



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Third party intervenes to prevent violence at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, 1973

Time period notes: *The exact time period of the Movement for a New Society intervention is not known*

March

1973

to: March

1973

Country: United States

Location City/State/Province: *Wounded Knee, South Dakota*

Goals:

The goal of Movement for a New Society was to prevent US federal forces from acting violently against the American Indian Movement members who were resisting the government's mandate to discontinue their occupation of Wounded Knee.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 171. Nonviolent interjection

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 171. Nonviolent interjection

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 171. Nonviolent interjection

Methods in 4th segment:

- 171. Nonviolent interjection

Methods in 5th segment:

- 171. Nonviolent interjection

Methods in 6th segment:

- 001. Public speeches › Marlon Brando's speech at the Academy Awards
- 011. Records, radio, and television › the airing of Marlon Brando's Academy Award Speech
- 053. Renouncing honours › Marlon Brando's refusal of Academy Award
- 171. Nonviolent interjection

Classifications

Classification:

Third-party nonviolent intervention

Cluster:

Human Rights

National/Ethnic Identity

Peace

Group characterization:

- Movement for a New Society activists

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

30 members of Movement for a New Society

Partners:

John Adams, a crisis-intervention worker for the National Council of Churches

External allies:

Not known

Involvement of social elites:

Marlon Brando, an actor who won the 1973 academy award for his part in The Godfather

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

Joining order not known

Segment Length: *Not known*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Federal Troops

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

No campaigner violence

Repressive Violence:

Not known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

4 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

1 point out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

Although MNS successfully stopped the violence between the groups during the time they were present, their numbers did not increase and they were eventually forced out of Wounded Knee. Afterwards, fighting recommenced.

The history of Native American and government interactions in South Dakota is riddled with animosity. In the mid-1900s the Native Americans were mortified by the atrocities committed against their people by the federal government and began to create a plan for protest. In 1968, two hundred members of the American Indian community met to discuss issues of police brutality, high unemployment rates, unjust prosecutions, and other government policies regarding the Native American population. At this meeting they launched the American Indian Movement (AIM).

Two hundred AIM members decided to protest by occupying Wounded Knee, South Dakota in the Pine Ridge Reservation. Reclaiming this area had symbolic value; it was historically known for the Battle of Wounded Knee, a massacre of Native American women and children by the Cavalry. They began their occupation on February 27, 1973. The occupants did not take a nonviolent stance and were armed with rifles, pistols, knives, and clubs. In fact, they even took the white inhabitants of Wounded Knee hostage.

Almost immediately, Federal troops surrounded the town. According to Agents of Repression, the Pentagon invaded Wounded Knee with 17 armored personnel carriers, 130,000 rounds of M-16 ammunition, 41,000 rounds of M-1 ammunition, 24,000 flares, 12 M-79 grenade launchers, 600 cases of C-S gas, 100 rounds of M-40 explosives, helicopters, and phantom jets. They established roadblocks around Wounded Knee approximately 15 miles in every direction. Through most of the occupation firing between the groups was normal and proceeded to produce casualties.

On March 13, members of Movement for a New Society (MNS), a network of U.S./Canadian groups dedicated to nonviolent revolution, flew into action. With both sides armed and poised for violence, the goal of MNS was to prevent the massive forces of the US Federal Government from firing upon the Native Americans. MNS launched a phone tree that contacted all who were a part of their network. Collectives responded from many major cities including Madison, Minneapolis, Milwaukee, Des Moines, Denver, Portland, and Philadelphia. Within two days, these collectives sent carloads of activists to Wounded Knee. The activists utilized the method of physical intervention by acting as unarmed bodyguards. This method is commonly acted out by individuals, however this time it was used as a mass action. They placed themselves between the occupiers and the government forces.

Throughout this time there were national demonstrations to show solidarity and concern. One demonstration was in Denver at the location of the AIM headquarters. This demonstration gathered 2,000 people to protest. Los Angeles also had a demonstration, although smaller, consisting of only 400 people. On March 21, activists demonstrated nationwide. In addition, celebrity Marlon Brando refused to accept his Academy Award for *The Godfather* (1) because he was making a statement to support AIM and (2) due to the poor treatment of Native Americans in the film industry.

Although MNS succeeded in stalling the violence for their first few days, the government eventually forced the MNS activists out. In the end, John Adams, a crisis-intervention worker for the National Council of Churches, stated that his position as a negotiator was validated and strengthened by the presence of MNS.

After 71 days of occupation, AIM and the government finally agreed on terms on 5 May 1973, which led to AIM completely disarming. The official end came when the government asserted control on 8 May.

Research Notes

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