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In Defense of Identity: A Comparative Analysis of Indigenous Self-Defense Movements in North America

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Abstract

This paper conducts a comparative analysis of two significant historical events of Indigenous resistance in North America: the Northwest Rebellion of 1885 in Canada and the Wounded Knee Occupation of 1973 in the United States. The Métis during the Northwest Rebellion and the Lakota Oglala along with American Indian Movement activists during the Wounded Knee Occupation both sought to assert their rights against encroaching government policies and settler expansion. By examining the actors, agendas, actions, and outcomes of these movements, the paper explores the nuanced nature of self-defense within a settler-colonial context. Comparative analysis highlights the persistent efforts of Indigenous peoples to protect their communities and cultures despite enduring oppression and genocide. It also investigates how media portrayal and the dynamics of authority influence the success of resistance efforts, revealing the distinct challenges faced by Indigenous communities in Canada and the United States. Through an exploration of these cases, we underscore the ongoing struggles of Indigenous self-determination and the importance of solidarity in resisting colonial legacies. Ultimately, this paper provides a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of Indigenous resistance and the critical role of self-defense in preserving cultural identity and autonomy. Understanding the paths of self-defense that were taken in the past is key to guiding the ongoing struggle against genocide, oppression, and the destruction of indigenous communities.

Introduction

In North American history, Indigenous communities have persisted as resilient defenders of their lands, cultures, and sovereignty against the threat of colonial oppression for centuries. The Northwest Rebellion of 1885 in Canada and the Wounded Knee Occupation of 1973 in the United States represent instances of this continual fight for survival and autonomy, serving as poignant reminders of the enduring pursuit of these ideals through acts of self-defense. Self-defense itself can be expressed through different actions, motivations, and definitions; it can also change based on the context and circumstances surrounding it. In the context of resistance and contemporary conflict literature we understand self-defense as the "prevention of an imminent, unlawful, violent attack" – "a right which [belongs] to individuals and to communities."[1]

This paper undertakes a comparative analysis of these historical events, delving into their similarities, differences, and lasting legacies. By examining the actors, agendas, actions, and outcomes of these resistance movements, with a central theme of self-defense, we gain insight into the multifaceted nature of Indigenous resistance in North America. Despite enduring continuous oppression and genocidal acts, Indigenous people in both Canada and the US engage in acts of self-defense to protect their communities and cultures. Through our analysis, this paper illustrates how the role of media and the dynamics of authority relationships influence the success of self-defense efforts within a settler-colonial context. The successes of the ancestors should inform the struggles of the present to defending communities against a genocide that has never truly ended.

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[1] David Kopel, Paul Gallant, and Joanne Eisen, "Is Resisting Genocide a Human Right," *Notre Dame Law Review*, 81 (2006): 1319, https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1347&context=ndlr; Kopel, Gallant, and Eisen, "Is Resisting Genocide a Human Right," 1328.

The North West Rebellion of 1885

The Métis People

During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Métis people, descendants of Indigenous peoples and European settlers, emerged as a distinct Indigenous group in Canada. This development stemmed from interactions primarily between Indigenous peoples, such as the Cree, Ojibwe, and Assiniboine, and European fur traders. Their culture, language, and way of life developed as a fusion of Indigenous and European traditions, incorporating elements such as fur trapping, hunting, farming, and Catholicism.[2] At the beginning of the 19th century, they had secured their role as the leading buffalo hunters and traders and supplied the North-West Company (NWC) with provisions. The Métis used bison hides to make clothing such as hats, coats, blankets, leggings, and gloves. They also used the meat to feed themselves and to trade, contributing to their economic growth.[3] However, in 1821, the NWC merged with the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), which resulted in the HBC taking control of the hunting and trading of buffalo. The HBC, which was primarily run by Europeans, wanted to relocate a majority of the Indigenous population in the Red River region for less money, so they could take control of the land.[4] From the 1820s to 1880s, the Métis people faced continuous economic loss and dehumanization and were often titled the "half-breed population".[5]

By the beginning of the 1880s, over ten thousand indigenous people had left the Red River region and scattered, with the majority of indigenous populations moving to the Métis

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[2] Gaudry, Adam, "Métis," The Canadian Encyclopedia, January 07, 2009, https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/Métis; "Who are the Metis?" Métis Nation of Ontario, 2024, https://www.metisnation.org/culture-heritage/who-are-the-metis/.

