

Carter Camp, Leader in Wounded Knee Uprising, Dies at 72

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On Dec. 29, 1890, United States cavalry, in the last battle of the American Indian wars, massacred as many as 350 Lakota Sioux at Wounded Knee in South Dakota. Three generations later, Carter Camp, a 32-year-old Indian militant, retaliated.

On the night of Feb. 27, 1973, he led the first wave of armed, self-styled warriors in an operation to seize Wounded Knee, which had become a town on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. The invaders, carrying a list of grievances against the federal government, seized the trading post, cut the telephone lines, ran the Bureau of Indian Affairs police out of town and took 11 hostages.

“We were pretty sure that we were going to have to give up our lives,” Mr. Camp said in an interview for the PBS program “American Experience” in 2009.

A caravan of 200 cars carrying Indians and their supporters followed, beginning a 71-day, gunshot-punctuated standoff that some applauded as a show of new assertiveness by long-downtrodden Indians and that others deplored as criminal.

By the time it was over, two Indians had been shot to death and a federal marshal was paralyzed. He later died. Mr. Camp was convicted

of abducting, confining and beating four postal inspectors during the siege and served three years in prison.

He went on to spend decades fighting for Indian rights and died at 72 on Dec. 27 in White Eagle, Okla., the headquarters of the Ponca tribe, of which he was a member. The cause was kidney and liver cancer, his brother Craig said.

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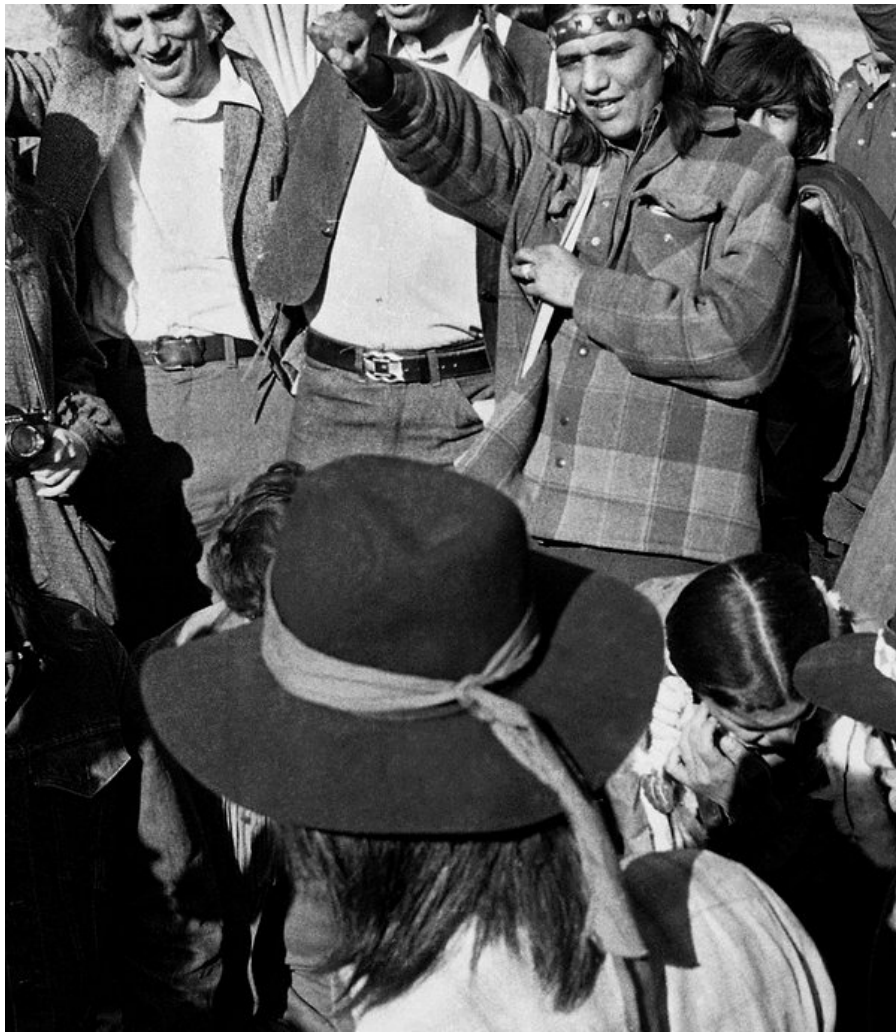
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Carter Camp's dream was to regain the vast lands his people had lost through unfair and broken treaties. But he started by aiming his sights lower, leading a campaign in 1970 to change the way federal money for Indian education was allocated on the Ponca reservation. He became state leader of the American Indian Movement, or AIM, which was organized in 1968 in Minneapolis as a defender of American Indian sovereignty. In 1972, he helped lead an AIM caravan from the West Coast to Washington, where "red power" advocates occupied the Bureau of Indian Affairs building.

During the Wounded Knee occupation the next year, alongside the AIM leaders Dennis Banks and [Russell C. Means](#), Mr. Camp was the spokesman who presented the group's demands to the government, among them that the government honor 371 broken treaties and that it end what the group called corrupt tribal governments. Mr. Camp rejected an offer of leniency if the protesters left immediately.

Image





Carter Camp, center, in Wounded Knee, S.D., during a 71-day standoff in 1973. William Kunstler, the radical lawyer, is at left. Credit...Associated Press

“We decided that the Indian people were more important to us than jail terms,” he was quoted as saying in “The Road to Wounded Knee” (1974), by Robert Burnette and John Koster.

