HANK ADAMS

An Uncommon Life

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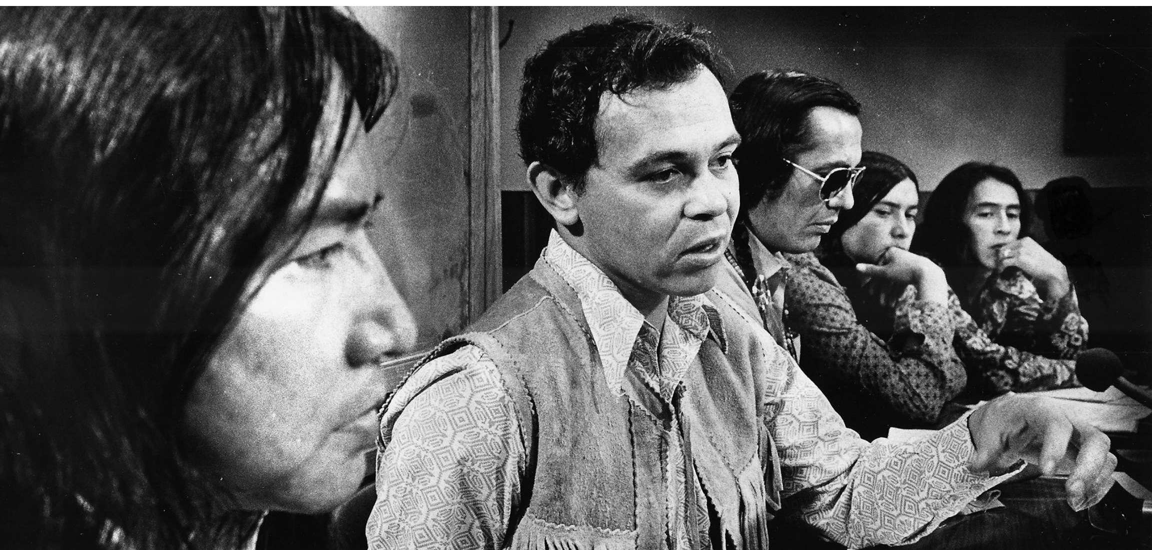
A four-mile caravan of pickup trucks and campers straggled into Washington, D.C., just days before the presidential election in 1972. Incensed by broken treaties, Native American protesters had crisscrossed the country to cast light on longtime grievances with the U.S.

Among the throbbing drums and butcher-paper banners denouncing mistreatment was Henry Lyle Adams. The Assiniboine-Sioux, 29, was more tactician than firebrand. There would be no teepees near the Capitol, he said, no tragic trail of violence. The demonstrators had come to negotiate peacefully with the U.S. government over self-determination—the right to make treaties, the right to restore ravaged tribal lands and the right to equitable treatment for Indian people often wracked by poverty and despair. But the Trail of Broken Treaties would not go according to plan.



Adams, in the fall of 1972, addresses the mission of the cross-country trip to Washington, D.C. Native Americans activists determined to cast light on grievances with U.S. policymakers would soon seize the Bureau of Indian Affairs. *Hank Adams collection*

The activists, weary after a night in a rat-infested church, seized the Bureau of Indian Affairs at dusk on November 2. They declared the six-story building the Native Indian Embassy and erected a tepee on the front lawn. From Constitution Avenue, you could see them standing on the roof. They peered out the windows and lingered on the stone front steps: the defiant man draped in an upside-down American flag; the activist clutching a reinforcement rod wrapped in red ribbon; the demonstrator scanning the front page for news of the takeover.

Men, women and children—a coalition of more than 250 tribes and nations—had barricaded themselves inside. Many were part of the American Indian Movement, a militant organization led by the striking-looking Russell Means, an Oglala Sioux with long braids, and Dennis Banks, an Ojibwa with shoulder-length hair and headbands. The men became box office hits, starring in the 1992 film, *The Last of the Mohicans*. They looked the part. Hank Adams didn't.

