

TITLE:

An American Indian Revolution: The American Indian Movement and the Occupation of  
Wounded Knee, SD, 1973

By:

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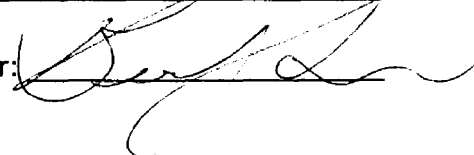
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## **Table of Contents**

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>I. The American Indian Movement</b>	
<b>Beginnings</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Formation</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Early Actions</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>II. The Governments Response to AIM</b>	
<b>Alcatraz Island</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Washington D.C. and the BIA</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>III. Road to Wounded Knee</b>	
<b>Reservation Unrest</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>IV. Occupation of Wounded Knee</b>	
<b>AIM Intervention</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Hardships and Diplomacy</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Developments and Deteriorations</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>V. Second Incident of Wounded Knee ends</b>	
<b>Recessions and Concessions</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Policy changes</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>VI. Conclusion</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>103</b>

## Introduction

*"The utmost good faith shall always be observed towards the Indians; their land and property shall never be taken from them without their consent; and in their property, rights and liberty, they shall never be invaded or disturbed, unless in just and lawful wars authorized by Congress . . ."*

- Northwest Ordinance of 1787<sup>1</sup>

On February 27, 1973, in the small village of Wounded Knee, South Dakota, the United States government faced the largest American Indian insurgency since the end of the Indian Wars of the nineteenth century. A group of American Indians drove into the historic hamlet of Wounded Knee and quickly captured the town by setting up road blocks. They ransacked the local trading post, homes, and other buildings in the village and set up their headquarters in the iconic Sacred Heart Catholic Church. This occupation was spurred by centuries of broken treaties and promises from the United States government towards the American Indian population, and it was backed by the rural organization known as the American Indian Movement (AIM). The occupation was preceded by numerous demonstrations organized by AIM that were directed at failed U.S. governmental policies. The incident at Wounded Knee did not originate over night, but was fueled by the growing "Red Power" social and political movement in 1960s and 1970s American culture. This movement was also driven by the turbulent demonstrations of the Vietnam and Civil Rights era in American society. The U.S. government was faced with not only internal bureaucratic weaknesses in dealing with this situation, but they were challenged by the growing popularity AIM developed, nationally and internationally. This event was viewed by many involved in the government as an act of

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<sup>1</sup> "Northwest Ordinance, July 13, 1787," *The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy*, Yale Law School, Lillian Goldman Law Library, (accessed December 7, 2011), [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/nworder.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/nworder.asp).

rebellion and by the American Indians as an act of liberation from an oppressive government. Spurred by the radical social climate of the decade, AIM was able to attract attention of the long forgotten minority population. They were also able to gain support from many in the larger dominant population who urged the U.S. government to pass numerous legislative acts that were landmark for the plight of American Indians.

The 1960s and 1970s were turbulent times in American history that witnessed numerous protests that fought against domestic racial suppression and international military conflict. The Civil Rights movement in the 1960s paved the way for segments of American society to benefit from governmental policy changes and gain national recognition. This movement made progress towards equality for minorities with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, but it was the belief of many minorities that they continued to suffer oppression. The American Indian Movement was late in coming for American Indian Civil Rights, but the social atmosphere of the United States was conducive for such a movement. The concepts of “Red Power” and “Pan-Indianism” were derived from AIM, and these concepts were designed to advance the ideology of a single ethnicity that incorporated all American Indians irrespective of tribal affiliation. It was AIM’s belief that all American Indians had similar ancestry and deserved the right to celebrate that heritage, and that all American Indians shared a common suppressive history that had faced countless tragedies. Journalist Greg Conderacci for the *Washington Post* said, “Mr. [Russell] Means says he hopes the Wounded Knee takeover publicity will have a ‘nationalizing effect’ on the Indians, convincing them they are all brothers. That isn’t easy. Indians are victims of not only the white man’s racism, but also of their own. Both Indians and

Bureau of Indian Affairs personnel agree there are hard feelings among Indians. Full-blooded Indians and those of mixed blood often don't get along, even within tribes."<sup>2</sup>

AIM was started in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1968, by a group of urban Indians. Dennis Banks and Clyde Bellecourt were two of the early founders, and Russell Means joined as a strong leader in the early 1970s. They originated as an organization to gain retribution for rural American Indians, and to have similar access to the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) as the American Indians on the reservation. As their organization grew, they attempted to incorporate all American Indians in their fight for equality. In the few short years following their inception to the occupation of Wounded Knee, AIM's actions donned them the label of a militarist group, similar to the Black Panthers, by attempting to gain recognition through intimidation. This revolutionary zeal attracted the attention of the FBI, which was determined to crush the movement. Even with opposition from certain American Indian subgroups, AIM was able to tap into the social unrest of this era and gain sentiment within portions of American society. AIM's fervent aggression started a chain reaction of events that led to their occupation of Wounded Knee, South Dakota, in 1973.

Historian Alvin Josephy Jr., in his forward to the book titled *Wounded Knee 1973: A Personal Account*, written by Stanley Lyman, claimed, "the episode [Wounded Knee South Dakota, 1973], deeply rooted in the tortuous history of Federal-Indian relations, was the explosive climax of a series of attempts by American Indians, led frequently by the militant leadership of AIM, to attract the attention of the general American population, an indifferent

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<sup>2</sup> Greg Conderacci, "At Wounded Knee, Is it War or PR?" *Wall Street Journal*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Wall Street Journal (1889-1994), (New York.), March 20, 1973, pg 26.

United States government, and the whole world to the continued frustrations and injustices of their daily lives.”<sup>3</sup> This tortuous history can be traced back to the first interaction of European explorers and the indigenous population of the Americas, and the savagery that was exhibited by the colonists in this clash of two cultures. The United States’ governmental policies, after the Indian wars of the nineteenth century, illustrate how the U.S. government dealt with what was termed as the “native problem,” in the twentieth century. The U.S. policies also give the best depiction to the attitudes of some the American Indian people in the twentieth century. Similar to other Civil Rights movements, AIM wanted to draw attention towards the notorious failed policies and broken promises of the U.S. government. AIM also wanted to attract awareness towards a minority group that was on the fringe of society. American Indians in the twentieth century were faced with poverty, poor living conditions, and were forced to participate in a complete annihilation of their culture through forced assimilation into American culture through educational institutions designed specifically for American Indian children.

From the inception of the United States, the governmental policy was to Christianize, agrarianize, and civilize the American Indian population. By the late nineteenth century, these policies created a greater dependency upon the programs of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which was paradoxical to that of American Indian society. They lived for centuries as independent nations, governing their tribe’s self-interest, and forging sustainable cultures outside of foreign influence not withstanding intertribal exchange and military alliances. It was not until the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, that American Indian tribes re-gained the right to establish their own government, and the policy of the BIA shifted from dictator to assistant. This plan of self-

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<sup>3</sup>Alvin Josephy Jr. quoted in *Wounded Knee 1973: A Personal Account* written by Stanley David Lyman, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991). vii.

governance was short-lived and, during the 1950s, American Indians witnessed a drastic alteration during the termination era when American Indians were enticed to relocate from the impoverished reservations to major urban centers. President John F. Kennedy, in the early 1960s, moved quickly to abolish the ideology of termination and to preserve tribal relations with the U.S. Government. Many of the tribes were able to maintain a constitutional government similar to the U.S. government. It was not until the election of President Richard Nixon that American Indians began to benefit from positive legislation for their people.

AIM's influence upon American Indian Policy could be drawn into question. If AIM had not occupied Wounded Knee in 1973 would the policies of the U.S. government have changed for American Indians? That question is difficult to answer, but the times were ripe within U.S. culture for social challenges and a large policy reformation for ethnic minorities. AIM's actions were militaristic, and at times even revolutionary. There is no wonder that the U.S. government was paying such close attention to AIM. The occupation of Wounded Knee was termed by many governmental officials as an act of rebellion. For seventy-one days, the leaders of the occupation formed the Independent Oglala Nation (ION) and attempted to send delegates to the United Nations to receive recognition as a sovereign state. The hope of both sides was to end the situation peacefully and with minimal casualties. The passage of the Indian Self Determination Act of 1975, the Indian Freedom of Religion Act of 1978, and various court victories and federal funding awards for American Indians demonstrate that the U.S. government was attempting to reconcile the negative perceptions and reality surrounding American Indian culture. The occupation of Wounded Knee, and the preceding demonstrations by AIM were an attempt to gain governmental retribution for American Indian tribes; however, while the American Indian Movement did not attain all of their demands, the occupation did

play a role in pressuring the U.S. government to expedite legislation to improve the lives of many American Indian people.

The intent of this thesis is to develop a picture of the culminating event of the American Indian Movements occupation of Wounded Knee, in 1973. There are also a few questions that can hopefully be answered utilizing the data presented in both primary and secondary sources. How did the Wounded Knee action contribute to the demise of AIM? Also, how did the media impact the Wounded Knee Occupation? This incident had many effects on the image of American Indians that were both positive and negative. Examining the U.S. government standpoint and the American Indian position develops a structure that can compare and contrast the two points of view in order to increase an understanding of this conflict. There were many parties involved on both sides of the barricades that played a role in the interactions and the outcomes of the event. The United States government had many agencies involved, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Marshals, and the Justice Department. The American Indians also had several groups and organizations involved; the larger two groups were the American Indian Movement and the Oglala Sioux who lived on the Pine Ridge Reservation. American Indians also had groups in opposition of the occupation, in particular the supporters of the tribal government under the tribal chairmanship of Richard "Dick" Wilson. Understanding the focus of all parties involved will give the greatest depiction of the attitudes and mindsets of the individuals, and the event in its entirety.

The outline of this thesis will take the role of comparing and contrasting the viewpoints of the individual parties involved. It will start with the formulation of the American Indian Movement and what the movement meant for rural American Indians. Chapter 2 will



demonstrate the negative attention that the militant rural Indians attracted, and the subsequent federal government interest in the organization. This section will deal with the two large events that garnered the attention of the FBI and the U.S. Marshals, and the measures that were implemented in order to counter the American Indian activists. Chapter 3 will cover the events that preceded the occupation of Wounded Knee that took place days before, on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Chapter 4 addresses the occupation and siege of Wounded Knee. This section discusses the sides of both major parties and the actions taken by both during the seventy-one day occupation. The final two chapters of this work will cover the repercussions of this event, and demonstrate the consequences.

The resources that will be utilized in this thesis will mainly consist of primary source documents, and a few secondary sources will be used to compare the scholarship that has been previously researched on this topic. Numerous primary documents have been compiled, edited, and published for the ease in accessing these documents for academic work. Major news sources including the *Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and *Washington Post* will represent news coverage of the time. The media was able to fuel the occupation, and at times held the movement under strict scrutiny for distracting much time and effort to this demonstration. The journal of Stanley Lyman, who was director of the BIA on the Pine Ridge reservation, demonstrates an excellent firsthand account of the event. His journal provides insight into the U.S. government's day-to-day strategies, and it also reveals the difficulty the government had with inter-agency communication. The BIA always seemed to be the last organization to be informed about the actions of the government. Lyman is torn between the mission of the BIA, which is to serve the American Indian population, and his conviction that the tribal government should hold the power on the reservation. Author Rolland

Dewing has compiled the FBI files on the American Indian Movement, which through the Freedom of Information Act, have allowed scholars to understand the complete interaction between AIM and the FBI.

Another important resource is the record of U.S. Senate hearings by Senator James Abourezk, who was chairman of the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Indian Affairs. Senator Abourezk was a Democrat from South Dakota and he worked hard to mediate during and after the conflict. In the hearings that took place after the occupation, June 16 – June 17, 1973, Senator Abourezk attempted to collect data from both sides of the event. The U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Indian Affairs of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs looked into the causations and aftermath of the Wounded Knee takeover by hearing testimonies from all sides of the account. Those testifying about the occupation include Richard Wilson, Stanley Lyman, William T. Schlick, Charlie Red Cloud, Frank Fools Crow, Russell Means, and many others representing a cross section of all parties involved. After the hearings there is a collection of papers written by Senator Abourezk, held in the University of South Dakota archives that are the senators' summation of the events. During Senator Abourezk's tenure, he worked persistently on assisting the American Indian population.

On the American Indian side there have been several documents also compiled of firsthand accounts that give insight into the support behind the occupation of Wounded Knee. One of the major works assembled by *Akwesasne Notes* entitled *Voices from Wounded Knee, 1973, in the Words of the Participants*, is a compilation of first hand narratives inside the occupation. During the incident *Akwesasne Notes* published numerous articles that were written by those inside the occupation that spoke about daily struggles. Two of the leaders of

the American Indian Movement compiled autobiographies that speak about the formulation, organization, and the events of AIM. The first was written by Dennis Banks, entitled *Ojibwa Warrior*, and the other was written by Russell Means, entitled *Where White Men Fear to Tread*.

There are also several secondary sources compiled by Rolland Dewing and Paul Smith who have written excellent accounts of the history of the event in Wounded Knee. Paul Smith writes a detailed account of the American Indian Movement in his book entitled *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee*, and their actions from the occupation of Alcatraz Island to the occupation of Wounded Knee. Rolland Dewing, in his book entitled *Wounded Knee: The Meaning and Significance of the Second Incident*, covers the broader history behind the occupation. He takes one of the most unbiased approaches by attempting to report the history of the event by incorporating all accounts involved. These texts along with a few other scholarly articles will be utilized to understand the scholarship that has already been written on the topic.

At the end of the seventy-one day occupation of Wounded Knee, the small village appeared as a ravaged warzone. The buildings were in shambles, pocked with bullet holes, and the village was surrounded by numerous bunkers dug into the earth. While assessing the damage, Stanley Lyman commented, “suddenly, in the midst of the nightmare, I realized that there was green grass all around; the grass had gotten green this spring without my noticing it. It was good to see it.”<sup>4</sup> Amongst all the turmoil that the U.S. government had to face with the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal, and the occupation of Wounded Knee; at least one segment of the chaos had concluded, and a ray of hope shown upon the devastated village. An

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<sup>4</sup>Lyman, 142.

old Iroquois saying states, "two boats are going side by side, separate. You can keep one foot in each boat for only so long. Sooner or later you must decide."<sup>5</sup> The occupation of Wounded Knee seemed to have been inevitable. There were many factors that played a major role in the development of this event, from the activist mentality of the time period to the centuries of suppression towards American Indians. Ultimately, some American Indians made a choice; they chose to make a stand for American Indian Civil Rights. This revolutionary engagement on the American Great Plains was an extreme action, and it challenged the history of the relations between the United States government and the American Indian tribal government.

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<sup>5</sup>Rex Weyler, *Blood of the Land: The Government and Corporate War Against the American Indian Movement* (New York: Everest House Publishers, 1982), 15.

## Chapter 1

### The American Indian Movement

*Things won't ever be the same again – and that's what the American Indian Movement is about. We are the shock troops of Indian sovereignty. We intend to raise questions in the minds of all – questions that have gone to sleep in the minds of Indians and non-Indians alike. AIM is the new warrior class of the century, bound by the bond of the drum, who vote with our bodies instead of our mouths. Our business is hope.*

- Virgil Kills Straight, Lakota<sup>6</sup>

#### Beginnings

The conclusion of the American Indian wars occurred near Wounded Knee Creek in South Dakota on December 29, 1890. The battle ensued between a vengeful U.S. 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry led by Colonel James W. Forsyth, and a group of *Minneconjou* Sioux, led by Chief Big Foot. According to the United States government the Battle of Wounded Knee 1890, signified the end of the rebellious factions of American Indian tribes. They had finally been subdued, and now were deemed “under control” and no threat to the dominant culture. In reality, the past several decades of the eighteenth century and nineteenth century, American Indians had become more and more dependent upon the U.S. government. The traditional cultures of the American Indian had slowly been stripped away, and what remained by the end of the nineteenth century was a small glimpse of the great American Indian nations. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century the U.S. government removed the lands of American Indian tribes and opened them for settlement. This action was similar to the colonialistic actions that the great empires of the time were practicing. This concept was driven by the ideology of Manifest Destiny, and it was formally put into practice with the passage of the Indian Removal Act in 1830. By the end of the

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<sup>6</sup> Dennis Banks, *Ojibwa Warrior: Dennis Banks and the Rise of the American Indian Movement* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 58.

nineteenth century the U.S. government had complete control over the lives of the American Indian people and they had begun the painful action of forced assimilation into white American society.

The first step into assimilation was forcing the concept of private property upon the American Indians. The United States government, in 1887, passed the Dawes Act (General Allotment Act), which would divide the reservation territory amongst the members of the tribe. It intended that they were also offered the tools and knowledge on how to cultivate the ground for agricultural purposes. It was the belief of Senator Henry L. Dawes, of Massachusetts, who was the author of the Dawes Act, that by giving Indians land and teaching them to farm, they would abandon the Indian way of life, assimilate into American society, and no longer burden the U.S. government as dependents. This new life style for the Plains Indians was completely foreign, because their entire society was based upon a mobile subsistence settlement strategy, hunting the large buffalo herds. The extermination of the buffalo forced the Plains Indians into greater dependency upon the U.S. government, and with the passage of the Dawes Act, finalized their fate.

The largest step the U.S. government took in forcing American Indians to assimilate with western society was to educate them about white American culture. This was accomplished by completely erasing American Indian culture through a comprehensive education. The educational opportunities came in three separate forms: the boarding school, the day school, and the mission school. The first method the United States created was the day school upon or near the reservation, which provided a remedial education funded by the government. In most cases the day school would only educate the American Indian children up to an eighth grade

level. Church organizations offered to assist the federal government in educating American Indian children, and they were allowed to create mission schools upon the reservation. In some cases the U.S. government would provide funding for building maintenance, while the church organization provided books, curriculum, and a teacher. The third and final institution designed to educate American Indian children came in the form of a boarding school. They would remove Indian children from their families on the reservation and place them in boarding institutions. The intent was to fully submerge American Indian children in American culture and society, so they would completely forget the Indian way of life.

The first boarding school was founded by Richard H. Pratt in 1879, as the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. Pratt was opposed to the Dawes Allotment Act, because he believed it failed in teaching American Indians the ways of white American culture. His philosophy on American Indians was to “Kill the Indian, save the man.”<sup>7</sup> Pratt stated,

A great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one, and that high sanction of his destruction has been an enormous factor in promoting Indian massacres. In a sense, I agree with the sentiment, but only in this: that all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man . . .<sup>8</sup>

Many of the American Indians who attended the boarding schools were left with deep emotional scars that led them into negative lifestyles. Chief Luther Standing Bear was one of the first Indians to attend the Carlisle Indian School; later in 1933 he recalled his experience in the school by stating,

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<sup>7</sup> Richard H. Pratt, “Kill the Indian, and Save the Man’: Captain Richard Pratt on the Education of Native Americans,” quoted in *Official Report of the Nineteenth Annual Conference of Charities and Correction (1892)*, Online by George Mason University, (Accessed January 20, 2012), <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4929>.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*

At the age of eleven years, ancestral life for me and my people was most abruptly ended without regard for our wishes, comforts, or rights in the matter. At once I was thrust into an alien world, into an environment as different from the one into which I had been born as it is possible to imagine, to remake myself, if I could, into the likeness of the invader.<sup>9</sup>

Most of the boarding schools were run by a single religious organization, and the tribal children were forcefully subjected to the dictating religion. They were forced to cut their hair, never speak their language, abandon their religion, and take on an English name.

