.

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<sup>204</sup> [ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=23206&LangID=E](http://ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=23206&LangID=E)

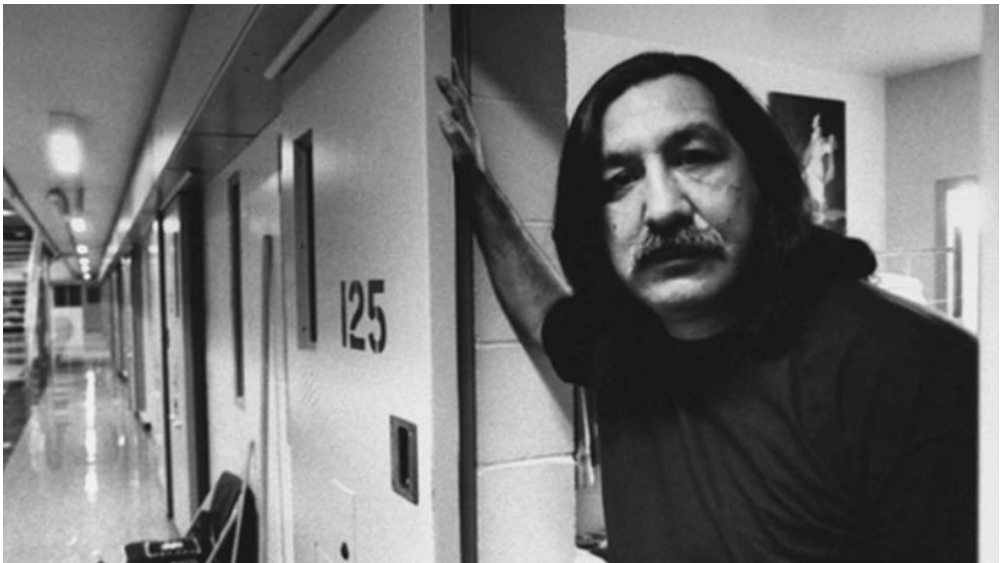
<sup>205</sup> [pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/michelle-alexander-a-system-of-racial-and-social-cont  
rol/](http://pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/michelle-alexander-a-system-of-racial-and-social-control/)

<sup>206</sup> <http://www.movement4peoplesdemocracy.org/>

<sup>207</sup> <https://goo.gl/DbzZqo>

## Indigenous activist Leonard Peltier speaks with People's World

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On the day People's World posted my Florida Strike article<sup>208</sup>, out of the blue, I received a phone call<sup>209</sup> from federal prisoner Leonard Peltier. He is also in federal prison in Florida. In fact, he and the Leonard Peltier<sup>210</sup> Defense Committee were early supporters of #OperationPUSH<sup>211</sup>.

Let me put this in context: A friend and fellow Yuchi tribal member, Richard Ray Whitman<sup>212</sup>, recently was in a movie I had reviewed. I wrote Leonard a letter and sent him a copy of this review in October 2017. I've written Leonard several times before but never got a reply. So this phone call from him was an honor. Richard knows Leonard and was at Wounded Knee in 1973.

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<sup>208</sup>[peoplesworld.org/article/florida-prisoners-on-strike-demand-locked-up-voices-be-heard/](https://peoplesworld.org/article/florida-prisoners-on-strike-demand-locked-up-voices-be-heard/)

<sup>209</sup> <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1jCvJ36fyF6wF6-XnkHHz19pUg7bCSR6O>

<sup>210</sup> <http://www.whoisleonardpeltier.info/>

<sup>211</sup>[peoplesworld.org/article/florida-prisoners-on-strike-demand-locked-up-voices-be-heard/](https://peoplesworld.org/article/florida-prisoners-on-strike-demand-locked-up-voices-be-heard/)

<sup>212</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard\\_Ray\\_Whitman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Ray_Whitman)

## Adopting Journalism for Social Justice

Richard is an accomplished artist, and drove to Wounded Knee with a camera in tow. In an interview with the Oklahoma Gazette<sup>213</sup>, he relates this experience. “It became a serious joke that my first collectors were the FBI,” Whitman jokingly said. While a student at California Institute of the Arts he took a weekend trip with his camera to document artistically the AIM takeover. That weekend turned into 71 days, including his arrest along with Peltier and others. He was released, but the FBI kept all nine rolls of film. “Unfortunately, no one but the FBI has seen the film,” Whitman laments. He has tried to fill out paperwork throughout the years but to no avail to get his pictures returned.

