

DAKOTA ACCESS PIPELINE UNIT: RESOURCE SET 4; HANDOUT 3**DENNIS BANKS PRISON INTERVIEW**

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Left: Dennis Banks (left) being interviewed in a San Francisco jail.¹

Right: A patch commemorating the 1890 Wounded Knee massacre and the 1973 protest.²

Dennis Banks was a co-founder of the American Indian Movement (AIM). This group fought for the rights of American Indian people living in American cities. He participated in the 1969 occupation of Alcatraz, and the 1973 occupation of Wounded Knee. After Wounded Knee, Banks was arrested and jailed in San Francisco. The following text is an excerpt from an interview in his jail cell.

Interviewer: What exactly were your intentions, and the intentions of your co-fighters, in occupying Wounded Knee, Alcatraz, and then Washington? What did you want to achieve?

Dennis Banks: Well first of all, it came at a time when the Watergate scandal was breaking loose, and we knew we had to bring worldwide attention. Not only to the fact that in America, that they were undergoing a scandal at the highest level. But that the scandal and the injustices continued at the reservation also. So we went to Wounded Knee, basically to get the treaty rights, and to have the Bureau of Indian Affairs removed from the [Department of the] Interior, and to have the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act ammended. Those have been the goals of AIM, and they still are.

And the secondary reasons of course, was the fact that at Pine Ridge, South Dakota, where Wounded Knee is located at, the dictatorship government of Dick Wilson was in full force,

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kqKgcCb0eJl&t=8s>

² <https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/the-wounded-knee-massacre/sources/755>

and he was using police, and he was using goons to run down old men and women, running them off the road, and causing them a lot of misery on that reservation. And we had carried demonstration signs, we went peacefully here and there to no effect. And finally, in a last desperate attempt to bring about corrective change, we decided that we would have to bring that hoop which Black Elk spoke about when he saw the massacre at Wounded Knee. He said that the hoop was broken, and Fool's Crow said that we must bring the hoop back together. And we decided to go to Wounded Knee.

Interviewer: *In a society like this, you have to make a lot of noise to be heard. Is that right?*

Dennis Banks: You certainly have to do that. And I'm only sorry that that's the only way that Indian people get attention, is by making dramatic efforts. You know, they don't listen to us when we go to Washington and hand-carry requests to them, and recommendations. They just file them away. And so you have to take very drastic action in this society.

Interviewer: *Mr. Banks, the Indians are not united amongst themselves. Is that right? The Navajos want their own way of life, the Hopis their own way of life, the Cherokees, and the Sioux. Indians are not united and do not want to become one nation, is that right?*

Dennis Banks: Well I think they're united in one respect: they do not want to be assimilated into a society that ignores them or rejects them. I think we're all united on that basic belief and stand. It's true that the Navajos want to maintain their way of life, and every right should be guaranteed them to allow that to happen. Same way with the Ojibwas, same way with the Sioux. Same way with every nationality. No matter if you're living on a distant reservation in New Mexico or Minnesota, then that right should be guaranteed them.

Interviewer: *Would you advocate violence to achieve your aims?*

Dennis Banks: Well, certainly nobody likes to be caught in the center of a violent situation. But certainly there is a time, and there is a need for forceful efforts to be made on the reservation. To cut down some of the crimes that are happening on the reservation. And I believe that it takes a great amount of concentration and effort by the American Indian Movement to make sure that we remain Indian people as we were born. Because unless there's no counter-plan to what the Bureau of Indian Affairs has set forth, we will be raised into an alien society that really ignores Indian people.