The Great Depression era witnessed one of the greatest pieces of legislation in the history of American Indian-white relations. In 1934, the Indian Reorganization Act (Wheeler-Howard Act) was passed. John Collier, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, appointed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, was the mastermind behind the Indian Reorganization Act and many other reforms within the Office of Indian Affairs that were designed to reverse the previous federal policies regarding American Indians. He stated, "Since 1933, the Indian Service has made a concerted effort — an effort which is as yet but a mere beginning — to help the Indian to build back his landholdings to a point where they will provide an adequate basis for a self-sustaining economy, a self-satisfying social organization."<sup>10</sup> This new law stopped the allotment process that had been going on for over fifty years, and attempted to restore tribal lands that had been acquired, by white land owners, during the time period of the Dawes Act. The Indian Reorganization Act was also known as the Indian New Deal and allowed American Indians to establish their own form of government stating, "Any Indian tribe, or tribes, residing on the same reservation, shall have the right to organize for its common welfare, and may adopt an

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<sup>9</sup>Dewi Ball and Joy Porter, *Competing Voices from Native America* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2009), 160

<sup>10</sup> John Collier, "We Took Away Their Best Lands, Broke Treaties," quoted in *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1938*, Online by George Mason University, (Accessed January 12, 2012), <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5058>.



appropriate constitution and bylaws, which shall become effective when ratified by a majority vote . . .”<sup>11</sup>

It was not long after this landmark legislation was passed that the U.S. government moved in the opposite direction in assisting American Indian tribes. In 1953, the U.S. government passed legislation titled the House Concurrent Resolution 108, that stated,

It is the policy of Congress, as rapidly as possible, to make the Indians within the territorial limits of the United States subject to the same laws and entitled to the same privileges and responsibilities as are applicable to other citizens of the United States, to end their status as wards of the United States, and to grant them all of the rights and prerogatives pertaining to American citizenship. . .<sup>12</sup>

This time period in American Indian relations was known as the Termination Era, because the U.S. government wanted to terminate the reservation system and sever federal ties with American Indian tribes. It was another attempt by the U.S. government to make American Indians self-dependent. Peter Osnos, reporter for the *Washington Post* said, “For the few tribes involved, ‘termination’ was a disaster. Without federal trust protection, their lands and resources were quickly taken over by shrewd business interests.”<sup>13</sup> The U.S. government also enacted a policy to remove American Indians from poverty ridden reservations, and place them into urban centers where they would have a higher opportunity at obtaining employment.

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<sup>11</sup>“The Indian Reorganization Act (Wheeler-Howard Act),” June 18, 1934, Online by Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, (accessed January 12, 2012), <http://www.cskt.org/gov/docs/reorganizationact.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup>“Concurrent Resolution of the Eighty-Third Congress, First Session, 1953, (House Concurrent Resolution 108),” *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties Vol. IV, Laws, (February 10, 1939 to January 13, 1971)*, Government Printing Office, Online by Oklahoma State University, (Accessed January 12, 2012), [http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/vol6/html\\_files/v6p0614.html](http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/vol6/html_files/v6p0614.html).

<sup>13</sup> Peter Osnos, “Protest by Indians sought an end to Paternalism,” *Washington Post*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post (1877-1994), (Washington D.C.), November 9, 1972, section C1.

In 1968, President Lyndon Johnson expressed a negative stance toward the concept of termination, and he articulated a desire to assist American Indians. His goal was to move away from termination and towards self-determination. He claimed, in a speech titled *I Propose a New Goal for Our Indian Programs*, that the U.S. governmental goals must include: "A standard of living for the Indians equal to that of the country as a whole . . . freedom of choice . . . an opportunity to choose to remain in their homelands . . . or to move to the towns and cities of America . . . and full participation in the life of modern America with a full share of economic opportunity and social justice."<sup>14</sup>

The two presidents that arguably deserve the most recognition for addressing the plight of the American Indian Tribes were President Richard Nixon and President Gerald Ford. Given the upheaval of the 1960s and 1970s and the formulation of the American Indian Movement, the U.S. government realized the terrible social conditions of American Indians. It was during this era that the American Indian Movement captured the attention of the American people and gained a tremendous amount of support for their plight. President Nixon, in a speech to the U.S. congress titled *Special Message on Indian Affairs*, said "the first Americans – the Indians – are the most deprived and most isolated minority group in our nation. On virtually every scale of measurement – employment, income, education, health –the condition of the Indian people ranks at the bottom."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Lyndon B. Johnson, "Special Message to the Congress on the Problems of the American Indian: The Forgotten American," March 6, 1968. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, (accessed December 7, 2011), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=28709>.

<sup>15</sup>Richard Nixon, "Special Message on Indian Affairs," July 8, 1970. *American Indian Environmental Office Tribal Portal*, (accessed January 12, 2012), <http://www.epa.gov/tp/pdf/president-nixon70.pdf>.

## Formation

It was after nearly a century of forced assimilation that certain American Indian people organized a social movement. The American Indian Movement began in the Minnesota Correctional Facility in Stillwater. The idea was conceived by Dennis Banks while serving a two and a half year sentence in prison, spending nine months of that sentence in solitary confinement. Banks was indicted in 1966, on burglary charges, or what he likes to call his “sixteen bags of groceries case.”<sup>16</sup> He was placed in solitary confinement for failing to comply with prison work duties, such as, making license plates and spooling twine. It was during this time period that Banks was able to educate himself on the social movements taking place outside of prison. He familiarized himself with the literature of organizations such as the Students for a Democratic Society, the Weathermen, and the Black Panthers. It was Banks’ desire to follow the example of these movements to accomplish his goal for American Indian Civil Rights. He originally wanted the organization to fight for the rights of urban American Indians, but over time that ideology expanded to all American Indians.

After his release from prison in May of 1968, Dennis Banks actively pursued his objective in establishing an American Indian Civil Rights movement. He connected with an old boarding school friend George Mitchell, and they began soliciting support from fellow American Indians. For both men, their boarding school experience shaped their views on the U.S. government and what would eventually become the American Indian Movement. This experience was negative for both Banks and Mitchell, as they were taken away from their families for years, and forcefully taught that the Indian way of life was bad and that the white man’s society was good.

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<sup>16</sup> Banks, 60

He met George Mitchell in his early boarding school years at the institution in Pipestone, Minnesota. Together they had attempted to run-away, but were quickly found and brought back to face the humiliating punishment that accompanied their offense. When speaking about his boarding school experience, Banks claimed, "The old boarding schools that Indian kids were forcibly taken to were concentration camps for children where we were forbidden to speak our language and were beaten if we prayed to our Native creator."<sup>17</sup>

Banks and Mitchell planned their first meeting for July 28, 1968, at eight p.m., in a run-down church basement in Minneapolis, Minnesota. They both were surprised by the amount of support they received, when nearly two hundred American Indians crammed into the church basement to discuss their concerns for their people. Dennis Banks opened the meeting by stating,

People are fighting battles in the streets of Chicago. They're fighting to stop the Vietnam War and bring about changes in the political party system. They're fighting in the streets of Alabama to change the situation for blacks. The SDS movement is trying to change the whole structure of the universities. What the hell are we going to do? Are we going to sit here in Minnesota and not do a goddamn thing? Are we going to go on for another two hundred years, or even another five, the way we are without doing something for our Indian people?<sup>18</sup>

They transitioned efficiently during the meeting through the issues, and quickly established a name for their organization, the American Indian Movement (AIM). During the meeting, many came forward to express their concern of the injustices that were practiced against their people.

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<sup>17</sup>Banks, 25

<sup>18</sup>Banks, 62

AIM's organizational purpose focused upon improving the economic and educational status of American Indians. They wanted to unify around the color red, which exemplified the American Indian sense of pride. Historian Rolland Dewing, in his book titled *Wounded Knee: The Meaning and Significance of the Second Incident*, claimed, "The organization was dedicated to strategies of demonstration, confrontation, and occupation as distinguished from traditionally less-militant Indian organizations."<sup>19</sup> Their leadership attempted to pattern itself after the Black Panther movement, yet, restrain from resorting to violence in their initial actions. They originally modeled two projects after the Black Panther's actions in Oakland, CA: create an Indian patrol and establish survival schools. The Indian patrol was initiated to fight against the illegal racial profiling practiced by the local police department by establishing a team of "red" vehicles that would follow the police around the city and record their actions. In an interview with *Akwesasne Notes* an AIM leader stated that, "Friday and Saturday night, the police would go down into the Indian area of town and pick up bus loads of Indian people and take them to jail, and the next morning, court-appointed lawyers would tell them to plead guilty."<sup>20</sup> The American Indian patrol attempted to follow police into Indian neighborhoods and prevent them from falsely arresting individuals or from treating Indians brutally.

The AIM survival schools were established to help rehabilitate those who were abusing alcohol, to train American Indians about their heritage, and how to survive in the urban centers of America while relying upon their people's history. The first survival school was established in Minneapolis, in January, 1971. The courses provided were taught by American Indian teachers,

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<sup>19</sup>Rolland Dewing, *Wounded Knee: The Meaning and Significance of the Second Incident*, (New York: Irvington Publishers, Inc, 1985), 40.

<sup>20</sup>"Voices from Wounded Knee 1973: In the Words of the Participants," *Akwesasne Notes*, (Rooseveltown: Akwesasne Notes, 1974), 60.

and they focused upon Indian culture and racial pride. By the fall of 1972, AIM had established three additional schools, bringing the total to four survival schools within the Minneapolis metropolitan area. These schools attracted many critics who claimed they were only established to garner federal funding for AIM. Critics also attacked the teachers, claiming they were only selected based on their race and political inclinations and not on their academic qualifications. Critics cited the lack of student academic progress of comprehensive basic skills as another form of evidence against the survival schools.

The idea of Pan-Indianism was addressed in the survival schools in the attempt to bring about a unified urban Indian front. The major concern of the leadership of AIM was that American Indians would attend Bureau of Indian Affairs schools to learn a skill, but that skill would not get them employment on the reservations. These Indians would then attempt to move to an urban center in search for employment, but they struggled to assimilate into American society so they would end up back upon the reservation. The reservations offered only unemployment which led to the negative lifestyles of drinking and gambling. Many American Indians found themselves continually on the journey between the reservation and the city. In an interview with the *Akwesasne Notes*, a leader of AIM claimed, "We realized that our involvement had to be with a total structuring of Indian life across the whole nation. We had to begin advocating for Indians on the reservation and off the reservation. Any place that there was Indian people, then we had to be right there to be their champion and fight for them, for their rights."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Akwesasne, 61

## Early Actions

It was not long after the success AIM received in Minneapolis, that they began comprehending the influence they could have nationally. According to Dennis Banks, “Minneapolis soon became too small for AIM. In 1969, we took part in the National Education Conference. One young man came up to me and asked if I would go to Cleveland and make a presentation at their Indian Center. His name was Russell Means.”<sup>22</sup> After the addition of an AIM chapter in Cleveland, many chapters began immersing around the nation. It is interesting to note that AIM initially strove for peaceful protests, yet they adamantly aligned themselves with the Black Panthers. American Indian historian and author Vine Deloria Jr., in his book *God is Red*, stated, “they believed deeply in the militant version of black power as violent confrontations, and grants were made to organizations within the respective minority groups that they were sure would produce the desired confrontations.”<sup>23</sup> AIM received much of its funding the same way the Black Panthers received theirs, through church organizations and government matching grants. Many of these supporting organizations relied on results from the capital donated, in the form of organized protests. The leadership of AIM quickly recognized their ability to raise not only support for the movement through membership, but also by funding.

It is estimated that between the years 1968 – 1973, AIM received approximately \$400,000 from church organizations, which included the Roman Catholic Church, the American Lutheran Church, the Episcopal Church, the National Council of Churches, the United Methodist

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<sup>22</sup>Banks, 65

<sup>23</sup>Vine Deloria Jr., *God is Red* (New York: Delta, 1973), 58.

Church, the Presbyterian Church, and the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints. The most substantial donation recorded from a church organization came from the American Lutheran Church, which donated \$110,181.73, to AIM, from 1968 – 1972.<sup>24</sup> The Executive Director of the Division of Social Services of the American Lutheran Church, Paul Boe, stood behind the ideals of AIM, especially their use of militancy. He believed that the violence AIM exhibited was necessary to bring about change. The support AIM received from religious organizations brought protests from members of the organizations community, who did not support the violent actions of AIM.<sup>25</sup> Boe specifically, provoked protests within the American Lutheran Church for his support and large financial contributions to such a violent organization.

Much of the funding AIM received from the federal government came in the form of federal matching grants that accompanied the donations given by the churches. These grants came with earmarked stipulations, designed for specific programs such as survival schools and community centers. Many members of AIM also worked for social welfare agencies, and these agencies were financed directly by the federal government. Consequently, the federal government was both directly and indirectly funding the actions of AIM. By 1970, the federal government was attempting to phase out these anti-poverty programs that employed many AIM members. Daniel P. Moynihan, a noted critic of the social welfare agencies, in his book titled *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding* said, “With militancy the mark of merit and increasingly measured in terms of the ability to be sufficiently outrageous to obtain press and television coverage . . . more and more the antipoverty program came to be associated with the

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<sup>24</sup> Dewing, 42

<sup>25</sup> Dewing, 43



kind of bad manners and arrogance that are among the mark of the rich rather than the poor.”<sup>26</sup> AIM fit this description because they were an organization that fought for an impoverished minority population but had substantial funding and resorted to violence to attract publicity.

In an interview with *Akwesasne Notes*, while speaking about AIM’s violent ambitions, an AIM leader, stated,

The real violence in America is committed by the Government against our people. The real violence is the fact that on a reservation our women are taken and raped in the back seat of these police cars. The real violence is the fact that our children are never able to learn to live in a society that is completely alien to them, and so they suffer tremendous disorientation in their own lives which many times leads to suicide, or drunkenness. The real violence is when the Bureau of Indian Affairs, who is supposedly holding our lands in trust for us, reduces our land base by 160 thousand acres or so every year. And it’s violence against our people when they build dams and flood our ancestral lands and disturb the graves of our past generations.<sup>27</sup>

The concept of utilizing violence for AIM came from the ideology of “Red Power” spread by the prophet of the Indian youth movement in the 1960s, Clyde Warrior. He claimed that “society banished the Indian. He was supposed to have vanished, become invisible and assimilated. What had happened was that the Indian was a refugee on his reservations – exiled in his own country. . . The situation will not change unless really violent action comes about.”<sup>28</sup> AIM’s desire to follow the example of militant social minorities like the Black Panthers adhered to the philosophy that the squeaky wheel received the attention. The use of weapons did not take precedence until the Leech Lake incident in 1972.

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<sup>26</sup> Daniel P. Moynihan, *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding: Community Action in the War on Poverty* (New York: The Free Press, 1969), 140.

<sup>27</sup> Akwesasne, 62

<sup>28</sup> Stan Steiner, *The New Indians* (New York: A Delta Book, 1968), 68.

The shift to violence attracted the most opposition towards AIM, from both white Americans and reservation American Indians. The major opposition of AIM from American Indians came from the reservation Indians, as they viewed AIM as an urban threat to the established system. Vine Deloria Jr. in his book titled *Custer Died for Your Sins*, said “There is such a mushrooming movement among urban Indians, old ideas and traditional policies have become woefully outmoded. In the past, tribal councils have largely determined national Indian policy.”<sup>29</sup> The migration of reservation Indians to the large urban centers in America has witnessed a large majority of the American Indian population now living as urban Indians. Peter Osnos, reporter for the *Washington Post* said, “The urban Indians, who now represent about half of the 800,000 Indians in the country, tend to produce more militant leadership, experts maintain than the reservations, where tribal officials are selected along more traditional lines.”<sup>30</sup> These urban Indians live outside of the direct influence of the BIA and have no restrictions on the way they raise or spend money. The Indians remaining on the reservation are still economically and socially attached to the old system, and many view the rising urban Indian organizations as an attack on their livelihood. Deloria states, “There is added danger to urban Indians from their involvement with the militants of other minority groups, particularly the black power movements . . . simply to invite violence upon oneself for the sake of temporary concessions seems ridiculous and stupid.”<sup>31</sup>

The first major militant incident that AIM was involved in took place upon Dennis Banks’ own reservation, the Leech Lake Chippewa Reservation. According to the State of Minnesota, all

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<sup>29</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died For Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (New York: Avon Books, 1969), 250.

<sup>30</sup> Peter Osnos, “Protest by Indians sought an end to Paternalism,” *Washington Post*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post (1877-1994), (Washington D.C.), November 9, 1972, section C1.

<sup>31</sup> Deloria, *Custer Died For Your Sins*, 250-251

Indians on reservation must adhere to the state laws on hunting and fishing, and were subject to license inspections from DNR officers. The Ojibwa people on the Leech Lake Reservation had already appealed this law to a U.S. Court of Appeals in the case of the Leech Lake Band of Chippewa Indians vs. Robert Herbst, commissioner of Natural Resources State of Minnesota. They had claimed their ancestral fishing and hunting rights upon their reservation, and won the case on “aboriginal rights.” They were granted the right to administer their own tribal fishing licenses that non-Indians had to buy in order to fish on reservation territory, and tribal members would be allowed to openly fish, hunt, or gather wild rice without regulations from the state government. The State of Minnesota continued to attack their tribal rights, and they were attempting to appeal the federal court’s decision.

The American Indian Movement was holding their national convention at Cass Lake, MN, on the Leech Lake Reservation, from May 10 – 16, 1972. The tourist season was rapidly approaching and the tribal government wanted to enforce their right of tribal fishing licenses, and AIM volunteered their militant services. They formulated a plan to march on the town of Cass Lake and to set up roadblocks preventing fisherman from gaining access to the lakes on the reservation without proper licenses. They were represented by over three hundred members, each armed with a rifle. Russell Means said, “[I] favored a blockade. My feeling is that a complete economic blockade is necessary on all highways and all routes into the reservation to force white people into equal treatment of Indians. I feel this is a necessary weapon.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> “Indians Split on Blockade of Fishing,” *Chicago Tribune*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1987), pg W15.

After a march on the town, the entire AIM organization nearly fell apart. A portion of AIM members believed they should not be at the Leech Lake Reservation because their actions were unsolicited. Many voted to leave the reservation and return to their headquarters in Minneapolis. Gerald Vizenor commented in the *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, "Many militants stated then that they had come to Cass Lake to die for tribal people. The issue was won through the courts, and suicide was not necessary."<sup>33</sup> In an attempt to connect urban Indian and reservation Indian issues, AIM's first official endeavor upon a reservation was a failure. AIM really did not generate a positive outcome for the tribal government at Leech Lake, and they nearly created a disaster. The Leech Lake tribal government had already taken care of the situation through the federal courts, and this episode created dissention within the organization.

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<sup>33</sup> "Editorial Comments," *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Minneapolis Morning Tribune (1867-1922), pg 1.

## Chapter 2

### The Governments Response to AIM

*If bad men among the whites, or among other people subject to the authority of the United States, shall commit any wrong upon the person or property of the Indians, the United States will, upon proof made to the agent, and forwarded to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs at Washington city, proceed at once to cause the offender to be arrested and punished according to the laws of the United States, and also reimburse the injured person for the loss sustained.*

- Fort Laramie Treaty, 1868<sup>34</sup>

### Alcatraz Island

As AIM gained national media awareness, they were also attracting the negative attention of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the United States Marshals. Modeling their movement after the Black Panthers and utilizing violent militant actions, AIM was quickly labeled a public threat by the FBI. It was originally during the occupation of Alcatraz Island that American Indian activist groups attracted the attention of the FBI and the U.S. Marshals. Under the direction of the organization known as "Indians of All Tribes," American Indians were able to offer their support for the new "Red Power" movement during this nineteen month occupation. It was also at Alcatraz that the leadership of AIM found direction for their young organization, and they were able to expand upon the success of the occupation to further their membership and support. The occupation of the BIA building in Washington D.C. garnered the most attention which subsequently solidified the FBI's investigations. It was after the occupation of the BIA that the FBI and the U.S. Marshals began using informants who would infiltrate the organization and keep a vigilant eye upon the leadership of AIM.

