



Nebraskans for Peace

Nebraska Report

There is no Peace without Justice

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THE LOVE THAT HATE PRODUCED

Malcolm Little, from the womb of his pregnant mother, experienced racial hate and trauma that shaped him and charted a course that started its journey here in Omaha, Nebraska. This course ended in his brutal assassination in front of his pregnant wife and their four children at the Audubon Ballroom in Bronx, New York City, New York by those who practiced hate.

Earl and Louise Little came to Omaha, Nebraska, in 1921, two years after the brutal riot and lynching of Will Brown at the downtown Omaha courthouse. A white mob of reportedly 10,000-20,000 homegrown terrorists beat, shot, lynched, dragged, and burned an innocent Black Man while still in their Sunday church clothes. Will Brown lost his life with no trial and no evidence for the standard racist's dog whistle, an alleged sexual assault on a white girl that, according to a grand

jury, was increasingly being committed in Omaha at that time by white men in blackface.

The violence and the damage inflicted on the residents and property in the North Omaha Black Community during this terrible time were conveniently never quantified nor recompensed.

Omaha, in the 1920s, could once boast having the 2nd largest Black population of western cities, (only Los Angeles had a greater population of black people than Omaha), but North Omaha has never fully recovered from this riot and many others.

A full 2,000 Black people left Omaha, Nebraska, in September of 1919, in fear for their lives due to the lynching of Will Brown. Many of the people leaving had previously run to Omaha during the Great Migration, trying desperately to

escape the Jim Crow South. Six million men, women, and children, Americans... right here in these United States, sought asylum in the North and the Midwest, to flee the terrors of black codes, mass incarcerations, rape, assault, violence, and death in the deep South.

The Ku Klux Klan, a terrorist group widely known for its unchecked and unprosecuted, murders, gang rapes, lynchings, drownings, tortures, abductions, castrations, and fire bombings of the Black Community as well as the Jewish, Immigrant, Catholic, and LGBTQ communities across the United States gained a large foothold in the plains of Nebraska.

The first Nebraska chapter of the KKK was founded in Omaha in 1921, called Klavern #1, originally located on 41st and Farnam St., and is now a UNMC parking lot. By the end of 1921, the numbers of the KKK had risen to 24 chapters in the state, with an estimated membership of 1,100 Nebraskans.

In less than two short years, by 1923, the KKK headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia claimed that Nebraska had 45,000 members of the Ku Klux Klan in the state. "The *Lincoln Star* reported that the Klan was "active in Lincoln, Omaha, Fremont, York, Grand Island, Hastings, North Platte and Scottsbluff" Large amounts of KKK activity was also reported in towns

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Nebraskans for Peace's state office in Lincoln is located on land that formerly belonged to the Otoe Tribe.

Nebraska Report

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NFP is a statewide grassroots advocacy organization working nonviolently for peace with justice through community-building, education and political action.

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THE LOVE THAT HATE PRODUCED

such as McCook, Curtis, David City, and Fairfield. Based on the the population of Omaha between the 1920s and 1930s, 45,000 Klan members means, one out of every four or five Nebraskans would have been an official member of the Ku Klux Klan, including Women and Children.

These same KKK thugs armed with shotguns and the law of the land on their side, threatened a pregnant Louise Little, with her three young children at their home on 3448 Pinkney St. in Omaha, Nebraska, while her husband Earl was away working. The KKK broke the windows out of their one-room shanty during a night raid in the middle of a Nebraska winter in January of 1925. Louise Little suffered all this trauma, pregnant with Malcolm Little, more commonly known as the Human and Civil rights leader Minister Malcolm X.

According to experts, the hate that Malcolm Little experienced in-vitro, before the the outside world could even lay eyes on him, would have had a lasting impact, particularly when reinforced by subsequent traumatic experiences of the same variety. "Theory and research from the last 20 years indicates that prenatal experiences can be remembered, and have lifelong impact., and prenatal experiences are likely to have lifelong impact when they are followed by reinforcing conditions or interactional trauma, that the most formative experiences were ones that occurred prenatally, especially during the first trimester."

Malcolm X continued to suffer more trauma as a child, due to incidents of racial violence, year after year, which reinforced his world view of being born into a hostile environment, one that was set out to destroy his family and him, a child and an innocent, who had never harmed anyone, simply because they were black.

The Littles fled Nebraska and moved to Lansing, Michigan in 1929. While there, when Malcolm was around the age of four, his family's house was set on fire because they were Black. The fire department refused to come and put the fire out because they were Black and the Little family, barely escaping with their lives, watched everything they owned and worked hard for burn to the ground and they were in transit and homeless yet again.

Just two years later Malcolm's Father was tragically killed (suspectedly murdered because he was black) when Malcolm was around six yrs. old, adding significantly more trauma to their lives.

Malcolm and his family suffered extreme poverty after Earl Little died. The Littles were defrauded the insurance money owed to them because they were Black, and the children sometimes ate dandelions and stole because there was no food. More trauma occurred when Malcom was around the age of 14, when his mother was forced into a mental institution, and he was separated from his seven brothers and sisters. Malcolm then

dropped out of school after his teacher told him he could never be a lawyer because he was Black.

Malcolm ended up being homeless as a teen, addicted and traumatized, hopeless and lost, eventually incarcerated because of this stream of tragic events that manifested in many ways simply because he and his family were Black, starting from when he was in the very womb of his mother, in Omaha, Nebraska.

