

# Thoughts of Racism, Politics and Spiritual Sovereignty

I've been receiving a lot of response and request to repost or forward my article that I added a permission to reprint as long as it is in its entirety. I am working on a book about my life and Standing Deers, of which the proceeds will go towards paying off the land and developing an infrastructure. As an organization we hope to set up a major concert to generate more funds and support for what we are doing.

I've been a writer expressing how I truly felt about issues. And as a public speaker, it still comes from the heart. This article is a glimpse into my life and my thoughts. I've been a leader more than a follower, but if someone has a better idea than me, I can support that person and their goals. It isn't about me, but the people. I came from a time in my life where my relatives and friends thought that I would never amount to anything. At the time they may have been right, I didn't expect to live past 21 with the things I was doing, but my life changed in prison. I became a voice for others who could not find their voice or knew how to express their self. I no longer existed, I lived cause there was a meaning to my life.

I have a story to tell and if people like Brenda stated:

*"Ben Carnes is a powerful voice for all Indians, he speaks the truth and he speaks it well. The racism against Indians is ingrained so much that people just accept it without question. No one should be treated like we Indians have been treated and continue to be treated. Myto, Brenda".*

Then I must tell this story to show that each of us are very capable of changing our life and making a difference. So if my article moves you in some way, please repost this and encourage others to do the same. Send me an add, an email or bookmark our website. We will add a page for comments and writings and quotes such as mine. In this way, when my book is ready to launch as an e-Book, you will know where to get it.

Thanks everyone for your support,

Ben Carnes

posting of rest follows on next page..

In the late 1990's, I worked for a company in Oklahoma who had a contract to lay phone cables for Southwestern Bell. At a job one day, my boss and a phone repairman were talking about some land my boss had purchased. The phone repairman said, "Well, if I bought some land some Indians will probably come and take it away from me." He knew I was Native and that I heard everything he said, so I simply told him, "No, we wouldn't. I know what it feels like to be homeless in my homelands." He didn't know what to say, so I continued on working.

My comment reflected a thought that has been with me for a very long time. I had wanted to pose this question to the late Vine DeLoria Jr., but the time is past. I know his answer would have been amusing, while at the same time, thought provoking. If we were to have our lands returned, and sovereignty recognized with the jurisdiction of our authority restored tomorrow morning. What would it look like? Are we even ready? And how would we treat the non-Native people who have been here for generations? Would we just repeat what we have been taught and nothing will have really changed? Would our leaders begin to fight one another for control of territories? Will some nations begin treating non-Natives as we had been treated? What of our relatives from the South? They are just Spanish speaking Indians who are being called illegal aliens or immigrants by the descendants of immigrants.

I find it very sad that my relatives from the South are being hunted down and sent back home. Oklahoma had recently passed a law prohibiting aiding any "illegal immigrants" with food, shelter, or work, or even a ride to work. The Indian way is to provide our relatives who visit with food, water and the comfort of shelter. In an indirect way, our way of life is being criminalized in our homelands, like in the 1800's when they imposed the Code of Religious Offenses.

Many of us, including myself, have made the demand for the recognition of our sovereignty. It is the reality of the past acts of assimilation/genocide has made that impossible for most of the First Nations. The one exception would be the consensus making process of the Iroquois Confederacy. The Clan Mothers of the confederacy have the authority to direct the War Chief to throw out the Todaho (Chief) if he acts contrary to the wishes of the people. Benjamin Franklin thought their form of government so effective that he patterned the US Constitution after it. That is with the exception of including women.

In the 1700's and 1800's, the government made over 300 treaties with the First Nations, often at the threat of being starved or murdered, and in other cases, the Chiefs were given alcohol by the barrels to get them to sign the treaty the government had written. Later, when the Supreme Court ruled that treaties were made on a nation to nation basis, the government began to pass acts of Congress, without the consent or knowledge prior by Native people. By then most of the Native people had been hunted down and placed under the custody of the War Department. So in effect, our ancestors became prisoners of war. That status had never been rescinded, with the exception of the Ft. Sill Apaches who were pardoned a few years after the 1924 American Indian Citizenship Act was passed.

