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**Leonard Peltier and the Indigenous People: Our Lives Have Meaning
Represent Our Resistance**

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BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board

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I know this. My life has a meaning. I refuse to believe that this existence, our time on Mother Earth, is meaningless. I believe that the Creator, Wakan Tanka, has shaped each of our lives for a reason. I don't know what that reason is. Maybe I'll never know. But you don't have to know the meaning of life to know that life has a meaning.

-Leonard Peltier

Prison Writings: My Life Is My Sun Dance

Spiritual warrior of the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota Nation, Leonard Peltier is 65 years old. In 1977, the U.S. government believed the warrior, then 30 years old, too dangerous. Now Elder Peltier, a political prisoner, currently incarcerated at the U.S. Penitentiary in Lewisburg, PA, is scheduled to come before the U.S. Parole Commission on July 28, 2009 after spending 33 years because the government fears dissidence more than it respects justice.

Another day ends. That's good. But now another night is beginning. And that's bad. The nights are worse. The days just happen to you. The night you've got to imagine, to conjure up, all by yourself. They're the stuff of your own nightmares. The lights go down but they never quite go out in here. Shadows lurk everywhere. Shadows within shadows. I'm one of those shadows myself. I, Leonard Peltier. Also known in my native country of Great Turtle Island as Gwarth-ee-lass - 'He Leads the People.' Also known among my Sioux brethren as Tate-Wikikuma - 'Wind Chases the Sun.' Also known as U.S. Prisoner #89637-132.

For three years, since the end of the 71-day takeover of Wounded Knee, the site of the

1890 massacre of women and children, the residents of Jumping Bull had been under attack. Ramsey Clark writes, a "rogue paramilitary group" - "the GOONs - Guardians of the Oglala Nation" who were provided "weapons, training and motivation to create a wave of violence...against traditional Indian people and their supporters, including the American Indian Movement," killed over 60 residents of Jumping Bull ("Preface," *Prison Writings*). The GOONs, led by Dick Wilson, mix-blood tribal leader and the leader of the anti-traditional "progressive" movement, presided over what is known as the "Reign of Terror." Wilson openly bragged to the media about his GOON squad and the particular brand of "law and order" on the reservation that didn't seem to alarm the U.S. government. Terrorist tactics against residents, particularly elderly people supporting the right to maintain traditional beliefs and values were beaten or murdered, was supported by the FBI.

The people of Oglala had had enough. As they had done in 1973, when they requested the help of the American Indian Movement (AIM) at Wounded Knee, the elders called on them once again and Leonard Peltier along with 16 other AIM members came to protect the people at Oglala. In a 1973 FBI document, Jon Lurie writes, "the government was concerned that AIM would shift their emphasis from advocacy of Native pride to the 'prevention of resources exploitation'" ("The Wiping of the Tears"). Wilson had given away "one-third of the uranium-rich reservation" to the federal government (Lurie).

Thirty-four years ago, on June 26, 1975, two FBI Special Agents, driving unmarked cars and claiming to be in pursuit of a *red pickup truck*, owned by a Jimmy Eagle, came onto the Oglala Reservation in South Dakota.

Peltier remembers resting near the homes where the women were doing the laundry. He heard shooting and dismissed it at first, until he heard screaming. "My job was to protect the terrified people," wrote Peltier (*Prison Writings*). He led the people away from the "dead zone" to a gulley where they prayed.

AIM activist Joe Stuntz and the two Special Agents Jack R. Coler and Ronald A. Williams were dead. Stuntz was shot in the head. To this today, neither Stuntz's murder nor the murders of 60 Oglala people were ever investigated. A few days later, the body of another AIM activist Anna Mae Aquash was found murdered.