At this point hate had taken everything good and stable from Malcolm, his dreams, his homes, his family, his freedom, even his identity.

Newton's Third Law of Relativity states that for every action there is an equal and adverse reaction and Malcolm's very public denunciation of the violent white racist power structure was equal to the pain and hate he had suffered... from a baby. Malcolm was a survivor with firsthand experience of the hate and racism that had stripped everything he loved from him. Malcolm's life had always been surrounded by those who hated him for no other reason than the truth of his existence.

Then adversely, despite all of the hate, violence and trauma, something miraculous happened in Malcolm X... seeds of Love, like a rose through the concrete, started to grow within Malcolm's mind and heart. Somehow, Malcolm X found himself embarked on a short, yet intensely transformative journey of Love... that started with the Love of himself.

Malcolm first discovered a Love of his very own skin, hair, nose, and the

shape of his own lips. He rekindled his Love for education, culture, and heritage. Malcolm grew to love the power of his own mind, his strengths, and a higher power. Malcolm was then blessed with the Love of his wife and six daughters, and the Love of many different people of all stations throughout the world.

Most importantly however, Malcolm found a deep Love for Truth, and that Love for Truth made a change in Malcolm. Before Malcolm was killed, he publicly and repeatedly expressed Love for ALL people operating in Truth and Justice, regardless of color.

"I Am for the Truth no matter who tells it, I Am for Justice no matter who it is for or against" --- Malcolm X

Because of this Love of Justice and Truth, Malcolm knowingly put his life on the line for oppressed human beings of every race, religion, culture, and creed.

Eventually, Malcolm was killed by the very ones he loved and was made into a sacrifice and a martyr for the cause of freedom. Malcolm knew his life was in danger (as it always had been), but it was his Love for an equitable future, a future where babies are not terrorized from the womb, that matured into a perfect Love for all humanity, that drove out all fear.

Although Malcolm X was born into a world amidst hate, it is his unlikely miracle of Love that Malcolm X embodied and left to us that we honor and celebrate. A Love that inspires us to continue to grow and learn, to relate and adapt as Malcolm did.

Malcolm X from Omaha, Nebraska, is The Love That Hate Produced.

Malcolm showed us a Love that literally gave everything and asked for nothing in return but our highest good, until his last breath. Malcolm X left us a legacy and example of the transformative power of Love, a love that can change a mind and a heart, a life, even the world. My hope for Nebraska is that we all embrace the Love of ourselves and others that Malcolm lived and died for. A love that transcends race and religion, gender and class, and nationality. A love that somehow cheats death and commands a better future.

Malcolm X and his legacy of Love proves that in the end, despite hate and fear, trauma and heartbreak, if we are open to receiving it... Love will always find a way. There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. St. John 15:13 NLT

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Schmeeka Simpson is a Mother of 3, a community advocate and political activist, a Creighton University Graduate and currently works as the Director of Tours for the Malcolm X Memorial Foundation. Schmeeka is a board member for the NPO Stand In For Nebraska and on the Governing Board of Divisible; A Documentary about Redlining in Omaha, using Malcolm X's birth place as a case study of Redlining nationwide, Divisible will be released in July of this year. Schmeeka also serves as a member of the UNO Community Engagement Center's Redlining Board and conducts tours of the "Undesign The Redline" exhibit being held at the CEC to educate Nebraskans about the negative impact of Redlining in Omaha Nebraska.

How to Work for Peace and Justice?

Thoughts on the Prejudice of Pollution, Police, and Prisons

by Anthony T. Fiscella

In a moment of conciliation often mocked by social justice activists, Rodney King (1965-2012), famously beaten by Los Angeles police in 1991, asked in the midst of ongoing rioting: “Can we all get along?” Many activists countered his call for peace with the chant “No Justice, No Peace,” yet, in the 31 years since those riots, the slogan seemed more like a prophecy: we remain with exactly that, neither justice nor peace and seemingly wrapped in a ceaseless spiral of violence. In our extremely unequal and highly racialized society, how do we work for justice and, significantly, how can we get along while doing so?

The *Banshees of Inisherin* (2022), a critically acclaimed film, has received the description “black tragicomedy” referencing not ethnicity but the type of dark humor employed throughout the story. And yet, thanks to Noel Ignatiev’s *How the Irish Became White* (1995), we can see that even if the all-Irish characters did not qualify as “black,” nor did they qualify as “white.” The British Empire had already honed its racialized divide-and-conquer tactics in its occupation of Ireland hundreds of years prior to enacting the first laws distinguishing “whites” from “non-whites” in the Virginia colony of the 1600s. Well into the 1800s, British and similar racial elites in the United States often did not regard Irish Americans as “white.” Although initially similarly subjugated and allied with Blacks, the Irish had to “prove” their whiteness by betraying and their former comrades and attacking them. They did this, in part, by working as city police and firefighters—the same forces that participated in massacres against Blacks in cities such as New York (1863), Memphis (1866), and New Orleans (1866) (while the New York incident has

received a fair amount of attention, the massacres in both Memphis and New Orleans, as well as many others, have largely faded from the collective memory of U.S. history—a convenient amnesia further exacerbated by recent legislation in Florida).