The government had signed a treaty with my people (Choctaw) that promised if we moved to Indian Territory (Oklahoma) it would never be made into a state or a part of the Union. Originally, Indian Territory was home to the Caddo's, Wichita's, and Waco's people. The land was considered barren and useless, but to the government, it was an ideal place to exile the Native prisoners of war. However, it wasn't long before the rumors of statehood prompted Native people to draft a proposal to Congress to allow them to form the State of Sequoyah, an Indian state. This proposal was ignored, and the move to turn Indian Territory into a state by non-Natives accelerated. My Choctaw people made a proposal to the government to allow them to sell off their lands so they could move to Mexico. This was also ignored.

By 1889, Senator Dawes decided that to make the Indians more productive, they needed to begin farming their lands. His proposal, the Dawes Allotment Act, was that each family would be allotted 180 acres per household and the remaining lands would be opened up for settlement to pioneers.

Some Muskogee's, Choctaws and Cherokees, including others followed Chitto Harjo in an attempt to stop their people from signing up for the allotment, but the government sent troops to quash the "Crazy Snake Rebellion". Those who did not sign up for allotments have descendants today who cannot prove their ancestry as Native.

These surplus/stolen lands, called unassigned lands were the subject of the 1889 Land Run. At the sound of a cannon shot, thousands of people raced into Indian Territory to stake a claim. These people were known as the "Boomers", whereas another group of people who sneaked into Indian Territory earlier were called the "Sooner". Oklahoma is known as the Sooner state and its flagship university's football team is called the OU Sooners. Dishonesty and thievery is deceitfully herald in Oklahoma.

Many of the people we call Chiefs consider themselves Americans and salute the flag that the cavalry waved as they murdered men, women, and children at Wounded Knee, Sand Creek and so many other places of pain. When the European immigrants arrived and embarked upon the mission of Manifest Destiny to conquer and exploit the land. It was the missionaries who came and stole our children away from their homes to teach them their education. Then they sent them back to their communities where government agents recognized them as the leaders. Their minds had been colonized and they worked on behalf of the colonizer.

The 1934 Indian Reorganization Act established procedures where Natives could apply for federal recognition. They had to create written democratic constitution and council system. In the mid 70's, the American Indian Self-determination Act was passed and more First Nations began to seek federal recognition, some real and some fraudulent. This Act permitted the First Nations to administer their own programs through federal funding.

Since the cession of treaty making with First Nations, many of the Acts of Congress has been to our detriment. Many of the so-called Chiefs have been convicted of fraud and mismanagement of federal funds. Their position has led to an abuse of office for self-serving interest.

The huge minus to these Acts is when I went to the United Nations in Vienna, Austria, I learned from the delegates that because of these Acts, we no longer have a voice in the UN. We are considered a domestic concern of the US government and if we have a problem, then we have to take it up with them.

In 1993, then President Bill Clinton signed the apology resolution in which he apologized for the illegal overthrow of the lawful Hawaiian Kingdom by the United States military and its agents. The Native Hawaiians began to seek liberation and full autonomous control of their lands. In response the government has been trying to pass legislation similar to the 1934 IRA to keep them under their control. I testified at this hearing in opposition to the proposed action. I urged the Kanaka Maoli to not accept this bill, because if they did they would lose any chance at regaining their sovereignty. The senate committee was so angry they turned off my microphone, recessed the hearing and walked out. Meanwhile the people urged me to speak louder so they could all hear what I had to say.

Politics is an unusual word if you really look at it. An armchair definition I think is more appropriate here. Poly is defined as many, and a tick is defined as a blood-sucking parasite. So we have a lot of ticks in congress sucking up all the money and power they can. With that bit of facetiousness said, my honest opinion is that our sovereignty will not come from the government. We need to look elsewhere.

## **Sovereignty – A State of Mind**

It was in prison that the birth of my activism took place. A brother there offered a few words, which was the key to my freedom. He explained that the Creator gave each of us free will, and that no one has the power to take it away or deprive you of it unless you allow them to do so. He asked me if the judges, cops or warden took away my freedom? I said no, I had pled guilty to my burglary charges. Then he said do you think you can take it back? I looked around the yard and said that if I could get on top of the rotunda across to the administration building and then onto the other side of the wall and fence without getting shot I could. He said that even if I could make it to the other side of the fence and they shot me and placed me in chains and put me in a cell, they still couldn't take away my choice to be free. Their physical obstacles and threats of force is not enough to keep you from choosing to be free. You can be free right here and now without trying to escape.

