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What Side Are You On? By Michael Steven Wilson and José Antonio Lucero. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2024. 214 Pages. $99.00 cloth; $24.95 paper; $9.99 e-book.

In 2002, Mike Wilson, a lay pastor and an enrolled citizen of the Tohono O'odham Nation, began putting out water on the Tohono O'odham reservation. Since the implementation of the US Border Patrol's policy Prevention through Deterrence in 1994, the number of migrant deaths in the area had increased dramatically. Wilson hoped to prevent future deaths. He met almost instant resistance from tribal and church officials.

What Side Are You On? emplaces Wilson's water activism in the trajectory of his life story. In it, Wilson reflects on his experience navigating poverty, racism, militarism, religion, and antiindigeneity as a child, as a young father, as a soldier, and as a would-be minister at home and abroad. Wilson's internal monologue drives the text, and the stories Wilson shares are powerful and intimate. They touch on many topics of scholarly interest, such as mining towns in Ajo, Arizona; US intervention in El Salvador; the American Indian Movement; and the role of religious and educational institutions in Indian country. Together, they reveal Wilson's unwavering commitment to justice even as Wilson's conception of justice evolved over time. In this sense, *What Side Are You On?* represents an important addition to O'odham literature. It enters and adds to a rich collection of O'odham autobiographies and as-told-to stories such as *A Papago Woman* (1936), *A Pima Remembers* (1959), *A Pima Past* (1974), and *A Papago Traveler* (1985). At the same time, the book grounds global processes and politics in one man's experience and life. Its appeal is broad, and all Wilson's stories lead back to the US-Mexico border, the subject of the last chapter.

The titular story, presented in Chapter 3, speaks to the book as a whole. As a young soldier, Wilson was deployed to El Salvador. Initially, by his own account, Wilson felt like, "a cold warrior" and he believed that "communism was the enemy" (62). On the ground, however, faced with violence, extreme poverty, and government corruption, Wilson realized he was aiding "a brutal military dictatorship wearing a democratic mask" (63). Wilson points to one moment in particular. He was sitting at a kitchen table across from a Salvadoran man, watching as the man counted his wages for the day. Wilson writes, "I don't remember the final amount, but I knew that his wages were less than what I had paid for my banana split." He thought, "Which side of the table are you on? It's poor families like this one that the Salvadoran government is calling 'the enemy' . . . Are families like this the enemy?" (76). Wilson names this moment as the one that changed him forever. Wilson had gone into the family's home on a mission: to win the hearts of Salvadoran citizens for the United States, but at that moment he asserts, "I began to question my government and my complicity" (77).

This is one of the many powerful moments that Wilson shares and which inspired Wilson's activism.

Native American studies scholars will find considerable value in the text's unique method: "a collaborative oral history" (5). Each chapter by Wilson is followed by an interlude by Tony Lucero, a professor of comparative history of ideas at the University of Washington. Lucero provides historical context and interprets Wilson's stories through academic literature. Built on a decade-long relationship, the rapport Wilson and Lucero have with each other shines. A small example: in Chapter 1, Mike offers his theory about the connection between the toxic waste from a nearby mine in Ajo, Arizona, and the death of his eleven-year-old brother. In a footnote, Lucero writes, "Mike is probably right about this." Lucero then provides a scholarly resource on the physiological effects of exposure to heavy metals (160). In the interlude that follows, Lucero discusses extraction, racial capitalism, and environmental racism. In other interludes, he discusses Latin American politics, federal Indian policy, boarding schools, missions, and Native American sovereignty. Lucero brings scholarly receipts to Wilson's stories. As a collaboration between a Native community member's work and a non-Native academic writing about that work, this book represents a gold standard in the field. I predict it will find itself on many graduate and undergraduate method course syllabi alongside classics such as *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999).

This book also offers scholars of Native American studies and the Indigenous borderlands a field-defining engagement in a study of tribal sovereignty, both implicit and explicit. In the introduction, Lucero notes that, "while Wilson, as an enrolled tribal member, felt that he had the moral and legal authority to put water out on tribal lands, he did not have the approval of his government or the local church" (4). This is an understatement; Wilson shares that both institutions actively tried to stop him. Lucero also discusses approaching the Tohono O'odham Nation's Institutional Review Board, which recommended that Wilson publish the book without Lucero (6). The two decided to forgo approval instead. Turning to the particularities of geopolitical jurisdiction, Lucero writes, "It's important to note that none of these conversations were held on the lands of the Tohono O'odham Nation" (5). Those familiar with IRB approval will recognize the particular legal claim Lucero is making.

Moreover, Wilson directly addresses tribal sovereignty in the final chapter. He does not mince words when he condemns liberal activists' aversion to casting judgement on the nation for migrant deaths (135–37). He writes:

> Why do you hold the US Border Patrol morally and criminally responsible for thousands of migrant deaths in the Sonoran Desert and yet you do not hold the government of the nation equally responsible? This is a moral hypocrisy . . . that, in your benevolent silence, you find a safe and neutral position. . . . Silence is not a neutral, safe position. (135–36)

Wilson finds the moral exemption given to the nation in deference to tribal sovereignty "paternalistic and racist" (137). This has massive implications for scholars and scholar-activists in the field. Although the US Border Patrol and the Tohono O'odham Nation are not equivalent in terms of the *level* of culpability for migrant deaths—Border

Patrol actively pushes migrants to cross over dangerous terrain—Wilson implicitly suggests that assigning degrees of immorality when people are dying is immaterial. As Wilson has been helping migrants on and off the nation—in the book he discusses helping migrants and discovering migrant remains—he is certainly entitled to speak on the matter. Lucero speaks for many when he writes, "It's not my place to evaluate the internal conflicts of the nation" (144), but I will be thinking deeply and for a long time on the book's views about what tribal sovereignty is for, and whether opting out of explicit critique of the nation constitutes respect, or racism, or something else.

Overall, *What Side Are You On?* constitutes a rich addition to the scholarship. Going forward, scholars writing about the US-Mexico border on the Tohono O'odham Nation, historically and in the present, will be required to cite and address this book and to explicitly state *which side they are on* in terms of methodology, sovereignty, and border politics.

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