

Clyde Bellecourt Biography

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Biography

As one of the original founders of the American Indian Movement (AIM), Clyde Bellecourt (born 1939) has long been an activist for the rights of Native Americans. He was an essential participant in the occupation of both Wounded Knee and a Bureau of Indian Affairs Building in the early 1970s.

Born on the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota in 1939, Clyde Bellecourt was one of the founders of a national activist organization called the American Indian Movement (AIM) and a powerful force in major activist struggles of the early 1970s. AIM was founded by Dennis Banks, George Mitchell, and Bellecourt, all Ojibwa, in 1968. On February 27, 1973, they and other leaders led an armed occupation of Wounded Knee, South Dakota, after Dee Brown's book *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (1971) had established the site as a nationally recognized symbol.

Bellecourt also helped draft twenty demands that were put before the government during the Indian occupation of a Bureau of Indian Affairs building in 1972. Among other things, the protestors demanded a separate government for Indians, the restoration of Indian lands, the renegotiation of all treaties, and a special agency in Washington, D.C., for the reconstruction of Indian communities. While the White House did not meet these demands, the government established a task force to meet with the protest leaders and promised to make no arrests for the occupation.

In December 1993 at an AIM conference, a tribunal was established to investigate charges against Bellecourt and his brother, Vernon. In November of 1994, the tribunal released its verdict: the brothers were found guilty of eight crimes, including collaboration with the U.S. government and drug related activity. As punishment, the two were banned from AIM for life.

Clyde and Vernon--key members of the National American Indian Movement, Inc. of Minneapolis, Minnesota--responded by calling the charges "ridiculous" and "slanderous." They named Russell Means, Ward Churchill, and Glen Morris as instigating the matter after the Bellecourt brothers signed an open letter that expelled Churchill and Morris from National AIM.

Bellecourt remains active in promoting the rights and culture of Native Americans. He is the current director of the Peacemaker Center for Indian Youth, organizer of the National Coalition on Racism in Sports and the Media, and chairman of the Board of American Indian OIC.