Leonard spoke exclusively with PW with his current pleas and requests. “I have a very unique and interesting tale to tell,” Peltier stated. “I want all Indian involvement from the director down to the writers, to the actors.”

“I knew (Marlon) Brando in the 1960s and many others,” Peltier related. “I worked with many other Native people to get Hollywood to change the stereotypical portrayal of Indians.”

Leonard’s website<sup>214</sup> states the background to what led up to the 1973 AIM takeover. “Actually the AIM takeover was just organized as protest,” Peltier says. However, it turned into a 71-day shoot-out with the government agents shooting many rounds of various caliber of ammo.”

At first, the AIM occupation was to protect the elders and citizens of the Oglala Sioux Natives who were being abused by then Tribal President Dick Wilson and his “goon squad<sup>215</sup>.” A previous PW article<sup>216</sup> outlines some of Leonard’s case.

In the ensuing occupation, several FBI agents were killed. Peltier was put on trial and subsequently imprisoned. Peltier has been in prison since 1977, making this Year 41 as a political prisoner.

“I went to Canada and asked for political asylum. Which places me under the International Extradition Treaty laws<sup>217</sup>, America signed into law,” Peltier related. “I did this under the advice of my elders because they

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<sup>213</sup> [okgazette.com/2016/05/25/richard-ray-whitmans-pursuit-of-art-led-him-to-activism/](http://okgazette.com/2016/05/25/richard-ray-whitmans-pursuit-of-art-led-him-to-activism/)

<sup>214</sup> <https://www.whoisleonardpeltier.info/home/background/wounded-knee/>

<sup>215</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dick\\_Wilson\\_\(tribal\\_chairman\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dick_Wilson_(tribal_chairman))

<sup>216</sup> [peoplesworld.org/article/american-indian-activist-leonard-peltier-seeks-new-trial/](http://peoplesworld.org/article/american-indian-activist-leonard-peltier-seeks-new-trial/)

<sup>217</sup> [justice.gov/usam/usam-9-15000-international-extradition-and-related-matters](http://justice.gov/usam/usam-9-15000-international-extradition-and-related-matters)

knew the American justice system would have to ‘prove’ I was guilty of first degree murder.”

In Peltier’s 1982 appeal in the 8th Circuit Court in Minneapolis, some interesting facts arose. “Judge Heaney asked the prosecutor Lynn Crooks, ‘Just what was Mr. Peltier convicted of, as we cannot find any evidence of first degree murder in the records,’ Peltier said. “Crooks told the judge, ‘Your Honor, the government doesn’t know who killed our agents nor do we know what participation Leonard Peltier may have had in it.’ This completely exonerated me.

“Yet here I sit still in federal prison away from my family,” Peltier sighed.

“You know, brother, I didn’t come to prison to become a political prisoner,” Peltier pointed out. “I’ve been part of the resistance since I was 9 years of age.” Peltier related how he and his sister Betty Ann and first cousin Pauline Peltier were forcefully removed from his grandmother and sent to boarding schools.

“Shit, my sister and cousin cried for days because of that. They were traumatized,” Peltier lamented. “Pauline was so traumatized she has never fully recovered.” The school officials finally let Leonard go see them in the girls’ dorm to tell them he was next door in the boys’ dorm.

“That incident to this day still has an enormous effect on me,” Peltier remembers.

Right now his own family is being traumatized by the government not paroling him. “I just had heart surgery and I’m 73 years old,” Peltier related. “I don’t think I have another ten years. I want out of here so I can be with my family.

“I want to see and hug my children, grandchildren, and my great-grandchildren,” Peltier pleaded.

