

Dennis Banks, Co-Founder of AIM
On the rationale for creating AIM...

“Indians have a life expectancy of 44 years. On many reservations, there are no jobs. Unemployment on Pine Ridge is 87%. Indians have no hope. We live in rotten conditions, many in tar paper huts, without water or heat. We have little health care, and what we have is terrible. Our infant mortality rate is the highest. Our ancestors treated with the U.S. government. In return for peace, we were guaranteed our rights over small parts of the land our peoples had inhabited for generations, so that we could continue our way of life. Then the lands were stolen. Some for gold. Others for water or coal or uranium for the energy companies or for grazing land for white cattle ranchers. The government violated every treaty. Our way of life was stolen too. The missionaries came. Our religion was stolen. The Bureau of Indian Affairs came. Our way of governing ourselves, thousands of years old, was stolen. We are still a conquered people. Our children are taken away from us, stolen, sent to boarding schools hundreds of miles away. They’re punished for practicing their Native religions, hit when they speak their Native tongues...I just want my people to survive. No one listened when we spoke politely about injustice. Only when we raised our voices did people begin to listen.”

(As quoted in Kenneth Stern, *Loud Hawk: The United States versus the American Indian Movement*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994:23-24).