

Davino Watson, American citizen wrongfully imprisoned by ICE, speaks out against American war drive and calls for elimination of COVID-19

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In early March, the *World Socialist Web Site* conducted an hour-long discussion with Davino Watson, an American citizen who was illegally imprisoned by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents for over three-and-a-half years.

Watson had originally been detained by law enforcement for a minor infraction in 2008. Upon his release, he was detained again by ICE agents on suspicion of being undocumented. As the WSWS wrote, Watson would spend the next years of his life “being shuffled across the country with no access to the outside world.”

Finally able to obtain his release in 2011, Watson sought court remuneration for the injustices that were perpetrated against him. In 2014 he was awarded \$82,000, a fraction of what he was owed by the United States justice system.

The WSWS began reporting on Watson’s case in 2017, after a federal Appeals Court determined that he was not entitled to compensation because the statute of limitations to sue the United States government for its crime had passed while he was still locked up and fighting deportation. The WSWS wrote at the time that the cruel decision to bar him from compensation “is a travesty of the judicial process and an attack on democratic rights.”

Watson’s wrongful incarceration occurred in the honeymoon years of the presidency of Democrat Barack Obama, who went on to be dubbed the “deporter in chief” due to his administration’s record on immigrant rights. The current Democrat in the White House, Joe Biden, has only intensified this program, deporting more immigrants and refugees during his first year in office than the fascistic Donald Trump’s administration did in its last year in office. The personal and social trauma caused by these policies is incalculable.

Though personally scarred by his treatment at the hands of the US state, Watson remains an immensely intelligent and productive individual. In addition to maintaining employment in New York City, he tries to assist others who have been incarcerated in the hope they don’t have the same experience

he did.

He also helps to remodel and paint home interiors for friends and acquaintances, a skill he acquired from his father. He is passionate about cooking and regularly volunteers to provide food at soup kitchens, serving the city’s homeless population.

The WSWS has stayed in touch with Watson over the years. Watson recently contacted this reporter after having viewed the WSWS’s online webinar “Stop the Drive to World War III!,” which was aired in late February in response to the NATO-Russia conflict over Ukraine. He agreed to speak to us about the impact of the pandemic, the deadly war in Ukraine, as well as the necessity for a genuine anti-war movement in the working class. His words carry an immense moral weight and speak to broader attitudes held within the working population.

The following is Watson’s discussion with this reporter, edited for clarity and length.

Nick Barrickman: Thank you for taking the time to speak with us again. It’s been a little while since we last spoke. It’s been officially two years of the global coronavirus pandemic which has killed 6 million people worldwide, officially. In addition, a war between Russia, Ukraine and the various forces in NATO has broken out. There are nuclear-armed powers involved in this.

Davino Watson: I’d like to speak about the pandemic first if I could. When the pandemic first hit people didn’t really know what to believe. I remember seeing people rushing into stores, buying everything. There was a lot of false information that some people believed. It was like a scene out of a movie. I saw hospitals overcrowded with people infected ... It was all very hard to watch.

It was also hard seeing the response from the US government and how it handled the situation. It was so unacceptable. All the life that was lost. China did a way better job, in my opinion.

I caught COVID twice. I’m so glad that I am alright. The first time I caught it (in summer 2021) it was okay, but the second

time I caught it, this Christmas, I thought I was going to die.

I've had family, friends and friends of friends die. My mentor, Kiki Adebola, he was a counselor. He was really special to me and a lot of guys here in New York City. He died in the summer of 2020. That's when I really started to take COVID seriously.

NB: I'm sorry to hear about your loss. New York has become the epicenter of the pandemic in the US a couple of times. Given the degree of losses people have suffered and are still suffering, how do you see the attitude of the media and the government, treating the pandemic like it is over with?

DW: I remember seeing trailer trucks parked outside of hospitals [to store dead bodies during the first wave of the pandemic]. Today, people are still dying. The mask mandates are finished, and now there's a war happening. But COVID is still present. I think that is the war that we need to focus on.

NB: That's an important point. The US media and political commentators are now entirely focused on the Ukrainian crisis. That's not to say it isn't a humanitarian crisis. But it's worth noting that more people are dying here every day due to COVID-19 than the war's present casualty rate.

DW: I agree. I've seen that there were African students being mistreated by the Ukrainian government. They didn't have the right to flee the conflict as people of other races did.

[Note: African students studying in Ukrainian universities have spoken publicly that they have been denied access to escape routes by the authorities. Rabiatu Bah, a fourth-year medical student studying in Ukraine, recently told the *Washington Post* that fellow students and she were "running from one train attendant to another, and they kept refusing to let us on," while allowing white passengers through. In covering the conflict, the WSWS has written previously about "an obvious element of racism in the selective outrage of imperialist governments and the corporate media," which breathlessly discuss the plight of Ukrainian refugees while ignoring "the equally terrible suffering" of the black and brown victims of US imperialism in the Middle East and Africa.]

NB: Let's speak about the conflict, if we could, and the way it's presented to the public.

DW: It's hard for me. I cannot watch the news for long. I saw an image of an elderly couple that was fired on while in their car. To see their bodies lifeless, it's very difficult. They [NATO] are just protecting assets and their interests. The American people do not want a war. Working class people just want to go about our lives and live peacefully. Gas prices are going up, it's taking a toll on people.

I believe that one thing that should happen is that working class people should go on strike all across the world. There's got to be a movement against this war. The people need to come together to challenge the world leaders and get them to do better.

We're not going to work so that our money can be funneled into the wrong things. We've been through so much. The

timing for this war is something else. We're tired. We have enough going on *right here* that needs to be addressed.

NB: Have people that you know spoken with you about the war? What's their attitude?

DW: They say, "Stop the war, stop World War III." I haven't come across one person that understands this war at all. I never imagined that I would ever see a world war in my lifetime. No one wants war.

NB: The US media is very focused on claims that Russian troops have committed war crimes. They should be investigated. But the WSWS also believes that the US government and the media are covering up many, many similar crimes that it has committed in places like Iraq and Afghanistan, Syria, and so forth.

DW: The striking of hospitals is a crime. When you do something like that, you show the world you don't care about life. But America is not innocent. We all know that. They have done a lot of things themselves. You mentioned Iraq, Syria. I'd throw in countries in Africa, too. For America to be pointing a finger at Russia right now is hypocritical.

I saw how corrupt the American government is. The Department of Homeland Security, in its efforts to win its case against me, falsified documents against me. One of the documents claimed that I was caught with contraband. That was a lie. They attacked my character. They assumed that people would look at me differently because I'm black. To me, that shows how much the [US government] cares about its own citizens.

[Note: Mark Flessner, Watson's attorney, told the WSWS in a 2018 interview: "The [US] government got to do whatever it wanted to do" to his client. He noted that the presiding judge in the appeal trial offered "no adult supervision" to the government's "win at all costs" strategy].

I feel like the media needs to do a better job. The *World Socialist Web Site*, you guys putting out the right information, the truth: that's what I live for.

We're living in really tough times right now. There's so much pressure. I wake up and just have all these worries cross my mind: There's COVID, there's a threat of World War III, there's an opioid epidemic. It feels like anything could happen.

This is why the *World Socialist Web Site* is very important to the working people across the world. It's here to expose the truth.

NB: I really appreciate you giving your thoughts on these things today.



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