

Wounded Knee

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The first of the Wounded Knee trials, that of Russell C. Means and Dennis J. Banks, opened here with the interrogation of potential jurors which was expected to last until the end of January.

Ultimately the jury will consist of a panel of 12 jurors, together with six alternate jurors, who will weigh the federal government's case against Means and Banks over charges stemming from the 71-day occupation of Wounded Knee in early 1973.

The lengthy jury selection process resulted from the extraordinary list of questions prepared for the prospective jurors which had been submitted to presiding judge Fred J. Nichol by the Wounded Knee Legal Defense/Offense Committee (WKLDOC).

Each prospective juror is being asked about 200 questions, 157 of them prepared by the WKLDOC and 35 prepared by federal prosecuting attorneys.

The bulk of the special Indian-oriented questions were prepared by social scientist Jay Schulman for WKLDOC.

Schulman was formerly associated with Cornell University and City College of New York, and is currently assisting in the setting of jury selection patterns for the accused Attica prisoners in New York, now also awaiting trial.

To determine the ethnic origin, character, thought-patterns, lifestyle and associations of the potential jurors, each was first asked questions concerning his or her upbringing, marital status, church affiliations, educational background, profession, political beliefs, reading habits, memberships in groups of their own choosing, other professional associations and the like.

All questions were aimed at "determining the qualifications and possible bias in an important case, as well as sympathy or prejudice," according to presiding judge Nichol.