

Setting a New Course in Native American Protest Movements: The Menominee Warrior Society's Takeover of the Alexian Brothers Novitiate in 1975

The Power of **AND**

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INTRODUCTION

At midnight on New Year's day 1975, a group of Menominee people known as the Menominee Warrior Society began to forcefully make their way into the Alexian Brothers Novitiate near Gresham, Shawano County, Wisconsin. Led by Michael Sturdevant, approximately 50 men, women, and children entered the monastery, removing the caretaker of the property and his family. The Menominee Warrior Society lay claim to the property under USC 25 Section 280 which states that "Indian land which has been patented by the Secretary of the Interior to tax exempt religious or missionary organizations that have become unused for those purposes, i.e. not used for religious or missionary purposes, must revert to the original Indian ownership." According to the Menominee Warrior Society, the monastery had been vacant for more than ten years, reverting its ownership back to the Menominee people.



Alexian Brothers Novitiate

This event, and responses to it made evident that there were two different reform strategies working against each other. The Menominee Warrior society was utilizing a militant form of direct action, while those opposing them were more interested in enacting peaceful change through legislation. These legislative reform strategies had been used previously by members of the Menominee tribe in groups such as the American Indian Movement (AIM) and the Determination of Rights and Unity for Menominee Stockholders (D.R.U.M.S.). These two competing reform strategies collided head on at the Takeover, with powerful consequences for future native American protest movements.



Secretary of the Interior Rogers Morton signs the documents that restored tribal recognition and rights to the Menominee People. This was after a long process led by D.R.U.M.S. and Ada Deer who used peaceful methods and trusted in legislative action.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What forms of protest were used during the takeover of the Alexian Brothers Novitiate and how effective were they?
- How did the Takeover impact future Native American protest movements?



Protesters at the occupation of Alcatraz in 1969. This protest movement utilized direct action and violent tactics.

METHODOLOGY

This research was done using many different primary sources. The most used sources were large archival collections filled with information concerning the Menominee Warrior Society's takeover. The most pertinent collections that were examined were the "Ada Deer Papers, 1969-1978", the "Menominee Collection on the Termination and Restoration Era, 1961-1973", and the "National Guard Papers, 1941-1978." These collections contained speeches, press releases, legislation, and newspaper articles.



Leader of the takeover, Michael Sturdevant and other members of the Menominee Warrior Society give a press conference inside of the novitiate in 1975.

CONCLUSIONS & SIGNIFICANCE

The takeover of the Novitiate changed the way that future native American protest movements were conducted. Two reform strategies, peaceful legislative change and direct action, collided at the Takeover, making it less successful than if the two reform strategies had worked together. Although a relatively small event in native American history, the Takeover of the Novitiate had an unprecedented effect on native American protest movements. After the takeover, protest movements typically combined both reform strategies into one ideological movement; by working together, legislative and direct action strategies could more successfully defend and promote Native American rights.



Ada Deer, a Menominee woman, was an essential part of D.R.U.M.S. and was a large voice for her tribe.

KEY PROTEST MOVEMENTS

- **The Occupation of Alcatraz – 1969-1970**
A pan-Indian occupation of the federal land using the argument that all federal land not being used belongs to Native American peoples. This movement utilized direct action.
- **AIM's takeover of the Bureau of Indian Affairs – 1972**
The American Indian Movement (AIM) was a militant Native American rights organization. In 1972, they marched to Washington D.C. and took over the Bureau of Indian Affairs to protesting government treatment of Native American Peoples.
- **D.R.U.M.S.**
The Determination of Rights and Unity for Menominee Stockholders (D.R.U.M.S.) was a group of Menominee People who utilized peaceful legislative action to restore tribal rights to the Menominee People in 1973.
- **Fight Against the Crandon Mine – 1986-2003**
Exxon wanted to create a zinc mine which would directly effect local tribes in Wisconsin. The Sokaogon Chippewa led the legal battle against them, even including a supreme court battle in 1986 against Exxon. Through their legal efforts, public presence, and direct action of protests led the tribe to an overall success when in 2003 interests in the land were sold to the Forest County Potawatomi and the Mole Lake Bands.
- **Standing Rock Demonstrations – 2016**
A pan-Indian demonstration led by the Sioux people to protest the implementation of the Dakota Access Pipeline which would cross through the Standing Rock Reservation. These protesters used both direct action and peaceful legislative action.

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