



## The Influence of Police Brutality on the American Indian Movement's Establishment in Minneapolis, 1968-69

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THE INFLUENCE OF POLICE BRUTALITY ON THE  
AMERICAN INDIAN MOVEMENT'S ESTABLISHMENT IN MINNEAPOLIS, 1968-1969

by

Christine Birong

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## ABSTRACT

The American Indian Movement (AIM) was established in Minneapolis, Minnesota in July of 1968. During this time, AIM organized around a variety of urban Indian community grievances, particularly police brutality and accountability issues. This thesis provides discussion of the nature of police brutality and police brutality's context in 1960s communities of color. There is also examination and analysis of how AIM organized around the issue of police brutality, direct action tactics, how police brutality impacted specific group members (specifically Clyde Bellecourt), and newspaper coverage of AIM and the police.

## INTRODUCTION

AIM is a grassroots organization known for bringing attention to Native issues in the United States in the 1970s. The public perceived this organization in different ways. Some viewed it as a youth-driven forging of the self-determination era, others perceived AIM's actions as reactionary and politically compromising to Native causes. Because AIM had so much attention given to them in the 1970s – a time of social reform and youth political activism – scholars have taken an interest in examining the organization. There are many publications that discuss AIM's activities in the 1970s, such as the occupation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), the Trail of Broken Treaties, and the occupation of Wounded Knee. After taking a personal interest in learning about AIM, I began reading the available literature. What I noticed was a lack of concentrated literary attention regarding AIM in 1968-69 – the year the movement was founded. While scholars do provide readers with some basic information regarding the movement's initial start-up, it is generally limited.

As I continued researching, I began to understand what issues and grievances AIM focused on. One of their main targets was police brutality. In order to fully understand why and how AIM organized around police brutality, we must understand the social context from which the movement emerged and the characters involved in its establishment. This requires evaluating the literature that offers readers insight into the lives of 1960s Minneapolis urban Indians and biographical information about AIM's founders. Donald L. Fixico's article, "Witness to Change: Fifty Years of Indian Activism and Tribal Politics," in the book, *Beyond Red Power: American Indian Politics and*

*Activism since 1900*, discusses the origins of AIS and identifies George Mitchell, Clyde Bellecourt, and Dennis Banks as AIM's original founders.<sup>1</sup>

However, William Keith Akard's 1987 doctoral dissertation out of Ball State University, "Wocante Tinza: A History of the American Indian Movement," identifies Bellecourt, Banks, and a man named Eddie Benton-Benei as AIM's founders. In his dissertation, Akard gives limited, yet important, information regarding these men. Akard notes that the founders he identifies had distinctive personal experiences as Annishinabe in Minnesota. However, what Akard fails to do is elaborate on why and how their experiences were different, simply making a one sentence statement about how their experiences are "diverse." He goes on to state that the only commonality threaded through their experiences until AIM's establishment was serving time at Stillwater Prison in Minnesota at the same time.<sup>2</sup>

Another literary source that is revealing about the background of these three individuals is the Dennis Banks' autobiography he co-authored with Richard Erdoes, *Ojibwa Warrior: Dennis Banks and the Rise of the American Indian Movement*. In this work, Banks reflects on the diverse backgrounds he, Benton-Benei, and Bellecourt had, informing readers about their education levels, careers, criminal records, social class, and

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<sup>1</sup> Donald L. Fixico, "Witness to Change: Fifty Years of Indian Activism and Tribal Politics," in *Beyond Red Power: American Indian Politics and Activism since 1900*, ed. by Daniel M. Cobb and Loretta Fowler (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2007), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Keith William Akard, "Wocante Tinza: A History of the American Indian Movement" (PhD diss., Ball State University, 1987) 13.

roles in Annishinabe life.<sup>3</sup> Banks' account of their lives before Stillwater Prison does, indeed, demonstrate how different their backgrounds are. This is an important work in providing a biographical context for these individuals, and in furthering an understanding of AIM's founding. Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior's book, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee*, adds to the discussion of how life at Stillwater shaped AIM's founders. However, they provide much of the same information as *Ojibwa Warrior* regarding how the men met and their activities inside the prison.<sup>4</sup> Though *Like a Hurricane* is a thorough investigation of Native empowerment and social movements in the 1960s and '70s, it does not provide readers the in-depth details about AIM's founding.

Information regarding the context from which AIM emerged is seen in Michaly D. Segal's doctoral dissertation, "The American Indian Movement: The Potential of A Counter Narrative," University of Pennsylvania in 2000. Segal's dissertation is both a psychological and sociological analysis of the state of Indians and Indian affairs in the 1960 and '70s rooted in historical experiences. Segal examines historical social policy effects on Native Americans and how her findings link to AIM. Segal's examination provides readers interested in AIM's founding with historical background about how policies impacting Natives have shifted, and how such shifts have altered the lives of Native peoples. Segal discusses how Bellecourt, Benton-Benei, and Banks met in prison. For this pre-AIM biographical information, Segal cites a July 1973 *Penthouse* magazine

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<sup>3</sup> Dennis Banks and Richard Erdoes, *Ojibwa Warrior: Dennis Banks and the Rise of the American Indian Movement* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 62.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 129, 60.

interview by Richard Ballad with Bellecourt.<sup>5</sup> Banks and Erdoes' 2004 autobiography provides further biographical sketches of AIM's founders.<sup>6</sup>

To further our understanding of AIM's foundation, we must understand the common grievances the Minneapolis urban Indian community shared. There is literature about this area, but, again, it is spread among many different sources. Larry R. Salomon's piece, *Roots of Justice: Stories of Organizing in Communities of Color* is one such contribution, but only discusses one grievance the community held, which is police abuse and misconduct against Minneapolis Indians. Salomon cites Banks as being the one leader who regarded this issue as a general community grievance requiring attention.<sup>7</sup> Though Salomon only identified police brutality as a community grievance, information from other literature expands upon the kinds of grievances Minneapolis Indians held, such as poverty.

In Segal's analysis of the social and historical context AIM emerged from, she briefly discussed the poverty facing the community. Segal identifies which geographical areas of Minneapolis (known as "Red Ghettos") had noticeable Indian populations. Segal notes that these neighborhoods experienced high rates of poverty, crime, and alcohol abuse.<sup>8</sup> Though Segal notes these conditions, she does not provide specific statistics or facts to support the argument. Instead she analyzes how such social conditions make

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<sup>5</sup> Michaly D. Segal, "The American Indian Movement: The Potential of A Counter Narrative" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2000), 97-99; Vernon Bellecourt, interview by *Penthouse*, "Penthouse Interview: Vernon Bellecourt," *Penthouse*, July, 1973.

<sup>6</sup> Banks and Erdoes, *Ojibwa Warrior*, 62-65.

<sup>7</sup> Larry R. Salomon, *Roots of Justice: Stories of Organizing in Communities of Color* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass: A Wiley Imprint, 1998), 130.

<sup>8</sup> Segal, "The American Indian Movement," 96.

individuals feel and the impacts on community morale and dynamics.<sup>9</sup> For instance, Segal states that a significant number of the residents of the “Red Ghettos” were high school dropouts, and attributes this trend to institutionalized racism within Western school systems.<sup>10</sup> No statistical data is provided to support this point. Bellecourt’s *Penthouse* interview is cited as the source for this statement. Donald L Fixico’s book, *The Urban Indian Experience In America*, echoes Segal and Bellecourt’s statements. Fixico discusses how Indian youth had difficulties graduating high school on and off the reservations, resulting in another social grievance against the greater community.<sup>11</sup> Fixico, too, does not provide statistical data for this assertion.

Segal also provides a similarly formatted analysis of the hardships Minnesota Indians faced when moving from on-reservation poverty to Minneapolis in search of upward social mobility.<sup>12</sup> Banks had an interview with William H. McClendon for *The Black Scholar*. In this interview, Banks describes the difficulties Minnesota Indians generally faced when transitioning from living on reservations to living in cities. Banks also describes the experience as “dehumanizing” because Indians are given no choice but to live in substandard housing as it was difficult for Indians to find places they were welcome.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 96-97.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>11</sup> Donald L. Fixico, *The Urban Indian Experience In America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 73.

<sup>12</sup> Segal, “The American Indian Movement,” 97.

<sup>13</sup> Dennis Banks, interview by William H. McClendon, *The Black Scholar Interviews: Dennis Banks*, Black Scholar, June 1976, 30.