[3] "Bison Hunting," Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada, 2024, https://indigenouspeoplesatlasofcanada.ca/article/bison-hunting/#:~:text=Although%20there%20are%20no%20true,feed%20themselves%20and%20to%20trade

[4] Canada Department of the Secretary of State, Trials in Connection with the North-west Rebellion, 1885. (Canada: Maclean, Roger & Company, 1886), 120. https://books.google.com/books?id=NK0NAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA120#v=onepage&q=land&f=false.

[5] Gaudry, "Métis"

settlements in the North West. It was at this time that the Métis community and its leaders were fighting to have more representation within the government of the Northwest Territories. Riel, along with other Indigenous leaders fought to have their voices heard. On October 2nd, 1884, it was reported that Riel and his men were "making certain demands on the Government and If not complied with they take up arms at once and commence killing every white man they can find and incite the Indians to do the same."[6] Nonetheless, the provisional government consistently dismissed these concerns and didn't address their lack of formal titles to their land and the disingenuous political representation.[7] With the agenda of the provisional government in the North West region focusing on expanding their land and power within the region, the agency and way of life among the Métis and indigenous communities began to decline, leading to rising tensions and increased fear.

The North West Rebellion

The North West Rebellion, a pivotal moment in Canadian history, emerged as a culmination of complex socio-political dynamics and longstanding grievances. Rooted in a history of broken promises and marginalization, the Métis people, under the leadership of figures like Louis Riel and Bishop Grandin, sought to assert their rights and protect their way of life against encroaching government policies and settler expansion. According to the Canadian Government archives, Riel believed "Indians had 'rights' as well as the Half-breeds and he wished to be the means of

[6] "[Documents and papers relating to Louis Riel and the North West Resistance]. Original title: Louis Riel - documents and papers relating to Louis Riel and his part in the North West rebellion (includes copies of documents found on his person at the time he was captured)," (Archives / Collections and Fonds, Government of Canada, 1885), 131.
[7] "1885 Northwest Resistance," Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada, 2024, https://indigenouspeoplesatlasofcanada.ca/article/1885-northwest-resistance/.

having them redressed."[8] In December of 1884, intending to negotiate with Prime Minister Macdonald, Métis representative Bishop Grandin petitioned for them to "become a province with a fully responsible government, that the Métis be granted full title to their lands, that these lands be surveyed to recognize the Métis ' river lot land-holding system, and that Louis Riel's leadership be formally recognized, either through his appointment to the territorial council or to Canada's Senate".[9] Yet, their demands for self-governance, land rights, and acknowledgment of their unique cultural identity in addition to their pleas for dialogue and compromise fell on deaf ears as the government issued a stern response in January 1885, refusing to negotiate with Riel and insisting on formal procedures for addressing Métis grievances. The Métis interpreted this stance as a catalyst for the eruption of the 1885 Northwest Resistance.

In the wake of the conflict, a poignant struggle emerged for survival and recognition. The violent rebellion, spearheaded by Métis political and military leadership, comprised three pivotal battles – the Battle of Duck Lake, the Battle of Tourand's Coulee/Fish Creek, and the Battle of Batoche – spanning from March 25th, 1885, to May 12th, 1885.[10] Despite the valiant efforts of approximately 500 indigenous troops, the Métis faced significant challenges, including a lack of support, depletion of ammunition and weapons, and exhaustion due to minimal troop numbers. In contrast, the Canadian government and military mobilized approximately 5500 troops, bolstered by support from British colonial authorities.[11] While the rebellion was ultimately suppressed by government forces, its legacy endures, highlighting the intricate dynamics of

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[8] "[Documents and papers relating to Louis Riel and the North West Resistance]. Original title: Louis Riel - documents and papers relating to Louis Riel and his part in the North West rebellion (includes copies of documents found on his person at the time he was captured)," 119.
[9] "1885 Northwest Resistance."
[10] "1885 Northwest Resistance."
[11] Bob Beal and Rod Macleod, "North-West Resistance," The Canadian Encyclopedia, February 07, 2006, https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/north-west-rebellion

indigenous-settler relations and the ongoing pursuit of reconciliation and justice in Canadian society.

