

## The Big Strong Government and the Little Wahatehwe Wa'ipi

The story of the Native American is a troubled one. In fact it's not even about Native *Americans* it's about a people who have lived somewhere for their entire lives, and their ancestors entire lives, until new people came along willing to take it; and kill anyone who got in their way. These new people named this new place and the beings that inhabited it. It's a story about how a government can become so powerful and corrupt that it can kill and steal freely. But, they do not define this as killing, no, they are so powerful in fact that they can create new words to justify the killing like "Doctrine of Discovery" or "Gradual Encroachment" or even "Manifest Destiny". Because this is what happened to the Western Shoshone people of present day Nevada. This powerful government created new, meaningless words to justify the killing of innocent lives and the taking of land in recent times. So in a country seemingly known for being tolerant and welcoming of all peoples, why would they turn their backs on so many, and why the native peoples no less? For the same reason they have for hundreds of years and what will ultimately be their own demise; money and greed. I'd like to take a look into the lives of a few people who had this struggle come to their doorstep and what we collectively are doing to help in the aftermath.

This story begins the home of the Dann sisters, who are Western Shoshone. The Western Shoshone people have lived in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains in present day Nevada since the dawn of time, since their creator put them there. They have lived there every day learning to be human and do what their creator would like them to do while working the land. The land, just like the sun, air and water are life to the Shoshone; and lack of anyone of these means no life. This was respected as "All life has spirit." The Shoshone also believe that the land is to share, for no one person can own land. Just as no person may own the sun or air. This was in the minds of the Shoshone as they signed the Treaty of Ruby Valley with the new white people they had never met before. At no point did they choose to give away their land nor sell it because no one man can own it, instead they decided to keep peace and share the land as their creator would have wanted. The Shoshone and the Dann family have lived this way for generations until one day in 1973, when a big strong government sent a representative to tell them they

were trespassing and have been since 1968 when the government decided they wanted the land. This was not stealing, for the government covered their tracks with a new, fancy reasoning they called Gradual Encroachment; which meant the land was automatically theirs now. No one had told the Shoshone of this, nor did any treaty allow such a change in circumstances.

This is “Spiritual genocide against the Western Shoshone people.” The strong government is killing something that no one else will ever understand. “It’s a spiritual killing,” the Danns have said. Never once have they asked the government for anything but now that government wants to take their land and prevent them from making a living! But the sly government has created things to cover their tracks here as well, things called laws. These new laws give the land to the government without anyone’s say. But “just because something’s legal does not mean its right,” one supporter mentioned. Even Hitler created the Nuremburg laws to justify killing. But as this came into speculation, the government needed something more concrete to right their wrongs. So they made up lies about the Dann’s family to sway public support. Helen Hankins of the Bureau of Land Management stated that the Danns “were not only trespassing but were running SO MANY animals that the land has been SIGNIFIGANTLY degraded.” Anyone knowing the facts will realize this is utterly insane. The Dann sisters, Mary and Carrie, did not have much help on the farm and were not able to run such a substantial farm from their one house. It is also common knowledge to any native that we need to take care of the land so that it may be enjoyed by our families seven generations from now; something the sisters did consciously every day.

These were just the beginning of such fabricated truths. The Bureau then went on to asking the Danns to pay fees for grassing licenses to work on their own property. This would be like someone trespassing into your yard then claiming that you’re the one trespassing, taking your yard then charging you to be on it; it makes absolutely no sense! Once none of these “passive” approaches worked the strong government thought it wise to respond with force. Over the next few months, preceding the notices, the military then came with attack helicopters and trucks loaded with heavily armored soldiers who took the cattle and horses off the Danns’ farm by gunpoint. Machine guns were aimed towards the family as the

livestock were chased off into the country where they would soon be tortured, neglected and killed from starvation due to the military's abuse. The others were corralled into trailers and hauled away never to be seen again. The strong government then created a new word to justify these horrible actions as well, the "Impounding of livestock" as if they were simple cars and trucks. Was this really an appropriate response?

The land was now effectively *owned* by the strong government. For the Dann's have lost everything in the fight and now have to turn to the legal system for help. Unfortunately for them the legal system is also a creation of the strong government designed to make the native people helpless in the fight for what is right. The government took notice to this as well and wanted to make sure they would have no money to fight back; so they claimed the Dann's were responsible for the military round up of the livestock and claimed they now owed 5,000,000 dollars in expenses. Even if the two elderly farmers had the money, they would never have given in to such wild accusations.