Although *The Banshees of Inisherin* seemingly relegated war to a mere backdrop to the main drama (a relationship dispute between two—former—friends) and it seemingly ignored race altogether, the film actually exposed some of the most personal, intricate, and strikingly absurd roots to war. It illustrated the poverty of loneliness and the loneliness of poverty that stifle our creativity, numb our sensitivity, and leave us desperate for meaningful human connection. The entire film takes place on a tiny island. This symbolism worked to capture the sense of claustrophobic confinement that characterizes daily life for most people on Earth: few people have the ordinary option to choose their neighbors, co-workers, landlords, classmates, or bosses.

Trapped on physical, economic, and psychic islands, the impoverishment of our social lives and opportunities leaves us fighting among ourselves with an inability to even reach—much less fight against—the powers that brought this impoverishment upon us. The film manages to level implicit critique of the British occupation, the Irish civil war, patriarchy, and the brutality of police all without ever discussing them directly as institutions. In doing so, it articulates, like an apt aphorism, a neat sum of the desperation and violence that permeates daily life, whether shootings on the streets of Nebraska or bombs falling in Yemen, Ethiopia, Gaza, and Ukraine. The universality of guns today stretch like thick toxic weeds of mechanical

ivy growing in the soil of inequality, racism, and fear. How can we replace those weeds with gardens that nourish us instead?

As Curtis Bryant noted in this journal last year, quoting Joan Baez: “Action is the antidote to despair.” And when we find issues that enable us to work across gender, class, and racial barriers we find opportunities to untie the knots that bind us.

Such steps, of course, do not resolve the question but they bring us into dialogue and learning curves with the terrain we aim to plant, plough, and harvest.

We find one example of activists effectively uniting together in the Defend the Atlanta Forest campaign. Outside of Atlanta, mostly Black residents and mostly “white” out-of-town activists have opposed the construction of a \$90 million dollar training center for police dubbed “Cop City” by activists (titled “Atlanta Public Safety

Training Center” by City Hall). Prior to the vote in 2021, city council recorded public comments—with 70% of residents opposed to the proposal—before the council proceeded to pass the plan with a 10-4 vote.

The proposed police training center (the largest in the U.S.) would include roadways for high-speed vehicle chases, a helicopter landing pad, a shooting range, and a fake town set-up to practice police raids. In response, residents who want neither police militarization nor destruction of the forest, nor the sound of bombs and guns as a backdrop to their daily life, have called to preserve the area known as South River Forest or Weelaunee Forest—the name bestowed by the Indigenous Muscogee Creek (from whom the land came after colonists took it over in the 1700s and Andrew Jackson

forcibly removed most Muscogee Creek from Georgia along with the Cherokee in 1832). The local Natives revere the forest. Residents want to preserve it.

Police and politicians want to raze 85 acres of it and build on the location of the Old Atlanta Prison. Far human rights abuses took place for decades. The forest area has critically prevented stormwater flooding and, if preserved, would form Atlanta's largest protected green space.

Activists have occupied the area in an attempt to stop the project. In January 2023, police swept through the forest shooting and killing 26 year-old protester Manuel Paez Terán known as "Tortuguita," whom police claimed had fired at them.

More recently, police arrested 23 people on charges of "domestic terrorism" (including a lawyer for the Southern Poverty Law Center there to observe). A local pastor, Chad Hale, commented to a local newspaper: "For us to get more and more militarized is not a good direction—it's the most uncreative way to approach crime."

We might recall that immediately prior to this project's approval, Atlanta police had shot 27-year-old Rayshard Brooks in the back—killing him as he ran away. More police and more militarization by building a "Cop City" would seem to intensify, rather than resolve, that type of violence. Opposition to the plan, however, has united people across social identities and ideological interests.

In Philadelphia in the early 1970s, a group arose named MOVE who united these issues together as well. Guided by their co-founder John Africa, they critiqued capitalism, industrial pollution, animal exploitation, racism, militarism, prisons, police brutality, and authoritarianism. They lived communally on a raw food diet, homeschooled their children, and worked to unite various movements to defend "Life". Although plagued by their own sectarianism and authoritarian tendencies, they nevertheless provided a model for comprehensive social change. One person attracted by their example, Mumia Abu-Jamal, reported, at that time,

for local news agencies.

Tried before a nearly all-white jury in 1982 for killing a police officer whom he witnessed beating his brother, Abu-Jamal has spoken from behind prison walls that have confined him for more than 40 years: "Simply put, capitalism kills. The unrestrained search for unlimited profits has endangered the air, water, temperatures, and water levels around the world. And human populations are facing survival threats that can't be met by America's formidable war machine. Perhaps, the planting of millions of trees and making human habitats green spaces could delay the coming environmental carnage. Perhaps." In Weelaunee Forest, the trees don't need planting—just protecting.

Thanks to Prison Radio, an organization that brings the voices of the incarcerated out through the bars to a wider public, we can read Abu-Jamal's words unlike many whose voices remain stymied and stifled. Despite intensely covering issues regarding social, racial, and ecological justice for decades, despite his old age, despite his severe health problems, and despite the passing of his wife Wadiya in December, Mumia Abu-Jamal remains committed to working toward a re-trial and, ultimately, his release. Right now, Common Pleas Court Judge Lucretia Clemons could potentially overturn Mumia's conviction and grant a new trial (see more info at www.prisonradio.org).