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<sup>34</sup> "Fort Laramie Treaty, 1868," *The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy*, Yale Law School, Lillian Goldman Law Library,(accessed December 7, 2011), [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/nt001.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/nt001.asp).

Alcatraz Island was invaded by a group of American Indians on November 20, 1969.

Richard Oaks, a Mohawk Indian and leader of the organization known as the Indians of All Tribes (IAT), led the group responsible for the invasion. IAT planned to utilize the island for an educational center and a museum. The occupiers of Alcatraz claimed the federal government gave American Indians the right to inhabit any federal land that had been abandoned. Alcatraz, which served as a maximum security federal prison from 1934-1963, at this time had been deserted for nearly seven years. Indians of All Tribes claimed in the *Occupation of Alcatraz Proclamation, 1969*, that the island was an excellent location to develop an American Indian educational and cultural complex, stating,

We feel that the so-called Alcatraz Island is more than suitable for an Indian reservation, as determined by the white man's own standards. By this we mean that this place resembles most Indian reservations in that:

1. It is isolated from modern facilities, and without adequate means of transportation.
2. It has no fresh running water.
3. It has inadequate sanitation facilities.
4. There are no oil or mineral rights.
5. There is no industry and so unemployment is very great.
6. There are no health care facilities.
7. The soil is rocky and non-productive; and the land does not support game.
8. There are no educational facilities.
9. The population has always exceeded the land base.
10. The population has always been held as prisoners and kept dependent upon others.<sup>35</sup>

In a show of historical drama, the leadership of IAT offered to purchase Alcatraz Island from the federal government for glass beads worth twenty-four dollars, referring to the storied purchase of Manhattan Island by the Dutch in the early seventeenth century.

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<sup>35</sup>Indians of All Tribes, "Occupation of Alcatraz Proclamation," *University of Tulsa*, November 1969, (accessed January 12, 2012), <http://www.personal.utulsa.edu/~nathan-wilson/alcatraz.pdf>.

The Nixon administration attempted negotiations with the leadership of IAT, but were met with constant opposition from the organization's leadership. On January 5, 1970, the administration proposed that all but a symbolic force of 5-10 should vacate the island, and those that would remain would be placed on the federal payroll. IAT refused this offer and all occupants remained on the island. It was reported in the *Washington Post* that "The U.S. Government, with no experience of a similar case to draw from, is caught in a squeeze-play between two sentiments. One view says that the Indians are breaking the law by trespassing on federal property. . . A second view is that the government should give Alcatraz to the Indians outright."<sup>36</sup> In the early months of 1970, the U.S. government transferred control of the Island over to the Department of the Interior with the designed purpose of establishing a national park. This was followed by the approval to cut electricity and fresh water supply to the island, in an attempt to force the American Indians to leave. Journalist Colman McCarthy, from the *Washington Post* said, "The government could easily get the Indians off the island by sending in the army or its riot-trained National Guard. But the White House, still haunted by the killings at Kent State, is reluctant to call up the troops."<sup>37</sup>

Public sympathy came from all across the nation for the American Indians on Alcatraz Island. It was not long after IAT established their claim of the island that many American Indian supported their actions. The leadership of AIM, including Dennis Banks, Clyde Bellecourt, and George Mitchell decided to travel to California to gather information about the occupation and offer assistance. They were not only looking to support the actions of IAT, but to also gather

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<sup>36</sup> Colman McCarthy, "The Indians on Alcatraz: Justice or Lunacy?: A Night Visit to the Rock," *Washington Post*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post (1877-1994), (Washington D.C.), December 14, 1970, section A22.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

inspiration and support for their own organizations' future demonstrations. When Dennis Banks returned to Minneapolis he commented about his journey saying, "Our time on Alcatraz had woken us up to the realization that we were part of a larger movement and that the reclaiming of tribal land had to be on AIM's agenda. We planned to justify a series of takeovers with the Treaty of 1868,<sup>38</sup> under which land that had fallen into disuse by the government would be available for Native people to reclaim."<sup>39</sup>

Support came from certain members of the U.S. Congress. Representative George Brown, Democrat of California, and a bipartisan group of ten other representatives worked on a resolution to hand over the rights to the island to IAT. They were met with tremendous opposition by the House Interior Committee and legislation never materialized. In an interview with the *Washington Post*, a federal official claimed, "As for why the government does not hand over Alcatraz and be done with its headache, sure we give in to these trespassers and people will ask, 'what's this, the government aiding criminals?'"<sup>40</sup> The federal position became "wait-and-see," as they adopted a "hands off" approach. The official continued by telling the *Washington Post*, "We really don't know what to do. Federal land has been seized and a law is being broken. The question for us has been how to operate with restraint and avoid bloodshed. We'd like the Alcatraz venture to go its symbolic way and then figure out a sensible outcome."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> "Fort Laramie Treaty, 1868," *The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy*, Yale Law School, Lillian Goldman Law Library,(accessed December 7, 2011), [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/nt001.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/nt001.asp).

<sup>39</sup> Banks, 108

<sup>40</sup> Colman McCarthy, "The Indians on Alcatraz: Justice or Lunacy?: A Night Visit to the Rock," *Washington Post*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post (1877-1994), (Washington D.C.), December 14, 1970, section A22.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid



After their visit with the leadership of IAT and the participants of the Alcatraz Island occupation, AIM planned to occupy other abandoned federal land. IAT was claiming their rights to this abandoned federal property through a loose interpretation of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, which according to IAT gave Sioux Indians the right to re-occupy abandoned governmental land. In the early summer of 1971, members of AIM moved to occupy the Twin Cities Naval Air Station which was located on the northern edge of the Minneapolis/St. Paul International Airport. The U.S. Marshals were quickly called onto the scene, because the members of AIM were actually hindering U.S. military operations on the base. When SOG (Special Operations Group, a division of the U.S. Marshals) burst into the occupied building, AIM members quickly moved to protect the women and children involved. They barricaded themselves on the third floor awaiting the attack and met the Marshals with clubs and knives, but they were quickly overpowered by the sheer numbers of the Marshals. After the quick skirmish, there were only a few injuries. The SOG unit was successful, and the occupying Indians were immediately subdued. This success gave officials in Washington confidence to end the occupation on Alcatraz Island, so they sent SOG to San Francisco to begin their preparations.<sup>42</sup>

The activism of the 1960s contributed to the creation of the Special Operations Group within the ranks of the U.S. Marshals. The group was organized by Wayne Colburn in 1971. He pushed to develop a small elite force of about a hundred men, who would train similarly to that of military personnel. They were equipped as initial responders to national emergencies and civil disturbances, and could be called into action in places that it would be inappropriate to use the U.S. military. This new group recruited younger ex-military individuals who would easily

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<sup>42</sup>Frederick S. Calhoun, *The Lawmen: United States Marshals and their Deputies, 1789-1989*, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 297.

take orders, worked better cooperatively, and were more disciplined than the old guard. Under the new leadership of William Whitworth they would move in an opposite direction from the old big shot mentality, epitomized by the U.S. Marshals, and adopt a closely controlled outfit. Historian Frederick S. Calhoun said, "By training, equipment, outlook, and mission, the members personified Colburn's image of 'semi-military oriented law enforcement officers.'"<sup>43</sup> It was during their inception, that the American Indian Movement was at its climax, and the actions of AIM and other Indian activist organizations shaped the direction of SOG in the 1970s.

By June 1971, the Indian population of Alcatraz had been greatly reduced because of poor sanitation, lack of food and supplies, and an overall weak morale. U.S. Attorney General James Browning Jr. told the *Chicago Tribune* that there was "a great feeling of sympathy among government officials toward law-abiding Indians, but good faith negotiations with this small group had been nonproductive and public safety and community welfare would not permit a continuation of this intolerable situation."<sup>44</sup> The United States Coast Guard had tried, on multiple occasions, to access navigational equipment that were located on the island, but they were forcefully repelled by IAT. Vessels that passed too closely to the island complained to the U.S. Coast Guard that arrows and other projectiles had been launched at their ships. The U.S. government had reached the decision to evict the remaining members of IAT from the island. It was reported by Browning that "Removal of the illegal inhabitants had become an urgent necessity since the Coast Guard was prohibited from restoring inoperative navigational aids with

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<sup>43</sup> Calhoun, 297

<sup>44</sup> "U.S. Marshals Oust 15 Indian Holdouts from Alcatraz Island," *Chicago Tribune*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1987), (Chicago), June 12, 1971, 4.

threats of violence. The Coast Guard, which had requested the removal of the Indians, said the occupants had interfered with the maintenance of a lighthouse and fog signals.”<sup>45</sup>

On June 11, SOG moved to re-occupy Alcatraz Island and met no resistance. Only fifteen Indians remained on the island, six young men, four young women, and five children. It was reported in the *New York Times* that “The Marshals leaped to the island from three Coast Guard boats, took possession, and transported the Indians to a San Francisco hotel.”<sup>46</sup> It was noted that the Indians were unprepared for the Marshals, but they left peacefully. U.S. Attorney General James Browning Jr., in an interview with Paul Hager from the *Los Angeles Times*, “described the ‘straw that broke the camel’s back,’ it was the reported theft of \$680 worth of copper cable from the island (on June 10). Three persons, identified as John Halloran, Frank Robbins, and Raymond Eugene Cox, were arrested in San Francisco in connection with the theft.”<sup>47</sup> The Marshal’s planned to stay on the island for the next several days to ensure that the Indians would not return. Other measures were enacted to prevent any return of undesirable visitors by the General Services Administration (GSA) and the U.S. Coast Guard. Daryl Lembke of the *Los Angeles Times* reported, “To prevent any such new embarrassment, Coast Guard picket ships constantly patrolled around the island to keep visitors away. Most of the equipment piling up on the dock was barbed wire and chain-link fencing which the GSA planned to erect at shoreline stretches where landings are possible.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>46</sup> “Indians Expelled from Alcatraz: 15 are seized on island by force of 35 Marshals,” *New York Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Times (1851-2007), (New York City, NY), June 12, 1971, pg 14.

<sup>47</sup> Philip Hager, “U.S. Marshals Oust last of Alcatraz Indian Invaders,” *Los Angeles Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1987), (Los Angeles, CA), June 12, 1971, pg 1.

<sup>48</sup> Daryl Lembke, “U.S. Fortifies Alcatraz Against Threat of Indian Invasion,” *Los Angeles Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1987), (Los Angeles, CA), June 14, 1971, pg 1.

The occupation aided the American Indian Movement, as they continued to garner national support. Over the next year, members of AIM moved to occupy several other federal properties including an abandoned army radio-transmitter base near Middletown, CA, a Nike missile base near Chicago, IL, and Mount Rushmore in the Black Hills of South Dakota. It was after the occupation of Alcatraz that the U.S. Marshals began assisting the FBI with monitoring Indian activist's developments. Historians Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall claimed,

Although the 19-month occupation had failed to accomplish its stated objectives, it had demonstrated beyond all doubt that strong actions by Indians could result not only in broad public exposure to the issues and substantial national/international support for Indian rights, but could potentially force significant concessions from the federal government as well. Both federal organizations placed informants within AIM's membership in order to abstract vital intelligence.<sup>49</sup>

The leadership of AIM, including Russell Means and Dennis Banks, understood the lessons of Alcatraz Island, and the power of attracting the attention of the media, even if the publicity was negative.

### **Washington D.C. and the BIA**

In the early months of 1972, AIM appeared to be waning, and the negative publicity that they received from their actions in places like the Leech Lake reservation was destroying their momentum. The occupation of Alcatraz Island served as inspiration for their leadership. They needed something exciting on the national scale to rekindle their lost momentum. They organized a large national march that would cover the entire United States. Starting on the west coast and ending at the nation's capital in Washington D.C. The march would be called the

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<sup>49</sup> Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret Wars Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement* (Boston: South End Press, 1988), 121.

“Trail of Broken Treaties,” symbolic of the “Trail of Tears,” the tragedy that followed the Indian Removal Act of 1830. The “Trail of Tears” occurred when members of the Creek, Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Seminole tribes were forcefully removed from their homeland and placed upon reservations west of the Mississippi River. The “Trail of Broken Treaties,” was designed to protest the centuries of broken treaties and promises between the U.S. government and American Indian tribes.

The march upon Washington D.C. was preceded with a press release that set forth AIM’s goals, known as the *Trail of Broken Treaties Twenty Point Plan*. In the preamble of the plan the author stated, “We seek a new American majority - a majority that is not content merely to confirm itself by superiority in numbers, but which by conscience is committed toward prevailing upon the public will in ceasing wrongs and in doing right.”<sup>50</sup> The march began in places as far west as Seattle, Washington and Los Angeles, California, and they followed a caravan of vehicles through many of the reservations in the Heartland of America. The intention of the march was to regain treaty rights of the tribes and to allow the tribal governments to negotiate with the U.S. government. Some of the main points of the *Trail of Broken Treaties Twenty Point Plan*, demanded,

1. Restoration of Constitutional Treaty-Making Authority
2. Establishment of Treaty Commission to make New Treaties
3. All Indians to be Governed by Treaty Relations
4. Land Reform and Restoration of a 110-Millions acre Native Land Base
5. Resume Federal Protective Jurisdiction for Offenses Against Indians
6. Abolition of the Bureau of Indian Affairs by 1976

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<sup>50</sup>“Trail of Broken Treaties 20-Point Position Paper - an Indian Manifesto," *American Indian Movement Governing Council*, (accessed October 27, 2011), <http://www.aimovement.org/ggc/trailofbrokentreaties.html>.

7. Protection of Indians' Religious Freedom and Cultural Integrity
8. Health, Housing, Employment, Economic Development, and Education<sup>51</sup>

Once the participants convened onto Washington D.C., they would organize a peaceful demonstration that was to be patterned after the 1963 Civil Rights march.

When the participants of the "Trail of Broken Treaties" commenced their journey to Washington D.C., both the FBI and the U.S. Marshals were tracking their every move. Upon arrival in Washington D.C., on November 2, 1972, the caravan was directed to the St. Stephen's Episcopal Church for accommodations. The leadership immediately condemned the prearranged accommodations and marched directly to the BIA to acquire a new location for their people. By the end of the day, Assistant Secretary of the Interior Harrison Loesch demanded that the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Louis Bruce, a Mohawk Indian, remove all Indians from the BIA building by 5:00 p.m. Bruce refused to close the BIA to AIM because he sympathized with the American Indians and claimed that the BIA is for all Indians and should remain open for Indian business. A group of Washington D.C. Metropolitan Police attempted to enter the building to remove all Indians, but were violently repelled. The U.S. Marshals and the police officers quickly quarantined off the building. It was at this moment that the "Trail of Broken Treaties" quickly transformed into the occupation of the BIA offices in Washington D.C. Once all police personnel were expelled from the building, Dennis Banks proclaimed, "This is a takeover, and we are going to stay here until we get some answers."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>"Trail of Broken Treaties 20-Point Position Paper - an Indian Manifesto"

<sup>52</sup> Banks, 136

The United States newspapers were in debate as to how many members of AIM were actually involved in the occupation of the BIA; their estimates range from three hundred to five hundred individuals. Louis R. Bruce commented to the *New York Times*, stating that “he and other officials had decided that the protesters would be permitted to stay in the building tonight (November 2) and expressed hope that all problems could be resolved tomorrow.” He continued by saying, “We can work with them.”<sup>53</sup> Bruce remained in the BIA through the first night and was promptly fired by Loesch. By the morning of November 3, all the doors had been barricaded by AIM and they had renamed the BIA the “Native Indian Embassy.” It was AIM’s endeavor to not only speak with the White House about their twenty point manifesto, but also to hold a religious ceremony at Arlington Cemetery to honor those who had died while defending the United States. The U.S. Army had denied AIM the opportunity to conduct such a ceremony, but AIM was challenging their decision in court, while simultaneously occupying the BIA. During the negotiations, Harrison Loesch “sought to assure the Indians that the Nixon Administration was dedicated to meeting their economic and social needs. He cited budget increases and other measures designed to aid Indians in education and in water and fishing rights as evidence of the Administration’s good will.”<sup>54</sup>

Throughout the duration of the occupation the U.S. Marshals kept a vigilant eye upon AIM, and members of SOG were on reserve in Washington D.C. Procedures had been drafted to take the building by force, but were deemed too risky by the White House because the building was also occupied by women and small children. Intelligence was gathered from informants on

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<sup>53</sup> William M. Blair, “500 Indians Seize U.S. Building after scuffle with Capital Police,” *New York Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *New York Times* (1851-2007), (New York City, NY), November 3, 1972, pg 81.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid

the inside, and by sending in undercover U.S. Marshals. Deputy Director Reis Kash gained entrance into the occupied building by posing as the foreman of a janitorial crew for the General Services Administration, and was allowed through the entire building. He was able to document much of the layout, weaponry, and preparations of the Indians by walking around the building with an official looking clipboard acting as if to take notes on stock. After the report from Kash, the federal troops concurred with the White House that it would be best not to evict the Indians by brute force, but through negotiations.<sup>55</sup>

The American Indians did gain in a few areas with this militant action. One major victory came on November 6, when “the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia reversed a lower court’s ruling that would have prohibited the Indians from holding religious services in Arlington National Cemetery to honor Indian war dead there.”<sup>56</sup> AIM’s victory was followed by a defeat when a U.S. District Court Judge signed an eviction notice for the occupiers. The *New York Times* reported, AIM was “served with a court order banning any further occupation of the building. The order, signed by Judge John H. Pratt of the United States District Court, was served by Federal Marshals.”<sup>57</sup> A deadline was set for the eviction of the Indians, but they refused to vacate the premises. Assistant Federal Marshal James F. Palmer, in a last ditch effort, granted the Indians another offer of food and shelter if they were to leave, but again they denied his proposal. Over a megaphone, Wayne Colburn, director of the U.S. Marshals, told the Indians, “I have no quarrel with you folks. I would urge you to cooperate with us because as I

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<sup>55</sup> Calhoun, 299

<sup>56</sup> “Indians ask Nixon to solve impasse, reject Government’s offer to shift to auditorium,” *New York Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Times (1851-2007), (New York City, NY), November 6, 1972, pg 21.

<sup>57</sup> William M. Blair, “Indians in Capital Defy a Court Order,” *New York Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Times (1851-2007), (New York City, NY), November 4, 1972, pg 42.



said before we have no desire for violence or confrontation. Also, we have no choice but to carry out the federal court order because we are servants of the court.”<sup>58</sup>

An agreement was finally reached between the two sides in their negotiations on November 8. AIM vacated the BIA building the following day, November 9, under the promise that no criminal charges would be filed. A panel would be created consisting of thirteen federal departments that would investigate the twenty point manifesto and other grievances of the American Indians over a six month time period and report their findings to President Nixon. Also, \$66,500 would be allocated to all the American Indians occupying the BIA to be used for travel expenses back to their homes. In a press release, “BIA property manager Carl Broadt estimated the damage (AIM inflicted upon the BIA property) at \$250,000. This includes four copying machines that were ripped out of the wall and used as barricades, pipes that were stripped from the wall, broken typewriters and furniture, and smashed doors.”<sup>59</sup> No charges were filed against the occupying force for the damages incurred, or retributions demanded for reported stolen documents. In regards to the documents, Dennis Banks acknowledges their intentional removal, claiming “It’s a ransom. We know it.”<sup>60</sup> The leadership of AIM believed if they held important documents that they stole from the BIA, as ransom, then the U.S. government would have to follow through on their promises.