Adams, lean and bespectacled, was a strategist whose quiet manner seemed to contradict his passion for justice. A Nixon aide described him as "slender, dark, nervously tentative." Behind his shy demeanor, Adams was driven and unusually intelligent. By age 6, he'd earned enough money laboring in the fields and fishing to supplement the modest income of his large family. As a teenager, he'd acquired the best student record at Moclips High School in its 60-year run. At 29, after locking himself in a Minnesota Holiday Inn for 48 hours, he'd crafted a manifesto a professor of American

Adams forged a friendship with Martin Luther King Jr. who chaired the Poor People's Campaign in 1968. Adams, a steering committee member, held King's hand as a group sang, "We Shall Overcome." Three days later the civil rights leader was dead. *Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico*

Indian studies called "one of the most comprehensive indigenous policy proposals ever devised." Adams' "20 Points" became the formal proposal submitted to the Nixon administration in November 1972. The document is still celebrated in Indian Country today. "Like most of the things he's written, the '20 Points' does not carry his name," says Suzan Harjo, who is Cheyenne and Hodulgee Muscogee. "I asked him once if he minded other people taking credit for his stuff and he said, 'But that's really not the point of it all, is it?'"

The constant back and forth with White House staff in November 1972 frustrated protesters and tension mounted. The tipping point came on November 6, the day before the election, when polls indicated President Nixon would crush Sen. George McGovern (D-SD), the Democratic Party's antiwar nominee. The court authorized police to remove the occupiers by force. The order was stayed; the destruction ensued.

Evidence of their anger was everywhere—in the carpets

In the aftermath of the BIA sacking, Bobbie Kilberg, a Nixon aide, observed the kind of "patient fury" it would have taken to mangle 44 keys on a typewriter, one by one. "That to me was just symbolic of how much hatred and venom and frustration there was among this community of people, rightfully or wrongfully," Kilberg said. *Associated Press*

soaked with gasoline; on the marble staircases lined with Molotov cocktails; among the overturned tables and scattered records. Irate demonstrators had poured glue in copy machines. Someone, acting with what was described as "patient fury," had mangled 44 keys on a bureaucrat's typewriter, "one by one." The destruction at the BIA building would be recorded as the "third most costly act ever visited on Federal property."

Adams was not an official member of AIM and he never advocated destruction of the building. But he became the principal negotiator with the White House during the occupation. "His anger was always quiet," says Susan Hvalsoe Komori, a protégé. She became an attorney in large part because of Adams' persuading. "I've never seen him physically angry. I think what he did with his anger is he wrote it." But if the building went in smoke, Adams urged AIM to carry out its plans when rush-hour traffic would tie up police and firefighters. The occupiers could escape.

At 8 p.m., hours before polls would close in the West, Adams sat down with a dozen or so Indians—some smoking peace pipes—and a handful of White House staffers. One was Leonard Garment, Nixon's trusted counsel. Their four-hour meeting to negotiate a peaceful way out of the building began in prayer.

Garment saw in Adams someone who could speak both "Indian" and "American." He also saw a savvy mediator who "knew every negotiating trick in the book" and possessed such vast knowledge of Indian law that Garment assumed he was an attorney. Yet Adams exasperated the White House aide. "Our initial phone conversation left me nearly brain-dead," Garment remembered. "Adams spoke very slowly, like a phonograph record playing at the wrong speed, and very softly, as if to evade wiretap detection. His sentences weaved, hovered and never quite ended. He had a cough, a nervous laugh and a stammer."

According to Garment, the long meeting was frequently interrupted by calls to Adams from inside the building—calls alerting Adams to impending disaster. Garment figured they were just "pressure tactics." But the communication from be-

hind the BIA barricades was increasingly worrisome to Bud Krogh, Nixon's deputy counsel. He'd spoken to an infiltrator who'd warned: "It's a tinderbox; it's ready to blow up."

On the cusp of Nixon's landslide, when the president carried 49 states, Krogh contacted John Ehrlichman, one of the president's top advisers. "You're going to fly back tomorrow, and you're going to be at a great victory. But you're going to look out the left window, and you're going to see an orange glow on the horizon. And as you land ...that will be the Bureau of Indian Affairs on fire. And my best estimate to you is that the headlines are going to read, *'So many Indians slain,' 'So many policemen killed,'* and the third one down will be, *'Nixon wins in a landslide.'* "

Henry Lyle Adams, 73 years old in the middle of another fractious election, sits on a park bench outside the Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually Wildlife Refuge north of Olympia. He reminisces about a rare life that carried him from his birth in Poplar, Montana, to vicious confrontations on Northwest riverbanks to the siege at Wounded Knee.