Issues such as Abu-Jamal's case or "Cop City" could require particular attention from "white" activists precisely because racism hides from those unaffected by the damages afflicted to those affected. Much like how ecological and animal-related issues take a distant back seat to other issues unless they directly affect humans (and often not even then), issues that affect Blacks in the United States get typically relegated to "side issues" rather than central keys to resolving fundamental flaws in the constitution

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Social Justice and Student Restraint/Seclusion

by Anahí Salazar

Policy Coordinator, *Voices for Children in Nebraska*

Every child in Nebraska deserves an education and educational space that is welcoming and SAFE. Social justice is the fair treatment and equitable status of all individuals within a society. Students deserve safe and fair treatment when they walk into schools. Schools are a place for learning and growing, not for punitive treatment and hostile environments. As a former teacher, all I wanted was for my students to feel like they belonged, that we could work together to make every space a learning and restorative environment. But introducing legislation that requires students to submit to physical intervention or be taken out of classrooms for undetermined amounts of time, is not best practice.

LB 811, or what is referred to as the physical intervention or restraint bill, disproportionately gives more power to the adults in a school setting. And it goes against student having rights. When students are being physically restrained, they do not have a say in what is occurring; instead a physical intervention occurs when the adult in the room determines the need for it to occur. There is no consent on behalf of the student. What makes LB 811 so dangerous is not only the permissive language for adults, but also the autonomy for every adult in the school to be able to physically intervene with no consequences for them if a student gets injured. Not every adult reacts to scenarios the same way and what might seem reasonable grounds to physically intervene to one adult may be absolutely unreasonable to another.

Physical restraint and seclusion not only tells students that they could be in harm's way when they go to school, it also impacts other students who will witness acts of physical intervention on their peers. They can see nonconsensual attacks on bodies. They may see that

some adults are not worth trusting. They may not feel safe either, noting that if someone physically intervenes, then what keeps that adult from physically intervening with them.

One of the wonderful things about schools is its makeup of diverse students. Different students have different needs. Based on Individual Education Plans (IEP), students may need different safety interventions. This can only be done equitably by making it specific to every individual student's need, which is

What makes LB 811 so dangerous is not only the permissive language for adults, but also the autonomy for every adult in the school to be able to physically intervene with no consequences for them if a student gets injured.

what an IEP is supposed to do. An IEP is created by a team of educators including special education teachers, administrators, and other school personnel that interact daily with the student and most importantly the caregiver. By creating an IEP together, the caregiver and everyone at school knows what the student needs to be successful and safe.

Currently, most incidents go without reporting. Parents have testified before the legislature in person and in writing that they were not told by the school

that physical intervention or seclusion were used on their children but rather their children displayed behaviors that exemplified fear of school and school personnel. Small children and children with disabilities are disproportionately affected by practices like physical intervention and seclusion because they are the most vulnerable population. It can be difficult for young students or students with disabilities, especially nonverbal students, to communicate to caregivers what is really occurring at school.

It is also worth noting that many teachers do not want to be placed in the situation where they are asked to physically restrain a child. Not only will this interrupt teaching and learning in the moment, it has the potential to damage future classroom dynamics. Students will not feel safe learning from a teacher who has had to restrain a classmate, nor will teachers want to continue working in environments where their teaching skills are interrupted to physically restrain a child. With our nation losing teachers at such rapid rates, we do not need to do anything that will further jeopardize recruiting and retaining quality teachers.

Practices like physical intervention and seclusion only further the threat to student health and safety, especially for students with disabilities, students of color and the youngest of students. Life-long trauma is experienced for EVERY child who witnesses or is the one being restrained. This goes beyond policing student bodies to harming children physically and psychologically. Social justice promotes the dignity of all people. Schools should be striving to make their spaces more accessible, inclusive and safe by having more counselors and mental health practitioners in the building and funding schools properly. As a society we can make schools more safe by respecting students, teachers and all school personnel. Every child in Nebraska should feel safe, welcomed and respected.

How to Work for Peace and Justice, conclusion

of American society. Of all humans, those incarcerated seem to rank lowest in priority: a 2017 study by Candice Bernd and others found more than 500 prisons in the U.S. located within 3 miles of toxic waste sites—close to contamination yet far from the public eye.

From Tyre Nichols to Breonna Taylor to Elijah McClain, police terror against Black Americans continues. Industrial pollution and addiction industries profit from and terrorize Black people in less obvious ways. And when we recognize how entangled these issues remain, we can perhaps better work together committing the spirit of both Rodney King and the activists who critiqued him to not just “get along” for the sake of it but to get along with each other while getting justice together.

Like the characters in *The Banshees of Inisherin*, we remain stuck on islands of isolation that damage our ability to creatively engage with the very issues that keep us on these islands. Yet, as Rodney

King concluded, “We’re all stuck here for a while, let’s try to work it out.” To this, we can recall the words of Malcolm X who stated in response to police violence in Los Angeles in 1962, “It is because of our effort toward getting straight to the root that people oftentimes think that we are dealing in hate. ...[Yet] the only way that we’re going to get some of this oppression and exploitation away from us is to come together against the common enemy. ...The white man is intelligent enough if he were made to realize how Black people really feel, and how fed up we are without that old compromising sweet talk ...[that] if he’s not ready to clean his house up, he shouldn’t have a house. It should catch on fire. And burn down.” As we can see through the forest fires plaguing the planet, the “white man” does not even seem to care that profiteering from industrial pollution contributes to the burning of the home. Because the narrow and addictive concern for profits obscures far more complicated and pressing issues such as collective survival.

