



Interpreting Moments of American Indian Activism

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Throughout the Americas, American Indians have suffered many cruelties as a result of the arrival of Europeans. American Indians have been captured as slaves, homelands have been looted and pillaged, and they have been forced to leave the territories American Indians have held for centuries. While there were instances of cooperation during the colonial period, the policy of removal was an incredible force that proved to be disastrous for many tribes. American laws and policies led to a series of rebellions, battles, and massacres that resulted in division and mistrust between American Indian tribes and the federal government. These same policies continue to divide and lead to mistrust between the groups today.

In 1968, The American Indian Movement (AIM) was founded in an attempt to encourage self-determination for all Indian tribes. This American Indian civil rights group used a variety of tactics to meet their intended goal, which includes protests, demonstrations, and the seizing of federal property. The American Indian Movement is analyzed through four prominent events that united tribes and brought national attention to the movement. The methods of AIM were often viewed as controversial as the protest and demonstrations were not always peaceful or legal. In fact, three of the four movements involved the seizing and destruction of federal property.

In Washington, D.C., the impact of rapid gentrification can be felt in many communities. The city approves permits for companies to rebuild and revitalize impoverished areas throughout the city. The fair housing agreement states that residents will be able to return to the respective areas after construction. In addition, the fair housing agreement indicates that a particular number of new units will be reserved for former residents at a subsidized cost. In many cases, residents do not return due to contractual technicalities. For example, rent may be at a subsidized rate, but parking and trash removal fees will cost hundreds of dollars each month. Many residents are unable to pay the new fees, thus are unable to return.

In this unit, students will have an opportunity to study the contemporary American Indian movement following the American Indian Movement (AIM). Students will analyze the successes and failures of the movement through collaborative discussions and seminars. In addition, students will analyze the effectiveness of AIM strategies in the fight for tribal sovereignty and the enforcement of treaties using primary and secondary sources. Ultimately, students will walk away with the tools and skills needed to take intake informed action in their own communities and nationally.

(Developed for World History I, grade 9; recommended for American History, grade 8, and U. S. History, grade 11)

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