Micheal LeRoy Indergaard's dissertation provides insightful statistical information surrounding schooling, which he obtained from the *Minneapolis Tribune*. I looked at the article Indergaard cited.<sup>14</sup> The newspaper provides telling statistical data about poverty and Minneapolis Indians. In a January 12, 1969 *Minneapolis Tribune* editorial, "Indians' Lot: Rent, Ruins, and Roaches," another important statistic is shared.<sup>15</sup> In Minneapolis in 1969, 21% of housing rented by Indian families had broken windows, 75% had broken doors, plaster, and steps, and 36% had inadequate plumbing. Gerald Vizenor, an Annishinabe wrote this article for the newspaper before becoming a scholarly author and American Indian Studies college instructor. Vizenor has written extensively on the Annishinabe and American Indian literature.<sup>16</sup> In the late 1960s, Minneapolis Indians generally lived in poor conditions and experienced difficulties while transitioning to city life.

Discussions of AIM's initial organization starts with their first meeting. I was surprised to find how much literature there is about the event. The most detail I encountered about the first meeting was in Banks' autobiography. According to Banks, he enlisted the help of his Annishinabe childhood friend, George Mitchell, to assist with organizing AIM's first meeting. From Banks, readers learn about Mitchell's personal history and character.<sup>17</sup> John F. Schuttler's University of Montana Master's thesis, "The

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<sup>14</sup> Micheal LeRoy Indergaard, "Urban Renewal and the American Indian Movement" (PhD diss., Michigan State University, 1983).

<sup>15</sup> Gerald Vizenor, "Indians' Lot: Rent, Ruins and Roaches," *Minneapolis Tribune*, January 12, 1969, sec. A.

<sup>16</sup> Gerald Vizenor, *The People Named The Chippewa: Narrative Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 173.

<sup>17</sup> Banks, *Ojibwa Warrior*, 63.

American Indian Movement as a Revolutionary Organization,” provides us with additional information about Mitchell’s life and role in coordinating the meeting.<sup>18</sup> The accounts both Schuttler and Banks share are consistent with one another. Another piece of graduate student work that touches on this opening meeting is Timothy John Baylor’s University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill dissertation. Julie Davis’ doctoral dissertation, “American Indian Movement Survival Schools in Minneapolis and St. Paul, 1968-2002,” also provides information regarding the first meeting. She also notes Mitchell’s participation, adding that Bellecourt also assisted with organizing.<sup>19</sup> Within this literature, there are consistencies with other discussions of the meeting, but also inconsistencies. Davis, Baylor, and Banks all provide readers with different locations of the meeting. Davis and Baylor identify the location as 1111 Plymouth Avenue, a storefront/Indian youth center in Minneapolis.<sup>20</sup> Banks claims the meeting took place in a church basement.<sup>21</sup> Both Banks’ and Davis’ sources are based primarily on personal experience with AIM organizing; Banks, of course, with his personal memory, and Davis from an interview with a former AIM activist.

After the first meeting, organizing the movement continued and escalated rapidly. Organizers had begun asking themselves how they were going to structure AIM and how they would identify as a group. Several literary sources discuss what inspired AIM’s

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<sup>18</sup> John F. Schuttler, “The American Indian Movement as a Revolutionary Organization” (MA thesis, University of Montana, 1991), 20.

<sup>19</sup> Julie L. Davis, “American Indian Movement Survival Schools in Minneapolis and St. Paul, 1968-2002” (PhD diss., Arizona State University, 2004), 97.

<sup>20</sup> Timothy John Baylor, “Modern Warriors: Mobilization and decline of the American Indian Movement (AIM), 1968-1979” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1994) 73; *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Banks, *Ojibwa Warrior*, 61.

organizational and group identification tactics, and it is clear that AIM leaders studied tactics that other grassroots, civil rights organizations were using. In David Kent Calfee's master's thesis out of East Tennessee State University, "Prevailing Winds: Radical Activism and the American Indian Movement," he analyzes how AIM took these tactics and altered them to work for their community. Calfee's conclusion is that doing so created a unique voice of AIM's own.<sup>22</sup> Calfee is not the only graduate student scholar to research and analyze this concept. In Steven L. Couture's dissertation, "The American Indian Movement: A Historical Perspective" out of the University of St. Thomas, he echoes and further develops this same concept. Couture states that development of this voice revolved around AIM's desire to truthfully represent the Minneapolis Indian community.<sup>23</sup>

When developing their tactics and philosophies, groups like the Black Panther Party heavily influenced AIM. AIM's mimicry of the Panthers ranged from adaptation of mission statements to dress. Couture notes that AIM activists began wearing red berets shortly after establishing, like the Black Panther Party and their black berets. AIM leaders also mimicked Panther terminology.<sup>24</sup> Couture's source for this information was an interviewee whom he identifies as "Participant Nine." In Participant Nine's quote, s/he did not elaborate or provide examples regarding the adopted terminology. Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall's book, *Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret Wars*

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<sup>22</sup> David Kent Calfee, "Prevailing Winds: Radical Activism and the American Indian Movement" (MA thesis, East Tennessee State University, 2002), 30.

<sup>23</sup> Steven L. Couture, "The American Indian Movement: A Historical Perspective" (EdD diss., University of St. Thomas, 1996), 51.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

*Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement*, discusses the correlations between these organizations. Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, leaders of the Panthers, made one of the group missions to organize, so the black community defended itself against those oppressing them. According to Churchill and Vander Wall, this is one of the philosophies AIM adopted from the Panthers.<sup>25</sup> Davis comments on how an AIM philosophy was that the people accessing social institutions should be the ones in control of them, and not the privileged few who do not use them.<sup>26</sup> Though this philosophy is similar to the one Churchill and Vander Wall discuss, Davis does not attribute this AIM philosophy as being Panther influenced. In fact, from reviewing Davis' citations, it is unclear what sources she used when drawing this conclusion.

One of the most recent works on 1960s Native political activism is Daniel Cobb's *Native Activism in Cold War America: The Struggle for Sovereignty*. In his introduction, Cobb demonstrates how AIM is consistently tied to 1960s Native grassroots organizational efforts, despite the fact that AIM only initially mobilized in the late 1960s.<sup>27</sup> Cobb clearly states his mission to compile a historical body of work dedicated to Native activist efforts *outside* of AIM during the 1960s:

This book is about a period that deserves to be understood on its own terms. It is about the National Congress of American Indians, the Association on American Indian Affairs, the National Indian Youth Council, and the Coalition of American Indian Citizens. It is about Helen Peterson, LaVerne Madigan, Sol Tax, Earl

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<sup>25</sup> Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret Wars Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2002), 119.

<sup>26</sup> Davis, "American Indian Movement Survival Schools," 99.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel M. Cobb, *Native Activism in Cold War America: The Struggle for Sovereignty* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008) 1).

Boyd Pierce, Robert K. Thomas, Clyde Warrior, Mel Thom, Vine Deloria Jr., Dr. Jim Wilson, Tillie Walker, and Rose Crow Flies High [and D'Arcy McNickle].<sup>28</sup>

Cobb stuck to his mission statement, and the only mentioning of AIM was quick references to AIM Patrol (discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis), and the occupations of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and Wounded Knee.<sup>29</sup> For those seeking information about 1960s Native activist organizations, events, and leaders outside of the American Indian Movement, Cobb's book is a wonderful reference.

Throughout the available literature that touches on AIM's initial founding, a wide variety of areas are discussed. From biographical information, to tactics, to finances, much ground is covered. However, there are contradictions within some aspects of the literature. There are also many literary sources that are consistent with one another. Some of the authors have built off from each other's work, adding layers to previously conducted research. As it turns out, there is much information about the establishment of AIM, it is just found in small pieces scattered throughout the available literature. Much of this literature mentions police brutality as a primary reason for AIM's establishment. However, I have only found one body of work that provides detailed discussion about how AIM organized specifically around police brutality in Minneapolis. Fay Cohen's University of Minnesota dissertation, "The Indian Patrol in Minneapolis: Social Control and Social Change in an Urban Context" addresses this point. Cohen's dissertation provides readers with an understanding of how and why AIM developed a civilian patrol

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 199.

to monitor police brutality against Minneapolis Indians.<sup>30</sup> Cohen wrote this dissertation while the civilian patrol was operating in the '70s, and the subject has not been revisited in-depth since.

