

On the Passing of Russell Means

Written by Mike Honda
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I wish to extend my deepest condolences to the family, friends and community of Russell Means.

Means was a charismatic Native American activist known for coordinating controversial, yet powerful, political demonstrations. In 1970 he began his tenure as the American Indian Movement's first national director by seizing a replica of the Mayflower at Plymouth, Massachusetts on Thanksgiving Day – a forceful expression of the frustration and disenfranchisement felt by so many members of the Native American community. Soon after, he organized an AIM takeover of Mount Rushmore to protest the United States' violation of the Treaty of Fort Laramie. He also served as a spokesman for the famous occupation of Wounded Knee. Under his leadership, the American Indian Movement received an unprecedented level of attention on the national stage. Russell Means sought justice and respect for his people. In the process, he fundamentally altered the discourse of American history and politics.

Although we have made great strides, there is still work to be done. We must ensure that Native American communities have equitable access to education and healthcare. We must demand respect for tribal sovereignty. We must hold ourselves and our government accountable to the historical obligations we have inherited. As long as we fight for justice, the legacy of Russell Means lives on.