The battle for ownership would rage on even through the Supreme Court, the highest law in the strong government. In the meantime the strong government now appeased with its new property, just so happens to discover the world's second largest gold deposit on the grazing land of the Dann family farm. That's quite a coincidence if you ask me. But the audacity and greed does not end here, no, the gold that they just so happen to stumble exactly upon is in the form of microscopic pieces; which the government just recently the year before learned how to mine efficiently. Another coincidence? But the process of mining this micro gold is complicated and detrimental. To do so, they must drill through the watershed of the area pumping out and wasting hundreds of millions of gallons of water and polluting all nearby water sources causing widespread death of wildlife. Then the soil must be chemically bleached and doused in cyanide to dissolve sediment from the gold. The aftermath of such a process was 20 metric tons of biohazardous tillings (waste rock) poured into the gaping holes and quarries that were dug. Please keep in mind the reason the Dannels lost their land was because the strong government said they, "were running SO MANY animals that the land has been SIGNIFIGANTLY degraded." If animals were degrading the land

how one can't even begin to describe what the big strong government had done. The earth is scarred just as the air the sun the water.

The strong government was now looking to take a sacred mountain from the Shoshone for more drilling and money lust. But the Danns were not quitting. Finding no help from the strong government they turned to the United Nations in Geneva. They then explained how this was an attack on everything they hold sacred and how it violates the peace treaty signed in the 1870s along with several other human rights violations. The hearing was unanimous; the strong government was ordered to stop the drilling on Shoshone land and return it back to the native peoples. The Danns may have lost every battle thus far but they won the war, and like with all wars they were left to clean up the aftermath of the mining. The strong government was also told to begin talking peace again with the Shoshone nations, to this day this has not happened. However, the Dann's are now at peace; for now at least the Shoshone nation can rest.

As you may have guessed the strong government in this true story is our United States government. It may surprise many that stories like this happen all the time all over the country. Even today and in recent years Native Americans are being subjected to discrimination beyond what we think is reasonable. If a single act of aggression is shone to anyone non-native by our government, it brings national attention to that unfairness. But not for the Natives, their hearts beat alone.

To me this story raises a few questions. Why do we think such acts of violence are dignified by laws the perpetrator created and why are the native peoples of America not represented in the United Nations. I think it's been made very clear the United States has no intentions of representing the rights of native people in the United Nations. This may be countered with the argument that the United States has made great strides in improving its relationship with Native Americans in recent years. However, much needs to be done. U.S. agencies are continuing to work with tribal leaders so that the United States can be a better model for the international community in protecting and promoting the rights of indigenous peoples (Lourdes Trammell). This is not entirely true. For years tribes have been declined membership to the UN. 567 tribes are federally recognized as sovereign nations in the U.S. alone. This means they have

the right to govern themselves freely and exclusively with their own laws and courts. Even so, not a single tribe has representation in the United Nations to this day. Many NGO's (non-governing organizations) won a place in the original UN Charter. Article 71 says that the Economic and Social Council "may make suitable arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations which are concerned with matters within its competence." NGOs can give their opinions on social and economic matters, but in the powerful political organs, the General Assembly and the Security Council, they did not get a role (Aline Baillat). Thus, no tribes or organizations have any representation into the proceedings happening on their own land.

Obviously it would be impossible to represent every single tribe in the United States; they all have different world views, creation stories, and lifestyles. They are a very cultured and different people but so are each of the people from each of the countries in the United Nations. The United Nations solved this problem by electing a representative from each country. The Native Americans may do the same by electing one leader from each group of nations thereby limiting the number of nation leaders. For example the Anishinaabe could elect one leader to represent the Ojibwa, Odawa and Potawatomi and so forth for other multi-nation groups. This is just an idea to explain how simple a plan would be to adequately represent native voices in the world government for the first time in history. Such an achievement would mean much to the native tribes and give hope to future generations of natives that have lost all hope otherwise.

In order to do anything we cannot let their hearts beat alone! For there will always be a strong government waiting to drown out the beat to make a quick profit no matter who they hurt. All we need are another Little Wahatehwe Wa'ipi (two strong women-Shoshone).

#### Works Cited

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