



## Prison Writings: My Life Is My Sun Dance

*Leonard Peltier, Harvey Arden (Editor), Arvol Looking Horse (Introduction), Ramsey Clark (Preface)*

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Edited by Harvey Arden, with an Introduction by Chief Arvol Looking Horse, and a Preface by former Attorney General Ramsey Clark.

In 1977, Leonard Peltier received a life sentence for the murder of two FBI agents. He has affirmed his innocence ever since--his case was made fully and famously in Peter Matthiessen's bestselling *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse*--and many remain convinced he was wrongly convicted. *Prison Writings* is a wise and unsettling book, both memoir and manifesto, chronicling his life in Leavenworth Prison in Kansas. Invoking the Sun Dance, in which pain leads one to a transcendent reality, Peltier explores his suffering and the insights it has borne him. He also locates his experience within the history of the American Indian peoples and their struggles to overcome the federal government's injustices.

## Prison Writings: My Life Is My Sun Dance Details

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Author : Leonard Peltier , Harvey Arden (Editor) , Arvol Looking Horse (Introduction) , Ramsey Clark (Preface)

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## From Reader Review Prison Writings: My Life Is My Sun Dance for online ebook

### **Jon(athan) Nakapalau says**

Leonard Peltier tells his story and draws from the ritual of the Sun Dance. Regardless of what side you take on his conviction this book will open your eyes to the struggles that Native Americans have endured and continue to endure.

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### **Adam82 says**

Written by an innocent man placed behind bars because of his strong stand for his people. Every Native brother and Sister should read this book. It is strongly poetic, symbolic in nature, and an opening of the mind and heart.

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### **Adam says**

Great book about the modern Native American struggle. You really don't hear much about it, but the people are *still* struggling.

Leonard Peltier is a Native that was wrongly accused for the killing of a federal officer during a conflict on a reservation. There is overwhelming evidence for his innocence, but you gotta pin it on someone, right?....

If interested, also see a documentary called "Incident at Oglala" Really good.

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### **Daniel says**

A sun dance is a ritual that includes (among other things I'm sure) self-mutilation. Spiritual awakening occurs at a sun dance when prayer and pain negate the self in service to a higher power, the Great Mystery. The metaphor is poignant. Leonard Peltier is a spiritual warrior for his people, and the massive repression that he and the American Indian Movement have suffered have caused him enormous suffering. But suffering is something he has been prepared to shoulder through these sacred sun dances.

Even though Leonard Peltier is not a superlative writer, I appreciate reading his words as he no doubt very carefully wrote them. You can read the anger at the treatment of Leonard Peltier's people in every word of this book. You can sense his sense of injustice, but on top of all of that you can sense his determination to keep alive, as he insists his people have done, in the face of massive amounts of oppression.

The historical memoir of Leonard Peltier's time in the American Indian Movement was my favorite part of the book. Peltier was a hunted fugitive since he was teenager, with arbitrary legal troubles hounding him since he was old enough to go to jail, just like all Native youth. Leonard Peltier had no choice but to rebel, or die forgotten and let his people die forgotten as well. And rebel he did, as a part of the Bureau of Indian

Affairs occupation, as part of fishing rights protests, and as part of the spiritual protection he was attempting at Oglala when a FBI agents and paramilitary rightwing GOON (funded by the US government) shot wildly into the area, starting the infamous "Incident at Oglala."

One of the images that will stay with me, though, is a much more personal one: the sweat lodge set up by Peltier and other native prisoners in the corner of the recreation area of the prison, the source of their religion and of the spiritual strength that keeps them alive and strong for their people. It's a breathtaking description.

Because of this book, I would like to read a more in depth book about the incidents described. I plan on picking up *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse* by Peter Matthiessen

The book design is strange. The book is much taller than it is wide, making for a narrow page area. And the type is very large, with perhaps 100% leading between the lines. It makes the book a quick read, and very legible, but its awkward shape bothered me throughout.

I would pair the reading of this book for newcomers to the Leonard Peltier case with the article "I Am Obama's Prisoner Now"

<http://www.republicoflakotah.com/2009...>

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### **Jessaka says**

This book is a prayer, not just for him but for his people and all peoples and for the earth.

A message to humanity

Our work will be unfinished  
until not one human being is  
hungry or battered, not a  
single person is forced to die  
in war, not one innocent  
languishes in prison, and  
no one is persecuted for his or  
her beliefs.

~~Leonard Peltier

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### **Anka says**

pg. 10 - "Be thankful you weren't cursed with perfection. If you were perfect, there'd be nothing for you to achieve with your life. Imperfection is the source of every action. This is both our curse and our blessing as human beings."

pg. 54- "Today white man lets his statistics do the killing for him. Indian reservations in South Dakota have the highest rates of poverty and unemployment and the highest rates of infant mortality and teenage suicide, along with the lowest standard of living and the lowest life expectancy-barely 40 years!- in the country. Those statistics amount to genocide. Genocide also disguises itself in the form of poor health facilities and

wretched housing and inadequate schooling and rampant corruption."

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### **Ani says**

*Prison Writings: My Life is My Sun Dance* is a collection of thought, poems, memories of Leonard Peltier - all written from inside a prison cell, with a half-chewed pencil, with barely any light. At the time of writing, he had been wrongfully incarcerated for 23 years. That was 15 years ago. He is still in prison.