After the American Indians left Washington D.C., the U.S. Marshals and the FBI increased their surveillance of AIM. Both departments received reliable intelligence, because of

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<sup>58</sup>“Indians Rampage in Capital Building,” *Los Angeles Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1987), (Los Angeles, CA), November 4, 1972, pg 1.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid

<sup>60</sup> “Indians Call Files from BIA ‘Ransom’,” *Washington Post*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post (1877-1994), (Washington D.C.), November 9, 1972, section C1.

the strategically placed loyal informants within AIM. During the trials that followed the occupation of Wounded Knee, Douglass Durham and many others were identified as some of the informants for the FBI. Durham served as the chief security officer for AIM and was a close confidant to Dennis Banks. It was reported in the *Los Angeles Times*, that Durham “said he had had contact with half a dozen FBI agents in several states and was asked to feed information concerning any foreign involvement with AIM, the travel of AIM leaders and fund-raising activities as well as defense strategy at several trials involving AIM members.”<sup>61</sup> It was discovered through informants that AIM’s focus turned to the Pine Ridge Reservation, because it was AIM’s goal to assist reservation Indians and break their stereotype of an organization concentrated on rural Indians. The intelligence received by the U.S. Marshals suggested that AIM planned on seizing the BIA building on Pine Ridge. An arraignment was made between the Interior Department and the Justice Department to increase the presences of U.S. Marshals on and around Pine Ridge.

If the American Indian Movement would have maintained their original goal to conduct a peaceful demonstration, similar to the 1963 Civil Rights march, they may have gleaned more positive results. Historian Rolland Dewing claimed, “As far as can be determined, the takeover was not planned beforehand but rather was a spontaneous and opportunistic reaction to the climate of the moment.”<sup>62</sup> These actions brought a large backlash from Indians on the reservation against urban Indian activism, but the “Trail of Broken Treaties,” was successful in putting pressure on the federal government. Reporter Paul Osnos claimed, “The over-riding

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<sup>61</sup> “Indian Movement Officer says he was spy for FBI,” *Los Angeles Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1987), (Los Angeles, CA), March 14, 1975, pgA18.

<sup>62</sup> Dewing, 67

issue, according to specialists here in Indian problems, is the growing Indian demand for self-determination: an end to what amounted in the past to alternating paternalism and neglect by the federal government.”<sup>63</sup> President Nixon was already developing a philosophy for an increase of autonomy for American Indians, and he stressed the necessity of maintaining federal support. Osnos concluded, that “the issues raised in the plan (AIM’s Twenty Point Plan) have been obscured by the seizing of the Bureau of Indian Affairs building, but the underlying causes of Indian discontent will remain no matter how that eye-catching turmoil is resolved.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Peter Osnos, “Protest by Indians sought an end to Paternalism,” *Washington Post*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post (1877-1994), (Washington D.C.), November 9, 1972, section C1.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*

## Chapter 3

### Road to Wounded Knee

*We have to fight our own Federal Government to get it to protect our rights and our interests as is its trust responsibility as guardian of our lands and as protectorate of our treaties. An now we have been faced with fighting Indians and non-Indians from other parts of the country, the same organization which has failed our brothers in the cities and which now means to maliciously destroy our tribal government.*

- Richard Wilson, Oglala Sioux Chairman 1972-1976<sup>65</sup>

#### Reservation Unrest

The Indian Reorganization Act (Wheeler-Howard Act), of 1934, allowed American Indian Tribes to develop and adopt individual tribal constitutions that gave their population the right to elect a tribal government. The adopted constitution was designed to give the governments the right to “employ legal counsel, the choice of counsel and fixing of fees to be subject to the approval of the Secretary of the Interior; to prevent the sale, disposition, lease, or encumbrance of tribal lands, or other tribal assets without the consent of the tribe; and to negotiate with the Federal, State, and local Governments.”<sup>66</sup> It was under the leadership of John Collier, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, who orchestrated the IRA, that the Lakota on the Pine Ridge Reservation were able to adopt the Oglala Sioux Tribal Constitution and to formulate the governing body of the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council.

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<sup>65</sup>*Occupation of Wounded Knee: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Indian Affairs of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, United States Senate, Ninety-third Congress, First Session on “The causes and aftermath of the Wounded Knee Takeover,”* June 16, 1973, Pine Ridge, South Dakota, June 17, Kyle, South Dakota, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974), 5.

<sup>66</sup>The Indian Reorganization Act (Wheeler-Howard Act), June 18, 1934,” Online by Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, (Accessed January 12, 2012), <http://www.cskt.org/gov/docs/reorganizationact.pdf>.

Under the Oglala Sioux Tribal Constitution, members of the tribe would hold an election for all tribal council positions every two years. The tribal council did not have a separate executive and legislative branch, but was governed strictly by one institution. Within the Oglala Sioux Tribal Constitution the council had a chairman who served as the president of the tribe, and was elected by tribal members through a general election. One of the largest issues with this type of system was that every two years the tribal government could face a complete change in council members and subsequently, political agendas, and this very scenario was taking place almost every election. Since the inception of the Oglala Sioux Tribal Constitution, there were few chairmen who served more than one consecutive term.

Historian Akim Reinhardt claimed that another important issue that plagued the Pine Ridge reservation since the allotment of reservation land to the Lakota was the racial tension between full-blooded and half-blooded Lakota.<sup>67</sup> Many of the past tribal chairmen's political decisions had been based solely upon the agenda of their political affiliation; half-bloods tended to side with more governmental influence through the BIA, and the full-bloods wanted more tribal sovereignty and a traditional way of life. The chairman from 1970-1972 was One Feather, who was pro-half-blood, and favored more involvement of the BIA. One Feather and the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council believed in a passive government; this governing philosophy assisted the campaign of Richard "Dick" Wilson. Wilson was running for chairmanship in 1972, on a platform that was pro-sovereignty. Wilson was a plumber by trade, but he had served as a council member on several occasions in the past, representing the Pine Ridge District. He was gaining much support from both half-bloods and full-bloods. His campaign promised many changes for

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<sup>67</sup>Akim D. Reinhardt, *Ruling Pine Ridge: Oglala Lakota Politics from the IRA to Wounded Knee* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2007), 129.

reservation life that included greater economic independence for the Lakota people and less dependency upon the U.S. government.

When elected as the tribal chairman in 1972, in his inaugural speech, Richard Wilson said, "Let me reassure you that my campaign promises will serve as the blueprint for my administration. We will not be belligerent, we will not be quarrelsome . . . The Oglala Sioux Tribe is all one family."<sup>68</sup> In the opinion of some of the full-blooded Lakota's, after his election Richard Wilson made a complete one hundred-eighty degree turn away from the promises and images he had created for himself during his campaign. They claimed that from day-one Wilson seemed to distance himself from the demands of the majority of his constituents, and that he quickly aligned his policies with that of the former Oglala Sioux Tribal Council, in favor of more U.S. governmental influence. In an interview with the *Akwesasne Notes*, Ellen Moves Camp said, "Ever since Wilson's been in office it's just been a one-man council. He's just some kind of a dictator that got in there. It's really bad to say but our people did go for the money and all the promises he made when he was campaigning."<sup>69</sup> Wilson openly expressed his opposition to the American Indian Movement, even after members of AIM, including Russell Means, supported his campaign and attended his inauguration. Wilson claimed, "They're a bunch of renegades – nothing but a bunch of spongers. Here in Pine Ridge, they bum off of my poor people. They're social misfits. Their lawlessness, their tactics of violence, give the rest of us a bad name."<sup>70</sup>

Fueling the controversy of Richard Wilson's tribal chairmanship, the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council passed two pieces of legislation that raised the eyebrows of some of the residents on

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<sup>68</sup> Reinhardt, 134

<sup>69</sup> Akwesasne Notes, 14

<sup>70</sup> Robert Burnette and John Koster, *The Road to Wounded Knee* (New York: Bantam Books, 1974), 224.

the Pine Ridge Reservation. Those in opposition to these pieces of legislation claimed that they took away the freedom of tribal members and advanced the power of the BIA. The first was passed in August, 1972, Ordinance 072-04, also known as the “Ordinance to Prevent Riots and Unlawful Assembly.” It was passed in the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council with a unanimous 18-0 vote, with the hope of easing tensions and maintaining order on the reservation. The ordinance stated,

Whenever three or more persons assemble with intent or with means and preparation to do an unlawful act which would be riot if actually committed but do not act toward the commission thereof or whenever such persons assemble without authority of law and in such manner as is adopted to disturb the Public Peace, such assembly is an unlawful assembly, and any persons convicted thereof shall be sentenced to labor for a period not to exceed thirty (30) days or to a fine not to exceed \$100.00 or both such imprisonment and fine with costs.<sup>71</sup>

It also gave the police force wide discretion for enforcing the ordinance, including the ability to employ anyone and as many persons necessary to disperse a potential riot. The second piece of legislation came in the form of a resolution appeal to the BIA, requesting the BIA assume the responsibility of law enforcement upon the reservation. According to the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council, the tribe did not have the budget to support a law enforcement agency. These two pieces of legislation angered some Lakota, because they believed that Oglala Sioux Tribal Council was abandoning their people and misusing tribal funds.

With the passage of Ordinance 072-04, many Lakota citizens became concerned, giving rise to the popular attack on Richard Wilson and his so called “goon squad.” This group of men (the goon squad) was supposedly hired by Wilson to squelch all opposition of his chairmanship.

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<sup>71</sup>*Occupation of Wounded Knee, 26*

According to Vern Long and Eddie White Wolf, President and Secretary of the Oglala Sioux Civil Rights Organization, in a letter to the *Akwesasne Notes*, they stated, “Johnson Holy Rock made a motion that AIM would not be allowed to hold a victory dance at the Billy Mills Hall and that they be forced to respect Tribal sovereignty and laws if any of their members came to Pine Ridge. . . The resolution . . . gave Dick Wilson almost dictatorial powers. Under the resolution, Wilson hired his famous so called ‘goon squad’.”<sup>72</sup>

In the Senate hearings on the Occupation of Wounded Knee, Senator James Abourezk questioned Richard Wilson on the accusation of hiring a good squad and the passage of Ordinance 072-04. Wilson claimed that the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council and the BIA on Pine Ridge was receiving threats from members of AIM and that Russell Means demanded the use of the Billy Mills Hall for a victory dance, following the occupation of the BIA in Washington D.C. The tribal council refused AIM access to the hall, and Russell Means told them, “Get your pigs together we are coming in anyway. We are going to take Billy Mills Hall and we are going to use it. We are going to have out victory dance.”<sup>73</sup> Wilson claimed that he consulted with the superintendent, area director, and the local BIA, asking for assistance in protecting the reservations buildings. He claimed that they hired approximately forty individuals that would stand guard at the buildings. Wilson said,

Well, as a result of the hiring of that small force to protect our buildings, the Bureau offices, Billy Mills Hall, and the tribal offices, this group became branded as the “goon squad.” These people that were hired were law abiding citizens of this reservation. People that had jobs, many of them did. They

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<sup>72</sup>Akwesasne Notes, 16

<sup>73</sup>Occupation of Wounded Knee, 12



didn't want the same thing happening here that happened in Washington.<sup>74</sup>

Wilson claimed that the passage of the ordinances became necessary because threats continued to come in from AIM and the tribal council did not possess the funds necessary to prevent an action similar to the occupation of the BIA in Washington D.C.

Historians Robert Burnette and John Koster, authors of *The Road to Wounded Knee*, claimed that many of the complaints levied against Wilson were focused upon "his misuse of tribal funds, his management of the tribe without a budget, his violation of the tribal constitution by refusing to call meetings in accordance with the tribal law, and the goon squad he maintained to intimidate his opponents who had antagonized even the most patient of the old Indian leaders."<sup>75</sup> Through these accusations some of the Lakota citizenry were determined to remove Richard Wilson as the tribal chairman by impeachment. This effort quickly found support especially amongst members of AIM and it was also backed by certain members of the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council. The impeachment trial was initially scheduled to take place on February 14, 1973. Richard Wilson claimed, "When I took office I was violently opposed to the American Indian Movement and their tactics. For that reason I think I had to become a target of the American Indian Movement. I never did go along with the destruction that they have used and have said all along."<sup>76</sup>

On the grounds of inclement weather and poor road conditions, the trial was rescheduled for February 22, 1973. In the weeks leading up to the trial, the tension upon the

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid

<sup>75</sup> Burnette and Koster, 225

<sup>76</sup> *Occupation of Wounded Knee*, 13

Pine Ridge Reservation was continually rising. Protests occurred daily on the streets outside of the BIA, U.S. Marshals were brought in to maintain order, and the FBI was constantly monitoring the actions of AIM. By mid-February 1973, sixty-five SOG deputies came to Pine Ridge to secure the BIA building and train BIA police. They were training the police on riot control, which was similar to the riot training of SOG. The SOG deputies were called into Pine Ridge to also protect the Oglala Sioux Tribal Counsel and tribal chairman, Richard Wilson. In an FBI report to the Acting Director of the FBI, it was noted that

As of this date (February 14, 1973), the following law enforcement personnel from various agencies are now on duty or standby at Pine Ridge Indian Reservation: 80 U.S. Marshals, 28 BIA law enforcement officers from other Indian reservations, 17 local BIA law enforcement officers, 15 BIA employees who have been deputized as guards, and 1 FBI agent, which equals 141 law enforcement personnel.<sup>77</sup>

Preparations were made to defend the BIA building by placing sandbag defensive parapets on the roof, reinforcing the windows, placing tear gas strategically throughout the building, and having the building staffed by U.S. Marshals and FBI agents. A communications headquarters was established in the BIA that would relay incoming and outgoing messages. A special message was sent on February 20 by the U.S. Marshal headquarters in Washington D.C. that fifty additional SOG members would be moved to Rapid City, SD; and FBI Special Agent in Charge Joseph Trimbach, from Minneapolis, MN, would take command of the FBI agents on Pine Ridge.

Stanley Lyman, director of the BIA in Pine Ridge, was taken on a tour of the defenses set in place by the FBI and U.S. Marshals by Reese Kash. Relaying information of a possible attack from AIM, Lyman stated that “[Kash] told me that AIM was definitely coming today. I

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<sup>77</sup>Minneapolis SAC (special agent in charge), letter to the Acting Director of the FBI, February 14, 1973.

questioned him about his source, as to whether or not it was reliable. He made a curious remark, something to the effect that ‘Well, I can’t tell you that it is from wiretapping because that is illegal. Let me just say that it is from a very reliable source’.”<sup>78</sup> Lyman was fascinated with how much the FBI and Marshals knew, and with the speed the information came to them. He commented, “I heard all of the communications which entered and left the command post, like reports from Rapid City telling exactly where the AIM people were. People at our command post could know this within an hour or two at any time of day – if they wanted to, that is.”<sup>79</sup>

On the day of the impeachment trial (February 22), Frank Fools Crow, a full-blood, was asked to open the meeting with prayer. Richard Wilson then insisted they begin the hearings by viewing the film *Anarchy-USA*, which was a film that attempted to connect the American Civil Rights Movement with a covert communist operation and an overthrow of the U.S. government with Marxist ideals. After showing the film the council elected a presiding officer, and Wilson opted to waive his right of a twenty-day waiting period for the trial. The trial was scheduled to commence the following day in the Billy Mills Hall gymnasium. The next day, when the trial recommenced, many of the anti-Wilsonites became enraged at the direction of the proceedings and decided to protest the trial by an old fashioned Lakota way, with their feet. In an interview with *Akwesasne Notes* Pedro Bissonette stated, “So they walked off the floor and was going to take it to Federal Court and our 650 [members] jumped up and started hollowing and screaming. Then we went back to Calico and we talked it over. Every time you approach the tribe, the BIA, in the normal way they always shut the door on us.”<sup>80</sup> With the departure of a

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<sup>78</sup> Stanley David Lyman, *Wounded Knee, 1973: A Personal Account* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 5.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid

<sup>80</sup> Akwesasne Notes, 26

large portion of the crowd and a few Oglala Sioux Tribal Council members, the council was motioned to remove the presiding officer and reinstate chairman Richard Wilson. The remaining council members passed the measure with a 14-0 vote, with two abstentions, determining that Richard Wilson had avoided impeachment and would remain the legal tribal chairman.

A lot happened on the Pine Ridge Reservation during the days of the impeachment trial of Richard Wilson. Tensions rose during the proceedings and many threats were reported to have been directed at both Wilson and Lyman, which caused the Marshals to implement added security measures on the families of both men. Both were asked to reside in the BIA building, which would be under constant surveillance, until the threats subsided. On February 23, at the end of the hearings, Lyman said, "The police stepped in and escorted Wilson and his family from the council meeting. The police did an excellent job in getting them safely out of the hall and into the BIA building."<sup>81</sup> Lyman, in slight opposition of the strict security measures, felt as if the federal troops had gone too far by making the BIA inaccessible to the American Indians on the reservation. He claimed, "The Marshals had taken down their sandbagged command posts from the roof of the agency building and laid the sandbags out flat on the roof so they were not visible (February 23) – 'keeping a low profile,' as they called it. That's where the bags should have been yesterday as well."<sup>82</sup> Lyman did send his wife and children to Chadron College in Nebraska for safety, but he refused to stay at the BIA and returned to his own home.

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<sup>81</sup> Lyman, 13

<sup>82</sup> Lyman, 8

During the time period between the impeachment trial of Richard Wilson and the occupation of Wounded Knee (February 23 – February 27), the Director of the U.S. Marshals, Wayne Colburn, decided to send more than half of the SOG team home (February 25). He was leery of the other districts around the United States, and the drain on manpower by having so many SOG deputies stationed at Pine Ridge. He was also aware of the mixed intelligence reports he was receiving from his informants inside of AIM. They did not have a clear objective, and some were suggesting that AIM might leave Pine Ridge completely. This correlated with the leadership of AIM and their lack of direction during this time. They had been awaiting guidance from the Oglala Sioux Civil Rights Organization and the traditional Lakota elders. The next decision of AIM came about as drastically as their decision to occupy the BIA building in Washington D.C., and that was to move on the small village of Wounded Knee and to forcefully occupy the town.

## Chapter 4

### Siege of Wounded Knee

*What can you do when society tells you that you should be non-existent? As I look at it, the situation will not change unless really violent action comes about. If this country understands violence then that is the way to do it. Some of the young Indians are already talking revolution. 'We have tried everything else,' they say. 'The only thing we have left is our guns. Let's use them'.*

- Clyde Warrior, 1968<sup>83</sup>

#### AIM Intervention

During the month of February, and with the increase of federal agents on the Pine Ridge Reservation, members of the anti-Wilson camp formulated the Oglala Sioux Civil Rights Organization (OSCRO). Some historians argue that the repressive actions of Wilson and his followers actually strengthened the bond between the OSCRO and AIM, thus causing the militaristic escalation on the reservation and the subsequent actions at Wounded Knee.

Historian Akim Reinhardt claimed,

Dick Wilson's coercive tactics helped to speed up a process that was already under way: a political alliance between full-blood residents of the reservation and the urban activists of the American Indian Movement. The two groups were drawn together by a set of reciprocal dynamics: AIM's desire to shed its image as mere urban activists and to define itself as an authentic Native organization, and the wishes of many full-blood people on Pine Ridge to find an ally in their burgeoning dispute with Wilson.<sup>84</sup>

This partnership initially seemed to work well for both organizations. It gave the OSCRO leverage and it allowed AIM a reservation to demonstrate upon.

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<sup>83</sup> Steiner, 68

<sup>84</sup> Reinhardt, 160

After they walked out of the impeachment trial, the anti-Wilson group met up in Calico, SD, and began deliberating their next action. In an interview with *Akwesasne Notes* Ellen Moves Camp stated, "We decided that we did need the American Indian Movement in here because our men were scared, they hung to the back. . . This way we knew we had backing, and we would have more strength to do what we wanted to do against the BIA and Dick Wilson."<sup>85</sup> The opponents of Wilson in Calico were seeking not only political guidance from their traditional chiefs, but also spiritual direction. The gathering at Calico quickly turned into a traditional Lakota powwow. Richard Wilson reminded the assembly of the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council Resolution 72-04, but he did not act upon this violation. The BIA, U.S. Marshals, and the FBI also refused to interfere with the powwow.