Bob Robideau and Dino Butler were captured and charged with double murder. Both men contended that they were defending the people who had for so long experienced an atmosphere of terror at Pine Ridge. The jury found them not guilty. The FBI cried foul! They set about to stack the deck on Peltier who was fighting extradition from Canada to the U.S. The FBI, instead of pursuing justice, pursued revenge, and a means to characterize AIM as a homegrown terrorist threat, as they had with the Black Panthers. The FBI sought and found a favorable environment. Contrary to U.S. Congress, in particular Senators Lindsey Graham and Jeff Sessions belief that judges don't *advocate* a certain ideology, the FBI located a judge favorable to permitting a kangaroo court, where false evidence was allowed to be presented against Indigenous People. It also procured a *favorable* jury - all white. In 1977, the government selected Fargo, North Dakota to hold the trial.

"Peltier's conviction is one of the worst examples of government manipulation of the justice process in American history," according to Dan Skye, June 2009, "Leonard Peltier Parole Hearing July 27, 2009." "In 1977... the judge disallowed testimony describing the state of open warfare that existed on Pine Ridge, nor was Peltier allowed to claim self-defense. Later, an appeals judge called the conduct of the FBI 'a clear violation of the investigative process.'" By the time the trial ended, it was Peltier's *red*

and white van (not a red pick up truck now) that was just ahead of the two unmarked car. It was Peltier's rifle that shot the officers "point blank." Peltier is sentenced for crimes in which "false affidavits" were used as evidence and witnesses were "intimidated" and "coerced" into testifying against Peltier (Skye).

The Spiritual warrior of the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota Nation, entered the hellhole that can only be conjured by hate and fear for people who struggle for freedom.

During the 1960s, Peltier worked as a farmer and then an auto shop worker in Seattle," writes Carolina Saldana, "Leonard Peltier: Silence Screams," *Born Black Magazine*. "At that time he got his first taste of community organizing" and joined, in the early 1970s AIM, participating in the Trail of Broken Treaties, a march from Alcatraz to Washington D.C. He also participated in the occupation of the BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs] in Washington (Saldana). As a result, Peltier became a "target of the FBI program [COINTELPRO] to 'neutralize' AIM leaders and was set up and jailed at the end of the year."

My own personal story can't be told, even in this abbreviated version, without going back long before my own birth on September 12, 1944, back to 1890 and to 1876 and to 1851 and, yes, all the way back through all the other calamitous dates in the relations between the red men and white, back to that darkest day of all in human history: October 12, 1492, when our Great Sorrow began (Peltier).

Some people know the facts surrounding October 12, 1492, but not many have sat long enough to feel the impact of the Great Sorrow against humanity. Fewer still truly recognize the willful destruction of people, cultures, and lands; the mandate forcing survivors to relocate in mass; the government neglect and the lies, deceit, and outright heavy-handed enforcement of legalities backed by repressive presence of police and military operatives - long before the ghettoizing Black urban communities, long before the 1948 Nakba in Palestine.

A First people, the Indigenous People of the Americas, abused by European forces and then by the might of the United States is expected to be forgetful and further assist in their own annihilation by assimilating to the rulers of capitalism and to foreign beliefs and values.

Give up the fight or at least remain silent!

Silence, they say, is the voice of complicity.
But silence is impossible.
Silence screams.
Silence is a message,
just as doing nothing is an act

Let who you are ring out and resonate
in every word and every deed.
Yes, become who you are.
There's no sidestepping your own being
or your own responsibility.

What you do is who you are.
You are your own comeuppance.
You become your own message.

You are the message.

-Peltier, "The Message"

The Great Sorrow, while *victimizing* the Indigenous People of Americas, has not diminished the peoples' knowledge of their history and relationship with the Mother Earth.

I had the honor to speak by phone with Tiokasin Ghosthorse, master musician and flutist, storyteller, poet, university lecturer, scholar, essayist, human rights activist, and host of *First Voices Indigenous Radio* (WBAI). "We are not claiming to be victims," Ghosthorse said. "We've known we have always been out of the box."

Ghosthorse is a survivor of the *official* Reign of Terror, 1972-1976. But the Reign of Terror began long before 1972. During the 1960s, Ghosthorse explained, the mining for uranium on the Pine Ridge Reservation included more than mining of the land: it mined the spirit of the people. "Some people ended up working for the government on those projects while it was said of the 'traditional' people that we were 'backward.'"