In contrast, we, like Abu-Jamal, can recognize how various institutions intertwine to sustain the unsustainable, to justify the unjustifiable, and normalize the terror of the status quo. Ecology, pollution, prisons, police, and racism connect and entangle. And likewise, the knot unravels when solutions connect to untangle. Prison abolition (which connects to) addiction treatment (which connects to) defunding police (which connects to) alternative forms of conflict-resolution and safety could all help nourish eco-systems of social justice that root themselves in the actions taken in daily life. This means, for example, prioritizing jobs and livelihoods that, rather than pollute, deplete, and destroy our social and environmental eco-systems, serve instead to clean, heal, and preserve them. Like an urban gardening for the soul, that which we plant together, we can grow together....if we exercise our remaining capacity for creativity.

Niskítthe Prayer Camp, continued from page 12

his subsequent consecration of sweat lodges across the country is American History, and we are fortunate to have a lodge in Lincoln that bears that history. For generations upon generations the Inipi ceremony has been life-sustaining and powerfully healing for countless people. Native and non-Native people alike will tell you stories about how that ceremony saved their life, helped them in their recovery from substance use, supported healing from acute and generational traumas, helped them reconnect to their ancestors, Mother Earth, a higher power, find community, and feel at home while away from their reservations. Impermanent and humble as the structure may be, the sweat lodge at the Fish Farm represents life, history, healing, and Indigenous resistance.

It was a shock then, when the ceremonial family who prays at the Fish Farm learned of the proposed housing development to be constructed directly across the street. The

development, called Wilderness Crossing, would create nearly 600 housing units, bring in 1200 motor vehicles daily, and dramatically change the environment. Ceremonial practitioners raised the alarm at official city meetings in March and April of 2022, stating that a peaceful natural environment is vital to the practice of the ceremony there. Building a dense neighborhood across the street and annexing that area into the City of Lincoln would make the lodge vulnerable to city code violations like noise ordinances and open fire laws. New residents of Wilderness Crossing may hear loud singing or drumming late into the night and call the police. Likewise, our large sacred fire may scare new residents into calling first responders. Each scenario with the potential to disrupt ceremonies and lead to citations. Such a situation is no minor inconvenience, it is the contemporary version of Indigenous ceremonial persecution.

In addition to threatening ceremonial practices, the annexation into the City of Lincoln places financial burdens on the landowner of the Fish Farm, requiring major construction costs to connect her property to City Water and Sewage systems. The cost would likely be impossible for the landowner to meet and could force a sale, again threatening the future of the lodge and the ceremonies practiced there.

Environmental advocates and residents of the area near the proposed development also raised serious concerns about the destruction of natural habitat for plants and wildlife, light pollution, run-off and pesticide drift from the development into Wilderness Park and Salt Creek. Area residents who had seen flood waters at their doorsteps in 2015 warned that the development could make their

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What's HOT in Global Warming?

by Professor Bruce E. Johansen

India: Lethal Air Pollution from Dirty Coal

Significant protests directed at the construction of coal-powered energy plants in India have met opposition, mainly from farmers whose land has been expropriated, as well as others whose enterprises will be caught in the path of air and water pollution from power plants spewing the world's dirtiest air.

The protests have been held nationwide, led by farmers, indigenous people, and environmental activists. These protests

increasing. China's authoritarian government has abandoned strict population controls (restricting births to one or two per family) as they showed signs of over-success. By 2022, the Chinese population was declining, and the number of elderly people was increasing.

India's Population and Pollution Increase

In semi-democratic India, the govern-

as quickly as possible, but not fast enough.

At the same time, global warming is raising temperatures and speeding up the melting of crucial water resources in the Himalayas. Other mountain ranges further endanger a nation with more than four times the population of the United States living on less than half the land. This is the context of the sometimes violent opposition to developing coal mining and power production in India. The outcome



New Delhi's particulate level was as dangerous to the city's 20 million residents as smoking more than two packs of cigarettes daily. "Open a window or a door, and the haze enters the room within seconds. Outside, the sky is white, the sun a white circle so pale that you can barely make it out. The smog is acrid, eye-stinging, and throat-burning, reported Ellen Barry in the New York Times.

have been large and sometimes violent, with several dozen people killed over a decade in protests of land expropriation for coal-powered power plants and mining of low-power "brown" coal to fuel them

India is pursuing an all-out program to develop any available power source to meet swift increases in power demand from population increases. India is or will soon be the most populous country in the world, soon to pass China, both at 1.4 billion. China's birthrate is falling, while India's is

ment tried to control the population once, an abandoned effort because of mass public disapproval, even as the population grew. At the same time, economic development required more power for comforts such as air conditioning in a climate that can turn lethal in summer. The newly affluent are a minority of India's vast population but enough to continually strain power-producing infrastructure. While India attempts to raise its coal-fired electricity production amidst widespread protests, sun, and wind power are being developed

of ballooning demand for power is quickly rising greenhouse-gas production and air pollution that now ranks as the dirtiest in the world.

The World's Worst Air Quality

Given a preponderance of publicity, many people believe that the world's worst urban air pollution is in Beijing. According to the World Health Organization, China's capital runs second in this noxious sweepstakes as the world capital of smog to the Ganges River valley around Delhi. The Delhi airport sometimes closes for smog so thick that jets cannot safely land.

Many people have persistent coughs, and some wear gas masks. Many days, the sun shines through a gaseous haze. Approaching Delhi from the south at 35,000 feet, the setting sun turns the Ganges Valley brown cloud a dull yellow, then a dun orange, then dark red before the sky goes black. Entering the Ganges Valley resembles sinking into an immense bowl of very old, brown clam chowder.

