



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

Published on *Global Nonviolent Action Database* (<http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu>)

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## U.S. student Tim DeChristopher disrupts government auction of oil lands, 2008

**Time period notes:** *Tim DeChristopher placed false bids at the Bureau of Land Management Auction on December 19, 2008. The U.S. District Court of Utah found him guilty and charged him with 2 years and a \$10,000 fine on July 26, 2011.*

19 December

2008

to: June

2011

**Country:** United States

**Location City/State/Province:** Salt Lake City, Utah

### Goals:

"My intention was to cause as much of a disruption to the auction as I could... Making that decision, that keeping the oil in the ground was worth going to prison, that was the decision that I made." -Tim DeChristopher

## Methods

### Methods in 1st segment:

- 160. Reverse trial › Mr. DeChristopher and his defense team continually call to question the validity of the laws in place, through their necessity and selective prosecution defense.
- 186. Preclusive purchasing › using a false bid
- 196. Civil disobedience of "neutral" laws › Mr. DeChristopher breaks law to place false bids at December 19, 2008 BLM auction

### Methods in 2nd segment:

- 160. Reverse trial

### Methods in 3rd segment:

### Methods in 4th segment:

### Methods in 5th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 160. Reverse trial

### Methods in 6th segment:

- 160. Reverse trial

### Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 016. Picketing
- 038. Marches
- 162. Sit-in

**Notes on Methods:**

Unknown sit-ins, marches, and picketing were done on Mr. DeChristopher's behalf and to protest industries contributing to climate change

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Defense

**Cluster:**

Democracy

Economic Justice

Environment

**Group characterization:**

- Tim DeChristopher is a West-Virginian and an economics student at the University of Utah

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

Tim DeChristopher

**Partners:**

Peaceful Uprising, Rising Tide North America, Rainforest Action Network

**External allies:**

Bill McKibben, Sierra Club, Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, Earthjustice, National Parks Conservation Association

**Involvement of social elites:**

Not known

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

- Earthjustice
- National Parks Conservation Association
- Peaceful Uprising
- Sierra Club
- Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance
- Tim DeChristopher

**Groups in 2nd Segment:**

- Rainforest Action Network
- Rising Tide North America

**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

**Groups in 4th Segment:**

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

- We Are Power Shift

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

**Additional notes on joining/exiting order:**

The growth of the campaign is somewhat difficult to quantify, as local groups are not always documented.

**Segment Length:** *Approximately 6 months*

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

**Opponents:**

Bureau of Land Management

**Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

Not known

**Campaigner violence:**

None known

**Repressive Violence:**

Physical incarceration

## Success Outcome

**Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**

6 points out of 6 points

**Survival:**

1 point out of 1 points

**Growth:**

2 points out of 3 points

**Notes on outcomes:**

Because this action is so recent, further examination of success will be needed in the coming years.

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In October 2008 the Bureau of Land Management finalized three Resource Management Plans that would open new federal lands for oil and gas leasing in Southern Utah. Some of the lands were adjacent to national parks and monuments, including Dinosaur National Monument. A number of environmental groups mobilized and over 1,600 protests were submitted to the Bureau of Resource Management. A coalition including the National Parks Conservation and the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance filed a lawsuit on December 17, 2008, to halt what they saw as the illegal leasing of public lands. On December 19, the Bureau of Land Management Auction proceeded.

Tim DeChristopher, a West Virginian and economics student at the University of Utah, entered the auction not originally knowing what action he would take, but sure that his “intention was to cause as much disruption to the auction as I could.”

Mr. DeChristopher signed in as a bidder, and subsequently bid and won fourteen parcels valued at approximately 1.8 million dollars. The BLM charged that DeChristopher’s actions were illegal, thus compromising the integrity of the sale.

In January 2009, friends and supporters of DeChristopher founded Peaceful Uprising, an environmental group committed to

nonviolent direct action and civil disobedience. Peaceful Uprising spread word of DeChristopher's protest.

On January 17, 2009 the United States District Court for Washington D.C. issued an order preventing the Bureau of Land Management from issuing 77 of the leases sold at auction, including 11 of the 14 that DeChristopher won. The court declared that the Department of Interior's environmental impact statements on the parcels in question were inadequate. On February 4, 2009, Secretary of the Interior Kenneth Salazar cancelled the winning bids on the 77 disputed leases.

DeChristopher was indicted by the Federal Government on April 1, 2009, for his participation in the auction. He was charged with violating the Federal On Shore Oil and Gas Leasing Reform Act, and with providing false statements. In the meantime, Peaceful Uprising, in coalition with Rising Tide North America, and the Rainforest Action Network, continued to spread the word of DeChristopher's actions, and supported various nonviolent direct action events to spread awareness about climate change and the role of extractive industries.

DeChristopher pleaded not guilty, maintained that his actions were appropriate, and offered in his defense the argument of necessity and selective prosecution. The necessity defense argues that when confronted with two evils, DeChristopher's decision was the lesser of the two in face of imminent harm and no legal alternative to breaking the law. In November 2009, U.S. District judge Dee Benson denied DeChristopher's necessity defense and he was forbidden from presenting any evidence relating to this defense. DeChristopher's selective prosecution defense, the claim that he was being charged unequally than others who committed the same crime, was also denied.

In March 2010, Judge Benson denied DeChristopher's request seeking additional fact investigation. DeChristopher still argued that his actions were justified to fight the "government's violation of its own laws and regulations and the consequential exacerbation of global warming and climate change." This process of turning scrutiny back on the law is known as reverse trial.

Meanwhile, Peaceful Uprising continued to spread awareness and support nonviolent direct action within the environmental movement. In April 2011 DeChristopher was the keynote speaker at Powershift, a conference of student activists concerned with climate change and energy policy.

Though unclear, some reports indicate that bureaucratic fear of Peaceful Uprising's plan for collective non-violent demonstrations led to the rescheduling of DeChristopher's trial in the spring of 2011.

On July 26, 2011, Tim DeChristopher was found guilty and sentenced to two years in federal prison and a \$10,000 fine. Protesters were present outside the hearing, and the environmental activist community has largely galvanized around DeChristopher.

Tim DeChristopher and his legal team have filed for an appeal. His statements at the sentencing hearing can be found at the link below.

<http://www.peacefuluprising.org/tims-official-statement-at-his-sentencin...> [1]

## Research Notes

### **Influences:**

Mr DeChristopher has said he was inspired by the Yes Men (1). Mr. DeChristopher and Peaceful Uprising have inspired many nonviolent direct action environmentalists.

### **Sources:**

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#### **Additional Notes:**

Due to the recent nature of this action, most sources are newspaper articles and court documents.

This case was originally researched by Hannah Jones and later re-researched and written by Pauline Blount.

#### **Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:**

Pauline Blount, 16/10/2011

**A project of Swarthmore College, including Peace and Conflict Studies, the Peace Collection, and the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility.**

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**Links:**

[1] <http://www.peacefuluprising.org/tims-official-statement-at-his-sentencing-hearing-20110726>