But traditionalist persisted, as has the Reign of Terror, he said.

"The Reign of Terror began long before the years of 1972-1976. Before that things were happening," Ghosthorse recalls. The government came and told the Nation that thousands of Lakota people living near the Missouri River, where the government was building a dam, had to move. "The government flooded the land and up rooted people." Whites living along the river were given sufficient time to evacuate the area, and they were compensated. This was not the case for the Lakota people.

The Reign of Terror precedes the official beginnings of the COINTELPRO FBI program. As early as the 1950s, "if you said you didn't like the system, you were deemed a dissident." And the police state continues today.

Ghosthorse explains that in 1999, 2000, and 2001, 9 men, educated in both traditional and at non-Indigenous U.S. institutions, were found dead, "face down, in Rapid Creek." Why? These young men, Ghosthorse said, were starting to organize the people, organize a movement. The government responded to this perceived *threat*. "No investigation [occurred] because they [the FBI] claimed they didn't have the resources." The U.S. government didn't investigate human rights violations against the Indigenous People. "But we are talking about our 'natural' rights - not those given by any government."

Currently, at Pine Ridge, "the life span of men is down to 40 years of age. It used to be 120." Women's life span is 45 years of age. "Sixty-four percent of our population is 20 years." That means most of our young people "are without parents and grandparents," Ghosthorse said.

He remembers that in his own childhood, he walked to school, dodging the GOONs and the FBI. "Everyone walked. But we knew where to walk and where not to walk." The people devised ways to walk where the GOONs and FBI agents wouldn't drive their cars. But people were "maimed for life and wounded" during this period. Many were killed, "far more than 60 people."

The culture of greed fuels the continuation of the Reign of Terror against the Indigenous People whose understanding of "freedom" precedes the imposition of capitalist values.

If we were dealing with truth, the U.S. would owe the Native Indian well over 125 billion dollars. What matters is not the money, but the truth that all Americans need to know. We are talking about the U.S. government's war on Earth that's driven by profit. Our way of relating to the Earth is anti-profit.

That's what this Reign of Terror is all about. That's what we are talking about.

But, Ghosthorse added, if we use "the language of the government...we are not going to get anywhere. We are going to stand until we get it - our 'freedom.'"

"It's about who we are - not were."

"We have always been poor," Ghosthorse concluded, "but we've been the riches in spirit. This is what the government does not want Americans to know. [But] if we forget who we are, this country is lost."

The persecution of elder Leonard Peltier is intended to conceal the attack against spiritual warriors who attempt to defend the Indigenous People against the violence of the U.S. government and those who engage the ruling power against their own people.

The meaning of Peltier's life is linked to the meaning of freedom for the Indigenous People.

This spirit of Crazy Horse is a spirit of being in total resistance to the wrongs perpetrated towards your people, community, family and yourself. It is when we make a conscious choice to try and balance the wrongs in this society that we are being compelled by this spirit of resistance to stand in defense of the wronged.

-Leonard Peltier, "Letter Written November 5, 2008," San Francisco Bayview, January 2009.

AIM Casualties on Pine Ridge, 1973-1976

4.17.73-Frank Clearwater-AIM member killed by heavy machine gun round at Wounded Knee. No investigation.

4.23.73-Between eight and twelve individuals (names unknown) packing supplies into Wounded Knee were intercepted by Goons [Guardians of the Oglala Nation] and vigilantes. None were ever heard from again. Former Rosebud Tribal President Robert Burnette and U.S. Justice Department Solicitor General Kent Frizzell conducted unsuccessful search for a mass grave after Wounded Knee siege. No further investigation.

4.27.73-Buddy Lamont-AIM member hit by M16 fire at Wounded Knee, Bled to death while pinned down by fire. No investigation.

6.19.73-Clarence Cross-AIM supporter shot to death in ambush by Goons. Although assailants were identified by eyewitnesses, brother Vernal Cross-wounded in ambush-was briefly charged with crime. No further investigation.