Through his International Leonard Peltier Defense Committee, Peltier is retooling their information. He stressed the need for folks to support him.

“Right now I want to get folks interested in helping me,” Peltier pleaded.

## Adopting Journalism for Social Justice

“We need lots of small donations, and people stepping up to help me get paroled.” Peltier reiterated that he is 73, and has been locked down for 41 years. He is tired and just wants his freedom so he can be with his family. He mentioned for folks to be sure to read his story, *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse*<sup>218</sup>, as it goes in depth into the challenges he has had to face. “I really hope folks will buy it and read it, it’s a great book.”

Federal prisons only allow for a 15-minute phone call. So it was near the end of our conversation when he specifically spoke about his case. “There is no evidence on me<sup>219</sup>, that came out of our 1983 appeals case,” Peltier states. “The government lawyer said [the government] does not know who fired the shot, nor if I even had anything to do with it.” The government still has not paroled him. He remains locked up to this day.

“This is what I am up against,” Peltier sighed. “This is why I really need the people’s help right now.”

Even behind bars, Leonard Peltier has been the voice of reason for over 41 years to the Native people. He encourages Native youth to embrace their culture, to respect the elders. He encourages and still fights for Native rights.

Peltier was a warrior from age nine. At 73 he remains a warrior still.

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<sup>218</sup> <https://goo.gl/n4Hga6>

<sup>219</sup> <https://www.whoisleonardpeltier.info/home/facts/after-the-trial/>



## Oklahoma Sheriff Indicted Over Death

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Garfield County, Oklahoma Sheriff Jerry Niles indicted<sup>220</sup> over jail death. Five of his subordinates along with Niles were indicted on felony second-degree manslaughter charges this past week.

African American male, Anthony Huff, 58, was deliberately denied water every two hours. Per Oklahoma and Federal laws, this gross negligence is against the law. Huff had other life threatening medical issues and was denied necessary medications. Huff had been arrested on a public intoxication charge and expired in a restraint chair.

A multicounty grand jury<sup>221</sup> found sufficient gross negligence of the Sheriff's department causing Huff's death. The indictment revealed that

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<sup>220</sup>[democracynow.org/2017/7/28/headlines/oklahoma\\_sheriff\\_indicted\\_after\\_prisoner\\_dies\\_in\\_restraint\\_chair](http://democracynow.org/2017/7/28/headlines/oklahoma_sheriff_indicted_after_prisoner_dies_in_restraint_chair)

<sup>221</sup><http://newsok.com/article/5557668>

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they (Garfield Sheriff's officers) allowed Huff to remain in the restraint chair for 48 hours. During that 48 hours, he was denied water and proper life saving-medications.

The indictments allege that on or between June 4, 2016, and June 8, 2016, the crime of manslaughter in the second degree was feloniously committed in Garfield County by each defendant. The indictments accuse each defendant between those June dates of "willfully, unlawfully and without justifiable or excusable cause the death of Anthony DeWayne Huff, in a culpable and negligent manner, by causing/allowing Anthony DeWayne Huff to remain in a restraint chair for over 48 hours without adequate food or water" while in custody. Huff died June 8, 2016, by the gross negligence and unlawful actions of the Sheriff and his staff.

The indictment included Vanisa Jo Gay, 38, a nurse; John Robert Markus, 29, assistant jail administrator; Lela June Goatley, 57, a nurse practitioner; Shawn Caleb Galusha, 37, a detention officer/supervisor; and Jennifer Niles, 34, then the jail administrator.

What is disturbing, the grand jury did not seek an ouster for Sheriff Niles. He still remains in control of the sheriff's office and jail. Despite that under their (sheriff's office) they allowed Huff to be in the restraint chair two days. Two days without water or life-saving medications for his medical issues. The maximum punishment for second-degree manslaughter is \$1,000 fine and four years in prison.

Another African American man dies in a predominantly white southern state at the hands of police. As well, the Sheriff is released to continue running the jail. It's an all too familiar scenario in Oklahoma repeating itself.