A Case for Self-Defense

During the Northwest Rebellion of 1885, Métis people found themselves engaged in a multifaceted battle for self-defense. Firstly, they confronted European settlers aiming to safeguard their land, rights, culture, and the well-being of future generations. The struggle encompassed a comprehensive defense of their identity and heritage against encroachments by outside forces. Simultaneously, the Métis also faced the challenge of defending their distinctiveness within the broader Indigenous community, standing firm against any threats to their rights and cultural autonomy from within Indigenous circles.[12] Various forms of self-defense were employed throughout the rebellion, each serving as a means of protecting the Métis community. Resistance, characterized by indirect assistance for perpetrators, was evident in acts such as strategic retreats and diplomatic negotiations aimed at preserving Métis sovereignty. Conversely, self-defense involved direct engagement with aggressors, including armed resistance against encroaching military forces. This distinction highlights the nuanced approaches taken by the Métis to defend their rights and autonomy.

The immediate responses of self-defense during the rebellion had significant repercussions on government policy, particularly regarding the establishment of residential schools. The perceived threat posed by the Métis resistance prompted authorities and European settlers to implement measures aimed at assimilating indigenous populations, including the forced removal of children from their families and communities. This policy served as a coercive

[12] "[Documents and papers relating to Louis Riel and the North West Resistance]. Original title: Louis Riel - documents and papers relating to Louis Riel and his part in the North West rebellion (includes copies of documents found on his person at the time he was captured)," 87.

tactic to undermine indigenous cultures and dismantle resistance to colonial authority.[13] Moreover, the significance of self-defense extends beyond immediate military confrontations; it encompasses broader struggles for cultural survival and identity. The bison were more than just animals to the Plains Indigenous peoples; they were seen as family members and regarded as 'older brothers'.[14] However, the destruction and overhunting of the bison, driven by capitalism, markets, greed, and colonialism, wasn't just about losing a vital resource. It also meant losing a significant relationship that was central to each Indigenous society's identity.[15] This loss further underscores the depth of the challenges faced by indigenous peoples in defending their way of life.

Ultimately, the Métis were defending a multitude of elements integral to their existence and identity. This encompassed not only their culture, beliefs, and land but also their rights, community cohesion, and agency within their broader sociopolitical landscape. By engaging in acts of self-defense, the Métis asserted their inherent right to self-determination and sought to preserve the integrity of their way of life in the face of external threats.

The Wounded Knee Occupation

Pine Ridge Reservation and the Occupation of Wounded Knee

The occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973 occurred within a period of large social movements and militant organizing around civil rights, the Vietnam War, liberation, and the Red Power Movement.[16] The American Indian Movement (AIM) was part of the Red Power Movement, led

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[13]"Aftermath of 1885," Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada, 2024, https://indigenouspeoplesatlasofcanada.ca/article/aftermath-of-1885/

[14] Winona LaDuke, *All Our Relations*, (Minneapolis: Haymarket Books, 1999) 154.

[15] Andrew Woolford and Wanda Hounslow, "Symbiotic Victimisation and Destruction," in *Genocide and Victimology*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2020), 86-101.

[16] The information on the occupation is provided from Smith, Paul C., and Robert A. Warrior, 1996, *Like a Hurricane*, N.p.: New Press.

by youth and well adept with media and intent on protecting Native Americans and their rights. They had experience with high-publicity events like the occupation of Alcatraz Island from 1969-1971 and the occupation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) building in 1972. They had proven to be a strong force for indigenous rights. The Wounded Knee Occupation itself was a powerful moment of resistance and visibility for Native Americans and a place for solidarity in defense of Indigenous communities and their right to self-governance. The occupation was closely tied to the history of the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890 and the relationship that communities had to Tribal and Federal governance over their affairs. While the occupation is often portrayed as a fight against the Tribal Chairman of the Pine Ridge Reservation Dick Wilson, it was about more than just a dictatorial Chairman.[17]

The occupation of Wounded Knee lasted for 71 days from February 27th until May 8th, 1973 with local Lakota Oglala and AIM activists occupying the small town and Trading Post while surrounded by U.S. Marshals, FBI agents, BIA police, Dick Wilson's goon squad,[18] and vigilante ranchers. Fire was exchanged between all sides throughout the occupation, which was more characteristic of a siege than a battle, though there were only two casualties: Buddy Lamont, a local Oglala occupier, and Frank Clearwater, an indigenous supporter who brought supplies for the occupation. The occupation was a large media affair as well, which dwindled as time went on, but the presence of media broadcast the words of the occupiers across the U.S. Sympathy for the occupation was broad throughout the country, including the support of public figures, such as Marlon Brando's principled decline of his academy award for *The Godfather*.[19]

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[17] Reinhardt, Akim D, 2007, *Ruling Pine Ridge : Oglala Lakota politics from the IRA to Wounded Knee*, N.p.: Texas Tech University Press, 13; Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*.