4.14.73-Priscilla White Plume-AIM supporter killed at Manderson by Goons. No investigation.

7.30.73-Julius Bad Heart Bull-AIM supporter killed at Oglala AIM supporter killed at

Oglala by "person or persons unknown." No investigation.

9.22.73-Melvin Spider-AIM member killed Porcupine, South Dakota. No investigation.

9.23.73-Philip Black Elk-AIM supporter killed when his house exploded. No investigation.

10.5.73-Aloysius Long Soldier-AIM member killed at Kyle, S.D. by Goons. No investigation.

10.10.73-Phillip Little Crow-AIM supporter beaten to death by Goons at Pine Ridge. No investigation.

10.17.73-Pedro Bissonette-Oglala Sioux Civil Rights Organization (OSCRO) organizer and AIM supporter assassinated by BIA Police/Goons. Body removed from Pine Ridge jurisdiction prior to autopsy by government contract coroner. No investigation.

11.20.73-Allison Fast Horse-AIM supporter shot to death near Pine Ridge by "unknown assailants." No investigation.

1.17.74-Edward Means, Jr.-AIM member found dead in Pine Ridge alley, beaten. No investigation.

2.27.74-Edward Standing Soldier-AIM member killed near Pine Ridge by "party r parties unknown." No investigation.

4.19.74-Roxeine Roark-AIM supporter killed at Porcupine by "unknown assailants." Investigation open, still "pending."

9.7.74-Dennis LeCompte-AIM member killed at Pine Ridge by Goons. No investigation.

9.11.74-Jackson Washington Cutt-AIM member killed at Parmalee by "unknown individuals." Investigation still "ongoing."

9.16.74-Robert Reddy-AIM member killed at Kyle by gunshot. No investigation.

11.16.74-Delphine Crow Dog-sister of AIM spiritual leader Leonard Crow Dog. Beaten by BIA police and left lying in a field. Died from "exposure." No investigation.

11.20.74-Elaine Wagner-AIM supporter killed at Pine Ridge by "person or persons unknown." No investigation.

12.25.75-Floyd S. Binais-AIM supporter killed at Pine Ridge by Goons. No investigation.

12.28.74-Yvette Loraine Lone Hill-AIM supporter killed at Kyle by "unknown party or parties." No investigation.

1.5.75-Leon L. Swift Bird-AIM member killed at Pine Ridge by Goons. Investigation still "ongoing."

3.1.75-Martin Montileaux-killed in a Scenic, S.D. bar. AIM leader Richard Marshall later framed for his murder. Russell Means also charged and acquitted.

3.20.75-Stacy Cotter-shot to death in an ambush at Manderson. No investigation.

3.21.75-Edith Eagle Hawk and her two children-AIM supporter killed in an automobile

accident after being run off the run by a white vigilante, Albert Coomes. Coomes was also killed in the accident. Goon Mark Clifford identified as having also been in the Coomes car, escaped. Investigation closed without questioning Clifford.

3.27.75-Jeanette Bissonette-AIM supporter killed by sniper at Pine Ridge. Unsuccessful attempt to link AIM members to murder; no other investigation.

3.30.75-Richard Eagle-grandson of AIM supporter Gladys Bissonette killed while playing with loaded gun kept in the house as protection from Goon attacks.

4.4.75-Hilda R. Good Buffalo-AIM supporter stabbed to death at Pine Ridge by Goons. No investigation.

4.4.75-Jancita Eagle Deer-AIM member beaten and run over with automobile. Last seen in the company of provocateur Douglass Durham. No investigation.

5.20.75-Ben Sitting Up-AIM member killed at Wanblee by "unknown assailants." No investigation.

6.1.75-Kenneth Little-AIM supporter killed at Pine Ridge by Goons. Investigation still "pending."

6.15.75-Leah Spotted Elk-AIM supporter at Pine Ridge by Goons. No investigation.