Adams never thought he'd live beyond the age of 40. Maybe his health would be to blame. He's been chain-smoking for years. Maybe his activism. "I can't identify him," Adams once said of the gunman who shot him in the stomach at point-blank range during the Northwest fish wars, "but hell, I've seen him before. In a thousand taverns, in a thousand churches, on a thousand juries." The 1971

The Poor People's Campaign, created to address the poverty of millions, housing shortages and unemployment, triggered a "responsible resolution,' Adams said. *Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico*

assailants were never caught. Adams concedes he might have been the target of a jealous Indian. The late Vine Deloria Jr., a noted Standing Rock Sioux author, famously said of Adams: "In my mind histories written a generation from now will say that he was the only significant figure to emerge in the postwar period of Indian history."

Adams has been arrested, jailed and wounded for his cause. He's fished with Marlon Brando and acted as a consultant to the Kennedys. He held hands with Martin Luther King Jr. three days before the civil rights leader was assassinated. In 1968, while he sat on the national steering committee of King's Poor People's Campaign for economic justice, Adams took a vow of poverty. "He's one of the most poverty-stricken people you will ever meet and he gives everything he has away for free," Komori says.

Adams has been labeled a "walking contradiction." He's self-effacing and elusive, yet accomplished and everywhere. His activism and writings are credited with influencing movements and culminating in a landmark decision in favor of treaty fishing rights in 1974. "He was never linear," says Komori, addressing Adams' ability to analyze history and case law. "Everything he thought about is how these factors interrelate. Hank was always looking at the universe of information. It's almost not humanly possible."

Hank Adams, arrested and jailed in the cause of his life, has such encyclopedic knowledge of Indian law he is often mistaken for an attorney. *Hank Adams collection*

Adams has prepared testimony for con-

In 2014, Adams and fellow activist Billy Frank Jr. testify in Washington state. The proposed legislation vacated criminal records for activities related to the struggle for fishing rights. *Hank Adams collection*

gressional hearings. Sometimes he will deliver the remarks; sometimes he's helping others advance the cause. He's behind numerous court challenges, and his fingerprints are all over books chronicling Native American history and the revival of tribal life. Yet his name never appears on much of his work. Harjo notes: "If you're looking at documents that are unattributed from the late '60s into the late '70s, you're likely to find that Hank had a hand in writing those."

Adams is a living archive of the story of the American Indian, a historian who can identify the most obscure dates and events with ease. He is known to disappear behind towering stacks in his duplex north of Olympia only to emerge with the precise case law or record in question. "In my own image of him, he is Yoda. I mean, he's in a cave, right? It's a cave with files and pictures. It's always been like that," says Komori.

Adams has been called a "mad genius," a characterization he finds humorous. "I don't know which one is here with you now," he once joked to an audience.

Some find Adams polarizing. "For some reason I still

Adams has been called the "most important Indian" for his lifelong activism, and a "mad genius" for his superior intellect, a label he finds humorous. "I don't know which one is here with you now," he once quipped to an audience. Above explaining the landmark court opinion on treaty fishing rights known as the Boldt Decision. *Hank Adams collection*

don't fully understand, Adams is considered in certain quarters to be radical and threatening, perhaps because of his ability to empower other Native people with knowledge and awareness of Indian rights," explains Harjo.

"Hank Adams, early on, was the one who got your attention because he was right in your face," remembers Dan Evans, who was Washington's progressive governor during the

Adams and Dan Houser, an activist with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, draw attention to the struggle for fishing rights and tribal sovereignty. *Hank Adams collection*

Adams, whose Indian name is Yellow Eagle, is a native of Fort Peck. With his father, Louis, "the best Indian bronc and bull rider out of Montana." *Hank Adams collection*

heated battles over treaty fishing rights. "He was doing things out on the river. He was making sure you understood that there was a problem."

You can trace Adams' life to Wolf Point, Montana, a remote place on the Assiniboine side of the Fort Peck Indian Reservation most commonly referred to as Poverty Flats. The roots of the Adams name are there too. When America was determined to assimilate Indians into white culture, someone at the Fort Peck Indian Boarding School renamed his grandfather: Two Hawk Boy became John Adams.

With sister Lois Adams in May 1957 while visiting an amusement park at Jantzen Beach in Portland. Lois was an operator at Bell Telephone and Hank in the 8th grade graduating class of Pacific Beach Grade School. *Hank Adams collection*

Hank is the son of Lewis Adams, a champion bronc and bull rider who was drafted into the Army five months before his birth in May of 1943. The elder Adams suffered extensive injuries to his head, feet and legs during the legendary Battle of the Bulge.

Adams' parents divorced when he was young. As a toddler he moved with his mother to Longview, Washington, and soon thereafter to The Dalles, Oregon, where he remained for seven years. It was here that Adams first acquired a strong work ethic. You'd find him in the fields picking cherries or cucumbers or out fishing.