India's Air Pollution Stunts Children's Brains

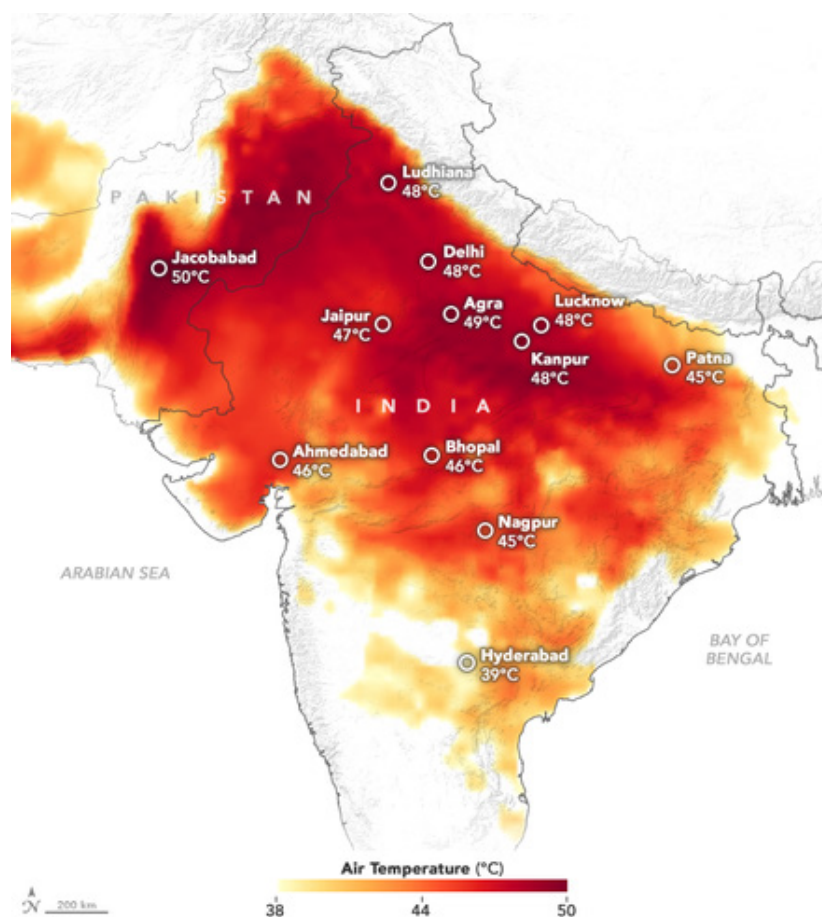
A United Nations report issued in 2017 asserted that air pollution in India, especially in the Ganges Valley, was triggering neuroinflammation, which impedes the cognitive development of children's brains. At the same time, the World Bank said that air pollution was costing India at least \$55 billion a year in 2015, as *The Lancet*, a prominent British medical journal, said that the same pollution was causing 2.5 million Indian people to die prematurely. India's premature deaths from dirty air have doubled in 25 years, from 1990 to 2015.

One reason for the Ganges Valley's filthy air is the combustion of petroleum coke, a residual waste product of Canadian tar sands refining that is imported from the United States. It burns hotter than coal, but that "also contains more planet-warming carbon and far more heart- and lung-damaging sulfur, a key reason few American companies use it. Refineries instead are sending it around the world, especially to energy-hungry India, which last year got almost a fourth of all the fuel-grade 'petcoke' the U.S. shipped out. After widespread press coverage of this practice, India's government said such imports would be phased out. "We should not become the dust bin of the rest of the world," said Sunita Narain, a pollution authority member who heads the Center for Science and the Environment. "We're choking to death already."

Delhi "Gasping for Breath"

India's highest court has called Delhi's atmosphere "like a gas chamber." On December 16, 2015, India's Supreme Court banned the registration of luxury diesel cars and SUVs with an engine capacity of more than 2,000 cubic centimeters in the National Capital Region (which includes Delhi) until March 31, 2016. It also imposed a one-time pollution tax on small diesel cars.

A lively debate was taking place in the public press over what to do about Delhi's pollution. Coal-fired power and the dung-fueled stoves used by 600 million



(mostly rural) Indians seemed off-limits. People need to eat, and at least 300 million in India have no electricity. That left only "four-wheels"—private cars and trucks—open to regulation.

A year after Delhi's air was likened to that of a gas chamber, it was even worse. The United States Embassy in New Delhi measures air quality on its roof (the same is done at the Chinese embassy in Beijing); on Monday, November 7, 2016, the reading on a scale of zero to 999 (twice the hazardous level of 500, and 16 times the safe limit of 60) was off the chart, entirely beyond the 0-999 range.

Coal Fields a Fiery Moonscape

New Delhi's particulate level was as dangerous to the city's 20 million residents as smoking more than two packs of cigarettes daily. "Open a window or a door, and the haze enters the room within seconds. Outside, the sky is white, the sun a white circle so pale that you can barely make it out. The smog is acrid, eye-stinging, and throat-burning, reported Ellen Barry in the *New York Times*.

Gardiner Harris, also in the *New York Times*, wrote of Dhanbad, India: "Decades of strip mining have left this town in the heart of India's coal fields a fiery moonscape, with mountains of black slag, sulfurous air and sickened residents. The city of Dhanbad resembles a postapocalyptic movie set... "With villages surrounded by barren slag heaps half-observed by acrid smoke spewing from a century-old fire slowly burning through buried coal seams. Mining and fire cause subsidence that swallows homes, with inhabitants' bodies sometimes never found."