The book captures Peltier's moments of anger and despair, yet mostly conveys the extraordinary sense of compassion which this man continues to have, in spite of the horrible atrocities which have been inflicted upon him. What a gift it was to be able to read this.

America: FREE LEONARD PELTIER.

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### **Shirvan says**

Free Leonard Peltier!

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### **Jennifer says**

I've always wanted to know more about Leonard Peltier - the first interest being our same last names (I was born a Peltier and adopted a McGinnis). But I thought people were fighting for his freedom because he was wronged or taken advantage of or something other than being totally, completely, obviously, utterly, provably, admitted-by-his-prosecutors-to-be NOT GUILTY! And HOW FRUSTRATING that he is still sitting in prison! I admire his heart (and his really beautiful hair haha) and his determination (nearly always successful) at not living in hatred.

But I can understand Reagan and the Bushes for not freeing him - but Bill Clinton! What were you thinking? You had absolutely nothing to lose by the time you left office - everybody tried to discredit you - you had shamed yourself quite publicly - and almost everybody STILL loved you! Why couldn't you have let Leonard Peltier go?

And Obama - come on! You should know better. I realize you can't right every wrong done to your people and mine (ok I have a teeny tiny bit of Ojibwe in me, but it comes out when I think of all this) but this is one of the most obvious, public disgraces and injustices ever done. Get on it!

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### **Justin says**

This is a great book that introduces you to a tragic story. It is amazing how many people are ignorant to the crimes of the US government against the Native Americans in the past but even I was surprised at how many of those crimes continue to this day. It is absolutely ridiculous that Leonard Peltier is still in jail and I don't believe he killed those FBI agents. Even if he did, the only thing he is guilty of is defending his people

against FBI brutality and abuse. It is a good read and this man needs as much recognition as he can get. Hopefully, one day justice will be served and he will be removed from prison.

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### **Kate says**

A few years ago, I watched a documentary about AIM and the 1970s occupations of Wounded Knee, Alcatraz, and the BIA building in Washington D.C. At the time I felt completely, ragingly angry. In part because of the way that Native peoples have been treated, are still being treated, all over the world. But also because I was 28 years old and I had never learned anything about the modern Native American movement. Why had no one ever taught me about this before? Oh, because ignoring the struggle is one way to oppress people. Dammit.

After watching that documentary, I started a self education about 20th and 21st century Native American struggle and history, watching all the films and reading all the books I could get my hands on. This book was written from prison by Leonard Peltier, who was convicted of murdering two FBI agents in the 70s on the Pine Ridge Lakota Sioux reservation. It's Peltier's musings on serving 2 life sentences: what it's like to be a prisoner, the ebb and flow of hope for freedom, his take on what happened on that day.

There are lots of little pieces of the trial and incidents that Peltier doesn't cover in this book because that's not his purpose in writing it. I'd recommend watching the film 'Incident at Oglala' to really get an idea of the details. This book is more like a window into Peltier's life and mind in prison. Reading it made me feel angry, sad, and helpless. I'm glad I did though, because this man deserves to be remembered. He's innocent in my opinion, and he's been in prison for over 30 years because he is an activist, because he is an Indian.

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### **Molly says**

I have wanted to read this book for years & am finally got around to it. What a powerful book - I highly recommend this reading this book.

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### **Kyle Aisteach says**

Let me start by saying that I'm going to make no judgment on Leonard Peltier's legal issues or moral righteousness. My personal politics don't belong in a book review, and therefore I'm going to limit this to discussing the literary merits of the writing. But I will say that those of you looking to this book for proof of Peltier's innocence or guilt will be disappointed. Yes, it's mostly about his point-of-view of the events surrounding the various crimes he's accused of, but, ultimately, there's nothing in there that one could cite without drawing heavily on one's own confirmation bias. I will say that this book suffers from the fact that, to the mainstream American audience, Peltier tends to come across as clinically paranoid and incapable of taking responsibility for his actions. Given the harsh realities of reservation life in the middle of the 20th century, that may or may not actually be the case, but for those seeking "truth," it renders this book suspect as a source.

However, for those looking to explore the psychology of a man regarded alternately as a domestic terrorist or as a political prisoner, nothing compares to this book. Written in clear, accessible language as a mix of prose

and simplistic poetry, Peltier puts his mind on display for all to see and to judge for themselves. Ultimately, the message is uplifting and rousing, and it's easy to see why Peltier found himself a de facto leader in the American Indian Movement.

So read this not as a history or a memoir, but rather as a spiritual journey, told in fragments across a life punctuated with violence and strife.

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### **Margaret Killjoy says**

I read this in two days. It's light and easy and sad as hell. I've known about Leonard's case for awhile, but this is the first time I've read about it in his own words.

There are parts I stumble over, like the continuing appeals to the constitution, and some of his appeals to nonviolence seem... i don't know. a little contrived. I mean, he carried a gun throughout his life with which to defend his people. that's not pacifism. instead, it's useful.

But this book is amazing and earnest, and I feel like the editor must have done a tremendous bit of work to get the whole thing as cohesive as it is.

It's insane that it's more than 10 years later and he's no closer to freedom. Probably, he's further from it.

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### **Angie Lisle says**

I admire Leonard Peltier and I do believe that he is a political prisoner of the U.S. government. This book gives us Peltier's version of the 1973 siege at Wounded Knee, the events that followed, a brief account of his life in prison, dispersed with poetry and infused with Lakota spirituality. A great read.

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