To anyone else, this may have been the craziest mumbo-jumbo anyone has ever heard, but the strangest thing is I understood him with such clarity that all of a sudden everything in the prison changed for me. I knew that I lived in a repressive environment, a maximum-security prison, and even if I was out, I still lived in a very racist state. I knew I would never allow the prison officials to manipulate me with parole, loss of days off my sentence or threats of transfer to a more restrictive prison. I knew that if I spoke out or challenged the officials or guards, I could get into trouble, but I was no longer going to be intimidated. I made my choice of my own free will to stand upon my principles. I was not going to be controlled as a puppet on a string, so I became well versed in the prison policies and procedures, and studied constitutional & civil law as a law clerk in the prison law library. I was left alone for the most part.

I filed a lawsuit against prison officials to prevent them from forcibly cutting my hair after a grooming code was put into effect. At the same time, I discovered a letter written by the director of the prison system who said that the Native American religion is in the same category as the Ku Klux Klan and the Aryan Brotherhood, and was therefore non-religious in nature. His arrogance in comparing our Native spirituality to two deadly white supremacy organizations only fueled the ire of Native people from around the country, and of socially conscious people worldwide. Media interviews were requested and letters from around the world was written to prison officials demanding that the Native prisoners be allowed to practice their religion. Although the judge ruled against us, he instructed the prison officials to develop a policy, which would allow Native prisoners to apply for an exemption.

On December 10, 1987, I was given the Oklahoma Human Rights Award. The first time in this country an award such as this was given to someone currently serving a prison sentence. The only other exception was political prisoner, Leonard Peltier, who received his award from the country of Spain. This recognition caused further embarrassment to prison officials. So much that caseworkers and other employees began persuading me to apply for parole. After discussing this with a few of my friends, I agreed. I had been waiving my parole appearances for a number of years. The prison officials were overjoyed with the news. I may have the distinction of being one of the few people kicked out of a maximum-security prison and then the prison system altogether. By then I had served over 7 1/2 years of a 12-year sentence for burglary.

Upon being paroled I was enrolled at the University of Oklahoma studying Public Affairs and Administration. Within two months after my release, the University paper featured a huge story about my involvement the struggle for long hair in prison and immediately 22,000 students knew who I was. When the paper came out, I almost didn't go to class, all day students and professors came up to me and congratulated me for what I had done. Being a campus celebrity was not the most comfortable thing I have been in my life, but it gave me more of an opportunity to speak out about the rights of Native prisoners.

Later, I formed the Spiritual Alliance for Native Prisoners, which was successful to a point in educating First Nation leaders and the officials of the corrections department about our rights. Then I became a National spokesperson for the Leonard Peltier Defense Committee and the League of Indigenous Sovereign Nations. I've testified on behalf of Native people and the Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiians) before three congressional committees. I've spoken with delegates at the United Nations in Vienna and traveled to the South American country of Columbia, as a Human Rights delegate, to meet with Indigenous peoples there, including those in prison. I've served as a Chaplain at the Oklahoma City bombsite counseling rescue workers and as a Spiritual Advisor to state and federal prisoners. I lived with Native Youth groups camped in the mountains of British Columbia conducting roadblocks, occupation of federal buildings and reclaiming Indigenous lands. I was at the occupation of a military base in Ontario after the police murdered Dudley George who was protecting the people when the police launched a raid to remove the Natives who were reclaiming their land. I've participated in several major demonstrations, including making the welcoming address on behalf of the Piscataway Indian nation whose lands Washington, DC and the White House sits upon.

All this and much more in the 19 years I have been out of prison. I remember someone named Robert Gann said, "Sovereignty is a state of mind." If we believe we are sovereign then we must conduct ourselves as if we are sovereign. This was part of what has motivated me to do what I have done, and the other part is my traditional spirituality.

### **Spirituality – A way of life**

After completing my parole in 1991, I had been going to several different ceremonies all around the country, and had begun to fulfill a Sun Dance commitment. Although, I did not feel I was ready, Chief Tayac of the Piscataway Indian Nation and his son, Mark, the Sun Dance Chief urged me to go into the prisons as a Spiritual Advisor.