Authors have either written about late 1960s AIM in passing or have contradicted each other. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to seek clarity and detail about AIM's initial founding in Minneapolis. To facilitate this discussion, I have written four chapters addressing this point. Chapter One defines police brutality and discusses the issue in the context of the late 1960s, when AIM first established in Minneapolis. Chapter Two provides readers with a brief history of AIM's establishment, particularly as it relates to policing. Additionally, this chapter will function as an introduction to AIM founders and how their beliefs and ideas shaped AIM's approach to police brutality. Chapter Three is divided into two sections. The first section looks at AIM's civilian patrol, its implementation, and its effects. The second section reviews then AIM chairman, Clyde Bellecourt's, arrest history to assess the relationship an AIM leader had before and after AIM's establishment, and how this affected the development of AIM. Chapter Four discusses how AIM-policing issues were portrayed in their hometown newspaper, the *Minneapolis Tribune*, for AIM sought media attention to bring public focus to their grievances. The purpose of Chapter Four is to see if their gained media exposure was ultimately positive or negative coverage and the implications of that coverage. Thesis findings will be discussed throughout the work and in the Conclusion.

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<sup>30</sup> Fay G. Cohen, "The Indian Patrol in Minneapolis: Social Control and Social Change in an Urban Context" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1973).

To conduct my research, I have reviewed secondary sources, such as academic and non-academic books, articles, and theses and dissertations. The primary focus of these sources was police brutality, AIM, and/or urban Indians in general. Conducting this research has helped me to establish a foundation in topic areas to expand upon them with the use of primary sources. I also reviewed primary sources used mostly consisted of newspaper articles and AIM's written statements held in the Minneapolis Public Library's archives, in addition to published and broadcasted interviews and autobiographies.

Additionally, I conducted interviews after receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the University of Arizona. I have interviewed Senator Fred Harris and Ms. LaDonna Harris. Both interviewees were Federal government researchers investigating social issues specific to communities of color. Ms. Harris is a Comanche activist who was appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson to the National Council on Indian Opportunity. Ms. Harris' position focused specifically on urban Indian social living conditions in the late '60s, and visited Minneapolis during her appointment. Senator Harris of Oklahoma, was appointed to the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders to investigate black issues as they relate to urban violence. Additionally, Senator Harris is an important source, for he was married to LaDonna Harris and his children are members of the Comanche nation. After completing law school, Senator Harris spent much time studying and researching American Indian history. The primary focus of our interviews was police brutality against communities of color and their opinions on police brutality and social conditions urban Indians faced in the 1960s. This

research has prepared me for holding the following thesis discussion, a look at police brutality's influence on AIM's establishment.

**CHAPTER 1**  
**POLICE BRUTALITY & ITS CONTEXT IN LATE 1960S URBAN**  
**COMMUNITIES OF COLOR**

Police brutality was one of the main purposes for the establishment of the AIM. AIM leaders were quick to realize that police officer abuse of Minneapolis' urban Indian population was one of their most serious community grievances. To fully examine police brutality's influence on AIM's establishment, it is important to understand the subject of police brutality in general.

Police are the primary mechanism for law enforcement and social control within the United States at the federal, state, local, and tribal levels. Moreover, a system of law maintains order within modern democratic systems.<sup>31</sup> The laws exist, but they cannot enforce themselves. Therefore, government systems rely on police officers to do so justly and fairly.<sup>32</sup> The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders – a 1967 Commission delegated the task of examining then contemporary civil unrest – defined the role of a police officer as “protect[ing] persons and property in a manner that embodies the predominant moral values of the community he is serving.”<sup>33</sup>

There is a tremendous amount of power that comes with this responsibility. To do their job, police are provided and entrusted with weapons, armor, arsenal, and the authority to make arrests and issue charges. In addition, police receive extensive training

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<sup>31</sup> Malcolm D. Holmes and Brad W. Smith, *Race and Police Brutality: Roots of an Urban Dilemma* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 7.

<sup>32</sup> U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Police Brutality: Opposing Viewpoints*, ed. Sheila Fitzgerald (Farmington Hills, MI: Greenhaven Press, 2007), 25.

<sup>33</sup> U.S. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *Supplemental Studies for The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, July 1968* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1968), 104.

by police departments on how to apply physical and deadly force. These materials and training equip police with knowledge and abilities needed to fulfill their prescribed role as law enforcement officials when confronted with violent or hostile wrongdoers.<sup>34</sup> However, when in the field, police are left to their own discretion as to when excessive or deadly force should be used. If an officer is confronted with such a decision, s/he is expected to quickly assess the situation and act accordingly. It is the officer's obligation to apply the least amount of force necessary based on the context of a situation.<sup>35</sup>

Police do not always conduct themselves in a prudent and orthodox fashion. Unfortunately, some police choose to direct their authority abusively towards civilians by brutalizing them. Police brutality is the utilization of greater force than is needed against a civilian.<sup>36</sup> Police brutality presents itself in several forms, consisting of unjustified excessive and deadly force – such as choking and wrongful shooting, assault, and abusive language.<sup>37</sup> Essentially, police brutality is an aggressive, unwarranted application of force that results from abusing the power, authority, and trust with which an officer has been entrusted. The commonality between the various forms of police brutality is that they all inflict victims with “physical or psychological harm.”<sup>38</sup>

Victims of police brutality not only encounter physical and/or psychological harm – they also experience a direct violation of their civil rights. Police brutality violates both

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<sup>34</sup> Holmes and Smith, *Race and Police Brutality*, 7.

<sup>35</sup> U.S. Legal, *Police Brutality Law & Legal Definitions*, <http://definitions.uslegal.com/p/police-brutality/>.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Holmes and Smith, *Race and Police Brutality*, 6; Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua', *Police Brutality: Opposing Viewpoints*, ed. Sheila Fitzgerald (Farmington Hills, MI: 2007) 56.

<sup>38</sup> Cha-Jua', *Opposing Viewpoints*, ed. Fitzgerald, 56.

the Fifth and Fourteenth amendments of the U.S. Constitution.<sup>39</sup> Police are considered part of the State, and under these amendments, a State cannot withhold civil liberties or take a life without due process.<sup>40</sup>

When police violate the rights and trust of civilians by inflicting abuse, serious consequences to the community emerge. When civilians experience police brutality, the relationship between the two groups shifts. Civilians may begin to feel that the police do not take actions to serve the public, but rather abuse their authority in a manner that opposes the institution's assumed function – to enforce the law and protect civilians.<sup>41</sup> After experiencing police brutality, victims often express disillusionment with law enforcement because there is no certainty police are held accountable for their acts of misconduct. Feelings of disillusionment are also rooted in a developing distrust of police officer judgment resulting from the experience.<sup>42</sup> The relationship between these civilians and police, thus, becomes polarized.<sup>43</sup>

The emergence of polarization between civilians and police is especially prevalent in communities that have historically experienced government oppression, including

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<sup>39</sup> U.S. Legal, *Police Brutality Law & Legal Definitions*.

<sup>40</sup> Cato Institute, *The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Cato Institute, 1998), 44, 48.

<sup>41</sup> U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Opposing Viewpoints*, ed. Fitzgerald, 25.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>43</sup> In the context of this thesis, polarize is defined as the “divide or cause to divide into two sharply contrasting groups or sets of opinions or beliefs” (“Dictionary.” Microsoft Office: mac. CD-ROM. Microsoft, 2004).

police brutality.<sup>44</sup> This is particularly applicable to communities of color – which have significantly higher rates of “legally justified” use of force incidents than whites.<sup>45</sup>

Arguably the most significant period in the struggle to combat police brutality in communities of color was the 1960s. During this time, communities of color organized and spoke out against police violence. One of these many different voices was that of AIM. In order to further develop an understanding of how AIM’s establishment was influenced by police brutality, police brutality during the time of AIM’s emergence must be examined.

Race riots occurred across U.S. urban centers, from Los Angeles to Newark in 1967 – the year before AIM’s establishment. In that year, 126 cities erupted in “racial violence,” 75 of which were deemed riots. Many of these eruptions were from black civilians reacting to neighborhood incidents of police abuse.<sup>46</sup> Since police were not properly trained to handle such turmoil, some “overreacted,” causing the situations to escalate.<sup>47</sup> Shock swept the nation and a call for a federal response was voiced on the Senate floor. Populist Senator Fred Harris of Oklahoma challenged the Federal government to investigate the source of the incidents:

It’s gonna take a national commitment, a massive kind of national commitment and anything less than that will not cure the ills that we have, and poverty generally, and the problems of race and the problems of our cities.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Opposing Viewpoints*, ed. Fitzgerald, 25.

<sup>45</sup> Holmes and Smith, *Race and Police Brutality*, 6.