Adams' mother, Jessie, later married a Quinault and raised her large family at Taholah, the tribe's ancestral village at the mouth of the Quinault River. The accomplished rodeo rider and horsewoman had studied at teachers' college. She eventually became a lay minister of the United Pentecostal Church at Queets. Jessie loved music. She played the violin and the piano all her life. Adams remembers her carting the same piano to three different states each time she moved.

The yearbooks at Moclips High School remember Adams as a standout athlete, a student body president and the editor of the school newspaper and annual. As a freshman at the University of Washington in 1961, he watched President John F. Kennedy address the 100th Year Convocation. Adams dropped out two years later when Kennedy was assassinated. He heard the news from his UW housemate Guy R. "Butch" McMinds, who would go on to become an influential Quinault leader in his own right. "My life was redirected by that event and I disenrolled from UW with my last classes there on that day."

The Assiniboine-Sioux worked in the orchards and fished throughout his youth while maintaining nearly perfect grades. *Hank Adams collection*

Adams began work as an indigenous political strategist. He was first exposed to public policy

Billy and Hank on the Nisqually River, the scene of turbulence during the "fish wars" that culminated in a sweeping ruling for the tribes in 1974.
Hank Adams collection

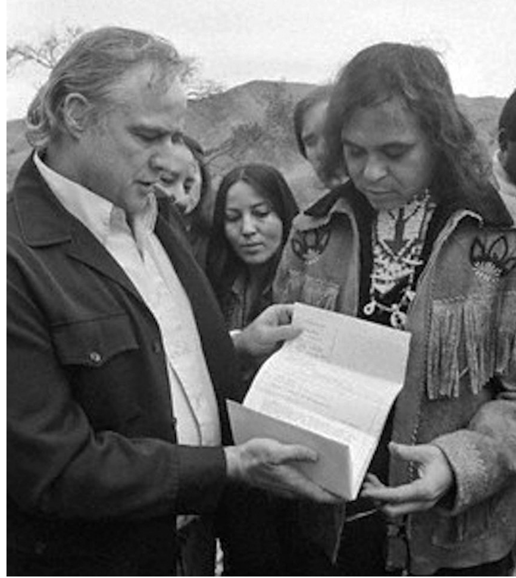
at age 14 during the debate over legal authority among tribal, federal and state governments. But his legacy started to take shape six years later when he and Billy Frank Jr., the charismatic Nisqually Indian, began their half-century battle for treaty fishing and hunting rights.

In 1963, as the newly minted special projects director for the National Indian Youth Council, Adams immersed himself in a complex and passionate struggle. The organization was dedicated to equal opportunity for Native youth. Adams' interest was in treaty fishing rights. The great fish war erupting on Northwest rivers pitted the state against Indian fishermen. The state called the crackdown conservation. Activists like Adams called it racism and the abrogation of treaty rights. Adams even refused induction in the military the next year, citing violations of Native treaty rights. (He later served for two years.)

The publicized faces of treaty activists usually belonged to Billy Frank or his brother-in-law, Alvin Bridges, two renowned fishermen out in their canoes on the river. But Adams was the figure behind the tribes' legal and public relations strategy. He understood how the power of celebrity could advance

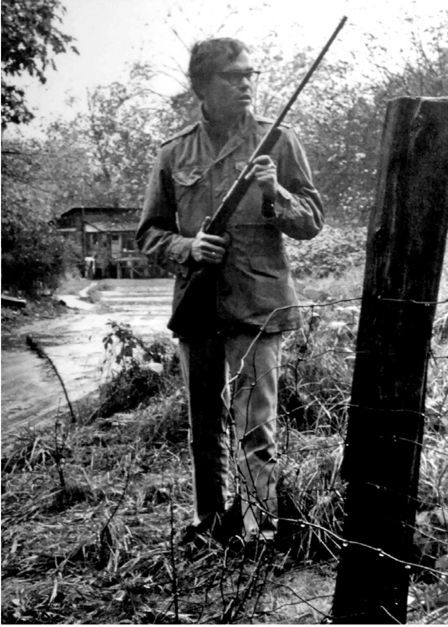
Laura Mott

treaty fishing rights for Indians. In 1964, he organized a major demonstration at the state Capitol and invited Marlon Brando. The visit attracted tribes from around the country, garnered national media attention and carried the struggle for treaty fishing rights into the American living room.



