

Ending illegal occupation of America

Suzanne Reisman
letters@metro.us



Not all that long ago in the grand scheme of things, a group of Europeans set forth to create settlements in a new land. Never mind that this “new” land was already called home by many people of different religious and ethnic backgrounds, several foreign sovereign bodies declared it to be theirs hence forward. A series of wars was fought over the ensuing decades. New borders were repeatedly drawn, giving the original residents of the country less and less space of their own over time.

“The end to the occupation begins at home.”

This occupier is the United States of America. While many liberals and prominent left-wing thinkers criticize Israel for their “illegal occupation” of Palestine, I cannot help but think about our own occupation of Native American lands.

Despite the sentiments of our founding fathers, declaring equality for all men and due process of law, Native Americans were denied basic human rights in the very lands where they had always lived. As the United States expanded in every direction, the American government violated signed treaty after signed treaty and property continued to be confiscated from its rightful tenants. Native Americans were often promised new homelands and/or forcibly relocated, only to be removed once again when it turned out that the territory had valuable resources to exploit or strategic importance. The most egregious example of our occupation policy is the 1830 Indian Removal Act. When the Supreme Court ruled that the Cherokee Nation could not be compulsorily moved from Georgia, President Jackson defied it, leading to the death and misery of thousands of Cherokees as they crammed into refugee camps, then to Oklahoma.

Americans who are so concerned with Israel’s “illegal occupation” — the Israeli democracy is, by the way, no more perfect or less responsible for protecting human rights than our own — need to reflect a bit more about our own collective complicity in the ongoing wrongs committed against Native Americans. If various tribes rose in violence, sending suicide bombers into malls in places like Georgia, New York and the Dakotas, would it be an acceptable act of protest against the occupying government? How can we dismantle years of illegal settlement here in an efficient manner? Who among the critics of Israel is going to be the first to give their property back and find a new place to reside in the world?

Suzanne Reisman is a freelance writer.