6.26.75-Joseph Stuntz Killright-AIM member killed by FBI sniper during Oglala firefight. No investigation.

7.12.75-James Briggs Yellow-heart attack caused by FBI air assault on his home. No investigation.

7.25.75-Andrew Paul Stewart-nephew of AIM spiritual leader Leonard Crow Dog, killed by Goons on Pine Ridge. No investigation.

8.25.75-Randy Hunter-AIM supporter killed at Kyle by "party or parties unknown." Investigation still "ongoing."

9.9.75-Howard Blue Bird-AIM supporter killed at Pine Ridge by Goons. No investigation.

9.10.75-Jim Little-AIM stomped to death by Goons in Oglala. No investigation.

10.26.75-Olivia Binais-AIM supporter killed in Porcupine by "person or persons unknown." Investigation still "open."

10.26.75-Janice Black Bear-AIM supporter killed at Manderson by Goons. No investigation.

10.27.75-Michelle Tobacco-AIM supporter killed at Pine Ridge by "unknown persons." No investigation.

12.6.75-Carl Plenty Arrows, Sr.-AIM supporter killed at Pine Ridge by "unknown persons." No investigation.

12.6.75-Frank LaPointe-AIM supporter killed at Pine Ridge by Goons. No investigation.

2.76-Anna Mae Pictou Aquash-AIM organizer assassinated on Pine Ridge. FBI involved in attempt to conceal cause of death. Ongoing attempt to establish "AIM involvement"

in murder. Key FBI personnel never deposed. Coroner never deposed. [to testify or bear witness, especially on oath in court].

1.5.76-Lydia Cut Grass-AIM member killed at Wounded Knee by Goons. No investigation.

1.30.76-Byron DeSersa-OSCRO organizer and AIM supporter assassinated by Goons in Wanblee. Arrests by local authorities resulted in two Goons-Dale Janis and Charlie Winters-serving two years of five year sentences for "manslaughter." Charges dropped against two Goon leaders, Manny Wilson and Chuck Richards, on the basis of "self-defense" despite DeSersa having been unarmed when shot to death.

2.6.76-Lena R. Slow Bear-AIM supporter killed at Oglala by Goons. No investigation.

3.1.76-Hobart Horse-AIM member beaten, shot, and repeatedly run over with automobile at Sharp's Corners. No investigation.

3.26.76-Cleveland Reddest-AIM member killed at Kyle by "person or persons unknown." No investigation.

4.28.76-Betty Jo Dubray-AIM supporter beaten to death at Martin, S.D. No investigation.

5.6.76-Marvin Two Two-Aim supporter shot to death at Pine Ridge. No investigation.

5.9.76-Juia Pretty Hips-AIM supporter killed at Pine Ridge by unknown assailants." No investigation.

5.24.76-Sam Afraid of Bear-AIM supporter shot to death at Pine Ridge. Investigation "ongoing."

6.4.76-Kevin Hill-AIM supporter killed at Oglala by "party or parties unknown." Investigation "still open."

7.3.76-Betty Means-AIM member killed at Pine Ridge by Goons. No investigation.

7.31.76-Sandra Wounded Foot-AIM supporter killed at Sharp's Corners by "unknown assailants." No investigation.

From "AIM, Pine Ridge and the FBI" <http://www.dickshovel.com/Aim.Pine.html>

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The BlackCommentator Readers' Corner Blog

BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board member, Lenore Jean Daniels, PhD, has been a writer, for over thirty years of commentary, resistance criticism and cultural theory, and short stories with a Marxist sensibility to the impact of cultural narrative violence and its antithesis, resistance narratives. With entrenched dedication to justice and equality, she has served as a coordinator of student and community resistance projects that encourage the Black Feminist idea of an equalitarian community and facilitator of student-teacher communities behind the walls of academia for the last twenty years. Dr. Daniels holds a PhD in Modern American Literatures, with a specialty in Cultural Theory (race, gender, class narratives) from Loyola University, Chicago. Click [here](#) to contact Dr. Daniels.

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