In 1974, Marlon Brando gifts Adams and the Survival of the American Indian Association 40 acres of land in Southern California. A decade earlier, Adams persuaded Brando to engage in a major demonstration for treaty fishing rights at the Washington State Capitol. *Hank Adams collection*

Adams was never particularly enamored with Brando's fame. The celebrated actor remembered how Adams and the other Native fishermen "didn't give a damn about my movies." Once, after a miserable night in a drafty cabin before a scheduled demonstration, Brando told Adams he thought he was suffering from pneumonia. "You know what my grandmother used to say?" Adams retorted. " 'If you smile, you'll feel better.' " The attitude never diminished their close friendship. In 1974, Brando donated 40 acres in Southern California to the Indians and Adams' Survival of the American Indian Association, an activist organization that arranged protests and strategized for treaty rights. In 1968, Adams was named the association's national director. He staged protests, managed the public relations strategy, advanced court challenges and produced or contributed to several documentaries exposing tussles on the riverbank between white authorities and Indians, particularly women who often fished when their husbands were arrested for violating fishing laws.



Adams appears in 1968 on the Nisqually River, outside the two-room home of Willie and Angeline Frank. It's the "only picture of me not holding a cigarette," he jokes to his many followers on social media. *Hank Adams collection*

Adams himself was roughed up, jailed and shot at on the riverbank. He was arrested in 1968 after he pulled an old milk carton from a set net on Capitol Lake in Olympia. Police tossed Adams—the tribes' behind-the-scenes strategist—into the back of a police car with Billy Frank. "What the hell are you doing here?" Billy asked. From then on, Billy called Hank "Fearless Fos," taken from a character in an old *Dick Tracy* cartoon.

Adams represented himself in court through invoking free speech and told the judge that he was assisting other fishermen in exercising lawful treaty rights—and invoked no First Amendment defense. On the state's conservation claim: "We were trying to demonstrate that the salmon were too smart to come out into that clear water and jump in our nets," Adams said. The court refused to accept his argument. In mid-January 1972, Adams began a 30-day sentence, lodged in a cell separate from those for whites. "My mom and dad joined scores of protesters at the Thurston County Jail in Olympia for my arranged arrest," he later noted.

In the winter of 1971, white vigilantes approached Adams and another fisherman while Hank dozed in a car and his companion tended net near an old railroad trestle that crosses the Puyallup River. Adams says he was jarred awake when an assailant opened the car door and fired. Adams eventually pressed charges—accusing authorities of depriving him of his civil rights, of failing to aggressively investigate and of spreading false rumors about the crime.

Willie Frank Sr., reputedly the last full-blooded Nisqually Indian, is surrounded by family. Adams, back row, considers elders like Frank the great teachers of his adolescence and adulthood. *Hank Adams collection*

Some contend that without Hank Adams, the court would never have upheld treaty fishing rights in the tribes' usual and accustomed places. "When Hank came into the fishing rights struggle, the Indians were disheartened, disorganized and certainly demoralized," Vine Deloria Jr. said. "In the decade in which he has been active, the situation has completely reversed." The landmark decision secured the tribes' rights to an equal share of the harvestable catch. In Adams' view, the most important outcome was the authority to co-manage the resource.

Early on, Adams acquired impressive credentials in American politics. He was selected for a plum job as an aide to New York Senator Robert F. Kennedy provided the Democratic presidential candidate won the California Primary in 1968. Kennedy was assassinated moments after celebrating his victory. Adams ran for Congress himself twice, as a Democrat in '68 and a Republican in '72.

By age 29, Adams was entrenched in planning for the Trail of Broken Treaties demonstration and within months negotiating a way out. The scene on Constitution Avenue in Washington, D.C., intrigued passionate supporters. One was a young man

from Colombia who'd just become a U.S. citizen. "I don't even know what BIA is," he admitted, "but I was ready to die for it!"

Snipers were stationed on the roof of the Interior Department across the street; the Metropolitan Police were queued up in the BIA parking lot: "An all-black force, over 100 of them in line, after line, after line, getting ready to act when they got the orders," Adams recalls. It is one of his most vivid memories. "I asked them, 'Why are you going to do this? You've been doing this for 400 years. When are you going to stand up and say no?' I gave a little lecture."