Huff's estate in June filed a federal lawsuit over this preventable death. The suit seeks damages actual and punitive. The family is suing the sheriff, Garfield County commissioners and others. The lawsuit is pending in federal court in Oklahoma City.

"It is our hope and belief that justice will be served as those who have been indicted ... for their involvement in this death now proceed through our criminal justice system," said Eddie Wyant, one of the attorneys for Huff's estate.

Special note on this story. The story was released by AP and UPI, and circulated in International news sources. However, I was the only reporter and People's World was the only paper to list the deceased as an African American, denoting a possible racist murder. We all were proud that we broke the story Internationally on a possible hate crime committed by law enforcement.

## Oklahoma Senators Arrested

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In the past few months over four Republican legislators have had to resign in Oklahoma. Each had to do with immoral actions from the party that runs on family morals platform. The most sensational are about Senator Ralph Shortey. He resigned due to news coverage regarding inappropriate sex with a 17-year old boy. Now, the FBI is involved with federal charges. “Recent court documents reveal two persons knew of the pornographic files but remained silent, as reported by Associated Press<sup>222</sup>(AP).”

“AP reports a federal indictment of four counts, including child sex trafficking, producing child pornography (2013-2017).” Shortey faces up to life imprisonment if convicted. He resigned from his Senate seat in March when state law enforcement arrested him at a local motel with the boy

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<sup>222</sup>[abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/fbi-searched-oklahoma-senators-office-porn-4992968](http://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/fbi-searched-oklahoma-senators-office-porn-4992968)

inside.

“Reuters<sup>223</sup> reports that when police arrived at the motel, a strong odor of marijuana emanated from inside the motel room.” Local news outlet The Oklahoma<sup>224</sup>n videoed local constituents speaking out on Shortey’s arrest.

“AP<sup>225</sup> story also focused upon Republican Sen. Bryce Marlatt sexual battery against an Uber driver. Republican Sen. Dan Kirby’s sexually harassing female legislative assistants. The former staffer, for Republican Governor Mary Fallin, Travis Brauer for taking pictures or video up the skirts of women at the state capitol.”

Many Oklahomans are now questioning the political platform of the Oklahoma Republicans family morals when obviously they are lacking. Brady Doughty of Tulsa, OK said, “If they are for family morals then they are for protecting children and their future by education. By cutting public education and engaging in anti-family morals they (Oklahoma Republicans) are being hypocritical.” Brian Collins of Edmond, OK said, “It’s about time Oklahoma conservatives wake up and realize their public servants are not listening to them.” Cindy Sanchez, Oklahoma City, states, “Republicans can no longer claim moral superiority or that they are the party of family values when they seek to destroy public education, cut off assistance to the poor and the working poor, yet cut taxes on the very wealthy. They claim it is a sin to be gay, while they hide their own homosexuality in the closet.”

Dennis Moore stated, “You would hope that any elected official would be moral. Yet I have to ask myself am I always moral?” Many politicians choose to run on red-baiting issues and platform to reach the masses. This type of mentality forces an unrealistic expectation upon anyone. Maybe politics need to change to listen to the public and not the politicians.

Wellstone Action’s book Politics the Wellstone Way<sup>226</sup> offers insights (page 166) from Paul Wellstone. “The book suggests that it’s advocacy that is needed, grassroots advocacy that should shape legislation. Because

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<sup>223</sup> <https://goo.gl/CJzf7z>

<sup>224</sup> <http://newsok.com/multimedia/video/5362205018001>

<sup>225</sup> <https://goo.gl/BuZMRX>

<sup>226</sup> [wellstone.org/sites/default/files/attachments/PoliticsTheWellstoneWay-1.pdf](http://wellstone.org/sites/default/files/attachments/PoliticsTheWellstoneWay-1.pdf)

## Adopting Journalism for Social Justice

grassroots advocacy builds public awareness, by organizing constituents and brings the people's voice to bear on public policy debates.”

Local Oklahoma City television, KFOR, states “ in April of 2017<sup>227</sup>, Republican Sen. Kyle Loveless, resigned due to the criminal investigation into unethical campaign fraud.” This year alone four Senators and one Governor's aide all resigned with unethical actions.

