



AIM struggles to resurrect Indian culture



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A.I.M.—three letters that have spelled trouble for law enforcement officials throughout the Midwest.

Many persons believe that members of the American Indian Movement (AIM) are young revolutionaries who desire to overthrow the U.S. government.

Russell Means, former AIM national coordinator, however, termed AIM members as older "traditionalists who want to return to Indian culture and religion."

The organization began in 1968 in Minneapolis, Minn., and has grown to 43 chapters throughout the nation, he said.

The movement gained national attention last March when Indians congregated in Gordon, Neb., to force an investigation into the alleged killing of Raymond Yellow Thunder, a 51-year-old Oglala Sioux, by two whites.

In November, AIM organized a demonstration in Washington, D.C., to protest the "Trail of Broken Treaties." Other protests have occurred in Scottsbluff, Neb., Custer, S.D., Rapid City, S.D., and now in Wounded Knee, S.D.

The Indians' demand: "We are an Indian nation and should be independent through self-determination," Means said.

The key to the Indian movement, however, is not political demonstrations but spirituality, Means said.

"To be an Indian, you have to be spiritually based," he said. "When we found our spirituality, our movement began to grow."

The spiritual significance of Wounded Knee was the principal reason for the AIM takeover on Feb. 27, according to Wallace Black Elk, an AIM spiritual leader from Denver, Colo.

On Dec. 29, 1890, between 200 and 250 Indians were killed by the U.S. Seventh Cavalry, as the Indians proceeded to Pine Ridge, S.D., to celebrate the Ghost Dance.

The Ghost Dance, an Indian ceremony, celebrated the reunion of the living and dead, and the restoration of Indian lands that had been taken by whites.

"The white man has separated my people from their religion and the Great Spirit," Black Elk said. "We almost got lost. Wounded Knee is where the white man nearly destroyed our religion. So we've come back to this place, to our religion, to start once again from the beginning."