Harjo and her spouse Frank covered the occupation for a radio station in New York City. Harjo was nine months pregnant. "The steps were lined with Molotov cocktails. I waddled down with my war zone Sony and there was Russell Means. And with a very great flourish, he said, 'It's a great day to die!' And he lit this long fuse. My husband, Frank Harjo (Wotco Muscogee), Oren Lyons (Onondaga Faithkeeper), and Billy Lazore—an Onondaga chief—ran down the stairs saying, 'Bullshit!'" They rubbed the fuse out with their feet.

Adams with longtime friend, Suzan Harjo.
Hank Adams collection

Despite 40 hours without sleep, Adams maintained his composure and helped negotiate an end to the takeover with the Nixon administration. "Hank Adams' role in the peaceful resolution of some very difficult problems is still vividly clear in my mind," Leonard Garment recalled. The BIA building, a scene of mass destruction, never burned. The occupiers evacuated after a week when they were granted amnesty and presented with more than $66,000 in travel money. The White House

Hank Adams of Frank's Landing, Wash., arrested Wednesday on charges of possessing stolen government property, talked yesterday with reporters in his Washington hotel room.—A.P. wirephoto.

agreed to establish an interagency task force to study Indian affairs and to review Adams' 20 Points within 60 days.

The trouble was not over for Adams. Members of AIM had carted off more than 20,000 pounds of BIA records. Alleging the documents contained evidence of bureaucratic neglect and wrongdoing, they'd packed the documents into cardboard boxes and loaded them onto trucks. The haul included "sixty-nine volumes of land allotment tract and deed books for the White Earth Chippewa of Minnesota and the Oneida of Wisconsin," personnel files and Navajo financial documents. Paintings and artifacts went missing too. The stolen property was stashed away, removed from the building as the Indians evacuated in a 40-car caravan with police escorts. Adams was "appalled" by the takings. He agreed to retrieve the missing files and return them to the FBI. He'd already made one delivery when, on January 31, as he prepared to send another three boxes to the Bureau, he was arrested by authorities in front of his Washington, D.C., apartment. The complaint charging him with possession of stolen property was signed by

the same agent who'd accepted his first delivery of documents. The Grand Jury dropped the charges. "I knew it was risky to deal directly with the FBI, although that's who the White House had told me to deal with," Adams said.

On January 11, 1973, the White House rejected Adams' 20 Point Proposal in a 36-page response that called the reopening of treaty negotiations "a false issue, unconstitutional in concept, misleading to Indian people and diversionary from the real problems that do need our combined energies." The cover letter noted the administration's hopes that the "wanton destruction of the Bureau of Indian Affairs building and the theft of many of its contents by members of the Trail of Broken Treaties will be seen as the divisive and distracting act that it was—an act which served only to impede the progress already being achieved by the combined efforts of the Administration and the responsible Indian community."

Adams says the White House dismissal of the 20 Points helped provoke the takeover for which AIM is best known, the siege of Wounded Knee, where Adams would again negotiate with Leonard Garment.

Wounded Knee was a wounded place—scarred by the historic massacre in 1890 that left 300 Sioux dead in a tragic end to the Indian Wars. Generations later, Wounded Knee remained a troubled place, a deeply impoverished village on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota known for its tumultuous relationship with the BIA, which wielded substantial paternalistic power over reservation life.

Dramatic events unfolded in the weeks before the uprising. Riots erupted in Custer, S.D., over the brutal killing of a local Oglala and his white assailant's second-degree manslaughter charge. A failed impeachment attempt of Richard Wilson followed. The controversial chairman of the Oglala Sioux was accused of misspending tribal money and keeping a "goon squad." AIM and many Oglala who lived at Wounded Knee opposed Wilson. Segments of the tribe saw the chairman as a "corrupt puppet of the BIA." Nevertheless, he remained in power by a 14-to-4 vote of the tribal council.

"The internal warfare at Pine Ridge was so paralyzing that even getting Adams into Wounded Knee was a crisis," remembered Leonard Garment, a Nixon adviser. Adams acted as an intermediary between Garment and the Oglala Sioux Council. "There seems a general failure to realize just how serious the threat of violent confrontation is at Wounded Knee," he told the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Indian Affairs," and an equally serious failure to realize that Wounded Knee is not confined to Wounded Knee."

On February 27, 1973, Carter Camp, a U.S. Army veteran, led the first of some 200 members of AIM into the village. They demanded a change of tribal leadership, an investigation into corruption on South Dakota reservations and a review of Indian treaties. "We were clinging to our weapons tightly," he remembered. "There was a full moon and we knew that a battle was gonna come. I was sitting there thinking of some of these young men that are around me, am I committing them to die?"