In the four days between the final impeachment trial (February 23) and the eventual occupation of Wounded Knee (February 27), numerous escalations between the U.S. governmental forces and the Calico powwow ensued, but not a single agency could have predicted the coming actions of this group. Historian Rex Weyler claimed there were two women at the Calico meeting who made a plea to their tribal members; they asked, "where was that Indian spirit that the Oglala Sioux Nation so many years ago stood up against the U.S. Army, Indians who were descendants of those great Indian heroes of long ago, and they asked if they were to allow another day to go by under the dictatorship of Wilson, and if they were the Indians that allowed the marshals who were surrounding them."<sup>86</sup> Women of the Lakota had been driving the men into action, and it was through their coaxing that AIM got involved. In the meeting the members of the OSCRO discussed their options and what actions should be taken

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<sup>85</sup> *Akwesasne Notes*, 31

<sup>86</sup> Weyler, 76

after the failed attempt to impeach Wilson. They asked their elders' advice, and the elders said "Go ahead and do it, go to Wounded Knee . . . take your brothers from the American Indian Movement and go to Wounded Knee and make your stand there."<sup>87</sup>

In an interview with *Akwesasne Notes*, Lou (last name anonymous) stated, "There was 54 cars when we counted them – that left Calico to come up here that night – 54 cars and they were all packed. All the cars were just packed."<sup>88</sup> They quickly seized control of the town, which was consisted of a museum, trading post, three church buildings, and a few residential homes. Wounded Knee was occupied by 7:30 p.m. on February 27, 1973, and by 10:00 p.m., the U.S. Marshalls along with FBI agents and members of the BIA police force had set up road blocks. Russell Means, an AIM leader, told the Associated Press in a telephone interview from Wounded Knee: "We have high-powered rifles, shotguns, explosives, and 14 hand grenades. The government has two choices: either they attack and wipe us out like they did in 1890 or they negotiate our reasonable demands."<sup>89</sup> Within a few hours of the seizure of Wounded Knee, the entire town was surrounded by U.S. federal troops. It was reported in the *Los Angeles Times*, "Federal officers exchanged gunfire with up to 300 hostage-holding Indians and brought in armored personnel carriers today in an attempt to drive them from the historic settlement of Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Oglala Sioux reservation."<sup>90</sup>

The next day after the seizure, in an interview with the media, AIM representative Carter Camp told the *Washington Post*, "It is symbolic that we have seized Wounded Knee and

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<sup>87</sup> Akwesasne Notes, 31

<sup>88</sup> Ibid

<sup>89</sup> News Dispatches, "Wounded Knee is a Battle Field Again," *Washington Post*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post (1877-1994), (Washington D.C.), March 1, 1973, section A1.

<sup>90</sup> News Dispatches, "Wounded Knee is a Battle Field Again," *Los Angeles Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times (1881-1987), (Los Angeles, CA), February 28, 1973, pg 2.



there is a definite threat that another massacre could occur here. We are not going to give in without a fight.”<sup>91</sup> Eight decades after the tragedy of 1890, another battle was about to take place between the U.S. government and the Lakota over Wounded Knee. The first few days were plagued with sporadic gunfire and bunker building. Members of the American Indian Movement were good at building bunkers and road blocks, because many of them had fought in Vietnam and Korea. Carter Camp and Stan Holder were in charge of the security within Wounded Knee. They had experience in deploying bunkers and weapons, also with coordinating communications and patrols. The situation had turned into siege warfare, as the U.S. troops surrounded the town. Those that were residing in Wounded Knee prior to the occupation were allowed to remain, although AIM had moved into their homes. AIM sacked the trading post, and was occupying all of the buildings in the area. They did not possess many weapons, a few hunting rifles, many .22 caliber rifles, shotguns, and one AK-47, and they lacked ammunition.

The media headlines surrounding the event were best summarized by the *Washington Post* correspondent Laurence Stern, who stated, “The occupation of Wounded Knee . . . was the latest in a series of ‘Red Power’ demonstrations by which the Indians hope to bring both ancient and current grievances to public attention.”<sup>92</sup> The demands of the occupiers were very similar to the *Trail of Broken Treaties Twenty Point Plan* established for the “Trail of Broken Treaties” march on Washington D.C earlier in 1972. In a press release to the *New York Times*, “The embattled Indians relayed demands to Washington that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hold hearings on treaties made with the Indians, that the Senate start a ‘full-scale

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<sup>91</sup> News Dispatches, “Wounded Knee is a Battle Field Again,” *Washington Post*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post (1877-1994), (Washington D.C.), March 1, 1973, section A1.

<sup>92</sup> Laurence Stern, “Indians Free Captives: Outline of Peace Seen,” *Washington Post*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post (1877-1994), (Washington D.C.), March 2, 1973, section A1.

investigation' of Government treatment of the Indians, and that another inquiry be started into 'all Sioux reservations in South Dakota'."<sup>93</sup>

The federal officials needed to establish a framework of command, because there were many organizations involved in this crisis. Stanley Lyman said, "On Thursday, March 1, [Ralph] Erickson met with the Justice Department personnel already on Pine Ridge, established a chain of command under which the three law-enforcement agencies represented there – U.S. Marshal Service, the FBI, and the BIA police – would operate, and instructed them to exercise restraint in the use of deadly force."<sup>94</sup> The initial concern of the U.S. officials was for the lives of the hostages. It was understood that the leadership of the occupation wanted to stay within Wounded Knee for as long as it took to reach a satisfactory agreement with the U.S. government. In an interview with the *New York Times*, Carter Camp stated, "We will occupy this town until the Government sees fit to deal with the Indian people particularly the Oglala Sioux tribe in South Dakota. We want a true Indian nation, not one made up of Bureau of Indian Affairs puppets."<sup>95</sup> Reports from inside the occupation initially stated that AIM were holding 10-12 hostages; yet, after the occupation was over, they stated that these people were free to leave at anytime. It was reported in the *Los Angeles Times* that "Mrs. Clive Gildersleve, whose

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<sup>93</sup> United Press Internations, "Armed Indians Seize Wounded Knee, Hold Hostages," *New York Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Times (1851-2007), (New York, NY), March 1, 1973, pg 1.

<sup>94</sup> Lyman, xxv

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*

husband operates the trading post, told UPI (United Press International) by telephone early today that she and members of her family were taken hostage in their home.”<sup>96</sup>

U.S. Senators from South Dakota, Senator James Abourezk and Senator George McGovern, were requested to go to Wounded Knee to represent the Senate Subcommittee on Indian Affairs, and to investigate the demands of the occupiers. AIM had previously requested Abourezk and McGovern along with Senator William Fulbright and Senator Edward Kennedy come to Wounded Knee and to begin investigations into American Indian mistreatment and negotiating terms to end the occupation. Senator James Abourezk stated,

I’m personally willing to go anywhere to discuss any problem any group of Indians may have and to do everything in my power to remedy the legitimate problems facing the Indian people in my state and across the nation. But, I am not willing to discuss substantive matters of legislation in a situation where a single group is seeking commitments on legislation under the threat of physical violence to innocent victims if that group’s viewpoint is not accepted.<sup>97</sup>

The two Senators arrived in South Dakota on March 3; they focused upon the hostage situation, because the occupation had been going on since February 27. In a special report for the *New York Times*, John Kifner stated, “The Senators said tonight, they learned when they reached the seized village in mid-afternoon that the hostages had been told by their captors a few hours earlier that they were free to leave.”<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> “Indians Seize Settlement at Wounded Knee, Hold Ten: 300 Insurgents Trade Gunfire with Officers,” *Los Angeles Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times (1881-1987), (Los Angeles, CA), February 28, 1973, pg 2.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid

<sup>98</sup> John Kifner, “Indians at Wounded Knee, Free 11 Held for 2 Days,” *New York Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Times (1851-2007), (New York, NY), March 3, 1973, pg 1.

After the senator's initial concern was resolved, they moved to encourage opening up peace negotiations to bring an end to this conflict. It was decided that on March 4, within the demilitarized zone (DMZ), a tepee would be erected, and talks between the Justice Department and the occupation leadership would commence. On March 5, the U.S. Attorney General approved a proposal that would hopefully bring an end to the ordeal. He proposed that,

All 'nonresidents' of Wounded Knee would leave the area beginning at 8 a.m. tomorrow (March 6). Identification would be required of men who left, but not of women and children. . . The Indians would not be permitted to approach the checkpoints with weapons. The weapons would be left at the designated spot and could be tagged with identification markers to be returned later. No arrest would be made if the departure was 'peaceful.' A Federal grand jury, however would consider pressing charges against those involved in the takeover.<sup>99</sup>

It was decided that Wounded Knee would be cleared by March 8, and the U.S. troops could enter the village to determine it was safe for re-entry of the citizens. The U.S. government believed that once Wounded Knee was clear then there would be no need for the road blocks and the federal troops could go home. Reporter John Kifner stated that "Russell Means, a leader of the American Indian Movement, said the Indians were in complete agreement with the proposal and would accept it if the Justice Department accepted it."<sup>100</sup> On March 5, Russell Means and Dennis Banks along with other leaders of the occupation had determined the demands of the Justice Department failed to guarantee any progress for American Indians, so they ceremonially burned the agreement.

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<sup>99</sup> Special to the New York Times, "Indians Get offer on Ending Seizure, Militants would Abandon Arms and Leave Village," *New York Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Times (1851-2007), (New York, NY), March 5, 1973, pg 1.

<sup>100</sup> John Kifner, "Marshals Trade Fire with Indians," *New York Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Times (1851-2007), (New York, NY), March 4, 1973, pg 1.

Leaders within Wounded Knee were determined to remain in the village past the deadline established by the U.S. Justice Department. Russell Means, in a press release said, "We came here and bet our lives that there would be historic change for our Nation. The Government can massacre us, or it can meet our basic human demands. Either way, there will be historic change."<sup>101</sup> The tension rose within Wounded Knee as many within the occupying force believed the U.S. troops would eradicate them, as they did their nineteenth century ancestors. A religious ceremony began as members of the occupation prepared for battle, and warriors came forward to be blessed by shamans and to have their faces painted, in the traditional Lakota warrior preparation for death. Carter Camp said, "We in no way think we can whip the United States Government, but we have every intention of selling our lives as dearly as we can."<sup>102</sup> By March 8, only two individuals had left the village, and the road blocks remained intact. The Justice Department moved away from the ideology that the occupiers must leave or else be removed, and proposed a cease-fire. A Justice Department spokesperson told the *Los Angeles Times*, "[Harlington] Wood made it clear that there would be no movement on the part of federal forces to take control of Wounded Knee while negotiations were in progress."<sup>103</sup>

It was accurately realized by the Oglala Sioux that AIM had larger intentions for the occupation of Wounded Knee. This event was more than rebelling against the tribal leadership of Richard Wilson, but it had turned into a symbolic revolution that promoted the radical ideology of the American Indian Movement. During the negotiations, the occupiers continued to demand that the U.S. government remove their roadblocks. It was the understanding of some

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<sup>101</sup> Akwesasne Notes, 51

<sup>102</sup> Akwesasne Notes, 51

<sup>103</sup> Meagher Ed, "Indians, U.S. Resume Wounded Knee Talks: Observer in Blockaded Village Believes Food Will be Exhausted in about a week," *Los Angeles Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1987), (Los Angeles, CA), March 14, 1973, pg 5.

of the U.S. officials that the occupants were apprehensive to vacate the village because they feared being gunned down by the federal troops. The Justice Department officers were assured by the leadership of the occupation that once the blockades were removed they would peacefully walk away from Wounded Knee. On March 10, the federal troops were ordered to lift their roadblocks. Ralph Erickson, official from the Justice Department, claimed, "It had become undesirable to maintain the roadblocks that have stood since the militant Indians took over the town a week ago last Tuesday. We are doing this because we believe this is the proper step at this point in moving toward a peaceful resolution. Furthermore, many of our law enforcement objectives have already been accomplished." Erickson was referring to the end of the hostage situation, which was the main concern of U.S. officials in the beginning of the occupation.

Once the roadblocks were removed, the people inside Wounded Knee were greeted by hundreds of supporters who were able to freely walk into the village bringing with them much needed food and supplies. Some of the occupiers opted to leave, but most remained and proclaimed they would not leave until the U.S. government met their demands. This was not the response that the Justice Department had expected. *New York Times* reporter John Kifner stated,

As Indians walking along the road shouted cheerfully and raised clenched fists, Federal Marshals were dismantling the armed ring they had thrown around the little village. Cases of ammunition, gasoline, field telephones, and rations were loaded in vehicles, the last checkpoint was dismantled shortly after 3 o'clock, only an hour after Federal officials had met with

the head of the Indian security forces in a yellow school bus in the “demilitarized zone” between their lines.<sup>104</sup>

AIM leadership portrayed the U.S. government’s removal of the road blocks as a victory for the occupation, and a victory in the larger war for American Indian Civil Rights. *Washington Post* reporter Leroy Aarons stated that “Russell Means told a jubilant throng of followers in Wounded Knee this afternoon (March 10) that the Justice Department’s withdrawal represented a major victory.”<sup>105</sup>

The removal of the federal blockade signaled a renewed enthusiasm driving the occupation. An *Akwesasne Notes* article reported that the “Oglala chiefs met all day (March 11) in the tipi and then announced that they would now be negotiating with the United States, nation to nation.”<sup>106</sup> The leadership of the occupation formulated the Independent Oglala Nation (ION), and established committees that would create different segments of the new government. They elected their own officials and granted citizenship. The chiefs of the ION stated,

Let it be known this day, March 11, 1973, that the Oglala Sioux People will: Revive the Treaty of 1868 and that it will be the basis for all negotiations. Let the declaration be made that we are a sovereign nation by the Treaty of 1868. We intend to send a delegation to the United Nations as follows: Chief Frank Fools Crow, Chief Frank Kills Enemy, Eugene White Hawk, District Chairman, Meredith Quinn – international advisor, Mathew King – interpreter . . . We want to abolish the Tribal Government under the Indian Reorganization Act. Wounded Knee will be a corporate state under the Independent Oglala Nation. In proclaiming the Independent Oglala Nation, the first nation to be called for support and recognition is the Iroquois Six Nation

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<sup>104</sup> John Kifner, “U.S. Removes Roadblocks in Wounded Knee Vicinity,” *New York Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *New York Times* (1851-2007), (New York, NY), March 4, 1973, pg 1.

<sup>105</sup> Leroy F. Aarons, “Blockade Lifted, Indians Claim Victory,” *Washington Post*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The Washington Post* (1877-1994), (Washington D.C.), March 11, 1973, pg A1.

<sup>106</sup> *Akwesasne Notes*, 54.

Confederacy. We request that the Confederacy send emissaries to this newly proclaimed nation . . .<sup>107</sup>

ION stood directly against the chairmanship of Richard Wilson and they called for a complete abolishment of the Oglala Sioux Tribal Government. Dennis Banks claimed, "Sovereignty! That had been in the back of our minds all along. That's what we had dreamed about for so many years – to be out from under the white man's rule, to govern ourselves again, to be truly independent . . . It meant the war was not over. It had barely begun."<sup>108</sup>

The leadership of AIM used a loudspeaker to address the occupying forces about the goals of ION. Russell Means stated, "If any foreign official representing any foreign power – specifically the United States – come in here, it will be treated as an act of war and dealt with accordingly."<sup>109</sup> Means also warned anyone who acted as a spy for the U.S. government would be shot by a firing squad. It was quickly understood that AIM had no intention of leaving Wounded Knee and with the establishment of ION the battle for Wounded Knee was only just beginning. Dennis Banks said,

We're going to establish here a symbolic Indian government and we're going to stay here indefinitely. We expect Indians here from all over the country to help us demonstrate our ability to rule ourselves. . . This is a chance to prove we can do it. That we can act like Indians. We want this to be a completely cooperative effort because if it isn't, we have the seeds for dissension in this camp.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Akwesasne Notes, 55

<sup>108</sup> Banks, 180

<sup>109</sup> Washington Post Staff Writer, "AIM Says Sioux Nation Independent," *Washington Post*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post (1877-1994), (Washington D.C.), March 12, 1973, section A18.

<sup>110</sup> Bill Kovach, "FBI Agent Shot as Indians Warn U.S.," *New York Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Times (1851-2007), (New York, NY), March 12, 1973, pg 65.



It was the intention of ION to deal with the U.S. government like their nineteenth century ancestors had, through the establishment of treaties. They were basing their claim of sovereignty upon the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty, and their sovereign rights to the Great Sioux Reservation that encompassed a majority of Western South Dakota. They also demanded that the BIA and the Department of the Interior would not be allowed to influence tribal decisions, and that eventually the BIA would be abolished. The chiefs of ION claimed that under the 1868 treaty, only the President of the United States had the right to negotiate with the Lakota.

### **Hardships and Diplomacy**

The excitement over the removal of the U.S. government road blocks quickly wore off within the matter of days. They had been removed on March 10, but after a firefight between two FBI agents and a group of Indians on the outskirts of Wounded Knee, the U.S. government road blocks were swiftly restored on March 12. The firefight resulted in the injury of one Indian and one FBI agent. *New York Times* reporter Bill Kovach stated, "A FBI agent was shot and a militant Indian was injured this afternoon when gunfire erupted at a roadblock set up by the Indians to control traffic into this occupied village. Tension mounted rapidly and Federal law enforcement officials immediately began mobilizing, apparently in a move to restore an armed ring around the village . . ." <sup>111</sup> Members of ION had also captured six white individuals who had attempted to enter Wounded Knee, two of which were Federal officers. These individuals were detained for several hours, and then escorted to the perimeter and set free. These two incidents destroyed the accomplishments and agreements that were made between the two sides, and set off a firestorm of conflict. These actions caused the members of ION to dig-in

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid

deeper, and the U.S. government troops to tighten the border around Wounded Knee, not allowing anything to pass their blockade. Early negotiations were abandoned, because there were new sets of demands from both sides of the DMZ. Stanley Holder told the federal officials, "Since we are an independent nation now we no longer recognize your authority and I have no authority on behalf of our country to negotiate with you. Any agreements made until now were made by me as an American citizen and are no longer in effect."<sup>112</sup>

In the early stages of the occupation, it was estimated that there were between two and three hundred supporters inside Wounded Knee. After the roadblocks were removed, estimates of supporters swelled between four and five hundred. ION was faced with the serious task of dealing with this many people within such a small space, so while formulating different segments of government they made sure to tackle huge issues such as medical care, housing, security, supply management, and maintenance. A small two bedroom house in downtown Wounded Knee served as the ION clinic, and it was staffed by a rotating group of medical volunteers who would manage to sneak into the village. Lorelei DeCora, a Minneconjou Sioux and State Director for Iowa of the American Indian Movement said, "It's like a hospital on the lines in Vietnam –we're under fire almost every night . . ."<sup>113</sup> As the occupation continued, it was necessary to establish adequate housing, because of sanitation concerns and inclement weather. They continuously struggled with the issue of sanitation, because of poor plumbing and lack of adequate water, but within two weeks of the establishment of ION the housing committee was able to provide adequate housing for approximately two hundred individuals.

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<sup>112</sup> Bill Kovach, "U.S. Again Blocks Roads to Isolate Wounded Knee," *New York Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Times (1851-2007), (New York, NY), March 13, 1973, pg 1.

<sup>113</sup> Akwesasne Notes, 72

Duane Camp, head of the new housing committee said, "People realize that when they're pounding a nail, they're pounding it for the Indian people . . ." <sup>114</sup> They found a way to get the warriors to lay down their weapons and pick up hammers, not only to reinforce the bunkers, but to create a sustainable community.