[18] Sometimes written as GOON, the name was attributed to Dick Wilson's armed forces that exerted control over the reservation. After they began to be called goons, they claimed that goon stood for Guardians of the Oglala Nation. See Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 196.

[19] Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 236; Sacheen Littlefeather, "Marlon Brando's Best Actor Oscar Speech," March 27, 1973, Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, Los Angeles, United States of America, 2:21, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2QUacU0I4yU.

People around the U.S. recognized the situation of Native Americans as unjust and sympathized with the self-determination movement against U.S. government control.

The Occupiers began their fight as a rejection of Dick Wilson's dictatorship over the Pine Ridge Reservation, but this rejection was a commentary on the imposed system of government set up through the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) of 1934.[20] The governing system of Pine Ridge did not reflect traditional and cultural governing models and reflected more of a system of colonial oversight than self-governance. The people of Pine Ridge had tried before to impeach Dick Wilson, to no success. They had to suffer instead under his dictatorial reign: as evidence shows, "during the three years after the siege of Wounded Knee... More than seventy of Wilson's opponents died violently: gunshots, arson, beating, and inexplicable vehicular deaths."[21] That is not to count the ordered beatings, intimidation, and other tactics that Wilson employed to exert control over Pine Ridge before as well as after the occupation. However, Wilson and each individual act of violence stood for something greater: the colonial control of the BIA, South Dakota, the U.S., and the treatment of Native Americans around the country.[22] AIM promised to come to the aid of any Indigenous American who called for their assistance,[23] and they came to the aid of the Lakota Oglala. The Occupation was not the work of outside militant youth belonging to AIM, but a coalition of AIM activists, local activists, and dissatisfied Lakota Oglala.

During the occupation, the occupiers declared the Independent Oglala Nation (ION) and called to revive the Treaty of 1868 as a sovereign nation and form diplomatic ties with the U.S.[24]

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[20] Reinhardt, *Ruling Pine Ridge*, 13.
[21] Ibid., 205.
[22] Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 183; Reinhardt, *Ruling Pine Ridge*, 13.
[23] Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 198.
[24] Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 217.

They wrote a constitution for ION which was ratified by 1,400 people.[25] The occupation was a declaration for self-determination and sovereignty and an exertion of agency larger than any AIM action had ever been or Native American communities had seen in decades. The occupiers "found at Wounded Knee solidarity, danger, and an exhilarating sense of freedom."[26] Solidarity for this daring declaration of agency and sovereignty often denied to Native Americans came from everywhere: Vietnam Veterans, Black Liberationists, Prison Abolitionists and Prisoners, Chicanos, and fellow Indigenous communities, many of whom swarmed to Wounded Knee to support the Occupiers.[27] The occupation was an act of self-defense against a continuing colonial power that restricted the agency and identity of so many people. Chief Oren Lyons, part of the delegation from the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy, spoke at Wounded Knee: "These people here at Wounded Knee are fighting for the right to conduct their own affairs. We've been fighting for our freedom all these years. It has just now come to attention. But it's not revolutionary, it's consistent. In our eyes it is an ongoing conflict that we must continually address to maintain our individuality and our sovereignty."[28] The occupation of Wounded Knee was a moment of self-defense against the ongoing colonial project and erasure of Native Americans from their own land. Agency, sovereignty, and individuality have been denied to Native American communities, and the occupation was a radical declaration of presence, power, and a refusal to back down.

The Occupation also included a return to cultural traditions with the Ghost Dance. The Ghost Dance was part of a revitalist movement in the 1880s and early 1890s by Wovoka in

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[25] Lindsley, Sheryl L., Charles A. Braithwaite, and Kristin L. Ahlberg, 2002, "Mending the Sacred Hoop: Identity Enactment and the Occupation of Wounded Knee," *Great Plains Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (Spring): 115-126, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23532835, 120.
[26] Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 227.
[27] Anderson, Robert, Joanna Brown, Jonny Lerner, and Barbara L. Shafer, eds. 1975, *Voices from Wounded Knee, 1973: In the Words of the Participants*, N.p.: Akwesasne notes, 91-102.
[28] Ibid., 97.