Ana Earis of the Heritage Foundation, states, “that corruption is a symptom of over-regulation. The government needs to curb corruption by lifting over-regulation.” While this pertains to economics, it does point out a general problem. As far as economics are concerned., over-regulation has decreased workers rights. Democracy works when workers speak up and show up.

Maine news blog, Bangor Daily News<sup>228</sup>, says, “Fundamental change happens when our daily lives mesh by getting involved with others. If we don't our elected officials respond to the corporatists and wealthy.”

While the Oklahoma Republicans have used family morals as a foundation base, these four Senators failed. Maybe they failed because of the apathy and lack of local grassroots involvement.

The Bernie Sanders movement did, in fact, awake the mass grassroots groups. From Occupy to Black Lives Matter to others, it was huge despite the mainstream media reporting as such. Senator Sanders was quick to point out it was “Us” and not him.

While the failings of these Senators hurts an already failing state economy in Oklahoma, maybe the 2018 election can change to benefit the citizens. Just last week a Democrat flipped a Republican-held House seat. CNHI reported that Jacob Rosecrants flipped it by a large majority. “Rosecrants spoke on how coalition building helped him win in House District 46. And that type of coalition building will be brought to the state capitol by him.”

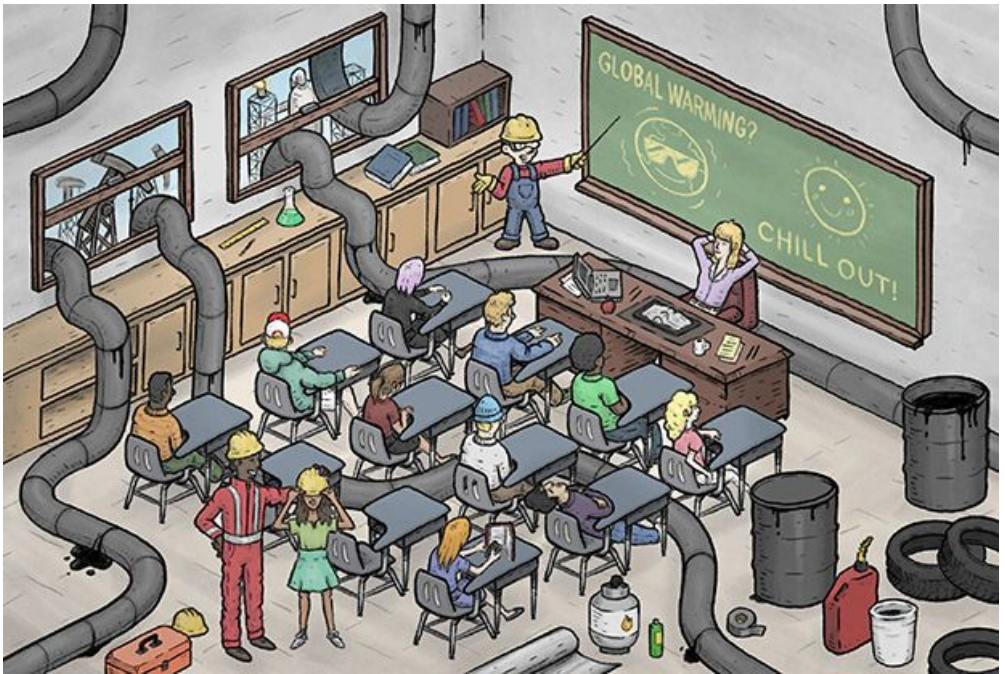
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<sup>227</sup>[kfor.com/2017/04/27/oklahoma-sen-kyle-loveless-submits-resignation-letter-amid-criminal-investigation/](http://kfor.com/2017/04/27/oklahoma-sen-kyle-loveless-submits-resignation-letter-amid-criminal-investigation/)

<sup>228</sup> <https://goo.gl/fuJW52>



## Oil and Gas Propaganda



Propaganda is not new, it's used by all for their own gain. However when capitalists<sup>229</sup> use it the workers are sure to lose. A new technique is not only unethical but could impede upon the next generation. Such is the case with the oil and gas industry in Oklahoma.