<sup>46</sup> Senator Fred Harris, interview by Bill Moyers, *Bill Moyers Journal: Transcript*, Public Broadcasting System, March 28, 2008, <http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/03282008/transcript1.html>.

<sup>47</sup> Senator Fred Harris, telephone interview, February 25, 2009.

<sup>48</sup> F. Harris, interview by Moyers, *Bill Moyers Journal: Transcript*.

In response to the violence and calls for action, President Lyndon B. Johnson issued an executive order to create the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders in 1967.<sup>49</sup> However, President Johnson's order did not stem from the same social and economic convictions Senator Harris held. Johnson believed the riots were incited by militant black power organizations like the Black Panthers. The Commission began its investigation of the erupting urban violence in 1967.<sup>50</sup> The commission eventually became known as the Kerner Commission after its Chairman, former Illinois Governor Otto Kerner.<sup>51</sup> The commission's purpose was to research causes of the race riots and other police-civilian conflicts occurring in urban centers.

The Kerner Commission report was released in 1968 and drew startling and real conclusions regarding race and police brutality. The Kerner Commission's *Supplemental Studies for the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* streamlines collected report data into an abridged government documentation of findings. As they toured rioted areas, the Commissioners observed that these neighborhoods had mostly black populations, and that the police were mostly whites living outside the city. While American Indian populations were not included in this study, their experiences were arguably similar. The police were the predominant segment of the white population encountered in many urban black neighborhoods. These factors placed police into an adversarial position against civilians.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Cha-Jua', *Opposing Viewpoints*, ed. Fitzgerald, 60.

<sup>50</sup> F. Harris, interview by Moyers, *Bill Moyers Journal: Transcript*.

<sup>51</sup> Cha-Jua', *Opposing Viewpoints*, ed. Fitzgerald, 60; U.S. National Advisory on Civil Disorders, *Supplemental Studies*, v.

<sup>52</sup> F. Harris, interview by Moyers, *Bill Moyers Journal: Transcript*.

When visiting these select areas for their report, the commission distributed surveys to black and white urban residents.<sup>53</sup> These surveys asked a variety of questions critical to understanding aggressive police behavior in the context of 1960s urban United States. One survey question read, “Some people say the police don’t show respect for people and use insulting language. Do you think this happens to people in this neighborhood?” Responses to this question demonstrate a contrast of experiences based on race, 38% of blacks responded “Yes” compared to 16% of whites. Approximately 43% of all black males surveyed responded in the affirmative to this question. When respondents were asked if a police officer had ever used “insulting language” with them personally, 15% of blacks, but only 7% of whites, answered, “Yes.” The third and final survey question regarding the use of insulting language by police asked respondents if they knew anyone who had encountered this conduct. More than twice as many blacks responded “Yes” than whites – 26% of blacks to 11% of whites.<sup>54</sup>

These statistics demonstrate the different experiences urban residents had when spoken to by officers based on the residents’ race. A minimal number of white residents believed police use of insulting language occurred in their neighborhoods, and even fewer felt they had been personally victimized by this misconduct. By comparison, twice as many black residents indicated their neighborhoods experienced insulting language by police, and twice the percentage of blacks experienced such mistreatment themselves.<sup>55</sup> Overall, the Commission’s empirical data illustrates the way in which black versus white

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> U.S. National Advisory on Civil Disorders, *Supplemental Studies*, 42.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

urban residents were spoken to by officers – black neighborhoods experienced verbal mistreatment at a significantly greater frequency than whites.

Police use of insulting language was one question leading participants to a “direct question about ‘police brutality.’”<sup>56</sup> Thirty five percent of blacks surveyed answered, “Yes” when asked, “Some people say the police rough up people unnecessarily when they are arresting them or afterwards. Do you think this happens to people in this neighborhood?” In contrast, only 10 percent of all whites surveyed responded, “Yes” to this question. Participants were then asked if they themselves had ever been “roughed up” by police. Approximately four percent of blacks said “Yes,” 1 percent of whites answered “Yes.”<sup>57</sup> With this data, the Commission again demonstrates the different experiences blacks and whites had with law enforcement. Only one tenth of whites surveyed reported neighborhood police brutality. Meanwhile, over one third of blacks responded in the affirmative – a striking contrast.

Examining the Kerner Commission’s data surrounding insulting language and physical brutality provides insight into blacks’ general lack of confidence in law enforcement, feeling officers did not provide protection,<sup>58</sup> but rather abused the community. Exposure to such high rates of mistreatment demonstrated to its witnesses that police had the ability to abuse their powers against civilians, and did so regularly within respondents’ minority community. Black residents were not experiencing protection, but rather commonplace abuse.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 45.

Chapter six of the Kerner Commission's *Supplement*, "Police in the Ghetto," provides statistical analysis of how police perceive their role as authorities in the "ghetto" and their impression of "ghetto residents."<sup>59</sup> To assure data accuracy, the Commission was careful to create a sample of officers that effectively represented the demographics and dynamics of both the urban area and the police force itself.<sup>60</sup> Surveyed officers were asked what "Complaints policemen hear about their actions." 75 percent responded that they hear "Policemen are physically brutal to people on the streets." Commissioners attributed this response to police believing residents perceive them as brutal and thoughtless, and feel civilians are aggravated, or "annoyed," by officers.<sup>61</sup>

Furthermore, the Commission asked police respondents about "Police attitudes towards treatment of Negroes by police." Seventy-eight percent of white officers indicated that black civilians were treated "As well off" as any other civilian. In contrast, only 36 percent of black officers believed blacks were treated "As well off," while 57 percent indicated blacks were treated "Less well off" than other civilians by police. An interpretation of police responses was provided in the Kerner Commission's *Supplement*, summarizing potential social factors that may explain the disparity in white versus black officer responses:

Most of the overall difference between the Negro and white [police] respondents can most likely be attributed to their race, and related community ties and associations. However, the fact that fifty percent of Negro policemen interviewed had at least some college education, while only thirty-two percent of the whites

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 106.

had some college, might contribute somewhat to the broader and more sympathetic outlook and analysis of the Negro policemen.<sup>62</sup>

The statistics presented regarding civilian and police perspectives of officer misconduct demonstrate the polarized climate among communities of color and police during the late 1960s. Black civilians generally did not feel police provide them protection. This is due to the high rates of community and personal experiences of police mistreatment and brutality discussed earlier in this chapter. Because of the prevalence of such experiences, it was justifiable for victims and their neighbors to believe brutality was an institutionalized mechanism of the police force. While more than three quarters of white officers surveyed felt black civilians were treated as equals, more than half of black officer respondents indicated black civilians were not treated as equals. Additionally, police generally interpreted civilian attitudes toward the force as negative and hostile. In fact, nearly one third of officers surveyed by the Commission felt blacks viewed them “as enemies.”<sup>63</sup> With such widespread oppositional tensions, divisions persisted and marinated.

According to Senator Harris, the “same thing” happening between police and African Americans was happening between Indians and police at the time,<sup>64</sup> despite different historical experiences as peoples. Though the Kerner Commission’s report does not specifically address urban Indian populations, the report provides us with sound, accessible data and analysis of relations between black civilians and police. Thus, the report provides insight about the similar kinds of police brutality issues facing urban

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>64</sup> F. Harris, telephone interview, February 25, 2009.

Indians communities. Additionally, Commission conclusions surrounding police brutality directly link to social stratification factors in cities. These findings correlate with certain aspects of the urban Indian experiences.

In their report, the Kerner Commission found a wide variety of social conditions to be a source of the conflict in ghettos.<sup>65</sup> “Ghettos” are defined as “part of a city, esp. a slum area, occupied by a [community or communities of color].”<sup>66</sup> Common ghetto conditions included substandard education, sanitation, housing, unemployment, and high crime rates.<sup>67</sup> The Commission determined that historical white racism is primarily why these conditions exist. In the 1960s, whites were resistant to equal housing and desegregation. Commissioners poignantly summarize the role whites play in ghetto dynamics when stating, “White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it.”<sup>68</sup> Factors and conditions plaguing black communities were also rampant in urban Indian communities across the country, with Minneapolis – AIM’s founding city – being no exception.

During the 1960s, 10 percent of Minneapolis’ population identified as Indian – a high percentage considering Indians were only one percent of Minnesota’s total population.<sup>69</sup> Minneapolis’ concentrated urban Indian population was larger than Minnesota reservation populations.<sup>70</sup> This was a result of Federal relocation policies and

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<sup>65</sup> U.S. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *Supplemental Studies*, 62.

