



AIM for the Knee

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TUMUN VII





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Letter from the Crisis Director

Dear Delegates,

I am Violet Johnson, and as your Crisis Director for the seventh iteration of TUMUN, I am extremely thrilled to welcome you all to my committee, AIM For The Knee: Wounded Knee Occupation of 1973. Although this is my first time being a Crisis Director, this is my third year involved in TUMUN, first as USG of Logistics and then as Secretary General. I am a Junior at Tufts, majoring in International Relations and Russian & Eastern European Studies. I am ecstatic to conduct this committee and I can't wait to see you all at Tufts in March.

For those new to the topic, the American Indian Movement (AIM) was founded in 1968 in Minnesota to combat the discrimination and poor federal policy that Native Americans were facing at the time. This organization was behind the seizing of various landmarks and government buildings, such as the Mayflower replica, Mount Rushmore, and the US Government's Department of Interior, including the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). This all culminates in the occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973. Wrought with historical implications, this town was controlled by AIM activists for a total of 71 days. Acting as the main activists involved in the conflict, you will attempt to achieve your political (and personal) goals while also navigating the tense atmosphere of surviving in a federal law-enforcement surrounded siege.

We will begin in late March. Acknowledging that this is a historical committee, I hope that you all still engage with your creative sides and see that we do not stick with the original script of the event. However, please attempt to stay within the boundaries of the committee and the viewpoints of your character.

Please email me with any questions you have, related to committee or MUN itself. This is my seventh year of Model UN and I hope to be able to pass some of my own experience on. I can't wait to meet you all!

Best,

Violet Johnson

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Note on Sensitivity

I expect all delegates to conduct themselves with diplomacy and collaboration with each other and the outside world in this committee. While this committee deals with tense situations and issues relating to death, structural racism, violence, and other sensitive topics, I expect you to grapple with these issues with maturity and decorum. Indigenous issues are not ones frequently brought to light, and I will not tolerate poor handling of characters or relations. There is a zero-tolerance policy for engaging in behavior or language that perpetuates harmful legacies. If you feel you witness this behavior, please bring it to the attention of the Crisis Director, the Chair, the Staff, or the Secretariat. I want everyone to feel comfortable engaging with this issue and have an overall positive experience in the committee room. We can only do this if we behave with the maturity and sensitivity that this topic requires of us. We must also do work to hold each other accountable to these standards.



General Background

The history of Native American relations with the United States Government is extremely fraught. The 19th century was marked by westward expansion and the annihilation of many western tribes. The invasion and spread of colonists caused tensions to rise tenfold in the midwestern and western parts of the United States. Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act of 1830, leading to a decade of forced relocation where Native Americans were removed from their homelands and placed in reservations. This act further led to the Trail of Tears. At the end of



Figure 1 Depiction of Trail of Tears.
<https://weareili.org/timeline/indian-removal-act-1830/>

the 19th century, the US Army massacred around 300 Lakota people in the Wounded Knee Massacre.

By the beginning of the 20th century, there were few to no Native Americans who had never experienced

contact with European culture. Native Americans did not become US citizens until June 2, 1924, with the signing of the Indian Citizenship Act. Around the midpoint of the 20th century, the new turn for Native Americans was to encourage relocation into urban areas through the Indian Relocation Act of 1956 and Indian termination policy.

Background on AIM

The American Indian Movement is one of the defining activist movements of the late 20th century. Founded in 1968, the original focuses of the group were on urban issues, including systemic racism, poverty, and police brutality against Native Americans. This cause came from the experience of the founders after the Indian Relocation Act of 1956. This act encouraged the movement of Native Americans from reservations to cities, in the name of providing better opportunities and more money. Around seventy percent of Native Americans left the reservation in favor of moving to urban areas. However, after moving, they often felt alienated from tradition and their culture.



Although originally focusing on urban issues, the movement grew to encompass issues such as treaty rights, preserving culture, and education. From the end of 1969 to mid-1971, AIM aided in the 19-month occupation of Alcatraz,



Figure 2 Entrance of Alcatraz Occupation
<https://static01.nyt.com/images/2012/12/25/us/ALCATRAZ-2/ALCATRAZ-2-jumbo.jpg?quality=75&auto=webp&disable=upscale>

which ended in a brief change in Indian Termination policies. The other names involved in organizing that event were Indians of All Tribes (IOAT) and Richard Oakes.