The trading post in Wounded Knee was converted into a multi-functioning building that was utilized as a kitchen, sleeping quarters, storage, and a meeting hall. Nightly meetings were scheduled to discuss actions of the day, possible offers directed to or received from the U.S. government, and space to offer encouragement. As new supporters infiltrated the U.S. government blockade, they not only brought in food and supplies, but news from the outside about demonstrations in support of the occupation. Demonstrations occurred around the nation from large urban centers to small rural villages, all calling for the safety and protection of the occupants of Wounded Knee. One of the major organizations behind the support effort for the occupiers was the National Council of Churches; they offered not only food and medical supplies, but also financial and legal counsel. Bill Kovach, journalist from the *New York Times* said, "Work continued today (March 18) on refinements of a system of supply and emergency aid for the besieged Indians by the National Council of Churches. Under the direction of Mr. Adams, the council has set up a disaster relief fund and is sending food, fuel, clothing and medical supplies into the village." <sup>115</sup>

In the declaration of the Independent Oglala Nation, the chief's of ION appealed to the U.S. Government for the support and recognition of the Iroquois Six Nation Confederacy. An

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<sup>114</sup> Akwesasne Notes, 74

<sup>115</sup> Bill Kovach, "Outsiders Headed for Wounded Knee are Arrested," *New York Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *New York Times* (1851-2007), (New York, NY), March 18, 1973, pg 42.

*Akwesasne Note* reporter stated, "On March 19, an official delegation arrived in Wounded Knee from the Six Nations, and they addressed the community meeting that night. They read a statement of support which their Grand Council had sent to the U.S. Government in Washington D.C., soon after the take-over."<sup>116</sup> The delegates from the Six Nations were welcomed in Wounded Knee with open arms, and were seen as a step forward for American Indian sovereignty. When the delegates left Wounded Knee on March 23, it was planned that they would leave via the main road, and walk through the main U.S. government roadblock. They were escorted by one hundred armed Lakotas; this was a show of strength and confidence in the direction of the occupation. Support came also from other activist groups such as the Black Panthers. As the delegates exited the occupied town of Wounded Knee, Angela Davis attempted to visit the village. Davis is a well known black activist from the late 1960s and early 1970s, but because of a connection between AIM and the Black Panthers, the FBI refused her admittance into Wounded Knee.<sup>117</sup>

Negotiations continued between the opposing sides; they were hoping to avoid major casualties although little progress was made during this time. Douglas Kneeland, reporter for the *New York Times* said, "The possibility always exists, of course, that a stray shot, an untoward incident, or even severely injured pride at the bargaining table could still turn the Wounded Knee affair into a bloody showdown. But up to this point, neither side has shown much stomach for it."<sup>118</sup> It became the official policy of the U.S officials to maintain their blockade, preventing infiltration of any individuals into the village of Wounded Knee. It was reported to the *New York*

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<sup>116</sup> Akwesasne Notes, 94

<sup>117</sup> "Angela Davis Is Turned Back in Effort to Visit Wounded Knee," *New York Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Times (1851-2007), (New York, NY), March 24, 1973, pg 15.

<sup>118</sup> Douglas E. Kneeland, "Wounded Knee: Holding out for 'Peace with Honor,'" *New York Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Times (1851-2007), (New York, NY), March 11, 1973, pg 270.

*Times* that the federal policy was to “let the marshals ‘contain’ the rebels in the hamlet for as long as they choose to hold out – allowing food, but not amenities and certainly not weapons, to pass through the blockade, as they seem now to be doing. Sooner or later, the braves will weary of this unheroic ‘house arrest’.”<sup>119</sup>

New negotiations began after the formation of ION and were arranged by Wayne Colburn, Director of the U.S. Marshals, and Harlington Wood, Assistant Attorney General. ION spokesmen demanded that the U.S. government suspend the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council and hold a referendum to formulate a new government. In the Pine Ridge Reservation, supporters of the occupation of Wounded Knee were able to collect 1400 signatures in favor of such a referendum. After two days of the negotiations, Harlington Wood left South Dakota for Washington D.C., which gave members of ION hope that they were getting through to the Washington officials. Russell Means said, “Sooner or later, in one way or another, the President is going to have to notice us.”<sup>120</sup>

When Harlington Wood returned from Washington D.C. he immediately met with Dennis Banks in the DMZ, and presented him with the Government’s proposal. Wood told Banks, “I’ve got this for you. This is the best I can do. I want you to take your time. If you want to see me again, I’ll come back at any time. It will be at your pleasure.”<sup>121</sup> After reviewing the proposal many of the members of ION believed the U.S. government did not fully comprehend their demands. “ION issued a counter-proposal requesting a special Presidential emissary to

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<sup>119</sup>“Out at Wounded Knee,” *New York Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Times (1851-2007), (New York, NY), March 15, 1973, pg 42.

<sup>120</sup>“Hopes Seen for Indian Peace Talk,” *Washington Post*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post (1877-1994), (Washington D.C.), March 25, 1973, section A3.

<sup>121</sup> Bill Kovach, “Outsiders Headed for Wounded Knee are Arrested,” *New York Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Times (1851-2007), (New York, NY), March 18, 1973, pg 42.

‘deal with our sovereignty and our separate governments’ relationship under our treaty’.”<sup>122</sup>

Wood told the *New York Times*,

Though negotiations undoubtedly will still be difficult. What compounds the difficulty are the immediate and in some respects impossible demands of the AIM leaders. These include, principally, a treaty violation – and action by the Department of the Interior to suspend the Oglala Sioux constitution in order to get rid of a tribal chairman they dislike. The investigation has already been promised by the state’s two Senators, who have scheduled hearings in a few days. But the second demand – apart from the sad fact that it is motivated by the fierce tribal politics that has victimized every chairman for the past 35 years – cannot be granted without undermining even the limited self-government the Indians now enjoy.

ION’s demands of the federal government had become nearly impossible to resolve, and would require the federal officials to completely ignore the tribal government.

ION was concerned about food shortages in the occupied village because of the strong blockade by the U.S. government. In a show of support for the occupation, a group of lawyers and legal workers formulated the Wounded Knee Legal Defense/Offense Committee. This new legal organization was going to fight for the rights of ION, and make sure the U.S. government adhered to the laws of humanity. On March 26, a federal judge ordered the blockade lifted for items such as food and medical supplies. Six carloads of provisions were allowed to pass through the security check points and supply the village. Allowing food and medical supplies through the U.S. government blockades was in constant debate within the leadership of the federal officials, because some believed the ordeal could be ended quicker if the occupants were “starved out” of Wounded Knee. The judge limited what items were allowed in Wounded Knee and maintained that his reasoning was based solely on a humanitarian purpose. He was

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<sup>122</sup>Akwesasne Notes, 115

also fearful of a bloody firefight if the occupants of Wounded Knee got desperate. When interviewed about the food situation within the occupied village, Dennis Banks told the *New York Times*, there is “no alternative but to try to shoot their way through the heavily armed lines of marshals and agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation blockading the town.”<sup>123</sup>

## **Developments and Deteriorations**

On March 26, one of the largest casualties of the situation occurred. U.S. Marshal Lloyd Grim, from Omaha, Nebraska, was shot while stationed at one of the six forward U.S. governmental roadblocks. It was reported by Wayne Colburn that the casualty occurred around 7:30 p.m. when all of the U.S. government roadblocks came under heavy fire from the insurgents within Wounded Knee. Colburn said “all six federal roadblocks had come under fire and had returned shots during what he called ‘the heaviest night of fire-fighting’ in the month-long siege of the tiny village.”<sup>124</sup> Justice Department official Mark Sheehan told the press that Grim was hit by a bullet in the chest and was rushed to the Fitzsimons Army Medical Center at Aurora, Colorado. Upon arrival, he was diagnosed in serious condition, and that he would be paralyzed from his waist down. It was reported in the *New York Times* that “Television crews from both the National Broadcasting Company and the Columbia Broadcasting System, which have camped in Wounded Knee since militants from the American Indian Movement seized it on

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<sup>123</sup> Martin Waldron, “Judge Allows Food for Wounded Knee,” *New York Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Times (1851-2007), (New York, NY), March 26, 1973, pg 22.

<sup>124</sup> “U.S. Marshal Shot at Wounded Knee,” *Los Angeles Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1987), (Los Angeles, CA), March 27, 1973, pg A1.

February 27, pulled out tonight (March 27). A cameraman said the situation was 'pretty tense'."<sup>125</sup>

Serious negotiations resumed on March 31, and continued through April 5. When they finally reached a settlement, the press was allowed to witness the signing of the agreement and the smoking of a peace pipe. Terms of the agreement included,

- There will be a 30-60 day delay in the arrests of AIM leaders and their followers under indictment
- Occupants of Wounded Knee against whom federal arrest warrants are outstanding will be taken to Rapid City as soon as arrangements can be made for prompt arraignment, subsequent to disposition of arms
- The parties agree to effect meetings between representatives of the White House and traditional chiefs and head men of the Teton Sioux tribes, so that these Sioux representatives may outline the need for a presidential treaty commission which they propose as a method for re-examination of the 1868 treaty. These meetings will be held in the third week of May.
- The Indians agree to a search of Wounded Knee for snipers, weapons, and other dangerous devices, presumably after the disarmament. A sufficient residual force of U.S. Marshals and FBI men – the men who have been ringing Wounded Knee for more than a month – will stay on the reservation.<sup>126</sup>

It was understood that Russell Means and a few other AIM leaders would submit to arrest, and then travel to Washington D.C. to continue the negotiations with representatives from the White House. Simultaneously, leaders of ION would continue negotiating the disarmament of Wounded Knee with the leaders of the FBI and U.S. Marshals. In his journal, Stanley Lyman BIA Superintendent, wrote on April 5, "Well, today was the day! The siege is over, after thirty-seven days of occupation. I stood on a hilltop overlooking Wounded Knee to watch things wind down.

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<sup>125</sup> Martin Waldron, "U.S. Marshal shot at Wounded Knee: Heavy Gunfire is Reported-Sioux Seize Key Road," *New York Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Times (1851-2007), (New York, NY), March 27, 1973, pg 31.

<sup>126</sup>"U.S. and Indians Sign Pact: 37 Day Siege Nears an End," *Washington Post*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post (1877-1994), (Washington D.C.), April 6, 1973, section A1.



. . . Russell Means got out of one of the cars and was arrested . . . It was good to see Russell Means in handcuffs, finally, after all this time, submitting to arrest.”<sup>127</sup>

Lyman wrote on April 6, “Today is the day when disillusionment has set in.”<sup>128</sup> Through a failed miscommunication in the ranks of the U.S. government, tensions quickly escalated in Wounded Knee. The federal officials and the leadership of ION were interpreting the agreement differently. ION assumed that the U.S. and the occupants of Wounded Knee would stand down simultaneously. The U.S. believed the occupants of Wounded Knee would stand down after a phone call was received by Russell Means and then the U.S. troops would enter the village sweeping it clean of all insurgents. Russell Means told the press from Washington D.C., “We’re at an impasse. We have abided by the agreement, and we’re in Washington D.C., waiting. We’re stuck in a hotel that the Justice Department got for us, that we can’t afford – I apologize for being short tempered, but there’s over 200 men, women, and children down there at any time could be ripped off. . .”<sup>129</sup> Lyman continued his April 6 comment by stating, “Disillusionment . . . Means had agreed in negotiations here that he would give the order to lay down arms when the meeting in Washington began. Now it is clear that the order may not be given at all and that the Indians are not going to lay down their arms tomorrow or anytime soon.”<sup>130</sup>

The blockade continued through the early weeks of April, and again the occupants of Wounded Knee feared the lack of food and supplies. Bill Zimmerman and a group of pilots

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<sup>127</sup> Lyman, 64-65

<sup>128</sup> Lyman, 71

<sup>129</sup> Akwesasne Notes, 151

<sup>130</sup> Lyman, 72

concocted a scheme to fly three small aircraft over the Wounded Knee village and drop packages of food and supplies. The drop occurred on April 17, at dawn, with the successful airlift of several hundred pounds of food and medical supplies. Throughout March only a few members of ION had been injured, but during the major firefights of early April, ION witnessed the death of two of their members and countless others wounded. ION leadership claimed that the airlift from Bill Zimmerman and company brought in much needed food and supplies, but also one of the largest firefights since the beginning of the occupation. Stanley Lyman claimed the fighting began early on April 17, at 1:30 in the morning, several hours before the aircraft arrived over the occupied village. Lyman claimed the fighting was initiated from the occupants, he said, "of course it was all begun by the occupants of Wounded Knee."<sup>131</sup> Assistant United States Attorney General Stanley Pottinger told the *Chicago Tribune* that "it was the first announced violation of a cease-fire which has been in effect for three weeks at the village, held by American Indian Movement members for seven weeks. However, government sources said there has been unannounced sporadic gunfire from the village almost every night."<sup>132</sup>

The first fatality of the occupation was Frank Clearwater. He had snuck into Wounded Knee on April 17, and had gone to the one room church to rest when a bullet ripped through the thin walls striking Clearwater in the head, severely wounding him. He was rushed out of Wounded Knee, and taken by helicopter to Rapid City, SD, where he would die on April 25. Over the following days the intensity of the daily firefights continued to escalate, and on April 27 the second fatality occurred. Lawrence "Buddy" Lamont, who was stationed at one of the forward

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<sup>131</sup> Lyman, 91

<sup>132</sup> "Two Indians hurt in new gunfire," *Chicago Tribune*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Chicago Tribune (1849-1988), (Chicago, IL), April 18, 1973, section A6.

ION bunkers, was flushed out of his bunker by the federal forces using gas grenades and was killed instantly. It was agreed to initiate another ceasefire so that the body of Buddy Lamont could be brought back to the clinic. The deaths of these two individuals lay heavy upon the leadership of ION and both sides agreed to commence an indefinite cease-fire.

The greatest outliers during this entire conflict were the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council and Chairman Richard Wilson. For most of the occupation they were the last organization to be given intelligence, and were almost always left out of negotiation meetings. It was not until April 27 that the federal officials conceded to the authority of the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council on the Pine Ridge Reservation and they allowed the council to participate in the negotiating process. Martin Waldron from the *New York Times* said, "In an effort to soothe the ruffled feelings of Oglala Sioux Indian leaders, the Justice Department agreed tonight to give the tribe a larger voice in handling the Wounded Knee insurrection."<sup>133</sup> Wilson had erected his own blockade on the main road into Wounded Knee, outside of the federal blockade. He agreed to remove the tribal blockade once he was allowed to actively participate in the U.S. governmental negotiations.

It was agreed upon by both sides of the demilitarized zone to begin negotiations on April 29. With the death of Buddy Lamont and Frank Clearwater and the fatigue associated with the length of the occupation, the leadership of ION was growing weary. After meeting with Dennis Banks and Leonard Crow Dog in the DMZ, Kent Frizzell told the *Los Angeles Times*, "We both agreed that each hour this siege continues there is a chance of more loss of life, I detected

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<sup>133</sup> Martin Waldron, "U.S. Gives Pledge to Sioux Leaders: Tribe will get Bigger Role in Wounded Knee Siege," *New York Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Times (1851-2007), (New York, NY), April 27, 1973, pg 15.

a willingness on their part to avoid this.”<sup>134</sup> It had been nearly a month since the last time anyone from Wounded Knee had met with the federal officials. It was back on April 5 that the two sides met and established a cease-fire. Wayne Colburn negotiated a firm cease-fire, and agreed that all federal forces would not fire upon the village unless first fired upon by the occupants. It seemed that the end was in sight for the occupation.

Throughout the two-month engagement between federal officials and the occupants of Wounded Knee numerous agreements had been arranged and quickly broken. It seemed that every time the federal government brought a proposition, the occupants would compromise only to quickly reverse their decision in a few hours. They would then counter the governmental offer with an offer of their own that demanded even more from the government. The situation witnessed several escalations in tension between the two sides that in some cases concluded in a serious injury or even death. The press coverage of the situation was probably the greatest indicator of the entire event. Reporters quickly flocked to Wounded Knee broadcasting the daily events on the front page, but the romanticism of the occupation quickly wore off as the event dragged on through the early spring.

Some reporters felt that the occupation of Wounded Knee was not about the centuries of mistreatment toward American Indian people, but a self promotion of a militant Indian organization. Reporter for the *Wall Street Journal*, Greg Conderacci claimed,

On a scrap of yellow paper pasted to a door in this town's trading post is the slogan of the 'uprising' at Wounded Knee: 'It is better to die on your feet than to live on your knees.' For some people, that slogan sums up the stubborn tenacity with

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<sup>134</sup> "U.S. Militant Indians Renew Peace Talks," *Los Angeles Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times (1881-1987), (Los Angeles, CA), April 29, 1973, pg F1.

which a band of Indians have held this hamlet since Feb. 27. For others, the slogan, posted where the visiting press will be able to see it, epitomizes the slick public relations job the leaders of the militant American Indian Movement have done since they engineered the takeover. Clearly, for Indians, the irony lends itself to press conferences. Envision a group of Indians surrounded by armed federals much like the Sioux of almost a century ago. The AIM leadership did. They figured that such a scene would capture the imagination of the American press, the American people and even the world. They were right. AIM succeeded in putting Wounded Knee on the front pages of newspapers across the world and so overcame a key problem – lack of publicity.<sup>135</sup>

It was clear to see that by the end of April the episode of Wounded Knee II was drawing to a conclusion. Much of the support AIM received from the Lakota on the Pine Ridge reservation was swiftly diminishing after the death of Buddy Lamont, and with the rapid decline in press coverage, the occupants were losing national support. It was agreed that negotiations would continue in the early days of May, with the serious hope this episode in Indian-White relations could be drawn to a conclusion.

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<sup>135</sup> Greg Conderacci, "At Wounded Knee, Is it War or PR?" *Wall Street Journal*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Wall Street Journal (1889-1994), (New York, NY), March 20, 1973, pg 26.

## Second Incident of Wounded Knee ends

*Most American Indians are peaceful, law-abiding people who suffer in silence rather than cause a disturbance. But, what does this nation want us to do? We seek funding from the churches and are sneered at because we are not militants. We offer our assistance to government and are not even considered. We seek responsible spokesmen and the first movie star that comes along gets prime television time to expound his or her theories on how bad things are with Indians. We ask people to negotiate the confrontation at Wounded Knee and half of them begin buying ammunition to keep the incident going. The other half refused to speak to us again. . . Wounded Knee 1973 shows one thing very clearly: American Indians are prohibited from having a modern identity. We must dress in buckskin when we protest. But, then we are told to work through the system and forget the buckskin. The system, public and private, listens only to the men in buckskin because they're 'real' Indians.*

- Vine Deloria Jr., Standing Rock Sioux<sup>136</sup>

### Recessions and Concessions

The final days of April brought a sense of urgency from both sides of the occupation. The U.S. government was feeling pressure to end this episode from numerous sources and AIM was rapidly losing support. Negotiations had resumed after nearly a month of silence, but the occupants of Wounded Knee continued to resist. Martin Waldron, journalist for the *New York Times*, claimed, "Federal efforts to negotiate a settlement with the insurgents during the long confrontation have been extremely complicated. The sessions have been a curious mixture of philosophical discussion of the future of Indians in this country and a long recitation of minor complaints about Richard Wilson who heads the Oglala regime at Pine Ridge."<sup>137</sup> Even with

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<sup>136</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., "An Indian's Reflections: Bury Our Hopes at Wounded Knee," *Los Angeles Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times (1881-1987), (Los Angeles, CA), April 1, 1973, pg 11.

<sup>137</sup> Martin Waldron, "A Mortal Conflict: Wounded Knee," *New York Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Times (1851-2007), (New York, NY), April 29, 1973, pg 214.

continued resistance from the occupants, many believed that the nightmare was inevitably about to conclude.