Nevada.[29] The Ghost Dance became associated with War Dances and struck fear into many of the colonizing whites, due to many exaggerated accounts of the Dance in the media at the time.[30] The Ghost Dance was last performed at the end of the 'Indian Wars' at the time and the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890.[31] The Ghost Dance was said to bring the winds that would disappear the whites from the land, return the herds of buffalo, and bring freedom back to the people.[32] It is a symbolic practice of community, but also a physical resistance to colonial powers that tried to restrict the performance of indigenous identities. Crow Dog initiated the Ghost Dance at the occupation in 1973 saying: "Everybody read about the Ghost Dance, but nobody ever seen it. That was something that the United States of America prohibits - they're not gonna have no Ghost Dance[,] no Sun Dance[,] no Indian religion."[33] The performance of the Ghost Dance, something calling for the return of native lands to native people, at the occupation of Wounded Knee was the first time in 80 years that the Dance was performed. It was a powerful force for reestablishing and celebrating Native American identity and connecting with traditions.[34] It was also part of "struggles for cultural survival"[35] and essential to the continuation of an indigenous identity. As Dennis Banks, AIM leader, is quoted saying: "Wounded Knee was an attempt to help an entire race survive."[36] The enactment of vivid cultural traditions was part of this survival and a self-defense practice: saving culture from erasure. The occupiers connected with spiritual traditions and the history of their people while refusing United States colonialism.

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[29] Bearor, Karen A, 2011, "The "Illustrated American" and the Lakota Ghost Dance," *American Periodicals* 21 (2): 143-163, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23025196, 143.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., 143.
[32] Bearor, "The "Illustrated American" and the Lakota Ghost Dance," 151; Lindsley, Braithwaite, and Ahlberg, "Mending the Sacred Hoop," 121.
[33] Anderson, Brown, Lerner, and Shafer, *Voices from Wounded Knee*, 89.
[34] Lindsley, Braithwaite, and Ahlberg, "Mending the Sacred Hoop," 121.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Quoted in Lindsley, Braithwaite, and Ahlberg, "Mending the Sacred Hoop," 123.

Comparing Indigenous Resistance Movements

Comparing the Northwest Rebellion of 1885 in Canada and the Wounded Knee Occupation of 1973 in the United States reveals shared themes of indigenous self-defense against colonial oppression. Both the Métis during the Northwest Rebellion and the Lakota Oglala and AIM activists during the Wounded Knee Occupation embarked on acts of self-defense with the aim of safeguarding their land, culture, and sovereignty. These movements also diverged in their approaches to land ownership acknowledgment before engaging in self-defense: with indigenous communities in the US emphasizing sovereignty and land ownership as foundational to their resistance, while the Métis in Canada did not explicitly address this aspect. Furthermore, disparities in media usage, as well as the involvement of social movements, played pivotal roles in shaping the dynamics and outcomes of each resistance movement.

Similarities

Similarities between these two events are evident in their underlying motives and actions. Both the Métis during the Northwest Rebellion and the Lakota Oglala and AIM activists during the Wounded Knee Occupation engaged in acts of self-defense aimed at protecting their land, culture, and sovereignty. Facing colonial oppression and dispossession, indigenous communities in both instances resisted encroachments on their autonomy and way of life. As we have shown in the case of the Occupation of Wounded Knee, occupiers chose an important location for their stand at the location of the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890 and collectively practiced cultural traditions like the Ghost Dance to assert their presence, identity, and right to be on their land in the way they chose to be.

Differences

While both the Northwest Rebellion and the Wounded Knee Occupation were driven by Indigenous resistance against colonial oppression, their differing outcomes and approaches to land ownership, the varied roles of media and social movements as well as the relationship with authority highlight the unique challenges and dynamics of these movements within their respective Canadian and U.S. contexts. While both witnessed violence and the imposition of aggressive assimilation policies, such as the establishment of residential schools, the extent and nature of these outcomes differed. In Canada, the aftermath of the Northwest Rebellion saw the enforcement of residential schools as a means of erasing Indigenous culture and rights, resulting in physical and cultural genocides. In the US, the Wounded Knee Occupation occurred with the history of residential schools and in the location of a genocidal massacre, symbolically bringing the past into the present and exposing the ongoing violence of the colonial project. The occupation and the efforts of AIM throughout the time period called attention to continuing violence and suppression of indigenous rights. The Occupation did not succeed in its aims to either oust Dick Wilson, the dictatorial Tribal Chairman, or assert sovereignty rights over land that rightfully belonged to the Lakota Oglala. Instead, the United States has witnessed the continuing marginalization of indigenous populations while ignoring current problems that disproportionately affect indigenous communities: poverty and alcoholism are only two of them. The Occupation brought a revolution in the Red Power movement with some expanding rights; however, full recognition of the genocide against Native Americans is lacking along with substantive structural changes to support indigenous communities today in the United States.