History of Wounded Knee

The location of this occupation was specific, as many of AIM's previous sieges were. Wounded Knee was the site of the last massacre of the Indian Wars. During the Wounded Knee Massacre, around three hundred Lakota people were massacred by the US Army. Two-thirds of the death count was made

up of civilians, mainly women and children. At the time, the Ghost Dance movement was gaining traction. Many tribes were performing the Ghost Dance in hopes of a prophecy that the white man would leave their lands and the buffalo would return. The US settlers around them grew frightened and fearful that the dance meant war was coming and this eventually led to the massacre. Wounded Knee is a town in the Pine



Figure 3 Lakota people being placed in a mass grave.
<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a9/Woundedknee1891.jpg>

Ridge Indian Reservation, an Oglala Lakota reservation almost entirely in South Dakota. Fraught with cultural devastation, this reservation is known to be one of the poorest areas of the United States, with some of the highest rates of mortality, depression, diabetes, and alcoholism. The history of this area is critical because it sets the scene for why



the occupation took place here and how important change is for its people.

Occupation Reasons

Although it is important to note that the demands of the activists grew and changed throughout the occupation, the three main reasons for the initial occupation were the corruption in Oglala tribal leadership, the desire for better treatment by the government in federal and judicial proceedings in border towns, and the rising frequency of the US Government breaking treaties.

Corrupt Tribal Leadership

The setting of the Pine Ridge Reservation was already overwrought with problems and poverty. Dick Wilson was elected in 1972, yet quickly considered corrupt and too controlling. Specifically, there were many accusations of him favoring his family and friends when considering jobs and benefits. Wilson also sold grazing rights to white ranchers at what some tribal members considered too low of a rate. Finally, violence was also on the rise on the reservation, which was frequently attributed to the Guardians of the Oglala

Nations (GOONs), Wilson's private militia.

There were those that rebelled against him, called "traditionalists," for they often were Oglala that held true to original tradition and custom. The Oglala Sioux Civil Rights Organization (OSCR) attempted to garner support for his impeachment, however, after failing, OSCRO went to AIM for support. Specifically, they kept strong ties with Russell Means.

It is useful to note that political crises were common on Pine Ridge and only one chairman has been reelected in the three decades prior to 1973. Even then, the reelected individual was impeached twice. Jobs within tribal governments were virtually the only ones around, thus the stakes were high.

Civil Rights Issues

In border towns across America, there are incidents of violence between Native and non-Native people. At the time, alcohol was banned on the Pine Ridge Reservation, and Native American men would go to the border towns for the bar. If a crime was committed by a white man against Lakota men, it was rarely prosecuted by local police.



In the January prior to the occupation, Wesley Bad Heart Bull, at only 20 years old, was murdered in a border town, Buffalo Gap. Tribal members believed his murder had to do with race. AIM led 200 supporters to a courthouse meeting in early February, yet were met with riot police and the demand to only let in five activists to the courthouse, during a blizzard. This event grew to be violent, leading to destruction of the courthouse and the surrounding area. The previous movements, the 1969-1971 Occupation of Alcatraz and the 1972 Trail of Broken Treaties, had similar motivations and wants, also looked for support from the media.

Treaty Rights

Activists from AIM brought in further criticisms of the government's constant failures to uphold treaties previously signed with Native Americans and hoped to negotiate many of the past broken treaties.

Current Situation

The occupation began on Tuesday, February 27th, 1973. As Russell Means entered the town, he was attacked by two men loyal to Dick Wilson. That

evening, Means met members of the OSCRO and other AIM leaders at Calico Hall. By the end of the night, a fifty-four car caravan strolled through Pine Ridge, with the ending destination of Wounded Knee, with only about 100 occupants. Around 8PM, the BIA and FBI create roadblocks around the hamlet and are fired upon by AIM, using stolen guns. The seizing was initiated by members of the American Indian Movement, and included taking 11 hostages from the town. At this point in the occupation, it is late March and there are around 200 activists in Wounded Knee, with some small amounts of weapons collected.



*Figure 4 Picture of two activists in Wounded knee.
<https://americanindianrepublic.com/the-origins-of-the-american-indian-movement-and-the-wounded-knee-occupation-a-history-of-liberation-and-defiance/>*

Kent Frizell has just been appointed to manage the response to Wounded Knee.