Recently, State Impact Oklahoma<sup>230</sup> and the Center for Public Integrity<sup>231</sup> published a report detailing the oil and gas industry have injected \$40-million worth of propaganda into Oklahoma classroom education.

This propaganda is in part a means to indoctrinate Oklahoma's youth about the "great" things the fossil fuel industry has provided society. What is conveniently removed is the environmental destruction, pollution and war

<sup>229</sup>[reddit.com/r/socialism/comments/1obmnv/what\\_are\\_the\\_biggest\\_forms\\_of\\_capitalist/](https://www.reddit.com/r/socialism/comments/1obmnv/what_are_the_biggest_forms_of_capitalist/)

<sup>230</sup> <https://stateimpact.npr.org/oklahoma/2017/06/15/oils-pipeline-to-americas-schools/>

<sup>231</sup> <https://apps.publicintegrity.org/oil-education/>

this industry really provides.

In the book *Petro Pete's Big Bad Dream*<sup>232</sup> a fable is shared from a young boy's nightmare on life without the by-products from the oil and gas industry. Again the industry was able to push this bourgeoisie propaganda with the Oklahoma legislators bought and paid<sup>233</sup> by the fossil fuel industry.

In Ohio teachers<sup>234</sup> show how to frack using Twinkies<sup>235</sup>. As well the fossil fuel industry advises on the curriculum around shale drilling for a charter school<sup>236</sup>. The bourgeoisie propaganda extends towards a national program<sup>237</sup> to play down climate change issues.

Years of reviewing documents by the Center for Public Integrity sheds light on a network of organizations working hand in hand with oil and gas industry for materials for classrooms in America. Yale Program on Climate Change Communication<sup>238</sup>, Anthony Leiserowitz, says, "You're exploiting that trusted relationship between the student and the teacher." Leiserowitz's academic vita has focused on politics, psychology, and culture impact public perception of our environment. Of course the bourgeois oil and gas interests want to paint a picture for future generations' reliance on oil.

One way, as Marxists, can combat this gross agenda is through agitation<sup>239</sup>. A letter to the editor call to action, to attending climate protection organizations to talk about this. All and many different actions by us can help turn this tide. We can't be silent, we can't be still. Agitation is movement. Now is the time in this fascist tide to be actively combating bourgeois propaganda.

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<sup>232</sup> <http://oerbhomerroom.com/ebooks/>

<sup>233</sup> <http://oklahomawatch.org/2017/05/23/oil-and-gas-donations-to-legislators/>

<sup>234</sup> <http://oogeep.org/>

<sup>235</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O8hTBSC2Z1E>

<sup>236</sup> <http://www.uticashaleschool.com/>

<sup>237</sup> <http://www.need.org/>

<sup>238</sup> <http://climatecommunication.yale.edu/>

<sup>239</sup> <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-8/rcp-agit-prop.htm>





These stories were first written from late 2017-June 2018. It was while I was a freelance journalist with *The People's World* (PW). The amazing group of editors there helped flush out my voice with stories I knew needed to be read.

While at PW I was humbled to see my stories time and time again be the most clicked/read stories of the week. For most of my stories had 1000's of hits a day for over 5 days in a row constantly. I always said, it is the combination of a

good nose for a story and the great editing team I shared which was a winning combination.

Mark is currently the National Coordinator for Movement 4 People's Democracy. A grassroots mass organization empowering the working class. He still continues to write and do freelance journalism.

Oklahoman Mark Maxey is a Yuchi Indian, enrolled in the Muscogee Nation, and has studied radio/TV/film with an Art minor in college. He is a member of the National Writers Union, UAW Local 1981/AFL-CIO. He's worked as an administrative assistant, petroleum landman, barista, staff writer, paralegal, content producer and graphic designer. He is a lifelong grassroots activist with a passion for justice. He spent six months as a National Data Team volunteer for the Bernie Sanders for President campaign.

<http://www.peoplesworld.org/authors/mark-maxey/>