Another key difference lies in the acknowledgment of land ownership before engaging in self-defense. In the US, indigenous communities, particularly the Lakota Oglala, emphasized

their sovereignty and ownership of the land as a basis for their resistance. Conversely, in Canada, the Métis did not explicitly acknowledge land ownership as a primary grievance before engaging in self-defense, although land rights were undoubtedly a central concern. The occupation of Wounded Knee constantly recalled broken treaties, especially the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, and the rights to land that were denied to them. Declaring sovereignty as a nation separate from the United States was key for them to declare their presence and expose the injustices that they experienced. In both of these cases, the defense of land and people is overlapping and symbiotic. The emphasis on land ownership by indigenous communities, particularly the Lakota Oglala in the US and the Métis in Canada, serves as a foundational aspect of their resistance. By asserting sovereignty and ownership of the land, they simultaneously defend their cultural heritage, way of life, and the well-being of their people against colonial encroachment and injustices. The defense of land is intricately linked to the defense of indigenous communities' rights, autonomy, and survival.

Furthermore, differences in media usage, as well as the involvement of social movements, shaped the dynamics of each resistance movement. In 1885, when the media was almost non-existent and social movements were often limited, the North West Rebellion was contained to only those impacted directly. The lack of media meant that the majority of the nation wasn’t aware of what was occurring, only known by word of mouth or military correspondence. Comparatively, the Wounded Knee Occupation, occurring in the era of widespread social movements and activism, garnered significant media attention and support from various advocacy groups across the US. The use of media was incredibly important for spreading the word of the occupation and making talk of the occupation common across the country. The occupiers used media attention to tell their story and garner support: “journalists

grew increasingly uneasy as they realized they were central players in the story they reported on."[37] The presence of journalists gave legitimacy and power to the occupation while checking the power of the government. In addition, the press was used to propagate disinformation from both sides about who started different firefights, who went back on promises, or over-inflating the danger of the situation.[38] The media portrayal of the occupation, which the government falsely portrayed as heavily armed,[39] was crucial to balancing the power of negotiations and controlling the sentiments of the public. The occupation was an embarrassment for the Nixon administration and the press presence ensured that people across the country were kept well up to date with that embarrassment. This actually encouraged the government to briefly pull out of Wounded Knee in the hopes that the press storm would die down, something which did not occur, and instead the occupation increased in force and the government quickly returned to the scene.[40] The media played a major role in the Occupation whereas in comparison, the Northwest Rebellion unfolded in a different media landscape, with limited avenues for indigenous voices to be heard beyond local and regional channels.

While the Northwest Rebellion and the Wounded Knee Occupation share similarities in their resistance to colonial oppression and dispossession, they also exhibit notable differences in their contexts, government responses, and outcomes. Despite these differences, the Northwest Rebellion and the Wounded Knee Occupation continue to represent the ongoing struggles faced by indigenous communities in asserting their rights and sovereignty amidst the complexities of colonial legacies in North America.

Conclusion

[37] Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 210.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid., 211.
[40] Ibid., 217.

Despite ongoing colonialization and genocide, Indigenous peoples in both Canada and the U.S. continue to act in self-defense of their communities and cultures. Even after the Northwest Rebellion, communities throughout Canada opposed the colonial regime. They are only part of a longer story. They were not the first to resist colonialism and they will not be the last. Similarly, with the Wounded Knee Occupation, the defense against erasure is not over. The Occupation in 1973 was simply one chapter of many. The story of indigenous resistance differs between the two countries. Canada has gone on to reconcile with residential schools and ongoing disappearances of Indigenous women and girls in both of their truth commissions. The U.S., on the other hand, has not reconciled with its history and continuing erasure of indigenous communities. The fight at Standing Rock against the Dakota Access Pipeline is another chapter in the self-defense of indigenous lands and cultures. All of these events serve as reminders of the ongoing struggles faced by indigenous communities in asserting their rights and sovereignty in North America. Each act of self-defense will be unique and similar, but the best that communities can do is learn from their predecessors and fellows. The continuing struggle for self-determination and rights in North America needs communities to work together in solidarity both across borders and with their ancestors.