<sup>66</sup> “Dictionary.” *Microsoft Office: mac*. CD-ROM. Microsoft, 2004.

<sup>67</sup> Holmes and Smith, *Race and Police Brutality*, 2; U.S. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *Supplemental Studies*, 62.

<sup>68</sup> U.S. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *Supplemental Studies*, 62.

<sup>69</sup> Banks and Erdoes, *Ojibwa Warrior*, 69, 62.

<sup>70</sup> Segal, “The American Indian Movement,” 96.

programs moving Indians to cities, significantly increasing urban Indian populations. Upon relocating, the Federal government scattered Indians throughout urban centers so the population would not be in one concentrated area. This was done to prevent development of “Indian neighborhoods.”<sup>71</sup>

Despite Federal government measures to prevent creation of urban Indian neighborhoods, Minneapolis did, however, develop one. During AIM’s emergence, Minneapolis was the only U.S. metropolitan area with an “identifiable” Indian ghetto, and was a place Indians were historically “forced to live in substandard conditions.”<sup>72</sup> Like other ghettos, poverty was prevalent in the “Red Ghetto.” In Minneapolis, 21 percent of Indian households had broken windows, 36 percent had insufficient plumbing, 75 percent were structurally unsound, and cockroach infestation was commonplace.<sup>73</sup> Despite great need for higher quality housing, only one percent of civic public housing units went to Indians.<sup>74</sup> Additionally, low wages and low high school graduate rates were endemic. The average Indian family earned 1,978 dollars annually in the late ‘60s; during that same time period, of the 1,357 Indian high school students in Minneapolis, only 14 graduated in ‘68.<sup>75</sup>

In 1971, the League of Women Voters of Minneapolis conducted a survey of civic policing with “The major impetus for taking a new look at police-community relations in

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<sup>71</sup> Ms. LaDonna Harris, telephone interview, March 9, 2009.

<sup>72</sup> Banks, interview by McClendon, *The Black Scholar Interviews*, 30.

<sup>73</sup> Vizenor, “Indians’ Lot,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, January 12, 1969, sec. A.

<sup>74</sup> Fixico, *The Urban Indian Experience*, 82.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 59, 73.

Minneapolis [coming] from the Kerner Commission Report published in 1968.”<sup>76</sup>

Though the study was conducted after AIM’s establishment, 1971 is, however, a year relevant to AIM’s emergence. This study specifically discusses some of AIM’s work on Minneapolis police brutality issues, and discusses policing in the city in the late ‘60s and beginning of the ‘70s. Thus, the report provides further insight into police-Indian relations in the context of late 1960s Minneapolis. A section of the League’s study examined police-Indian relations, citing that police-Indian relations were made difficult by abject poverty, relocation transitions, and lack of education within the Indian community. The study asserted that police were insensitive to these conditions and to Indian peoples in general. Though brutality and misconduct by police against Indians is not specifically addressed within the League’s report, police sentiment toward Minneapolis Indians is summarized as follows, “Police, probation officers, welfare workers – all report a sense of inadequacy in dealing with the habitual Indian offender. A sense of futility and helplessness sometimes becomes callousness and assumed indifference.”<sup>77</sup>

In their book, *Race and Police Brutality: Roots of an Urban Dilemma*, sociologist Dr. Malcolm D. Holmes and criminologist Dr. Brad W. Smith assess police-ghetto dynamics. Holmes and Smith determined that through training, police are socialized and conditioned to assume the existence of danger and threat when patrolling urban ghettos to

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<sup>76</sup> League of Women Voters of Minneapolis, *The Police and the Community*, February 1971, (Minneapolis: League of Women Voters of Minneapolis, 1971), 18.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

“maintain their edge.”<sup>78</sup> During their tenure, officers begin associating specific areas within ghettos as more or less dangerous. These associations, in turn, cause officers to develop assumptions of how “dangerous” residents and visitors are by neighborhood. Everyone is assumed to be a threat in ghettos.<sup>79</sup> Officers working in poor neighborhoods with high crime rates among people they find threatening, often develop personally created stereotypes and unwarranted aggressive tendencies.<sup>80</sup> Officers “demand that their authority be recognized” and are prepared to defend themselves without delay.<sup>81</sup> Officers are expected to provide protection to *all* residents, and yet, do not trust specific neighborhoods – especially those predominantly consisting of communities of color – and, thus, are more likely to exhibit aggression and force in such communities.

Police abuse and brutality were prevalent in 1960s urban ghettos. Existing dynamics between civilians and police were fragile. Governments and civilians trusted officers to enforce laws and provide protection. Despite their prescribed role, police have historically abused their authority, particularly against communities of color residing in ghettos. When civilian residents witness patterns of police abuse, they become disillusioned with law enforcement, perceiving the institution as corrupt. This was the urban climate from which AIM emerged, strongly influencing the group’s initial establishment – police brutality was a primary community grievance to rally around.

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<sup>78</sup> Holmes and Smith, *Race and Police Brutality*, 90.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

**CHAPTER 2**  
**A BRIEF HISTORY OF AIM'S ESTABLISHMENT & THOUGHT**  
**PERTAINING TO POLICE BRUTALITY**

During the 1960s, Minnesota Indians were being sentenced to criminal institutions at high rates. One percent of Minnesota's population was Indian, yet American Indians amounted to one third of the state's prison population.<sup>82</sup> Ten percent of Minneapolis' population was identified as Indian, but amounted to 70 percent of Minneapolis' jail population.<sup>83</sup> And at the Minneapolis Workhouse, an institution for minor criminal offenders, 15 percent of male and 27 percent of female inmates were Indian.<sup>84</sup>

Among Minnesota's Indian prisoners were three Annishinabe credited as critical figures in AIM's establishment: Clyde Bellecourt, Eddie Benton-Benei, and Dennis Banks.<sup>85</sup> While at Stillwater Prison in the early 1960s, Bellecourt and Benton-Benei studied together.<sup>86</sup> Banks was also a prisoner at Stillwater, but served his sentence in the late 1960s, where he studied on his own. While serving their individual sentences, each drew conclusions about Minnesota Indian social conditions, particularly in Minneapolis, and what it meant to be Annishinabe.<sup>87</sup> Such efforts contributed to developing the philosophies AIM built as its foundation. Each of their personal biographies facilitates

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<sup>82</sup> Banks and Erdoes, *Ojibwa Warrior*, 59.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>84</sup> Indergaard, "Urban Renewal and the American Indian Movement," 44.

<sup>85</sup> Akard, "Wocante Tinza," 13.

<sup>86</sup> V. Bellecourt, interview by *Penthouse*, *Penthouse*, 60; Card 609-486, Minneapolis Police Department Bureau of Identification Unabridged Record: Bellecourt, Clyde H. FBI # 643 528 B, microfiche, Minneapolis Police Department Records Division.

<sup>87</sup> V. Bellecourt, interview by *Penthouse*, *Penthouse*, 60; Banks and Erdoes, *Ojibwa Warrior*, 60.

the understanding of their individual experiences as Indian peoples, and how each played their own unique role in AIM's establishment and mobilization.

Raised on the White Earth Reservation in northwestern Minnesota, Clyde Bellecourt moved with his family to Minneapolis' Phillips neighborhood – an area with a dense Indian population and part of the “Red Ghetto.”<sup>88</sup> While living in Phillips, he struggled with drug and alcohol addictions.<sup>89</sup> Additionally, Bellecourt conflicted with law enforcement officials, facing charges ranging from intoxication to burglary.<sup>90</sup>

Examining Bellecourt's arrest record provides insight about his personal history with the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD). Before AIM's establishment, Bellecourt was arrested 13 times by MPD officers in the thirteen years between 1954 and 1967 – averaging one arrest per year.<sup>91</sup> This arrest rate dramatically increased in correlation with the development of his political activism – the more politically active Bellecourt became, the more frequent his arrests. Bellecourt was arrested 28 times between 1969 and 1977 – a time of heightened activism – for an average of nearly 4 arrests per year.<sup>92</sup> Interpretation of this record is significant in the context of this thesis because it aids in illustrating an AIM leader's relationship with law enforcement both pre- and post-AIM. A further examination of arrest-activism timeline correlations is elaborated upon in Chapter Three of this thesis.

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<sup>88</sup> Akard, “Wocante Tinza,” 13; Banks and Erdoes, *Ojibwa Warrior*, 62; Segal, “The American Indian Movement,” 96.

<sup>89</sup> Akard, “Wocante Tinza,” 13.