Prior to this point, March has included a visit from Senators James



Abourezek and George McGovern. On March 11th, four postal inspectors coming into Wounded Knee are captured by AIM, seen with guns and handcuffs. The inspectors are given food and a lecture on the reasoning of the occupation, then returned back to federal lines. Fire has already been exchanged on both sides, causing the paralysis of US Marshal Lloyd Grimm.

Public opinion of the occupation varies but at this point is widely sympathetic to the cause as the general population becomes more aware of the issues facing Native Americans. The occupation is beginning to attract the attention of large names across the country and it is up to delegates to garner support from these individuals. Sacheen Littlefeather has just spoken on behalf of Marlon Brando at the 45th Academy Awards, after his refusal to speak due to Wounded Knee and the discrimination of Native Americans in TV and Film. Although it was not her



Figure 5 Sacheen Littlefeather speaks for Marlon Brando at the 45th Academy Awards.

<https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2022/09/awards-insider-sacheen-littlefeather-academy-apology>

original speech, she spoke in her traditional Apache clothing and her words reached many around the country.

The forces outside of the encampment number many government officials and bureaus, including the FBI and the US Marshals Service. The leaders speaking for the United States would consist of Richard Nixon, as President of the United States, Wayne Colburn, as director of the US Marshals, L. Patrick Gray, as director of the FBI, and finally, William Ruckelshaus, as another FBI representative and attorney. Additionally, the president of the Oglala Nation, Richard (Dick) Wilson, will be aiding the government in freeing Wounded Knee, alongside his GOONs.

The two main locations housing activists are the trading post in Wounded Knee and Sacred Heart



Catholic Church. Some of the hostages include the priest of the church and the Gildersleeves, owners of the Trading Post.



Figure 6 Dick Wilson, Oglala President, pictured in center. <https://muscarelle.wm.edu/rising/wounded-knee/bury-my-heart/>

- How do activists negotiate with the government, ensuring that they receive what they want, while still getting out alive?
- Who can activists reach out to for aid in surviving living locked up in a town under siege?
- How can activists arm themselves while not being able to leave the town?
- How do the activists seek out more support, nationally and internationally, for their cause?

Questions to Consider

- What exactly are the goals of the larger group here? Does the involvement of AIM make the goals clearer or more broad?
- Why is AIM supporting the Oglala rebels and how are their motivations different?
- How is trust built in a high-pressure, high-stress environment like this siege?
- During and after the occupation there were great fears of the potential existence of a spy, someone reporting to the FBI. Is it possible to avoid this?



Characters

The characters below are the most notable activists involved in the siege. Their tribal names, if accessible, are provided in italics. Be sure to consider what your portfolio powers could be and get ready to get a little creative!

Anna Mae Aquash (*Nagusset Eask*) is a Mi'kmaq activist from Nova Scotia, Canada. She is a part of AIM, joining in 1968-1969, and had previously participated in the occupation of the BIA and the Trail of Broken Treaties. Aquash is partially responsible for the creation of the Boston Indian Council. She married the man she now shares her last name with at Wounded Knee, Nogeeshik Aquash.

Dennis Banks (*Naawakamig*) is the Ojibwe co-founder of AIM, a teacher, and an author. He is also an Air Force veteran, but was dishonorably discharged after going AWOL. Banks founded AIM in 1968 in Minneapolis, seeking to protect the rights of urban Native Americans. He joined the Lakota movement to aid in handling relations with law enforcement responsible for

border towns nearby. Eventually, Banks, and AIM, involved themselves in the political activists seeking to impeach Richard Wilson, the current elected chairman of the Oglala Lakota Sioux. Banks is the main negotiator and leader of the siege.

Clyde Bellecourt (*Nee-gon-we-way- we-dun*) is an Ojibwe activist who helped found AIM. He is the younger brother of Vernon Bellecourt. In the 1950s he was incarcerated for a variety of criminal charges. There, Bellecourt met other Native Americans, including Dennis Banks, and started to form the idea of AIM. He led the takeover of the BIA in 1970. He is one of the negotiators at Wounded Knee.