Dr. Johansen taught journalism, environmentalism, and Native American Studies at the University of Nebraska at Omaha from 1982 to 2019, when he retired as emeritus, with 55 books.

Niskithe Prayer Camp, conclusion

homes and lives even more vulnerable with the loss of porous land to absorb excessive rainwater. With concrete roads and shingled roofs replacing soft earth, rainwater will run into the storm sewers and into Salt Creek, which have already been maxed out in extreme flooding events—events we can expect to see more of as the climate crises worsens.

Despite thousands of letters and hours of public testimony advocating for Indigenous ceremonial rights and warning of the environmental and personal property damage, Lincoln's Planning Commission and City Council swiftly approved Wilderness Crossing. It should be noted that in six hours of public testimony at the City Council on April 18th, 2022, only one person testified in favor of the development, and that was a representative of Manzitto, the developer who stands to make millions from this project. The people of the city of Lincoln resoundingly rejected the development, citing numerous moral and environmental reasons, pointing to Lincoln's 2050 comprehensive plan and demanding the city be accountable to the sustainable and ethical growth plan they themselves developed and published. But the elected representatives ignored the will of the people and approved all ordinances and amendments in support of Wilderness Crossing.

The day of the City Council's vote, April 25th, 2022, there was a strong showing of Lincoln's Native Community. Elders, teens, long-time advocates for Native Rights were sitting side by side with their Environmentalist allies. Though hundreds of letters, phone calls, and testimonies had addressed the concerns for the sweat lodge at the Fish Farm, the word sweat lodge wasn't uttered once by the council members. The Native Elders in the room went unacknowledged and attempts made by Council Women Raybould and Washington for Environmental Impact studies were batted away like a bothersome fly. The motions passed. We were gutted.

One week after that decision, dawn rose on Snell Hill, illuminating seven tipis that had been erected overnight. Niskithe Prayer Camp was established, and with our presence



Four prayer walk on August 22, 2022. Photo by Kenneth Ferriera.

we stated, "We are still here. We are strong. We will remain."

From May 2nd-May 18th we camped on Snell Hill. Through freezing rain, blazing hot days, and countless thunderstorms, our tipis stood tall. We were in ceremony, constantly in prayer, educating visitors, making new relatives, decolonizing our minds and hearts, singing late into the night, feeding the fires, reconnecting to the Land and each other. We made earnest attempts to negotiate with the Mayor, the City Council, with Manzitto, the developer, and the Catholic Diocese of Lincoln—the landowner prior to Manzitto. One thing was clear, no one was willing to take responsibility. Each entity, with their unique positioning, had ample resources to make decisions and effect change. All claimed powerlessness and abdicated responsibility for, yet another community of Indigenous people displaced for the sake of "development." Demonstrating that neocolonialism is alive and well in this country, and even so-called liberal city administrations would not defend the land or Indigenous ceremonial rights when dollars were at stake.

With heavy hearts, uncertain if we were doing the right thing, many of us deeply conflicted, we took our last tipi down on May 18th,

2022. We needed to return to our homes, our jobs, our responsibilities. Our negotiations had not led to the protections for the land or the lodge, and Manzitto was threatening to send the police in the day they became the legal landowners. Rather than see our relatives in jail, and our tipis and sacred items in the hands of law enforcement, we changed tactics. We would come off the hill and continue our fight in the courts.

During the summer of 2022 we were blessed to be connected to the ACLU of Nebraska and Big Fire Law and Policy group, who agreed to represent the Niskithe community pro-bono. This was the answer to many prayers, and thanks to the diligence of our dear friend Ken Winston. Our Indigenous-women led legal team went to work and on August 2nd, we formally filed a notice of appeal with the city, requesting a hearing with the Board of Zoning Appeals. It is our position that the City approved their actions in support of Wilderness Crossing outside of the legal administrative timelines and in violation of several parts of the 2050 Comprehensive plan. Nebraska State law mandates that a board be appointed to hear zoning disputes within the city of Lincoln. Our legal team sought to utilize that right. The City

of Lincoln disagreed. On September 21st, the same day Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird signed a proclamation declaring that day Otoe Misouria Day, her administration filed a lawsuit against Niskithe representatives and the Indian Center, requesting a judge formally deny us our right to a hearing with the Board of Zoning Appeals.

On November 18th we were called to court. We came with our relatives, and we came with our tipi. Again, we gathered, brought our drum, sang our songs, brought our medicines, made our prayers, held up our signs, and shared our story with local journalists. We sat on the lawn of the courthouse in our tipi while our legal team argued for our rights.

Months passed, the calendar year changed, and finally on February 1st, 2023 we were given a decision. The Judge had ruled in Niskithe's favor. The City could not sue to block us from the Board of Zoning Appeals. The same day we celebrated our court win, the first bulldozer was moved onto Snell Hill. The city had tied our hands with their lawsuit for months, and now time had run out. We needed to get in front of the Board of Zoning Appeals and ask for all progress to be stopped while the entire project was reviewed. We began gathering, organizing, and strategizing. However, on Friday, February 3rd the City indicated to our legal team that despite the Judge's ruling, we would not be offered a hearing with the Board of Zoning Appeals. We were out of time. We needed to act to defend the land.

