

The American Indian Movement (AIM): Modern Indigenous Relations

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The historical background of the relations between native populations and official federal governments on the territory of the North American continent is vast, whereas the modern state of affairs is noteworthy, which forces us to examine the American Indian Movement (AIM). The multi-faceted aspects of human rights, living conditions, and equal access to education were the crucial determinants of the relations between American Indians and public policies concerning the native populations of the United States. Therefore, a more modern way of handling agreements took place in July, 1968 when the AIM was formed to address indigenous rights by paying extreme attention to the issues of poverty and police brutality.

Notwithstanding, the emergence of the modern Native American grassroots movement resulted in the consolidation of forces forwarded against not only socioeconomic issues but rather a comprehensive set of protests aimed to reform treaty rights, high rates of unemployment, cultural continuity, and the preservation of indigenous cultures. Subsequently, under no circumstances should the activities of the AIM be associated merely with protests against violence and brutal atrocities. Considering the most remarkable aspects in the discourse of the AIM's strikes, one may underline the importance of the Wounded Knee incident, the cultural significance of the Urban Indian movement, and the contemporary manifestation of American Indians' struggles, which are to be further analyzed due to their relevance to the essence of the AIM's fundamental objectives.

Wounded Knee Incident

One of the most remarkable events of the AIM's efforts to reconfigure the public policies of the federal government by the beginning of the 1970s was the Wounded Knee

incident, which was the culmination of the struggles for the compliance with indigenous rights. The Pine Ridge Indian Reservation was not an exception of the dissatisfaction with the elected President, which resulted in the siege of Wounded Knee, South Dakota on February 27, 1890 (Chertoff, 2013). The demands of the AIM and Sioux activists were related to the reconsideration of previously signed treaties, the impeachment of the President, and the emergence of an adequate set of reforms to enhance the living conditions of American Indians. The response from the government was rather predictable since police officers formed a column to prevent protestors from exiting the town, resulting in a 71-day siege and armed conflict (Chertoff, 2013). The Wounded Knee incident may be perceived as an obscure legacy of the AIM, yet its role in inspiring indigenous individuals across the state should not be neglected.

As the result of such a prolonged siege, which was further characterized as the longest civil disorder in American history, two protestors lost their lives in the protest, whereas a federal agent was shot and paralyzed. However, one of the most vital breakthroughs of the Wounded Knee incident was the widespread sympathy for Native Americans during the protest, which was voiced in numerous public polls and the overall attention from public figures (Chertoff, 2013). When two sides agreed to disarm, the government regained control of the town; however, the implications of the incident were apparent even after the siege ended. In particular, the rates of internal violence in Wounded Knee were the highest across the U.S., meaning that internal conflicts persisted in the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation (Chertoff, 2013). Notwithstanding, the siege of Wounded Knee could not solve the vast majority of issues of the AIM, but the foundation of public awareness and the urgent need for negotiations was built, meaning that this particular incident was crucial in the discourse of the AIM.

Cultural Significance and Urban Characteristics of the AIM

Since the Indian Termination Act meant high rates of forced relocations to urban centers by Native Americans, the essential feature of the AIM was its urban nature, which was explicit by its transnationalism and its work in urbanized contexts. What is most important, the historical background of the AIM is often associated with military protests, whereas the movement was more concerned about cultural renewal, monitoring of police activities, coordination of employment programs, and the reconfiguration of indigenous rights in modern contexts. With regards to these objectives, the AIM borrowed strategies from other organizations, even including the Black Power Movement (Heppler, 2009, p. 68). Having adopted the strategy of Black Panther-like street patrols, the urban activities of the AIM members were crucial for representing the willingness to act for the sake of Native Americans as a whole.

Although the illegal occupation of Alcatraz Island, the conduction of the Trail of Broken Treaties, and the protests for women's liberation were accomplishments, the interrelation of various strategies from other organizations should not be disregarded (Heppler, 2009, p. 69). The cultural phenomenon of modern indigenous relations was focused on the broader extent of autonomy of protestors, which coincided with the hostility and ignorance of the federal government. With regards to such a reaction, urban patrols, coupled with the disintegration of tribal and reservation life were signs of how the AIM adopted both urban contexts and those of other human rights organizations (Heppler, 2009, p. 70). In some sense, the role of the AIM in the structure of the American Indian Civil Rights movement should not be disregarded, especially considering the emergence of the modern form of raising awareness,

including media coverage, close cooperation with urban civil rights movements, and militant actions.

Contemporary Manifestation of American Indians' Struggles

Presumably, public opinion concerning the issues related to the native population often articulates the events of the 18th and 19th centuries, whereas the activities of the AIM were decisive manifestations of how indigenous rights were to be secured. As it was mentioned, the protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s were collaborating to adopt new strategies and tools for accomplishing the discussed objectives; however, the AIM never developed an official body for establishing contact with media sources (Garcia, 2014, p. 6). Unlike the Black Panther Party, which organized a specialized Ministry of Information to cope with media interactions, the AIM adopted a unique strategy which insisted on utilizing high-profile forms of dissent to draw public attention (Garcia, 2014, p. 7). Not to mention the role of the Trail of Broken Treaties and the Wounded Knee incident, the AIM efficiently adopted the policy of confrontation to challenge the institutions they were willing to transform. Although the AIM protests were severely criticized in the media concerning the compliance with existing legal regulations, the acquired publicity tactics were crucial for generating enough attention on the national scene.

With regards to the immediate success of the AIM in terms of bringing attention from the establishment, it should be noted that the ideology of liberation was dominating among the AIM members, who voiced their preparedness to die for their beliefs (Garcia, 2014, p. 73). Hence, the historical background of the AIM campaigns, which were either militant or peaceful ones, emphasizes the importance of the AIM as a crucial determinant of modern indigenous relations and the call for urgent reform of indigenous rights. In such regard, the American

Indians' struggles of the post-1960s era were accessibly comprised under the banner of the AIM, which became a dominant American Indian human rights organization in the reviewed time frame.

Conclusion

Having scrutinized the cultural significance of the AIM protests, the specific case of the Wounded Knee incident, and the importance of the AIM for comprising the forces of Native Americans, one may point out the irreplaceable role of the AIM under the circumstances. Although the AIM adopted a unique way of attracting the public's attention, a series of protests in Alcatraz, Washington D.C. and Wounded Knee were presumably the most efficient tool for raising public awareness about indigenous rights. Other than that, the AIM played a role in establishing the framework of modern indigenous relations, which further stabilized in the long-term perspective. The relevance of the urban context in the operational capacity of the AIM should not be neglected, meaning that the emergence of Indian street patrols and monitoring activities were remarkable for advocating for the change in indigenous rights and the framework of renewed treaty negotiations. With regards to unveiled notions, the cultural and political significance of the AIM should be commemorated in the discourse on the American Indians' struggles for accomplishing the development of indigenous relations.

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