When I went into the prison and ran a sweat for my family there, I have never felt anything more fulfilling. I was doing what the Creator had set out for me, and I also saw more clearly how the assimilative effects of conformity in prison was a barrier to our traditional values and philosophies. One example is listening to some of the brothers talking about what they were going to do when they got out. I heard the word "bitches" used quite often around the fireplace of the sweat. I waited until we were in the lodge and close the door. I spoke to everyone about the language I heard around a place of prayer. I told them being an ex-con; I understand where that language comes from. I explained that the prison system originally held white males and that they developed their code of honor according to their culture. Later, when blacks and Indians were being held in prison, they adopted that code of honor to conform. Most everyone wanted to be known as a "Good Convict", someone who is solid and won't steal or rat you out. So in order to conform, I told them they were doing nothing more than trying to be a white prisoner. I asked them, "What is so wrong with being a Native person here in prison? We don't have to be like them. And think about who taught you to call your grandmothers, mothers, sisters, aunties, cousins and nieces - bitches. Where is the respect for the Woman Nation in that? Is that how you guys are going to conduct yourselves when you get out?" You could feel the shame and guilt pour out of these brothers.

Whether it is in prison or on the streets, without our spiritual or cultural identity, we feel lost and find ways to conform with our peers so that we can fit in.

When we make a pledge to Sun Dance, it isn't just for eight days of the year or for the four years of our commitment, it is for the rest of our lives. As a Sun Dancer, our life is lived in service to the people. Adhering to these spiritual principles becomes a development of our personal self on a physical, mental and spiritual level. In our hearts, minds, and spirit, we need to remove the negative forces of racism, sexism and elitism, and many other isms' that blocks our path. Often we have become our own worst enemies when we allow ourselves to become corrupt with the desire for power, status and financial gain. None of those negativities are fulfilling, they only eat away at your life like an addictive drug. When those forces get in the way of our visions, we lose the focus of our path.

### **Eagle Mountain – Sacred Sovereign Territory**

For more than 25 years it has been my vision to have land where I/we could build a community utilizing alternative forms of energy and have ceremonies and host conferences. I was in Canada when the twin towers went down on Sept. 11th. As I sat there watching the news, I realized that I couldn't keep participating and conducting direct-action activities. The ensuing result was that I would end up in prison for a long time or I would end up dead. Not that I was afraid of those things happening, but with the changes in the laws, it was time for a different strategy. I decided to return to the states and make my vision a reality.

Today we have 160 acres with water rights to two springs on the foothills of the Sheep Mt. We are almost ready to submit an application for tax-exemption to act as a non-profit. And to date, with the help of friends, family and past speaking engagements, we have paid over half the value of the land. It has been our intention that once the land is paid off, we would place it into a trust so that it never be sold off or used as collateral for loans.

We can build energy efficient homes below ground that can maintain a constant temperature without having to utilize excessive amounts of energy or wood. We have clean spring water to sustain us, and we have been collecting organic seeds to plant in our gardens.

We have friends who are Sun Dancers, Aztec dancers and Peyote people who are planning on moving onto the land. There are future plans to host a conference bringing in Indigenous Spiritual leaders from across the hemisphere to share their prophecies with us. Next summer, we will host the 3rd Annual Eagle Mountain Sun Dance.

I have sensed that there are so many important things that need to be done within the next five years, and having this land is going to be the only way I can accomplish it. In 1976, Thomas Banyacya, Hopi, told a committee of the UN during a meeting in Vancouver that many of their prophecies have been completed and that it is time for the people to return to a spiritual path and leave the material one behind.

The end of the Mayan Calendar [www.water-consciousness.com/must/must\\_article09](http://www.water-consciousness.com/must/must_article09), in 2012, signifies a cross roads the world is coming to. In short, the Mayans have said that we are in a period where the powers of darkness and light are at their peak. One is on a conquest for power and control, while the other is praying for peace and balance to be restored. Over the next five years this spiritual battle between dark and light will determine our future with the conclusion of the Mayan Calendar.

To help illustrate this point, consider how the government has been using fear as a marketing tool to coerce people to give up their civil and constitutional freedoms since the Oklahoma City bombing which broadened police powers, and then so much more after Sept. 11. Those police powers would have been abhorrent to people in the 1960's, and been reminiscent of fascist police states.

