

Raymond Yellow Thunder and the AIM Song

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SAN FRANCISCO -- Listen as Bill Means, cofounder of the International Indian Treaty Council, remembers Raymond Yellow Thunder. Speaking during the AIM-West 40-year Reunion on Nov. 28, Mean's memories are followed by the AIM song.

In 1972 Raymond Yellow Thunder, Lakota from Porcupine, S.D., was brutally murdered in the bordertown of Gordon, Nebraska. When Yellow Thunder's relatives sought justice, they found none.

"They stripped him from the waist down and they took him into the American Legion Hall on Saturday night dance," Means said. "They told him to dance Indian." Raymond Yellow Thunder's feet were burned with cigarettes. "They beat him to death and they found him two days later in a trunk of a car. Nobody would help him."

"That is the way Indian people used to face justice," Means said, from coast to coast, wherever there were bordertowns, there was racism. Gordon, Nebraska was "the Mississippi of the north." The signs read, "No dogs or Indians allowed," when four-thousand people Indian people marched into town.

"We marched and we took over the town, we took that town for four days." During four days of Red Ribbon Grand Jury hearings, AIM recorded over 200 civil rights violations with the US Justice Department and Civil Rights Commission. It was a turning point for the American Indian Movement. The days of just carrying signs was over.

"They knew they couldn't kill our people anymore without us coming to challenge them," Means said. He said this AIM song was created in memory of Raymond Yellow Thunder and Indian people in all the bordertowns.

"Always remember Raymond Yellow Thunder." by Censored News

Sioux, born in Kyle, South Dakota. He is notable for the controversy and racial tension behind his death.

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[edit] Life

Raymond Yellow Thunder was the grandson of Chief American Horse, and had six other siblings. Yellow Thunder grew up in relative poverty, and was noted in his reservation school to be an average student, a good athlete, and the best artist in the school. He was also gifted in breaking horses, which allowed him to work as a ranch-hand in his adult years.

Yellow Thunder eventually pursued work at Gordon, Nebraska as a ranch hand. He developed alcoholism and had numerous encounters with the Gordon Police for public drunkenness. It was noted that he was not violent, and would often request a cell at the police department to sleep for the night.

[edit] Death

On February 12, 1972, Raymond Yellow Thunder was wandering the streets of Gordon intoxicated, as he did regularly. The brothers Leslie and Melvin Hare, along with friends Bernard Lutter, and Robert Bayliss found Yellow Thunder in a used car lot. Under the influence of alcohol, the Hares and Bayliss proceeded to assault Yellow Thunder, as they had discussed "busting an Indian" earlier in the night. They proceeded to strip Yellow Thunder of his pants and undergarments and shoved him into the trunk of their car. Jeanette Thompson was present, but did not actively partake in the assault or kidnapping.

The Hares, Lutter, and Bayliss took Yellow Thunder to the American Legion Club. There, the still half naked Native American was shoved into the hall, where patrons briefly gawked at the spectacle. Though offered help by employees of the club, Yellow Thunder rejected assistance and left the club alone.

Later that night, the Hares and group found Yellow Thunder again. Allegedly concerned with the cold weather and Yellow Thunder's lack of clothing, they again kidnapped him, retrieved the clothing from the used car parking lot they had found him in, and at a Laundromat, allowed Yellow Thunder to leave. Yellow Thunder then made his way to the police station, where he requested a cell to pass the night. The following day, February 13, 1972, Yellow Thunder was found by a Sioux boy named George Ghost Dog. After an exchange in which Yellow Thunder explained "I got beat up by some white guys", Ghost Dog departed. This was the last time Raymond Yellow Thunder was seen alive, as it is believed a few days later, he died on the front seat of a car in a used car lot. The autopsy would later show that he had died of subdural hematoma, caused by blunt trauma to his forehead above his right eye.

[edit] Legacy

The Hare brothers Leslie and Melvin, Robert Bayliss, Bernard Lutter, and Jeanette Thompson were arrested as suspects for the death of Yellow Thunder. The Hares, Bayliss, and Lutter were charged with manslaughter and false imprisonment. Thompson was also charged with false imprisonment. Lutter's charges of manslaughter were eventually dropped in exchange for a testimony against the other defendants. All five defendants posted their bail. Thompson's charges were later dropped as it was later decided that she did not actively partake in the crimes.

Upon hearing rumors perpetuated by newspapers and suspicious Indians that Raymond Yellow Thunder had been forced to dance naked at the American Legion Club, tortured and castrated before killed, the American Indian Movement took it upon themselves to protest for justice. AIM vowed to pursue justice and gave demonstrations in the city against the brutalization of Native Americans, with Yellow Thunder at the center of the demonstrations. The rumors surrounding Yellow Thunder's death were eventually dispelled by a second autopsy. Leslie and Melvin Hare were eventually convicted and sentenced to 6 years with \$500 fine, and 2 years with \$500 fine respectively. AIM, incensed by the meager sentences, started a protest against the decision. AIM's involvement in the Raymond Yellow Thunder case would lead AIM to its breakthrough onto the national scene and public consciousness.

American Indian Movement Anthem

This song is the American Indian Movement National Anthem song adopted in 1972 in Gordon Nebraska, AIM went there to protest the handling of an American Indians death, Raymond Yellow Thunder. It was given to the Yellow Thunder Family. Because of the circumstances the Northern Cheyenne people gave this song to the American Indian Movement. ~It is an honor song that every Native person should know and every nation should respect~