"They were up to no good," said Joseph Trimbach, a former FBI agent. "I mean, why would they be traveling in a caravan with all these weapons and all these Molotov cocktails if they weren't going to engage in some kind of destructive activity?"

The insurgents overran the remote village, took 11 hostages and burglarized the only grocery store for miles, a trading post owned by Agnes Gildersleeve. "We had just finished eating our dinner and I looked out the window and said, 'Well, for heaven's sake, who opened the store?' And they're carrying things out, bringing things out by the carload. And I was floored, just floored."

A siege began. BIA police, U.S. Marshals and FBI agents surrounded the hamlet. Roadblocks went up as far away as the Nebraska state line. Indian militants and the federal government exchanged gunfire, particularly at night. Ralph Erickson, a special assistant to the U.S. attorney general, called upon the leaders of AIM to "come to their senses, to think of the innocent people and lay down their arms and come out in the daylight hour." But the deadlock remained.

Viewed by a Nixon aide as a skilled mediator who could speak both Indian" and "American," Adams negotiates the end of the takeover at the BIA in 1972 and the armed siege at Wounded Knee in 1973. *Barry Staver, The Denver Post*

From the start, Hank Adams had attempted to diffuse the crisis at Wounded Knee. He pressured U.S. senators to travel to the village, wrote President Nixon and urged AIM to release the hostages through messages he sent broadcast media in South Dakota. It was Garment, the Nixon go-between, who solicited Adams' help in negotiations. He became an intermediary between Garment and the Oglala Sioux Council. "I asked Adams to work informally and quietly with federal officials and AIM representatives at Wounded Knee, to pass on to me privately any suggestions he had, and to keep in touch," Garment later wrote.

The Assiniboine-Sioux first arrived at Wounded Knee in mid-March to review a Justice Department proposal to end the armed conflict. An assistant attorney general informed Adams that the offer was "the best that can be secured from the U.S. Government."

But Adams was certain the proposal would be rejected because it treated the takeover solely as a criminal matter and failed to address the treaties. He countered with new terms that called "for the dispossession of weaponry and process for dealing with substantive issues." According to Adams, the Oglala Sioux Council accepted the agreement while he slept. But the Justice Department flatly rejected it "with virtually no reading or review."

Adams spent hours with Garment back in Washington, D.C., weighing ideas to end the conflict. He carried a proposed settlement back to Wounded Knee later that month, but was arrested by local BIA police and evicted from the Pine Ridge Agency village. "The internal warfare at Pine Ridge was so paralyzing that even getting Adams into Wounded Knee was a crisis," Garment remembered. From then on, as the tense occupation continued, federal authorities escorted the Assiniboine-Sioux across the barricades. Sometimes he was even flown in.

Negotiations moved more swiftly after the killing of Lawrence D. Lamont, 31, who died in a gun battle with federal marshals in April. The well-known tribal member had a large family on the Pine Ridge Reservation. His death—along with diminishing supplies of food, water and electricity—brought the two sides closer. Garment signed an agreement in May—a variation of earlier proposals Adams had helped draft.

Chief Fools Crow, an Indian mediator, insisted that Adams act as a White House courier and deliver the final agreement. The settlement included a promise from the White House to send representatives to the reservation within two weeks to hash out Indian grievances over broken treaties and land compensation.

Adams took off for Rapid City. Fearing Wilson or "bureaucratic infighting" between federal departments would interfere and block the delivery, he hid security copies of the letter. "There were Interior Department officials who supported anything the BIA or Wilson wanted," he explained. "And most of those people and many surrounding non-Indian communities did not want a peaceful settlement of the matter."

A historic pact, delivered by Adams to Chief Fools Crow, officially ends the 71-day deadly siege that made news around the world. *Associated Press*

On May 6, 1973, Adams hand-delivered the pact to Fools Crow across a barbed wire fence at a sacred mesa, some 40 miles from the reservation border in the South Dakota Badlands. "It is not the contents of this letter that will make the difference for the Indian people," he told the chief. "The Indian people will have to make that difference themselves. The Sioux people have to give meaning to this letter, which may recreate hope for all Indian people. I see your people still hurt, still suffer, still have too little hope."

