

Dramatizing Native American Resistance Movements

Introduction

There is a long and inspiring history of Native American resistance to the European invasion, occupation, and desecration of their lands—within the many strands of Indigenous resistance throughout the entire landmass of North, Central, and South America. This resistance continues. In connection with the film, this activity gives students a chance to learn more about some of the more recent events in this history—those that took place in the 1960s and 1970s. Before students begin, and depending on their educational background and how non-European-centered and progressive it has been, you may want to make at least these essential points, expanding and having open discussion on them as you wish and as time allows:

- Despite what textbooks often say or imply, and despite what Buffy Sainte-Marie has most accurately termed “the genocide basic to this country’s birth,” diverse nations of Native Americans are still very much here. The verbs to use are in the present tense!
- Native American resistance has occurred throughout the centuries and continues at present.
- Indigenous nations/tribes are diverse, with different languages, traditions, and cultures.
- The resurgence of the 1960s and 1970s represented a new degree of unity, as new organizations, protests, occupations, and various acts of sovereignty took place all over the country. As the film shows, these actions were brutally repressed, with many deaths and injuries. At the same time, they inspired a revived national and international consciousness among Native peoples and their impact remains strong. The struggle for the freedom of Leonard Peltier, as stated in the film, has grown, and symbolizes this ongoing resistance.
- Both of the film participants, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz and Ward Churchill, come out of these Native American struggles. Dunbar-Ortiz is a longtime activist and author of a number of books, including *The Great Sioux Nation: An Oral History of the Sioux Nation and its Struggle for Sovereignty*. Churchill is one of the nation’s leading experts on COINTELPRO, and has written several books about it, not only its repressive impact on Native American movements, but the operations and impact of the entire program, as in his book co-authored with Jim Vander Wall from South End Press—*The COINTELPRO Papers*.

Research and Presentation Activity

1. As possible, using web and book resources (such as pages 513–526 in Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History of the United States*) acquaint yourself with some of the major recent events of Native American resistance. We suggest some web links following the list of events, but you will likely want to add from books or other materials you may have, and from your own library and Internet investigations. Some of the assignment choices you make may depend on having sufficient information available for students to make presentations.

2. Divide the class into working groups and assign each group one of the events or related series of struggles. You may want to add on to or adjust what we suggest, but try to maintain some chronological and geographical spread. It's likely that the list below is too lengthy for your class groups, unless you assign more than one event to each group. That's up to you.

3. Depending on the interest level of the class, you may want to have each group make a role-playing, brief script, or other dramatic and visual presentation of some kind, and you may want to have the presentations take place in chronological order.

3. These are among possible research and dramatic presentation topics.

— Formation of the National Indian Youth Council, 1961

— Mohawk resistance, including the start of the newspaper *Akwesasne Notes*, and formation of the Mohawk Singing Society, which became the Mohawk Warrior Society, with protests and occupations, including at Seaway International Bridge, 1968

— Formation of AIM, the American Indian Movement, in Minneapolis, 1968

— The seizure and occupation of Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay, 1969

— Black Mesa, New Mexico and Big Mountain—Navajo and Hopi struggles against strip mining and pollution, in defense of their sacred mountain, 1969 and ongoing

— Puyallup and Tulalip Indians, Washington, fishing struggles ("fish-ins"), 1970 and earlier

— Pit River fishing rights struggles ("fish-ins"), California, confrontation with US Marshals, Forest Services, PG & E, 1971. Good information in *A People's History of the United States*.

— AIM protest & disruption against re-enactment of Mayflower landing at Plymouth Rock, Massachusetts, gains national attention & helps AIM to expand, 1970

— Occupation of Mount Rushmore, 1971

— AIM and other native groups organize the Trail of Broken Treaties, a caravan from the west coast to Washington, DC. When caravan of several thousand arrives in Washington, officials refuse to meet. The Bureau of Indian Affairs headquarters is occupied for 6 days, with extensive damage and thousands of files taken, 1972

— Occupation of Wounded Knee, site of 1890 massacre, begins February 27, 1973, lasting for 71-days during which two Native Americans are shot and killed (Buddy Lamont & Frank Clearwater). Occupation ends on May 9, 1973

— At Oglala, on the Pine Ridge reservation, an FBI raid ends with two agents killed and one Native American defender (Joe Stuntz-Killsright). FBI launches massive manhunt, 1975

- The Mohawk occupation of Ganienkeh in state of New York begins, 1974 (in 1977 negotiations result in Mohawk possession of land, Ganienkeh, which continues to present)
- Founding of the International Indian Treaty Council, South Dakota, 1974 (gathering attended representatives of 98 Indigenous Nations. In 1977, became first Indigenous peoples recognized as a Non-Governmental Organization with Consultative Status to UNESCO)
- Protests against the 500-year anniversary of Columbus' invasion of the Americas, including arrests in Denver, Colorado, militant protests and police confrontations in San Francisco, and other demonstrations, October, 1992

Extension Ideas

- Include events and organizations in Canada and Latin America, including the Zapatista Rebellion, from 1994 on
- Do a similar activity with a focus on leaders and others who made outstanding cultural or political contributions to the 1960s Native American movements and the resurgence of resistance consciousness
- Do a similar activity focusing on major Native American resistance events over the entire span of US history
- Have students research the extremely significant influence that the organization and democratic practices of the Iroquois Confederacy had on the formation of the United States and the Constitution

Some Helpful Internet Resources

Brief, good summaries of resistance from the 1950s on

<http://wiinimkiikaa.wordpress.com/indigenous-resistance-from-the-1960s-to-2006/>

Brief outline of “modern Native American militancy”

<http://www.emayzine.com/lectures/Indianmil.htm>

Short lesson using a page from a textbook, including Alcatraz and Wounded Knee

<http://urbandreams.ousd.k12.ca.us/lessonplans/mlk2/materialso4.html>

Much information on Leonard Peltier case, COINTELPRO, and related events

<http://www.freepeltiernow.org/COINTELPRO.htm>

Friends of Peltier website, includes two radio speeches by Ward Churchill on COINTELPRO

<http://www.freepeltiernow.org/COINTELPRO.htm>

Same website, information on the shootings at Oglala

<http://www.freepeltiernow.org/shootout.htm>

Retrospective news article on the Puyallup Indians fishing rights struggle
http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2012827306_fishwar07m.html

Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project—The Fish-In Protests
<http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/fish-ins.htm>

Ganienkeh Territory: Independent North American Indian State
<http://www.ganienkeh.net/>

Wikipedia entry on the American Indian Movement, some good information
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Indian_Movement

The International Indian Treaty Council—gathering called by AIM in Standing Rock, South Dakota attended by more than 5,000 representatives of 98 Indigenous Nations. In 1977, became first organization of Indigenous Peoples recognized as a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) with Consultative Status to UNESCO.
<http://www.treatycouncil.org/about.htm>

Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, official site: Feminist, Revolutionary, Historian
<http://www.reddirtsite.com/>

Wikipedia entry on Ward Churchill (many other sites include information)
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ward_Churchill