<sup>90</sup> Minneapolis Police Department Bureau of Identification Unabridged Record: Bellecourt, Clyde H. Minneapolis Police Department Records Division.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

While serving a two to fifteen year sentence for armed robbery at Stillwater, Bellecourt befriended fellow inmate, Eddie Benton-Benei. Before serving his manslaughter sentence, Benton-Benei received a Master's of Education from the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. Moreover, he was well versed in Annishinabe knowledge and practices, serving as a community spiritual leader.<sup>93</sup>

As a spiritual leader and educator, Benton-Benei was truly a teacher in every sense of the word. It is no wonder that so many of his initial interactions with Bellecourt involved teaching him lessons. Bellecourt had begun a personal hunger strike while serving in Stillwater and was suffering fatigue. Benton-Benei approached him, pleading with him to begin eating again. Bellecourt refused to end the strike, but Benton-Benei spoke with Bellecourt about Annishinabe pride and gave him literature about Annishinabe peoples. Bellecourt did not read those materials right away, but eventually when he did, his attitude shifted. In an interview with *Penthouse*, Clyde Bellecourt's brother, Vernon, shared the story behind Clyde's change:

Then one day [Benton-Benei] started quoting literature, telling about the Ojibwas and our proud heritage. And finally one day, I guess just of boredom, my brother picked up a piece of this literature and started reading about us. And he finally recognized he wasn't the dirty Indian he'd been told he was by White students at school, where we went through all that racism and hatred.<sup>94</sup>

Bellecourt felt a personal and social empowerment, resumed eating, and soon recovered.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Segal, "The American Indian Movement," 98.

<sup>94</sup> V. Bellecourt, interview by *Penthouse*, *Penthouse*, 60.

<sup>95</sup> Segal, "The American Indian Movement," 98.

Bellecourt and Benton-Benei began working cooperatively as educators in Stillwater, focusing their efforts on fellow Indian inmates. The team began speaking with Indian inmates frequently, eventually organizing an Indian awareness program to facilitate dialogue surrounding the importance of Native culture. Opening up this dialogue among Indian inmates was an effort to prevent Indians from returning to jail upon release.<sup>96</sup>

Dennis Banks traveled a similar journey. During a nine-month solitary confinement sentence, Dennis Banks intensely studied and analyzed American history and the history of social movements. Banks shares in his autobiography, *Ojibwa Warrior*,

I began to read about Indian history and became politicized in the process... I had plenty of time to research the issues of American Indian civil rights since I was in a maximum security prison for two-and-a-half years with nine months of that in solitary confinement.<sup>97</sup>

His studies also included examining the various student-organized factions of the civil rights and anti-war movements through available media, such as newspapers.<sup>98</sup> Banks researched specific “radical” movements, such as the Weathermen and the Black Panther Party, reading about their motives and accomplishments.<sup>99</sup>

Banks recognized there were numerous social organizations and movements representing specific communities of color and their issues, however, none represented

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Banks and Erdoes, *Ojibwa Warrior*, 60.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.; Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* (New York: The New Press, 1996), 129.

<sup>99</sup> Banks and Erdoes, *Ojibwa Warrior*, 60-61.

the American Indian experience.<sup>100</sup> From this realization, Banks recognized the need for a social movement representing Indian peoples.<sup>101</sup>

It was then he began reflecting on matters facing his Minneapolis urban Indian community, concluding police abuse to be one of the most significant problems.<sup>102</sup> In *Ojibwa Warrior*, Banks provides readers a synopsis of the urgency to organize Indians around social conditions and police brutality.

We had nineteen Indian organizations for social welfare and gathering clothes. These were needed, but there was no movement specifically addressing the police brutality that was an everyday fact for Indian peoples or the discrimination in housing and employment in Minneapolis... Inside Stillwater, I made a commitment to myself that there would be an Indian movement.<sup>103</sup>

Minneapolis Indian neighborhoods were subject to excessive numbers of police patrol officers, which increased the likelihood of arrest.<sup>104</sup> Generally in urban centers, “Indian Bars” were central social locales since there were few community centers or other social establishments specifically for Indians. Police would often arrest Indians leaving, and those arrested tended to receive longer sentences than non-Indians. Indians were treated poorly during their sentencing – typically through harsh reprimand.<sup>105</sup> Such police-Indian encounters occurred frequently in Minneapolis, with police often parking paddy wagons on Franklin Avenue – Phillips’ main artery in order to facilitate arrests of

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>101</sup> Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 129.

<sup>102</sup> Salomon, *Roots of Justice*, 130.

<sup>103</sup> Banks and Erdoes, *Ojibwa Warrior*, 60-61.

<sup>104</sup> Davis, “American Indian Movement Survival Schools,” 99.

<sup>105</sup> L. Harris, telephone interview, March 9, 2009.

Indians.<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, the occasional officer would escalate these abusive situations by using aggressive language with victims, including racial slurs.<sup>107</sup>

Upon Banks' release from Stillwater, he phoned George Mitchell, an Annishinabe friend from BIA boarding school in Wahpeton, North Dakota.<sup>108</sup> During their conversation, Banks explained the need for Indians to organize. Mitchell agreed with Banks, and they soon began contacting people, mostly friends and family, living on and off-reservation about the meeting. The two canvassed door-to-door, distributing 500 informational fliers. When handing out fliers, they simply stated, "We need to have a meeting," and moved to the next door.<sup>109</sup> In addition to door-to-door and word of mouth recruitment methods, fliers were sent out by mail.<sup>110</sup>

The meeting was held on July 28, 1968. Before beginning the meeting Banks quickly jotted down "on a scrap of paper the kinds of issues I [Banks] thought we should discuss – prisons, courts, police, treaties, the government."<sup>111</sup> Banks was the first speaker at the meeting, reflecting on the social movements in the U.S. that focused on ending the Vietnam War, and also reflecting on the Civil Rights movement, and how

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<sup>106</sup> Rick Edmonds, "Indians to Patrol Franklin Av. to Deter 'Harassment' by Police," *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 20, 1968, Folder "MPLS: Indians 1967/68," MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN; Davis, "American Indian Movement Survival Schools, 99.

<sup>107</sup> Davis, "American Indian Movement Survival Schools," 100.

<sup>108</sup> Banks and Erdoes, *Ojibwa Warrior*, 61; Ron D. Johnson, "Faces of Minnesota: The Indian in Minnesota," *Minnesota Motorist*, March 1970, 5, Folder: "Minnesota Indians 1969, 1970, 1971," MHC, Minneapolis Public Library, Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>109</sup> Banks and Erdoes, *Ojibwa Warrior*, 63.

<sup>110</sup> Baylor, "Modern Warriors," 73.

<sup>111</sup> Banks and Erdoes, *Ojibwa Warrior*, 61.

students were working to change the nations colleges; but stated that there was no Indian voice, no one working for Indian issues,

They're fighting in the streets of Alabama to change the situation for blacks. The SDS movement is trying to change the whole structure of the universities. What the hell are we going to do? Are we going to sit here in Minnesota and not do a goddamn thing? Are we going to go on for another two hundred years, or even another five, the way we are without doing something for our Indian people?<sup>112</sup>

The speech was an assertion and demand for an Indian voice to emerge, and a call for Indians to organize, resist, and combat oppressive forces.

Several community issues were brought forward, however, police brutality proved to be a common grievance among those present.<sup>113</sup> As the meeting progressed, more attention was drawn to the issue of police brutality. Bellecourt asked Banks, "When do you propose to go down there to Franklin Avenue, to all those Indian bars where the cops inflict abuse on our peoples every night?" Banks said, "Our top priority is to do something about the police brutality that is going on every day. Tomorrow we'll start our protest." Bellecourt demanded they start that very night, and the group did just that.<sup>114</sup> The group wanted to collectively fight back against injustices, recognizing police brutality and high prison populations as major community issues.<sup>115</sup>

AIM compiled a list of six initial grievances to remedy.<sup>116</sup> Each grievance mirrored the oppressive social conditions discussed in the Kerner report as contributors to ghetto civil unrest. As discussed in Chapter One, the Kerner Commission cited housing,

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>113</sup> Schuttler, "The American Indian Movement," 97-98.

