

## Reliving the past: Bisbee remembers deportation on 102nd anniversary

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By Alexis Ramanjulu



Robert Green, director of “Bisbee ’17, said the anniversary of the deportation was on he remembered even before making his documentary.

ALEXIS RAMANJULU HERALD/REVIEW

**BISBEE** — What appeared to be a good idea at the time quickly became Bisbee’s dirty little secret.

“If you grew up here or were from here you were in a cone of silence about it,” said Bisbee resident Charles Bethea. “I learned it wasn’t by choice.”

On July 12, 1917 roughly 1,500 miners and those deemed “undesirables” were kidnapped and brought to Warren Ballpark. Of the 1,500 brought to the park 1,186 were put on to cattle cars and shipped to Columbus, New Mexico — approximately 170 miles east of Bisbee — but their final destination was Hermanas, New Mexico.

Bisbee resident and historian Mike Anderson said 80 percent of those who were deported were foreign born and the largest group, demographically, were Hispanics.

Friday marked the 102nd anniversary of the Bisbee Deportation, an event the city has recently started talking about more. Part of the reason it has been brought to the national stage is because of Robert Green’s documentary “Bisbee ‘17.”

The film crew, POV, Arizona Public Media and the Copper Queen Library hosted a series of panels discussing the importance of the deportation and the film.

“This started as a labor story but it got worse and worse on the border so it became more about deportation,” Green said. “I think the town was coming to terms with it and we just gave it a louder voice.”

Sue Ray, who played herself in the film and spoke during one of the panels on Friday, shared the story of how her grandfather Archie arrested his brother — her great uncle — and brought him to the ballpark to be deported. She said growing up she didn’t know much about what had happened because it wasn’t something her family talked about.

“I’ve become stronger knowing my grandfather and great uncle were involved with the deportation,” she said.

Anderson admits a clear reason for why the deportation occurred hasn’t been found, but the actions of the roughly 2,000 vigilantes were prompted by the copper miners strike against the Phelps Dodge Corporation on June 26, 1917.

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Siblings Vivienne and Wesley Holden, ages 6 and 4, listen as Story Time reader and Friends of the Copper Queen Library President Joan Reichel reads from the book “The Black Book of Colors” by Menena Cottin and Rosana Faria. The book uses braille and black-on-black illustrations to describe colors in a way a blind person may experience them.

PREMIER ALLIANCE PHOTO

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“What Bisbee had was a company-dominated town,” Anderson said. “There was an element of paternalism (by the company) — ‘we built this town and we know what’s best for it.’”

By the time November 1917 rolled around there had been a sense of shame cast on the city. Anderson said it was at this point when people started having second thoughts, but for Bisbee it was too late for this realization. Roughly 300 men were charged with kidnapping — none of them were convicted — and only one, Harry Wooton, had a trial. A jury acquitted him after 15 minutes of deliberating on a trial that spanned nearly two years.

“Those men (that were deported) just picked up and went back to their lives,” Anderson said. “Those who stayed supported the deportations. Some think it was a good thing and some think it was wrong. It depends on how it was passed down.”

The argument today isn't necessarily whether the deportation was good or bad, but why hasn't society learned from what happened over a century ago.

“Things haven't changed,” said Bisbee artist and resident Becky Reyes. “Now we don't ship them, we leave them in cages on the border. We're still doing it.”

The conversation comes as the nation continues to see large numbers of apprehensions, asylum seekers and deportations along the southern border.

“You have to talk about the story,” Reyes said. “We have to talk about it because one day it has to break through.”

Because of its relevance to present day, Bethea doesn't see the conversation ending.

“This is a story that is very alive and will be alive for a long time,” he said.

### **More Information**

"Bisbee '17" makes its national television debut on Monday. A watch party will be held at the Bisbee Royale on Monday. Doors open at 8 p.m. and the movie starts at 9 p.m. RSVP at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/watch-party-pbs-national-broadcast-of-bisbee-17-tickets-64445637637>