Vernon Bellecourt (*WaBun-Inini*) is an Ojibwe activist and a leader of AIM. He is the older brother of Clyde Bellecourt. At 19, he was convicted of robbery and spent time in St. Cloud prison.

Gladys Bissonette, with the nickname "the brave-hearted woman of Wounded Knee," is an Oglala Lakota elder who aids in leading the traditional faction of the occupation. She was one of the



speakers at Calico Hall, requesting AIM to come and help the fight at Pine Ridge. She works at the health clinic and was established as one of the negotiators to discuss with Kent Frizzell. She believes that this occupation occurred because they tried every other way to get the government's attention.

Carter Camp is a Ponca AIM activist. He helped lead the Trail of Broken Treaties in 1972. He was part of the group that led the initial seizing of the town, including the trading post, cut the phone lines, took eleven hostages, and forced BIA employees to leave. He is the spokesperson.

Ellen Moves Camp is an Oglala Lakota activist who lives in Pine Ridge. She is one of the original elders to try to gather support for the cause against Dick Wilson. She spoke at Calico Hall, calling for AIM to support Pine Ridge. Camp and Gladys Bissonette were at the front of gathering Native American support across the nation for their case against Wilson. She often greets activists as they join the siege. She is one of the negotiators.

Thelma Conroy-Rios is a Native American activist for AIM and was present at Wounded Knee. She lives on the Pine Ridge Reservation.

Frank Fools Crow, often referred to as "Grandpa Frank" or "Grandfather," is an Oglala Lakota activist and medicine man. A nephew of Black Elk, he works tirelessly to preserve traditions and support Indigenous & Lakota issues, including sovereignty and treaty rights. He is at the forefront of the traditional faction during the Wounded Knee Occupation. He does not speak fluent English, but serves his people in a variety of ways, particularly being a medicine man, teacher, and healer. He is a senior elder, and therefore is considered highly respected.

Len Foster, Navajo, is one of the younger activists involved in AIM. He was involved in the Alcatraz occupation, the Trail of Broken Treaties, and the BIA takeover. He is a huge advocate for Native Americans experiencing incarceration have access to worship with their own traditional ceremonies.



Agnes Lamont is an elder at the Pine Ridge Reservation that, alongside Ellen Moves Camp and Gladys Bissonette, pushed men to action in response to Dick Wilson. Lamont aided in gathering support for the movement, from AIM and other Native American activists. Although she was not in the original caravan, she joined later on.

Russell Means (*Wanbli Ohitika*) is an Oglala Lakota activist, actor, writer, musician, and political activist. He is a prominent member of AIM. He was born on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Means joined AIM in 1968. Having been involved in most of the acts AIM took on, he appears at Wounded Knee as a spokesperson for the movement and leader.

****While researching, do not worry if it seems that, for certain characters, there is little to acknowledge, regarding personal views. Rather, focus on filling in the gaps and being creative with your character's personal motivations and wants in committee.*

Glossary

Border towns are towns that border Native American reservations. There is a fraught relationship between town residents and the reservations.

GOONs are the Guardians of the Oglala Nation, Richard Wilson's personal militia.

Indian Termination Policy is a series of government changes in policies that led to the loss of lands and removal of tribal memberships.

Reservation is an area of land held and governed by a federally recognized tribal nation.

Sovereignty is the right to govern oneself, and in the case of this piece of history, the right for a tribe to govern its own lands and people.

Treaty is a contract between the US government and specific groups of Native Americans. Often these treaties were signed historically in exchange for certain rights, privileges, or access.



****If you are having trouble finding definitions for certain terms, please reach out.*

Resources for Delegates

B. D'Arcus, "Contested boundaries: native sovereignty and state power at Wounded Knee, 1973"

https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0962629802001075?casa_token=yvc2bmvX3DwAAAAA:IWPDrm6oLc_YyNZQc772B9ldQf1UHG95cxPHfsM2zVg6B78z4BQ_3MoW2bHjaMkYqUHpA409A

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Paul Chaat Smith, Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee

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The Atlantic, Emily Chertoff, "Occupy Wounded Knee: A 71- Day Siege and a Forgotten Civil Rights Movement"

<https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2012/10/occupy-wounded-knee-a-71-day-siege-and-a-forgotten-civil-rights-movement/263998/>

****If you are struggling to find information on your position, send me an email and I will help direct you.*

Bibliography

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