<sup>114</sup> Banks and Eroses, *Ojibwa Warrior*, 62.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Reference Appendix 1.

education, unemployment, and racism as the roots of urban black conflict. AIM's list was a reflection of how AIM recognized the same conditions the Kerner Commission observed, but in the context of urban Indian life. AIM grievances identified "slum housing," "80% unemployment," reprehensible public schooling, racism within the welfare system, and Federal Indian policy" as plaguing Minneapolis Indians. AIM placed "Police Brutality" at the top of the list, identifying it as AIM's number one grievance. Assembling organization grievances into a list established targets to facilitate and maintain focused group objectives.<sup>117</sup>

To administer their plan to combat injustices, AIM implemented a hierarchal leadership structure established by the leaders themselves. Awarded positions included, chairman, field director, and spiritual leader.<sup>118</sup> Prescribed roles and responsibilities were delegated to each official appropriately based on position. Hierarchical organizational structure provided appointees greater authority than ordinary members. Bellecourt became AIM's first Chairman, bestowing tremendous responsibility upon him – he was now AIM's front man and highest-ranking official. Bellecourt's duties involved being the group's orator and overseeing members during public demonstrations. Banks became AIM's first field director.<sup>119</sup> Benton-Benei's background as an Anishinabe community spiritual leader qualified him to fulfill his appointment as AIM's first Spiritual Leader.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Indergaard, "Urban Renewal and the American Indian Movement," 75.

<sup>118</sup> Cohen, "The Indian Patrol in Minneapolis," 45; Banks and Erdoes, *Ojibwa Warrior*, 62.

<sup>119</sup> Banks and Erdoes, *Ojibwa Warrior*, 62.

<sup>120</sup> Indergaard, "Urban Renewal and the American Indian Movement," 45.

Though AIM membership was open to the whole Indian community, the majority of members were Annishinabe who had resided on-reservation before moving to Minneapolis – nearly all specifically to Phillips.<sup>121</sup> Additionally, many AIM members were enrolled at Indian boarding schools as youths and some served jail sentences.<sup>122</sup> When reflecting on general membership backgrounds and leaders’ personal biographies, parallel personal histories are evident; for AIM’s leaders’ pasts were a collective mixture of these experiences. Sharing such hardships, upbringings, and other circumstances presented a common ground which ordinary members and leadership could draw from and relate to one another. Correlated aspects of member’s backgrounds are reflected in AIM’s organizational philosophies, particularly Indian boarding school experiences.

Those members sent to Indian boarding school often suffered abuse while enrolled, contributing to some developing low self-esteem.<sup>123</sup> To help encourage positive self-images, AIM adopted and promoted the concept of Indian nationalism – the construction of a national identity without boundaries among individual tribes; they are all one.<sup>124</sup> AIM believed that when Indians view themselves and their tribes as part of a whole entity – as opposed to individual segments – their identity as indigenous peoples strengthens and inspires pride, thus raising self-esteem.<sup>125</sup> The group applied Indian nationalism by tailoring the organization to be a pan-tribal movement – a movement

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<sup>121</sup> Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 128; Rachel Bonney, “The Role of AIM Leaders in Indian Nationalism,” *American Indian Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Autumn, 1977), 211.

<sup>122</sup> Segal, “The American Indian Movement,” 72-73; Cohen, “The Indian Patrol in Minneapolis,” 45.

<sup>123</sup> Segal, “The American Indian Movement,” 72-73.

<sup>124</sup> Rachel Bonney, “The Role of AIM Leader,” 210.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

inclusive of all indigenous peoples regardless of tribal affiliation. Organizing in this fashion conveyed the message that AIM was an organization of Indians striving toward justice for all Indians, not solely individual tribes. However, AIM also recognized the importance of individual tribal beliefs and practices, encouraging Indians to maintain and participate in their tribe's traditions.<sup>126</sup> Thus, AIM worked simultaneously to promote both participation and pride in individual and pan-tribal capacities. Additionally, AIM was not an ethnic minority movement. Though America Indians are peoples of color, their communities are also nations with sovereignty and unique government-to-government relationships with the Federal level possessed by no other American peoples.. Even if a tribe lacks Federal recognition, they are still a nation, for their governing system was intact prior to European arrival. Therefore, Indians are “nations, *not* minorities.”<sup>127</sup>

AIM was a pan-tribal movement, as well as a grassroots movement. “Grassroots” organizations are groups working within specific communities to address grievances from the “bottom-up” – starting with individuals with the least power to eventually make them those with the most. Since this organizational method had proven effective among Civil Rights groups – such as the Black Panthers – AIM adopted the approach.<sup>128</sup> AIM felt the method conveyed an empowering message to the community surrounding the importance of oppressed groups providing themselves defense and liberation from within.<sup>129</sup> In the

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<sup>126</sup> Davis, “American Indian Movement Survival Schools,” 105.

<sup>127</sup> David E. Wilkins, *American Indian Politics and the American Political System*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), 45-65.

<sup>128</sup> Akard, “Wocante Tinza,” 16.

<sup>129</sup> Indergaard, “Urban Renewal and the American Indian Movement,” 80.

late 1960s, AIM was “primarily a grassroots effort to stop police brutality against Indian people.”<sup>130</sup> Organizing around police brutality was “easy,” according to long-time police brutality activist and Pasqua Yaqui woman, Lupe Castillo. Castillo’s son, Joe, was brutally murdered by a white Tucson, Arizona police officer who was never charged with the crime. Mrs. Castillo made her statement to this researcher from the perspective that it is easy to organize people around issues and experiences they have had that are “not right” – such as police brutality.<sup>131</sup>

Direct action was a tactic often utilized by 1960s grassroots movements – an approach where ordinary citizens cut “out the middleman – solving problems [themselves] rather than petitioning the authorities or relying on external institutions. Any action that sidesteps regulations and representation to accomplish goals directly is direct action.”<sup>132</sup> Bellecourt agreed with the utilization of direct action, for it urged civilians to resolve community issues on their own, rather than seeking permission or aid from formal institutions or agencies.<sup>133</sup> This encouraged group empowerment and self-reliance development. At demonstrations AIM members purposely agitated participants and spectators to get everyone riled-up and make a scene – bringing attention to their voices.<sup>134</sup>

AIM leaders asserted that actions were more powerful than words. They expected that members participate in actions by giving public speeches, demonstrating in protests,

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<sup>130</sup> Fixico, “Witness to Change,” in *Beyond Red Power*, 5.

<sup>131</sup> Lupe Castillo, personal interview, March 12, 2009.

<sup>132</sup> *A Civilian’s Guide to Direct Action: What it is, What it’s good for, How it Works*, “Direct Action in a Nutshell: A Step by Step Guide,” 2006, page 1.

<sup>133</sup> Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 131.

<sup>134</sup> Indergaard, “Urban Renewal and the American Indian Movement,” 75.

and the like.<sup>135</sup> To fulfill this obligation, one specific direct action members could volunteer for was AIM Patrol. AIM Patrol was a systematic network of volunteers who monitored and documented police brutality and misconduct in Phillips to publicize and discourage police abuse. Extensive discussion of Patrol organization, tactics, and impacts follows in Chapters Three and Four.

Soon after AIM's establishment, Bellecourt and Banks collaborated on whether or not the group would condone the use of violence, and if so, under what conditions would it be acceptable. They recognized this as a pivotal decision, for it would affect membership recruitment and support within the Indian community and throughout Minneapolis. To assess options, leaders reflected upon the effects of both violent and non-violent tactics within the Civil Rights movement. AIM leaders wanted to be confrontational like the Civil Rights movement, but questioned if the group should be confrontational like Martin Luther King Jr. by using non-violence, or like the Black Panthers who utilized force and weapons when deemed necessary. As Banks states in his autobiography, "I rejected violence and some of the methods involving force adopted by the Panthers, but I knew that AIM would do what we needed to do to achieve our ends."<sup>136</sup> Thus, a dilemma emerged.

Ultimately, leaders wanted to communicate a peaceful message, but did not want unarmed members confronting armed police, concluding the use of "necessary violence" would be the organization's stance. The decision rested within Banks' belief that preventing aggression could be accomplished only through demonstrating powerful

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>136</sup> Banks and Erdoes, *Ojibwa Warrior*, 63.

opposition – such as violence – toward aggressors. Since AIM was combating violent police abuse, they felt posing a threat through armed self-defense was permissible; for such action may, in the end, prevent violence.<sup>137</sup> The group’s justification for utilizing violence against opposition was similar to one of AIM’s organizational influences: the Panthers, who argued, “Black people had been taught non-violence; it was deep in us. What good, however, was non-violence when the police were determined to rule by force?”<sup>138</sup>

Ramifications of AIM’s decision to apply necessary violence emerged among Indian and non-Indian Minneapolis residents. One stereotype regarding Indians is they are “aggressive,” and AIM’s approval of violence was seen as just that by some residents – aggressive behavior. Additionally, member obligations to participate in public action to demonstrate loyalty caused many group outsiders to view AIM activists as “militant,” “undignified,” and radical; thus stigmatizing the organization.<sup>139</sup> As historian Donald Fixico summarizes, this “militancy provoked a renewal of mistrust of and discrimination against Native Americans. Old stereotypes persisted and redneck critics claimed these beliefs had always been true.”<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Banks and Erodes, *Ojibwa Warrior*, 63.