The Real ID Act of 2005 (Public Law 109-13), effective on Dec. 31, 2009, is being opposed by several states. This Act was attached as a rider to a military spending bill and passed. The component of the implementation of the Act is that no federal agency will accept any driver's license as valid identification for federal purposes. The federal Transportation Security Administration will not let you board a plane without further screening. And employers will not hire you, nor will banks provide services.

The National Animal Identification System is a program regulated by the USDA (<http://animalid.aphis.usda.gov/nais/index.shtml>). The first step of this program is premises registration, which allows the USDA access to your property at any time for inspection.

The second part of NAIS is that all of your livestock must be chipped at your expense. If you have livestock that is not micro chipped, you can be fined. The microchips are being implanted into livestock so that the government can keep track of your livestock. If a cow leaves your property to eat in a neighbors pasture and you don't report it. You can be fined a thousand dollars a day, even if you weren't aware of it. If your animals become infected with a curable disease, your entire livestock could be destroyed without compensation. There are several organizations that are opposed to NAIS, such as, [www.nonais.org](http://www.nonais.org). Consider that if everyone had to register his or her firearm, and then one day the government decides to confiscate it. They know where to look. If there is a food shortage, and the need more, they'll just show up and take it.

We have issues of Global Warming, and the chemtrails, along with the GMO foods manufactured by Monsanto. If you live near one of their "manufacturing" areas, and if the wind blows pollen from their "products" into your organic garden, they can have your garden destroyed because they have the copyright.

Water is being currently bought up by the wealthy and powerful. Real estate magnate, Warren Buffet has been said to sell off much of his holdings prior to the market dropping out. Nearly 80 to 90 % of sub-prime home loans are being foreclosed upon. Oil is nearly \$100 a barrel, which will be passed on to consumers in gas, commercial travel, and products. For the first time in history, the Canadian dollar is above the US dollar. And a possible war with Iran will bring China and Russia against the US.

Somehow the future doesn't look so great.

In facing the current events of the world, the birth of the White Buffalo Calf's is assuring that something spiritual is taking place. In heeding the words of Thomas Banyacya and the Mayan Calendar, it may not be such a bad idea for the Ghost Dance to make its return in the form as it was presented to Wovoka. Not the versions in which people believed that if the dance was done, the whites would disappear and our ancestors would return, along with the buffalo. It has always been difficult for me to believe the Creator would show us a ceremony to eradicate our relatives. From what I have understood about Wovoka's vision is that the dance was to bring peace and understanding to all people.

My idea of sovereignty is based upon a spiritual way of life. Through this way of life, I have found a stronger connection to the Creator and Mother Earth. There appears little can be done politically, Bush's "selection" in 2000 seemed pretty obvious, and there was no national outrage that I heard about. But if the news media is 95% corporate controlled, it wouldn't be on the front page.

There is little we can do against a government with no honor or morals. We do know the power of prayer and we have witnessed true miracles according to today's definition take place. So if we are to return to a spiritual path, then I am thankful for all of my life's' experiences that have brought me here. There are terrible things happening, and more are going to take place. This is a time to educate one another and to become spiritual warriors devoid of any negativity. Get out of the cities and acquire some land to grow & raise your own food. Bring like-minded friends and families with you because there may come a time that you need a community to help defend the land. Being a spiritual person doesn't mean we have to turn the other cheek, nor is self-defense an act of violence. If all of our prayers are strong and sincere, it will be our defense and a way to bring peace and balance into the world. We'll see.

To All of My Relations,  
Ben

#### About the author

Ben Carnes is from the Choctaw Nation, a long time activist, prisoner's rights advocate, and a Sun Dance Chief. He currently resides in Southern Colorado. He can be reached at [eaglemountain@earthlink.net](mailto:eaglemountain@earthlink.net) or [www.myspace.com/eagle\\_mountain](http://www.myspace.com/eagle_mountain). Visit his website at [www.eaglecouncil.org](http://www.eaglecouncil.org). All comments and responses are appreciated.

Recently published in CABAN UNzeen, an independent grassroots zine

Permission is granted to reprint only in its entirety.

Eagle Mountain Press. Copyright 2008.