A point of contention for the occupiers was over the funeral and burial of Frank Clearwater and Lawrence “Buddy” Lamont. Clearwater was a Cherokee from North Carolina, who had hitchhiked to Wounded Knee with his wife. He was the first fatality of the episode and many of the occupants believed he had a right to be buried in Wounded Knee. The Oglala Sioux Tribal government disagreed with the demands of AIM and obtained a restraining order on Clearwater’s wife, preventing her from bringing his body onto the Pine Ridge Reservation. It was reported in the *New York Times*, that “Mr. [Kent] Frizzell was trying to sell the idea that a wake for Mr. Clearwater could be held on the Oglala reservation, with the funeral and burial to be on the Rosebud Sioux reservation, which adjoins that of the Oglala’s. Mr. Frizzell said that Leonard Crow Dog, a Rosebud medicine man, had offered to allow Mr. Clearwater to be buried in his family plot.”<sup>138</sup> Two days after the death of Clearwater, Buddy Lamont was shot and killed. Lamont was a Lakota from Pine Ridge and was allowed to be buried on the reservation by the tribal government. On May 6, he was laid to rest next to the memorial of the 1890 Wounded Knee massacre. Dennis Banks eulogized Lamont in a prayer that was written upon his headstone, Banks stated, “Two Thousand came here to Wounded Knee. One Stayed.”<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Martin Waldron, “Dispute over Indians burial worsens at Wounded Knee,” *New York Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *New York Times* (1851-2007), (New York, NY), April 30, 1973, pg 14.

<sup>139</sup> Banks, 208

Two major setbacks for the occupants of Wounded Knee occurred on April 30. The first arose when the trading post within Wounded Knee caught fire and burned to the ground. It was reported to the *Akwesasne Notes* that “a kerosene lamp caught some curtains, and by the time anyone noticed it, it was burning too fast to stop, especially in the wind. We lost everything in there, even a bunch of ammo which exploded in the blaze.”<sup>140</sup> The occupants were already running low on supplies and the loss of the trading post was devastating. The second setback transpired during the negotiations when Kent Frizzell told the occupants,

Time is running out. There is a question as to how long the government will exercise patience and restraint. My opinion is that if a negotiated settlement is not obtained in the immediate days ahead, the government will be left no other choice than to take the position that the occupiers are not really interested in peaceful resolve and we will be required to take a look at other choices.<sup>141</sup>

With the immediate loss in supplies and the U.S. government threatening forced action on the occupants, the leadership of AIM had to face the decision to end the occupation.

An official plan by the U.S. government to eradicate the village was leaked to the press and was featured in the *New York Times*. The report claimed, “In preparation for a possible assault on the village, the Justice Department last week began bringing in extra United States marshals. The Justice Department refused to say how many marshals were in the area now, but many new arrivals could be seen checking into headquarters in Pine Ridge.”<sup>142</sup> It was already documented that there were around 180 U.S. Marshals on the reservation before the reported

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<sup>140</sup> *Akwesasne Notes*, 222

<sup>141</sup> “Fire Breaks out in Indian trading post: Blaze out of control at powerless Wounded Knee,” *Los Angeles Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times (1881-1987), (Los Angeles, CA), April 30, 1973, pg A1.

<sup>142</sup> Martin Waldron, “Dispute over Indians burial worsens at Wounded Knee,” *New York Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Times (1851-2007), (New York, NY), April 30, 1973, pg 14.



increase. There was an acknowledged increase in supplies of ammunition and guns, and a helicopter was flown in that could drop tear gas on the village. It was also reported that the Eighty-second Airborne was put on stand-by. "The Government official familiar with the Justice Department's plans," told the *New York Times* that "the village would not be attacked without prior warning. The plan calls for the dropping of leaflets urging all non-combatants to leave Wounded Knee several hours in advance of the time set for the assault."<sup>143</sup>

The federal government allegedly placed a time table on the negotiating efforts of Kent Frizzell. He continuously reminded the occupants that the government was growing impatient and wanted the occupation to end immediately. He claimed that higher ranking governmental officials were breathing down his neck, and might use force to sweep down upon the village. Frizzell was quoted in the *New York Times* as saying, "The clocks are running short, time is running out. If a negotiated settlement is not reached in the immediate days ahead, the government will be left with no other choice but to take the position that the occupants are not really interested in a negotiated or peaceful settlement."<sup>144</sup> The government's main concern was that college semesters were about to conclude across the United States, and they feared Wounded Knee becoming the "Woodstock of the North," with adventure seeking young adults flooding their support to the occupiers.<sup>145</sup>

On May 1, negotiations recommenced in two separate yellow school busses in the DMZ. The government utilized a dual-negotiating approach, one bus would accommodate the conversation on the disarmament of Wounded Knee, and the other would discuss the treaty

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid

<sup>144</sup> Ibid

<sup>145</sup> Lyman, 106

rights of the Lakota. It was agreed that a media blackout would be imposed. The government officials agreed on the blackout because they wanted to prevent a hyperinflation in the media about the possibility that federal troops would forcefully end the occupation. Stanley Lyman claimed in his journal of the events that AIM actually proposed a cease-fire initiative and asked for the media blackout; he stated:

Shortly after Lamont's death, a cease-fire had been agreed upon, and part of the agreement was a news blackout. It was AIM, in fact, who had asked for the news blackout. The government complied and did not put out any information. As it turned out, AIM wanted to stop all press releases because the press coverage was beginning to favor the federal position.<sup>146</sup>

Frizzell reminded the leadership of AIM that the White House would not fully discuss treaty rights while the village was still occupied. The media blackout did not last long, and on May 4, it was lifted. It was reported in the *Washington Post*, that "Shortly afterwards, the two (Frizzell and [Richard] Hellstern) lifted a two-day news blackout on peace talks, saying that AIM had requested the government silence and then misused the agreement by circulating reports around the country that FBI agents and U.S. marshals planned to invade Wounded Knee this weekend."<sup>147</sup>

A letter, from white house official Leonard Garment was to be delivered by Hank Adams, an AIM activist who was an Assiniboine Sioux from Pine Ridge. The letter addressed the issue of Lakota treaty rights and the role of the President of the United States. It was to be delivered to Frank Fools Crow who was currently amongst the occupying force within Wounded Knee. Fools Crow accepted the letter dressed in attire worn by traditional Lakota chiefs; he had

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<sup>146</sup> Lyman, 129

<sup>147</sup> "U.S. – Indians Peace Talks Reopened," *Washington Post*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post (1877-1994), (Washington D.C.), May 4, 1973, section A5.

on buckskins and a war bonnet. It was reported to the *Washington Post* that “The White House has agreed to send a 5-man delegation to the Pine Ridge Indian reservation to discuss treaty issues if the militants occupying Wounded Knee will lay down their arms by May 11 . . . Kent Frizzell said he obtained the White House commitment as a token of good faith in the government’s effort to end the 66-day-old occupation of the hamlet without bloodshed.”<sup>148</sup>

The U.S. government negotiation team was cautiously optimistic that an agreement could be finalized. The occupation leadership within Wounded Knee was becoming more and more willing to compromise. Dennis Banks claimed, that “At Wounded Knee we were starving. Shelves were bare. We had run out of food. The Feds had tightened the noose around us. It became harder and harder for our backpackers to get the needed supplies to us. We were always hungry now.”<sup>149</sup> The combination of lack of supplies and loss of support contributed to the serious talks between the occupiers and the federal government. Late in the day on May 6, an agreement was reached to end the occupation. It was decided that on May 9, beginning at 7:00 a.m. both the federal government and the occupants would stand down. An *Akwesasne Notes* reporter claimed, “The [Wounded Knee] community envisioned a stand-down, rather than a surrender, in which both sides were to pull back from their bunkers and lay down their weapons.”<sup>150</sup> Many of the occupants signed the agreement, including Leonard Crow Dog and Frank Fools Crow, the traditional Lakota leaders, and others within AIM’s leadership. It was noted that Dennis Banks and Carter Camp refused to sign the agreement. It was reported in the

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<sup>148</sup> “AIM Offered Treaty Talks,” *Washington Post*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post (1877-1994), (Washington D.C.), May 5, 1973, pg B2.

<sup>149</sup> Banks, 196

<sup>150</sup> *Akwesasne Notes*, 234

*Los Angeles Times* that AIM attorney Ramon Roubideaux said “Dennis Banks and Carter Camp, did not sign the agreement. However, Banks said he would ‘submit to arms lay down’.”<sup>151</sup>

The agreement included many concessions on both sides of the DMZ. The American Indians were required to lay down their arms and surrender the village. The Justice Department told the *Los Angeles Times* that personnel from the Community Relations Service, a branch of the Justice Department, would “divide Wounded Knee occupants into three groups. Those against whom arrest warrants are outstanding will be taken to nearby Rapid City for legal proceedings, permanent residents will be allowed to return to their homes and all other persons will arrange for transportation from the reservation.”<sup>152</sup> Occupants that did not agree with these concessions attempted to leave the village on foot, and shortly after negotiations concluded Dennis Banks slipped out of Wounded Knee. Most of the American Indians did not agree with the laying down of their arms, and believed they must smuggle their weapons out of the village. Richard Hellstern told the *Chicago Tribune*, “It was clear that the intention was that the warrior types with warrants outstanding would attempt to infiltrate the perimeter and leave. However, the government anticipated this after the agreement was announced yesterday and reinforced its positions.”<sup>153</sup>

On the morning of May 9, the government planned to remove all armored personnel carriers (APCs) from the area, and stand down simultaneously as the occupants of Wounded Knee. Stanley Lyman said, “The government, for its part, made three concessions: first, all

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<sup>151</sup> “Indian Militants Agree to Quit Wounded Knee,” *Los Angeles Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times (1881-1987), (Los Angeles, CA), May 7, 1973, pg A4.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid

<sup>153</sup> “Wounded Knee Indians to lay down arms today,” *Chicago Tribune*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Chicago Tribune (1849-1988), (Chicago, IL), May 8, 1973, pg 5.

armored personnel carriers will be withdrawn prior to the laying down of arms; second, one of the chiefs or headmen will be allowed to sit in each bunker occupied by the FBI and the marshals; third, weapons of a 'noncombatant nature' may be claimed by the owners and may be returned to them after twenty-four hours."<sup>154</sup> After the village was clear of occupying forces, the government would send troops in to sweep the area clean of all weaponry, and begin the rebuilding process.

The stand-down was set for May 9, at 7:00 a.m., but the leadership of the occupation believed that waiting until May 9 was essentially delaying the inevitable. They requested to move the dispossession of Wounded Knee 24-hours ahead to May 8, at 7:00 a.m. The remaining leaders of the Independent Oglala Nation were Carter Camp and Leonard Crow Dog, who submitted to arrest on the night of May 7. They were released on bond; Camp's was set at \$70,000, and Crow Dog at \$35,000. Thirteen sympathizers were arrested as they tried to slip past the federal road blocks, and two more buildings burned down within the village the night before the stand-down. On the morning of May 8, it was reported in the *Akwesasne Notes* that the remaining members of the occupation force sat down to a large breakfast, eating the food in the emergency food supply, and then they gathered outside around a drum to sing. Wallace Black Elk spoke,

We have come to understanding, all of us, white, black, yellow, and us red people. I thank the powers of the four winds, and to the Grandfather, Great Spirit, and I thank the sacred Mother Earth, Grandmother. Thank you. I ask you and bless all people here, from the powers of the four winds, and Grandfather, we thank you this day that we are alive. Grandmother we thank you for keeping us alive. Grandmother we stand here on your lap and once again you cradle us in your arms, and feed us, and

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<sup>154</sup> Lyman, 131

comfort us, and heal us and forgive us. *Metakuyeayasi* – all my relations.<sup>155</sup>

After 71 days the occupation of the historic village of Wounded Knee was finally over. It was reported by the occupants that only twenty-three residents, fifteen non-residents, and two insurgents remained in the village. The numbers stated were much depleted from the over three hundred reported in early April. By the end of the day on May 8, around one hundred twenty-nine individuals had been processed by the U.S. forces and only fifteen had been arrested.

Before escaping from the village Dennis Banks claimed, “We have accomplished what we came here to do, so now we will quit.”<sup>156</sup> After numerous injuries and two deaths the occupation of Wounded Knee was finally over. The U.S. Marshals entered Wounded Knee on foot at 9:50 a.m. to secure the village, and were followed by a team of FBI agents about a half hour later. Many of the leaders of the federal forces entered after the village was deemed safe. Upon arrival Stanly Lyman said, “The disorder, the destruction, the wanton disregard for personal property were appalling. Everywhere were the dirt and debris of weeks of unkempt living: broken and scatter possessions, remains of food, spent cartridges, and abandoned weapons, discarded clothing, garbage. Graffiti, signs, and pictures covered the inner walls of buildings – churches and private homes alike.”<sup>157</sup> It was estimated by Lyman that the cost of repairs to the village would be around \$500,000, and it would take several weeks if not months before repairs could be finalized.

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<sup>155</sup> *Akwesasne Notes*, 240

<sup>156</sup> Lyman, 133

<sup>157</sup> Lyman, 138

## Policy Changes

Once the occupation had ended, the next few steps included dealing with the political and legal ramifications of the Wounded Knee incident. There also had to be an assessment on the effectiveness of the government's policies during the occupation. Historian Rolland Dewing said,

Most certainly it was not the best the government could do. Nor was it the worst, considering recent events such as Watergate, Attica, Chicago, and Kent State. Although two were killed and one was severely wounded at Wounded Knee, the toll could have been disastrously more considering the circumstances. If the April settlement had been culminated when anticipated, in fact, no one would have perished.<sup>158</sup>

A set of meetings was arranged by emissaries from the President of the United States to take place on the Pine Ridge Reservation for May 17, 18, and 19, to discuss treaty issues. Senator James Abourezk organized a formal senate hearing for June 16, 1973, to take place in Pine Ridge, South Dakota, and also on June 17, 1973, to take place in Kyle, South Dakota. He also employed Touche, Ross, and Company, an accounting firm, to investigate the Wilson administration's policies, procedures, and transactions. The firm concluded that "the Tribal government is not functioning efficiently or effectively. This situation has not been caused by a particular person or administration but is the result of many factors which have been influencing government operations for many years."<sup>159</sup> Preliminary hearings were set to deal with the legal issues of the occupation and to arraign those arrested who had outstanding warrants. An

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<sup>158</sup> Dewing, 257

<sup>159</sup> Occupation of Wounded Knee: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Indian Affairs of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, United States Senate, Ninety-third Congress, First Session on "The causes and aftermath of the Wounded Knee Takeover," June 16, 1973, Pine Ridge, South Dakota, June 17, Kyle, South Dakota. Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974, 401.

investigation was also launched to examine accusations of Civil Rights violations against American Indians.

The May 17-19 appointments with the president's emissaries were to take place at the home of Frank Fools Crow. The White House sent Bradley Patterson, the executive assistant to Leonard Garment. Upon their arrival, Fools Crow immediately intercepted Patterson and asked him for a direct answer on if they would be able to discuss treaty issues and particularly the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty. Patterson explained that the President did not have the power to negotiate treaty rights with the tribes because of the Indian Appropriations Act that was passed on March 3, 1871. The act transferred the power of treaty-making from the president to congress, an action of removing tribal sovereignty. The law stated, "No Indian nation or tribe within the territory of the United States shall be acknowledged or recognized as an independent nation, tribe, or power with whom the United States may contract by treaty."<sup>160</sup> Removing the right to negotiate with the president and placing that right upon congress essentially denied American Indian tribes sovereignty by making them wards of the nation and denying them the right to negotiate nation-to-nation. Even though Patterson told Fools Crow that he could not directly assist them with treaty rights, he insisted that they move forward with an open dialogue about the numerous concerns of the Lakota people.

Following the June 16-17 hearings in South Dakota, Senator Abourezk proposed legislation titled Senate Joint Resolution 133 that would create an American Indian Policy Review Commission. The commission would be attached to congress and consist of three

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<sup>160</sup> *Indian Appropriations Act 1871, U.S. Code Title 25: Indian Tribes, 25 U.S.C. Section 71, Future Treaties with Indian Tribes*, Online by the University of Louisiana-Lafayette, (Accessed March 8, 2012), <http://www.ucla.edu/~ras2777/indianlaw/appropriations.htm>.



Senators, three members from the House of Representatives, five members of American Indian tribes, and thirty-three task force members. They would be charged with investigating the historical and legal developments in the relationship between American Indians and the United States government, with the purpose of formulating a better national Indian policy. It was reported to the *Washington Post* that Senator Abourezk wanted “to introduce legislation in Congress which he hopes will improve the system of government. He wants an independent tribal court with trained judges. Individuals would have the right to appeal decisions to a higher court completely removed from the reservation.”<sup>161</sup> Resolution 133 was eventually approved as Public Law 93-580 on January 2, 1975. The members of the commission would not have to report their findings until August, 1976, which allowed time to conduct a thorough investigation.

Trouble continued to abound upon the Pine Ridge Reservation after the occupation of Wounded Knee. Historian Akim Reinhardt claimed, “When the siege of Wounded Knee finally ended on May 8, 1973, it was not a victory for the besieged. More than 200 people were arrested, and the tribal council system was still in place. The remainder of Wilson’s tenure on Pine Ridge, which did not end until 1976, was nothing short of civil war.”<sup>162</sup> Wilson and the BIA were accused of implementing a “reign of terror” upon the residents of the reservation, and particularly those that had supported AIM. Wilson won his re-election in 1974 by defeating AIM leader Russell Means. Means had won the presidential primary over a dozen other candidates.<sup>163</sup> Many blamed the constant violence on the presence of AIM and their actions at Wounded Knee. Journalist Grace Lichtenstein of the *New York Times* said, “On a per-capita

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<sup>161</sup> Jim Parsons, “Wounded Knee Revisited: Same Old Sioux Problems,” ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post (1877-1994), (Washington D.C.), July 8, 1973, pg D2.

<sup>162</sup> Reinhardt, 204

<sup>163</sup> Reinhardt, 207

basis, the Pine Ridge homicide rate is six times greater than that of the city of Chicago, the assault rate four times greater. Residents are afraid to leave their houses, even in daylight.”<sup>164</sup>

The 1974 election was clouded by corruption, which was acknowledged by the United States government. Russell Means challenged the election results in court, but he ultimately failed to reverse the U.S. decision to recognize the original election results and maintain Richard Wilson as the elected tribal president. It was reported in the *New York Times* that the Pine Ridge Reservation was “a cauldron of violence, intimidation, and alleged economic corruption and virulent political animosity between Russell C. Means, a leader of the 1973 take-over, and Richard Wilson, the tribal council president – a power struggle that has erupted into gunfire at times.”<sup>165</sup> The violence did not fully subside until Richard Wilson failed to secure a third term in 1976. He lost to a more moderate individual, Al Trimble, who garnered much of his support from full-bloods. Trimble was able to attract former supporters of AIM because much of Pine Ridge associated AIM with the negative violent actions on the reservation during the Wilson years.

Bob Dylan released the album *The Times They Are a-Changin’* on January 13, 1964. The title song epitomized the 1960s and 1970s in the United States, as cultural and social norms drastically transformed. Civil Rights issues dominated the 1960s and minority groups such as American Indians gained much ground. Even with the positive legislation passed, the American Indian population continued to suffer extreme poverty and racism, and many United States officials recognized this issue. In 1968, congress passed the Indian Civil Rights Act, the same

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<sup>164</sup> Grace Lichtenstein, “Legacy of Wounded Knee: Hatred, Violence, and Fear,” *New York Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *New York Times* (1851-2007), (New York, NY), April 22, 1975, pg 1.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid*

year that AIM was formulated. Richard Nixon expressed his dedication to the plight of American Indians in 1970, and in 1972 the Indian Education Act was passed giving American Indians access to the same education as other white Americans receive. This decade also witnessed the passage of the Indian Self Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 and the American Indian Religious Freedom Act in 1978.