Monday, February 6th in the early morning hours, we gathered in prayer, laid down tobacco, and raised our tipi polls yet again. The quiet of the morning dawn was broken by the sound of diesel engines. The desecration of Snell Hill was about to begin.

The land and ceremony defenders looked on in horror as the first trees were ripped from the ground. We could only take so much until we were compelled to step in. Several of us moved to put ourselves between the machines and the trees. The police arrived moments later. While we were up on the hill, witnessing the beginnings of the destruction, we saw a string of prayer ties in a heap on the ground. A bird that had been placed in a tree during a ceremony last spring was also

displaced, laying in a heap next to splintered wood.

For months we had thought that Manzitto and the City were not listening to us. But that morning they demonstrated that they had heard us. They had heard us when we said that land was sacred, that hill held our prayers, and was home to many spirits and non-human relatives. With trees all over that property, they started there, on Snell Hill, where we had camped, where we made our prayers, the part of the land we were striving so hard to preserve. We understood then that they were listening, and that they wanted to hurt us.

Over the course of that painful day and the next, we had many relatives stand with us in support. Six of our people were arrested. Countless tree relatives lost their lives. The Lincoln Police Department established a large presence with multiple road blockades, nearly 20 police officers, and a 24-hr surveillance station. They had the land surrounded, and they ensured the desecration would continue undisrupted.



What could we do then but pray. Night fell and we once again walked the land, careful to avoid the eye of the surveillance cameras. It looked like a battlefield. The bodies of slain tree relatives laid in heaps on land scarred by giant tire treads. We stepped over broken limbs, said prayers for the fallen, laid down tobacco, and let our tears fall.

Our tipi still stands just east of Snell Hill. We gather there to pray and be with the land as she experiences these deaths, like sitting with a relative before they make their journey to the spirit world. Our prayer leaders tell us

to be proud of what we have done, to keep our heads high, even as our hearts hang heavy in our chests. But we are lifted by one another, by the sacred fire, by our prayers, guided by our ancestors, and connected to one another through Spirit. We are still here. We are strong. And we will remain. The desecration and disrespect we experienced here in Lincoln has been going on for 500 years. It is not new, nor is it close to done. But we stood up and disrupted that system. And we will continue to do whatever we can to protect Unci Maka, Grandmother Earth, and to carry on the legacy of our ancestors who lived and died so that we could pray in our way.

Our legal fights continue. Now our relatives who were arrested make their way through the injustice system. We have trials set for April 24, May 1, and June 7th, 2023. Our legal team at Big Fire and ACLU of Nebraska submitted a new case against the City of Lincoln on Monday, March 6th, alleging that the city denied us our right to due process by withholding a hearing with the Board of Zoning Appeals. We will see this

through using every avenue available to us. For we are committed to our Mother Earth and sustained by our ceremonies. We are blessed with new relationships, new kinship bonds that have formed over this past year, newcomers to our ceremonies, new supporters looking to do their part. We are focusing on healing and renewing our work to rematriate the land to Indigenous stewardship. We encourage everyone to move to be in right relation with each other and with Mother Earth, to see yourself and understand your role in the land back movement. We are all related. Mitakuye Oyasin.

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Niskithe Prayer Camp Update – The Journey thus far...

*by Erin Poor
Citizen of Cherokee Nation, member of
Niskithe Prayer Camp*

It is mid-March. Nettles are beginning to break through the ground, the Sandhill cranes have arrived, and the Thunder Beings will soon make their return to the prairie. As the sun rises over southeast Lincoln, Nebraska, the landscape has once again changed, but not from natural causes. Snell Hill, the highest point in Lancaster County, and a place of historical, spiritual, and environmental significance to many, has been desecrated by bulldozers. Trees and medicine plants have been ripped from the ground; bird relatives displaced. Just east, flags fly from the tops of tipi poles.

The people of Niskithe Prayer Camp, made up of Tribal citizens, environmental advocates, and people from all walks of life reconnecting with Mother Earth, mobilized

again on February 6th, 2023, to protect Indigenous ceremony, and defend the land and waters. One of our relatives who lives near Snell Hill alerted us to the arrival of the machines the week prior. It was the thing we had been dreading since the proposed development was brought to our attention in March of 2022.

Nearly one year ago, signs were placed by city officials along south 1st street between Pioneers Boulevard and Old Cheney, alerting area residents to a proposed change of zones. The area, then part of Lancaster County, had been zoned for agricultural purposes for generations, and before that, it was part of the Otoe Missouri peoples' territory. In addition to being Otoe Missouri homelands, it was (and will forever be) an intertribal gathering place. People of many tribal nations came to the area to harvest salt from the Salt Creek, which winds its way through what we now call Wilderness Park. Undoubtedly, the original

Indigenous stewards of this land would have gathered at the highest point in the area, what we now call Snell Hill.

Around the turn of the 20th century, a house was built not far from the banks of the Salt Creek. That house would eventually come to be known as the Flying Fish Farm and would be surrounded on three sides by Wilderness Park. On that property, tucked between the trees and set back from the road, a sweat lodge was built. Though we know that lodge was consecrated by the great Sicangu Lakota medicine man Chief Leonard Crow Dog in 1979, oral histories tell us that it had been there even before then, operating clandestinely when it was still illegal to practice Indigenous ceremonies in the United States. Chief Leonard Crow Dog was instrumental in advocating for Indigenous People's right to religious freedom and was a part of the movement that led to the Native American Religious Freedom Act of 1978. His work and