

From Minneapolis to Arizona, ICE targets Native peoples

written by Gary Wilson
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Protesters gather at Moore Square in downtown Raleigh, N.C., on Nov. 18 against ICE and U.S. Border Patrol raids. In recent weeks, Indigenous nations from Minnesota to Arizona have reported ICE detentions of Native citizens, prompting tribal leaders to denounce racist detentions and treaty violations.

Jan. 17 — Immigration and Customs Enforcement has escalated a nationwide campaign of racial profiling and arbitrary detention against Indigenous people, seizing members of federally recognized tribes in Minnesota, Arizona, and Oklahoma in what tribal leaders are denouncing as open treaty violations and a direct attack on Native sovereignty.

What began earlier this month with mass arrests in Minneapolis has now spread across state lines. Native citizens are being stopped, detained, and threatened despite presenting valid tribal identification and proof of U.S. citizenship. Across all three regions, the pattern is the same: ICE treating Native identity itself as grounds for suspicion.

ICE raids Minneapolis, detains Native peoples

The Minneapolis raids set the stage. In early January, roughly 2,000 ICE agents and other federal personnel flooded the Twin Cities in one of the largest immigration enforcement operations in the region's history. At least five Indigenous people were seized. Four Oglala Lakota citizens remain in federal custody after being arrested near the Little Earth housing complex in Minneapolis' East Phillips neighborhood.

A fifth person, Jose Roberto "Beto" Ramirez, a 20-year-old Red Lake Anishinaabe man, was violently detained after ICE agents repeatedly punched him while he was complying with orders, according to video evidence and family testimony.

"This is a treaty violation. Treaties are not optional. Sovereignty is not conditional. Our citizens are not negotiable," Oglala Sioux Tribe President Frank Star Comes Out

said in a statement.

Those arrests were carried out from Fort Snelling, a site inseparable from the history of genocide and forced removal in Minnesota. In 1862, Dakota people were imprisoned at Fort Snelling following the U.S.-Dakota War, culminating in the mass execution of 38 Dakota men — the largest mass execution in U.S. history. Today, Indigenous citizens are again being taken to the same grounds by federal agents.

When the Oglala Sioux Tribe demanded information about its detained members, federal officials responded with an ultimatum: The tribe would only receive details if it entered into a formal agreement with ICE. Tribal leadership refused, stating that such an agreement would violate binding treaties recognizing tribal sovereignty. Days later, the tribe formally banned Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem from the Pine Ridge Reservation, citing her repeated racist claims about “cartels” operating on tribal lands and her role in promoting militarization.

Community resistance followed. On Jan. 10, Indigenous activist Rachel Dionne-Thunder narrowly avoided detention when ICE agents surrounded her vehicle and threatened to smash her window. Community members quickly converged, forcing agents to retreat. Tribal governments across the region issued condemnations, circulated “Know Your Rights” guidance, and warned that documentation alone does not guarantee safety under ICE operations.

Racist arrests spread to Arizona and Oklahoma

According to a Jan. 16 report by Brenda Norrell at Censored News, ICE agents this week detained Navajo and Pascua Yaqui citizens in Arizona while expanding harassment of Absentee Shawnee members in Oklahoma.

In the Phoenix Valley, Peter Yazzie, Diné, was seized early Monday morning while on his way to work. ICE agents ignored his tribal ID and citizenship documents, forced

him into a vehicle, and detained him before eventually releasing him hours later.

Near Tucson, a Pascua Yaqui tribal member was tackled and detained near the San Xavier District of the Tohono O'odham Nation after being followed by an unmarked van. Held for nearly eight hours, the individual described hearing screams and threats inside the facility. Federal agents dismissed their tribal ID as "fake," called them "illegal," and threatened deportation or death. When released, the person overheard agents saying, "I can't wait to get rid of them all" and "I'm gonna turn them into my slaves."

In Oklahoma, Absentee Shawnee leaders reported that ICE agents have begun approaching and detaining tribal members using racial profiling.

As raids continue, deportation operations are also intensifying nationwide. On Jan. 16, a deportation flight departed Mesa Gateway Airport in Arizona bound for Venezuela. Flight monitors have also tracked a deportation flight from Minneapolis to the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo earlier this month.

The legal reality is unambiguous. Native people are not immigrants. They are citizens of sovereign nations whose status is defined by treaties that predate the Department of Homeland Security, ICE, and the modern U.S. immigration system itself. The Native American Rights Fund has reiterated that ICE has no jurisdiction over Indigenous people in immigration matters.

The political reality is equally clear. ICE is operating as a militarized arm of the capitalist state, carrying out repression that has always been central to U.S. imperialist rule. From the removal of Native nations to the policing of migrant labor today, surveillance, detention, and forced displacement are not abuses of the system but necessary tools for maintaining class domination. Immigration law is simply the current legal mechanism for enforcing that power.

From Fort Snelling to the Sonoran Desert, Indigenous communities are responding with resistance — through rapid-response defense networks, legal challenges, and public mobilization. As tribal leaders have stated repeatedly, Native citizenship is not negotiable, and treaties are not historical artifacts. They are living obligations the federal government is now openly violating.