American Indian activism that peaked in 1973 at the occupation of Wounded Knee, South Dakota, has been cited by some historians as the cause of these policy changes. Other historians cite the changing political direction of the nation. There is much evidence that these policy changes were started before the activism of organizations such as AIM and that they would have continued without AIM's involvement. Russell Means claimed, "the 71-day occupation had accomplished one major victory: it gave the Sioux a new feeling of pride. 'The children are growing their hair long, wearing sacred eagle feathers. I count that an immeasurable plus. First, one has to have self-pride, then you have to have political change and then follows economic change'."<sup>166</sup> Because of the militaristic actions, positive legislation had been passed and that attempts to remedy the decades of suppression. Bob Dylan best summed up the political activism of the time by stating, "Come senators, congressmen, please heed the call. Don't stand in the doorway. Don't block up the hall. For he that gets hurt, will be he who has stalled. There's a battle outside and it is ragin, it'll soon shake your windows and rattle your walls. For the times they are a-changin'."<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid

<sup>167</sup> "The Times They are a-Changin'," Bobdylan.com, Copyright 1963 by Warner Brothers Inc., (Accessed March 8, 2012), <http://www.bobdylan.com/songs/the-times-they-are-a-changin>.

The site of Wounded Knee, South Dakota has undergone a drastic transformation since the seventy-one day occupation. There are no armored personnel carriers surrounding the village, U.S. Marshals and FBI agents standing guard, or dug-in bunkers protecting the few buildings inside the village. The iconic Sacred Heart Catholic Church was removed after it burned down, and many of the other buildings have been eliminated. Dennis Banks claimed,

Today nothing is left of the buildings inside the perimeter of the 1973 siege at Wounded Knee. The government did not want reminders that Indians once made their stand here, that they fought and died for what they believed in. But it does them no good. What happened there is not forgotten. Wounded Knee was the greatest event in the history of Native America in the twentieth century. It was our shining hour, and I am proud to have been a part of it.<sup>168</sup>

Many positive governmental policy changes followed the occupation of Wounded Knee, but was the violence necessary to evoke these changes? Stanley Lyman said, "In Wounded Knee, this tribe, this reservation, has gone a long way down the road of discord, and lines have been drawn and hates stated. . . I hope that we can now move into the future and somehow build on this experience. As we build with boards and bricks and stones, we can also build with human lives. That is what we must do now, more than ever."<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Banks, 209

<sup>169</sup> Lyman, 145

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

*As you look at the poverty in Pine Ridge, as you become aware of the prejudice which abounds in this area and the lack of improvements here over the last twenty years, you initially have the reaction that Wounded Knee has been the result, the culmination, of legitimate complaints – which may be true. On further reflection, however, you wonder why some Indians are successful and others are not. Why have some tribes succeeded educationally and economically while others have not? Is it just the personal problems that some Indians have which prevent them from meeting or coping with the challenges of day-to-day life? These are enormous questions and complex ones to which there can be no quick answers, not even from something as drastic as what we have seen at Wounded Knee.*

- Martin Lyman, son of Stanly Lyman<sup>170</sup>

The occupation of the village of Wounded, South Dakota in 1973 was the culminating event of the militaristic actions of the American Indian Movement. Once the event was finalized AIM began to witness a dramatic decline in support. A number of the leaders were caught in legal battles that carried on for several years and internal bickering about the direction of the organization caused the remaining leaders to go their separate ways. The American Indian Movement would never be as strong as it was in the early months of 1973. From its inception in 1968 through the events of 1973, its actions caused much controversy among American Indian people across the nation. Some historians argue that the historical relationship between the United States government and the American Indians during the 20<sup>th</sup> century underwent a dramatic shift after the passage of the Indian Reorganization Act in 1934, which allowed tribes to formulate their own constitutional government.<sup>171</sup> Tribal government systems served as a medium for dissent among the citizenry, and the subsequent distrust between full-blooded

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<sup>170</sup> Lyman, 164

<sup>171</sup> Reinhardt, 209

Indians and half-bloods. It certainly led to the distrust and eventual hatred of Richard Wilson by some of the Lakota on the Pine Ridge Reservation. The tribal dissention and the political activism of the era eventually led to the request of the full-blooded Lakota to have AIM stage a demonstration upon the reservation.

Historian Akim Reinhardt argues that the culminating events at Wounded Knee were attributed to both the formulation of the tribal council system in the 1930s and 1940s and the turbulent social climate of the 1960s and 1970s. He claimed that “the two events themselves may be viewed as bookends to the mid-twentieth century efforts of Pine Ridge Lakotas to resist the colonial authority of the United States as it was manifested through the tribal council system.”<sup>172</sup> He points out that many reservation governments relied heavily on white authority through the governance of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Dissention followed as many full-blooded citizens distrusted the entire system, claiming that Indians were submitting to this authority as recognition of white supremacy. They also feared mix-blood domination that could occur through the general election of council members, and this fear boiled over in the early 1970s on the Pine Ridge reservation with the election of Richard Wilson as the tribal chairman. Reinhardt concluded that “with reservation constituencies polarizing at almost exactly the same time that national constituencies were polarizing, the coalitions as they developed on Pine Ridge in the early 1970s seem predictable in hindsight. The culmination was the failed attempt to impeach Wilson, which directly led to the occupation and siege of Wounded Knee.”<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid

<sup>173</sup> Reinhardt, 211

As AIM evolved from its inception, it faced many challenges in establishing an identity. Russell Means and Dennis Banks strove to spread the ideology of “Pan-Indianism,” but failed as inter-tribal distrust sabotaged their mission. The occupation of Wounded Knee was designed as a large unifying event and the beginning of a prolonged battle for the rights of American Indian people. When asked about AIM, Irma Rooks, from the reservation community of the Wanblee, said, “I think what the American Indian Movement are doing is really beautiful because for a change somebody is really fighting for the people. They’re going to try and make the government live up to its promises and I think that’s really neat.”<sup>174</sup> Wounded Knee was, in actuality, the last dramatic performance of the American Indian Movement, and marked the “straw that broke the camel’s back” of the organization. As quickly as American Indian activism found itself on the front pages of the large newsprint media it had diminished, and once again American Indians found themselves outside mainstream media attention. Historian John Sayer claimed, “One could argue that by the end of 1975, when the trials related to Wounded Knee had ended, no politically left mass movements were still having an impact on a national scale.”<sup>175</sup>

Some historians argue that AIM’s largest issue with the occupation of Wounded Knee was that it stayed too long on the reservation and spent too much money attempting to remain in the headlines of the daily news. It was reported in the *Los Angeles Times* that “a Harris poll conducted during the third week of March found that 51% of those interviewed sympathized with the Indians at Wounded Knee, while only 28% sympathized with the federal government’s

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<sup>174</sup> Akwesasne Note, 183

<sup>175</sup> John William Sayer, *Ghost Dancing the Law: The Wounded Knee Trials* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 12.

position.”<sup>176</sup> They had the initial support of the American people, but as the ordeal dragged into April and early May the American people began to grow tired of the occupation that was taking place in South Dakota. Even the news media grew weary of the event and began to favor the American government’s point-of-view. This turn by the media led to further the demise in support for the occupants. At various points in the occupation, when the media was locked out of negotiations or denied entry to the occupied village, the government point-of-view dominated the media. This domination allowed the governments’ positions to become more widely accepted. That is why the media blackouts did not last long; AIM’s leadership realized they could not get their position across without the assistance of the media. Vine Deloria Jr. stated, “The first couple of weeks it was very beneficial, but one of AIM’s chief problems is they come and stay too long; and they wind up spending all their time negotiating amnesty.”<sup>177</sup> As AIM began to unravel, it became apparent that it did not represent the entire American Indian population.

One of the greatest tests of the organization came two months after the occupation when it held a national convention in Oklahoma, which was the epicenter of American Indian population. The event was poorly organized and meagerly attended, signifying that it did not represent the American Indian population as a whole. AIM began to rapidly implode as dissention struck its leadership. In August 1973, after an argument among the leaders, Carter Camp shot Clyde Bellecourt, causing a huge split in the entire organization. The final nail in the coffin came as the Department of Justice launched a large scale legal assault against the

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<sup>176</sup> Bryce Nelson, “Wounded Knee: the Months only deepen division,” *Los Angeles Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times (1881-1987), (Los Angeles, CA), May 5, 1973, pg 1.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid



movement's leaders, followers, and supporters. It was reported that the final tally of individuals arrested by the federal government in connection with the occupation was 562 people. The government's strategy was to bring to trial every individual even if it did not win the case. It argued that it could immobilize AIM by tying up supporters in court, and the astronomical amount of finances and effort exerted to defend each individual would cripple the organization. Historian Steve Hendricks claimed, "It was not a new strategy. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover had used the same plan in the late 1960s to kneecap the Black Panthers."<sup>178</sup>

AIM would witness a few more moments of fame in the early months of 1974 when Dennis Banks and Russell Means were put on trial for nearly ten months. The federal prosecutors chose to try them together, and separate from the other leaders of the organization. The trial took place in Saint Paul, Minnesota, and captivated the residents of the Twin Cities during the entire proceedings. Banks and Means were able to turn the courtroom into a show, as they turned their own case into a trial against the United States government. They called in witnesses who could speak to the harsh conditions on the Pine Ridge reservation and introduced evidence that supported their claims. Russell Means claimed, "Dennis and I jumped up to object or protest at every opportunity. Usually those interruptions came at the wrong time, legally speaking, but it was a guerrilla theater. We were trying to raise issues that the formal legal system wouldn't allow."<sup>179</sup> The judge eventually dismissed the federal charges based on the evidence of the government's misconduct and failure to address the issues on the reservation. He also cited the fact that the U.S. Attorneys could not refute certain contradictory

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<sup>178</sup> Steve Hendricks, *The Unquiet Grave: The FBI and the Struggle for the Soul of Indian Country* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2006), 141.

<sup>179</sup> Russell Means, *Where White Men Fear to Tread: The Autobiography of Russell Means* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 311.

evidence presented by the defense. Even though the Wounded Knee Legal Defense/Offense Committee lawyers won over ninety percent of the cases, the United States government ultimately won. After months of battling the government in court the American Indian Movement was bankrupt.

American Indians around the country agreed that the American Indian Movement played a tremendous role in the 1970s and had an impact upon Indian communities. They could not agree upon the nature of the impact. Angela Butterfield, a veteran council member of the Shoshone-Banock tribe in Idaho told the *Los Angeles Times*, "The people at Wounded Knee are doing a great disservice to some of the tribes, and the federal government just sits there and lets them make fools of the whole country. How can they let them do it? I believe in law and order and the Constitution, and I don't give a damn what they call me . . . Wounded Knee has brought about a lot of hostility toward Indians in our area."<sup>180</sup> Ada Deer, a leader of the Menomine tribe in Wisconsin said, "Violence doesn't appeal to me, but it's the only way you can get people to do something . . . Indians identify with the forthright way they took over Wounded Knee; it has captured the imagination of the Indian people."<sup>181</sup>

Even American government officials differed in their opinion regarding the impact of the occupation. Representative James A. Haley of Florida said, "I've done as much for the Indians as any man in history. I don't know about AIM, but I know these people at Wounded Knee are wrong. They are violating laws, taking the trading post, burning down houses. I just hope it

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<sup>180</sup> Bryce Nelson, "Wounded Knee: the Months only deepen division," *Los Angeles Times*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Los Angeles Times (1881-1987), (Los Angeles, CA), May 5, 1973, pg 1.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid

doesn't make it more difficult for the Indian."<sup>182</sup> Representative Lloyd Meeds of Washington said, "I don't have any time or tolerance for violence, but so many times when you have violence, it focuses attention on Indian problems. The more attention that's focused on these problems, the better it's going to be for the Indians."<sup>183</sup>

Some historians argue that the Indian activism of the 1970s contributed to the increase in American Indian community pride. Much like the feminist movement and the early Civil Rights movement of the era, the element of pride arose both in the community and impacted academia. During this era many higher educational institutions began expanding course offerings that focused upon gender and ethnic studies. There was also a marked rise in the American Indian educational community that focused curriculum upon ethnic pride and away from the traditional western influenced curriculum. Jim Parsons, journalist for the *Washington Post* claimed, "AIM has raised the possibility that the essence of traditional life can be recaptured. It is a popular idea, especially with the young whites who came to Wounded Knee and have stayed to help AIM."<sup>184</sup> Even Dennis Banks and Russell Means claimed their biggest victory with the occupation came when the younger generations were excited to learn about the traditional Indian way of life.

There were some American Indian communities around the United States that immediately flooded their support to the American Indian Movement, and the subsequent occupation of Wounded Knee. They viewed the movement as positive because it applied

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid

<sup>183</sup> Ibid

<sup>184</sup> Jim Parsons, "Wounded Knee Revisited: Same Old Sioux Problems," *Washington Post*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post (1877-1994), (Washington D.C.), July 8, 1973, pg D2.

pressure upon the United States government to address the negative relationship between American Indians and the government. There was a sense of excitement to see Indian people challenging the United States government, even if their actions were militant. The militancy was seen as an act of rebellion, and a resurrection of the old Indian Wars of the nineteenth century. During the early days of the occupation of Wounded Knee news reports covered the front pages, which helped to fuel the support from Indians who were not near the action. Once that news coverage began to dwindle, so did the support from American Indians who were not directly involved with the episode. Historians Robert Burnette and John Koster claimed,

As the siege wore on, press coverage became less hysterical and more cynical. Many Indians not on the scene became less enthusiastic. The lack of any immediate results were probably another major factor. . . Part of this slump was undoubtedly a psychological letdown. Many Indian people, inured to a lifetime of police brutality and raised on a history of genocide, literally expected the activists at Wounded Knee to be wiped out to the last man by the FBI and marshals.<sup>185</sup>

Hope for immediate results from the occupation was another major disappointment to outside support, and decreasing press coverage discouraged many of the supporters of the movement.

The occupation of Wounded Knee will always be seen as an American Indian rebellion, where a group of Indians on the Great Plains were able to turn an impoverished reservation village into an independent nation for a short period of time. Historians Paul C. Smith and Robert A. Warrior claimed, “The Indian movement was an edgy, unpredictable creature that challenged American power in a way not equaled this century before or since. In the decades

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<sup>185</sup>Burnette and Koster, 256

that followed, activists have tried and failed to re-create its passions and drama.”<sup>186</sup> The idealism of Indian activism foresaw a “Pan-Indian” culture that could create a university out of an abandoned prison or turn a federal bureaucratic building into a Native American Embassy. For five years AIM challenged the social norms of America in an attempt to gain unity and recognition of failed promises from the United States government. Smith and Warrior said, “Cultural revival swept Indian communities, but it was also criticized by some as diluting tribal differences into a generic, pan-Indian culture almost as harmful as assimilation.”<sup>187</sup>

Some historians argue that the reason the ideology of “Pan-Indian” culture did not take root was because of deep seated inter-tribal hatred and distrust. Stanley Lyman claimed that “Wounded Knee is now a symbol of hate, frustration, and failure.”<sup>188</sup> Immediately following the occupation, the Pine Ridge reservation underwent a civil war that witnessed the murder of numerous residents, which caused the reservation to be labeled as one of the most dangerous locations within the United States in the mid-1970s. Old tribal hatreds and mistrust sprung forward after the events of Wounded Knee that caused the battle between full-bloods and half-bloods to continue. Hatred was focused again upon the presidency of Richard Wilson, because some of the residents of Pine Ridge continued to believe that his administration was antagonistic towards full-blooded residents. Historian Akim Reinhardt claimed that the several factors that plagued Wilson’s regime were, “his dictatorial style [that] was divisive, and his autocratic tendencies alienated and upset full bloods and certain members of his own tribal

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<sup>186</sup> Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* (New York, The New Press, 1996), 279

<sup>187</sup> Ibid

<sup>188</sup> Lyman, 164

council.”<sup>189</sup> In the past, American Indians were more apt to trust the white government rather than support an opposing tribe or even a mix-blooded tribal council. This same historical sentiment continued to play a role in 1970s tribal politics.

Historians have been attempting to evaluate the events of Wounded Knee, South Dakota ever since the occupation concluded. There was an explosion of hatred towards failed Indian policies at the beginning of the 1970s and against an organization that was willing to lead a group of Indians onto a reservation and occupy a village for seventy-one days. This occupation attracted much controversy and support from both the American Indian communities and the entire United States population. It failed to accomplish the goals set forth by AIM prior to the event. AIM demanded the removal of Chairman Richard Wilson and BIA Superintendent Stanley Lyman. It continued to fight for tribal sovereignty and the reinstatement of treaty rights, and it also wanted the BIA abolished. On every goal AIM was unsuccessful, but it was able to generate a sense of pride in traditional Indian culture and society. Author Bill Zimmerman said the occupation of Wounded Knee “reawakened a cultural heritage and spirit of resistance that are [the] cutting edge of a movement to change the lives of hundreds of thousands of Indian people. The occupation taught non-Indians more about the real-life problems of their Indian neighbors than any other single event in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>190</sup> It was also able to generate pressure upon the United States government to continue to seriously address the issues that faced the American Indian population.

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<sup>189</sup> Reinhardt, 211

<sup>190</sup> Bill Zimmerman, *Airlift to Wounded Knee* (Chicago: The Swallow Press Inc., 1976), 338.

The American Indian Movement and the subsequent occupation of Wounded Knee was not supported by the majority of the American Indian population, and it encountered much hatred and distrust from reservation Indians.<sup>191</sup> For some, AIM's actions were militaristic and garnered the label of a revolutionary organization that seemed to care more about the theatrics of its demonstrations than the outcome. Historian Rolland Dewing concluded, "Considering the bleak employment situation at the Pine Ridge Reservation plus the cost in lives, property, and social disruption, it would seem that at this stage in time the second encounter at Wounded Knee served the interests and concerns of outside Indians . . . better than it did those of the Oglalas."<sup>192</sup> The American Indian Movement was able to apply pressure upon the United States government to launch investigations into reservation life and attempt to change a community that President Richard Nixon deemed the "most deprived and most isolated minority group in our nation."<sup>193</sup>

It is important to consider the role of the Wounded Knee action in the demise of AIM? It is safe to conclude that the occupation of Wounded Knee did contribute to the demise of AIM, as it was not only economically damaging for the organization to occupy the village for as long as they did but it also was the causation behind the loss of support. During the final weeks of the occupation the media blackouts proved to be more detrimental to the occupants rather than a positive. The government's position was the only view the media had access to which subsequently was the only view they broadcasted. The data also demonstrates that after the occupation concluded the organization was bombarded by lawsuits by the Justice Department.

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<sup>191</sup> Reinhardt, 207

<sup>192</sup> Dewing, 359

<sup>193</sup> Richard Nixon, "Special Message on Indian Affairs," July 8, 1970, Online by American Indian Environmental Office Tribal Portal, (Accessed January 12, 2012), <http://www.epa.gov/tp/pdf/president-nixon70.pdf>.

The time spent in court and the subsequent fees that followed crippled the organization. AIM also faced much dissent and distrust amongst its leadership throughout the aftermath of the episode that caused further fracturing of the organization. After the occupation of Wounded Knee the American Indian Movement would never coordinate another substantial demonstration.

Times were ripe for an American Indian Civil Rights Movement, but even with the actions of a militant organization, the American Indian population was already gaining many positives. Legislation had already been passed in the late 1960s that paved the way for the legislation and investigations of the 1970s. The two major contributions of the American Indian Movement were a sense of ethnic pride for some American Indian communities and expediting some of the legislative actions of the United States government. AIM brought much destruction when it demonstrated; two individuals lost their lives, and millions of dollars had to be spent to repair the damages incurred. If one weighs the balance, AIM did bring awareness to the issues of the American Indian population, but was the cost for that awareness really necessary?



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