

Raymond Yellow Thunder Dies

On February 12, 1972, Raymond Yellow Thunder, an Oglala Sioux Indian, was forced to entertain a crowd at the Gordon, Nebraska, American Legion Hall by dancing without trousers or undershorts.

The next morning he complained to the police about having been forced into that situation.

Then he disappeared and the discovery of his body on February 20, 1972, resulted in increased tensions between Indians and whites in and around Gordon, which is near the state's northwest border with South Dakota, and the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.

About 1,000 Indians from Pine Ridge and throughout the country marched on Gordon on Tuesday, March 7, 1972, to protest the official handling of the death of Yellow Thunder.

There were rumors that Yellow Thunder's body had been mutilated and the Indians were suspicious of the local authorities, who although they had arrested five suspects, had seen fit to charge three of them with manslaughter rather than murder and only two with false imprisonment rather than kidnapping.

The original bail was also reduced from \$12,500 to \$6,250 and all of the suspects are free.

A second autopsy was performed by a Denver pathologist, Dr. George Ogura.

In a press conference, John E. Echohawk, Deputy Director of the Native American Rights Fund, which has been retained by the family of Yellow Thunder, said that "the rumors of mutilation are not true. There is no indication of the things that were rumored such as cigarette burns, crushed hands, or that the decedent had been castrated. The family is fully satisfied that the first autopsy has been substantiated."

He further stated that, "the key question is why the rumors began. The basic reason relates to the aura of mistrust by Indian people of the white communities bordering the Pine Ridge Reservation and other Indian reservations across the country.

"There is tension due to numerous incidents which have become commonplace over the years. The incident of February 12, 1972, in which Raymond Yellow Thunder was stripped from the waist down and bodily thrown into a dance at the American Legion Hall in Gordon is just one example of these incidents.

"Does anyone really have to ask why there is tension and mistrust when an Indian is humiliated in this fashion?"

Mr. Echohawk stated that "the Fund's attorneys will attempt to cooperate fully with the prosecuting attorney in Gordon, Nebraska, so that those responsible for this can be brought to justice."

"In the meantime," he said, "the Fund will continue to investigate the incident to determine whether the surviving family has any civil remedies."