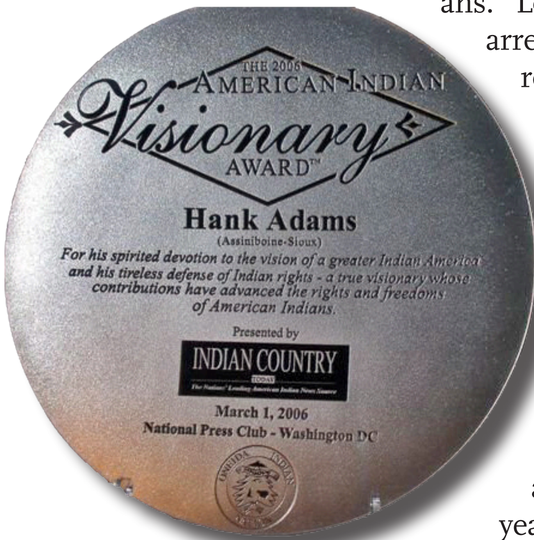
"It's a long time back," Garment recalled, "but Hank Adams' role in the peaceful resolution of some very difficult problems is still vividly clear in my mind."

After 71 days, the siege ended with a promise from occupiers to lay down their arms. Two Indians had died. A U.S. marshal had been shot and paralyzed. Dozens were injured and hundreds arrested. The U.S. Marshals Service ranked the occupation as the "the longest-lasting 'civil disorder' in 200 years of U.S. history." Adams worried about the future. "There

is still a strong possibility of armed conflict in other parts of the country unless something constructive is done in Indian relations and a clarification of their legal rights."

Controversy at Pine Ridge did not cease. In 1975, two FBI agents died in a shootout on the reservation, launching the biggest manhunt in the history of the Bureau. Four AIM members were indicted on murder charges. One, Leonard Peltier (Oglala Sioux & Turtle Mountain Chippewa), is still in prison. In the years immediately following the occupation, more people were murdered at Pine Ridge than in "any jurisdiction, rural or urban, in the United States." Richard Wilson remained the tribal chairman.

Adams' contribution to resolving the BIA occupation and the siege at Pine Ridge has slowly been recognized over time. Eight years after authorities charged him with possessing stolen BIA documents, Adams received the Jefferson Award from a foundation dedicated to promoting public service activism. He was saluted for his "leadership in seeking equal opportunities for Indians." Les Whitten, a journalist arrested with Adams for returning BIA papers, said: "Hank Adams is one of the bravest and finest men I have ever known. His bravery is not foolhardy or mad, but that of one who totally recognizes the dangers he faces and goes ahead anyway—not once, but year after year."



Adams' activism continued. In the 1980s, he assisted the Miskito Indians in their longtime battle for self-determination with the Sandinista government of Nicaragua. Adams and two other Americans join-

ing the fight said the cause demanded the attention of "anyone in the hemisphere with a conscience." Adams also played a role in the negotiations of the U.S./Canada Pacific Salmon Treaty and helped secure the Little Big Horn National Monument Indian Memorial.

Adams is awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Native Leadership from Northwest Indian College. *Hank Adams collection*

In recent years, Adams has devoted hours to mentoring Indian young people—educating the next generation on the importance of treaty rights, the wisdom in their history and their role in the future. "It's for my nephews and nieces, for Indian families," Adams says. "Not one person born in this century will vote in this election, yet it's their century.

"How can we expedite solutions and alleviate the effects

A popular speaker with Indians and non-Indians alike, Hank remains a tireless advocate for treaty rights. At the Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge. *Hank Adams collection*

of climate change rather than simply accept a time schedule for everything bad to happen? Can we affect the rising ocean levels? Can we keep those villages in Alaska on beaches where they now are? Are we going to have to move them off? And if we have to move Miami, are we going to forget about those Indians and Natives on the Alaskan beaches?" He said that with a sardonic chuckle before adding, "There are a lot of things beyond your control but you do what little you can with the little time that you have. But, you also recognize that time is so short."

One of his ever-present Winstons in hand, the lifelong activist commiserates at the refuge with a couple of Nisqually Indians over last-minute details for an upcoming canoe journey before quietly heading home.

"Somewhere in Olympia, Wash.," says Ramona Bennett, a former Puyallup chairwoman, "there is a thin, aging Assiniboine-Sioux man leaning over a computer. He is making sure we have a tomorrow."

Trova Heffernan,
Legacy Washington
Published 2016

Adams' longtime relationship with the family of Billy Frank Jr. dates back more than a half-century. Here with Maiselle Bridges, Billy's older sister.
Laura Mott

Source Notes

This picture appears on the cover of *The Hank Adams Reader*, a collection of Adams' most important writings during his lifelong career as a political strategist and activist. *Hank Adams collection*

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