<sup>138</sup> Huey P. Newton, *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, ed. David Hilliard and Donald Weise, (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002), 49.

<sup>139</sup> Cohen, “The Indian Patrol in Minneapolis,” 48; Baylor, “Modern Warriors,” 75; Indergaard, “Urban Renewal and the American Indian Movement,” 74.

<sup>140</sup> Fixico, *The Urban Indian Experience*, 181.

### **CHAPTER 3 THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AIM PATROL & THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHAIRMAN CLYDE BELLECOURT'S ARREST RECORD**

AIM set out to combat police brutality against Phillips' Indian residents in 1968 with the launch of AIM Patrol – a coordinated direct action tactic consisting of a network of volunteers monitoring Phillips for police misconduct. This began as an effort to develop a collaboration between Indians and police to reform the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD). In 1969, less than a year after launching AIM Patrol, AIM chairman, Clyde Bellecourt, experienced frequent arrests by MPD officers, particularly after filing a claim against one officer for brutality against Bellecourt himself. The following is an examination of AIM Patrol's initial implementation and Bellecourt's arrests. This section reviews how police misconduct impacted both AIM Patrol and Bellecourt's arrest separately and, also, how the two subjects overlapped. This discussion begins with a look at AIM Patrol's first year and transitions into Bellecourt's frequent arrests.

#### **AIM Patrol's Initial Implementation**

Police brutality and social conditions plaguing Minneapolis Indians were of the greatest concern for AIM' founding members. Though AIM recognized that not all officers abuse their authority, they were compelled to hold those who did accountable for unethical behaviors.<sup>141</sup> One established mechanism to fulfill this mission was AIM Patrol – networked volunteers who monitored police conduct in Phillips, Minneapolis'

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<sup>141</sup> Fay Cohen and Clyde Bellecourt, Folder "Indians: American Indian Movement, Spec. Coll." MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

Indian neighborhood. Clyde Bellecourt's brother, Vernon, summarized AIM's initial policing and social grievances in a 1970s address:

The American Indian Movement recognized that we had to form to draw attention to these [substandard] conditions, to start working on police-community relations in the community because Indian people were assaulted as a way of life by the police in Minneapolis and throughout this country.<sup>142</sup>

When configuring AIM Patrol, leaders looked to the Black Panther Party for a model, since they, too, founded their organization upon police brutality grievances.

Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale – Black Panther Party co-founders – established a black community patrol in Panther's founding city of Oakland in 1966. In his essay on patrolling, Newton states the program's establishment was "based upon defending the community against the aggression of the power structure, including the military and the armed might of the police."<sup>143</sup> The patrol functioned as a community mechanism to monitor and prevent police misconduct and brutality by having volunteers survey black neighborhoods on-foot or driving. If participants saw a black resident questioned by police, they would ask witnesses about the situation and observe from a "safe" distance, to prevent accusations of interference.<sup>144</sup>

The development and implementation for the Panther's community patrol occurred when promulgating the "Black Panther Party Platform and Program: What We Want / What We Believe" – a list of group grievances and demands. Point 7 on the list reads: "*We want an immediate end to police brutality and murder of Black people: We*

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<sup>142</sup> Vernon Bellecourt, "American Indian Movement," in *Contemporary Native American Address*, ed. John R. Maestas (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University) 66.

<sup>143</sup> Newton, *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, ed. Hilliard and Weise, 53.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

believe we can end police brutality in our Black community by organizing Black self-defense groups that are dedicated to defending our Black community from racist police oppression and brutality.”<sup>145</sup> Newton and Seale recognized police brutality as a major community grievance that most residents had experienced in some capacity. They believed, therefore, that people would mobilize around the issue, becoming engaged in the Panthers and, thus, potentially join. Newton had researched cities working to establish civilian review boards – a body of civilians delegated the task of evaluating police misconduct and to monitor police behavior. However, civilian review boards had all failed in Newton’s eyes – ultimately police were still the authority over police.<sup>146</sup> Panther leaders felt the patrol was a way to gain membership, protect community rights against police brutality, and empower the black community.

In North Minneapolis, prior to AIM Patrol, blacks residing in the community created a patrol modeled on the Panther tactics applied in Oakland.<sup>147</sup> Minneapolis Black Panthers’ patrolling operation proved successful in reducing the rate and frequency of police brutality within the black community.<sup>148</sup> Indians wanted the same for their neighborhood. In a *Minneapolis Tribune* article, an Indian employed at the Citizen Aid Center expressed the desire for an Indian patrol to protect those residing in the area from police abuse.<sup>149</sup> In 1967, three University of Minnesota Indian students involved in the neighborhood action program, Minneapolis Community Union Project (M-CUP),

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 56, 58.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>147</sup> Davis, “American Indian Movement Survival Schools,” 100.

<sup>148</sup> Akard, “Wocante Tinza,” 16.

<sup>149</sup> Indergaard, “Urban Renewal and the American Indian Movement,” 68.

attempted to organize a patrol on Franklin Avenue.<sup>150</sup> However, M-CUP's program lacked momentum and faded away. The next year, AIM formed and established its own patrol and, as Dennis Banks stated, "We patterned it after the patrol created by the Black Panthers in Oakland."<sup>151</sup> Group members voted at their Monday August 18<sup>th</sup> night meeting to launch the Patrol that August weekend with Banks asserting to the *Minneapolis Tribune*, "I'm tired of seeing the paddy wagon parking on Franklin at 9 o'clock and waiting to load up my people... The Negroes got rid of that sort of thing on Plymouth Av. with their patrol, and we're going to have to do the same thing."<sup>152</sup> Banks added in the interview that he was willing to lead members into violent action because sometimes "the only way to get any action is by show of force."<sup>153</sup>

AIM Patrol debuted August 23, 1968.<sup>154</sup> To jump-start the program, Bellecourt and Banks obtained grant funding from local churches.<sup>155</sup> AIM bought cars, installing two-way radios, tape recorders, and cameras inside. This equipment made it possible for patrollers to hear police dispatch and document interactions between police and civilians.<sup>156</sup> Initially AIM had three red patrol cars: one for Bellecourt, one for George Mitchell (who helped organize AIM's first meeting – see Chapter Two), and the other for

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<sup>150</sup> Dick Cunningham, "Student Patrol Fights for Indians in Court," *Minneapolis Tribune*, May 11, 1967, Folder "MPLS: Indians 1967-1968," MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>151</sup> Banks and Erdoes, *Ojibwa Warrior*, 63.

<sup>152</sup> Edmonds, "Indians to Patrol," *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 20, 1968, Folder "MPLS: Indians 1967/68," Minneapolis Public Library.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Cohen, "The Indian Patrol in Minneapolis," 55.

<sup>155</sup> Russell Means and Marvin J. Wolf. *Where White Men Fear to Tread: The Autobiography of Russell Means* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 163.

<sup>156</sup> Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 128.

Banks.<sup>157</sup> However, some other members, who were not leaders, were also authorized to drive patrol vehicles.<sup>158</sup>

On AIM Patrol's first official night, the group established its base station inside the Indian American Youth Center on Franklin Avenue. Approximately twenty Indian and non-Indian volunteers participated, dividing into teams to survey Franklin by foot.<sup>159</sup> A diverse representation of Minneapolis residents volunteered for the action. Patrollers consisted of men and women, Indians and non-Indians, workers, students, and AIM founders.<sup>160</sup> This first night was "quiet" – there was little interaction between police and Indians. Typically, paddy wagons arrived at 9pm, however, this evening they arrived at 1:30am.<sup>161</sup> Patroller's believed police decided to "cool things" since Banks had told Police Inspector Donald Dwyer that AIM Patrol would begin work that evening.<sup>162</sup> Though AIM Patrol's debut evening did not consist of normal Franklin Avenue police activity (e.g. paddy wagons arriving unusually late) AIM deemed their first night a success. AIM voted at their next meeting to maintain the program.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Banks and Erdoes, *Ojibwa Warrior*, 63.

<sup>158</sup> Cohen, "The Indian Patrol in Minneapolis," 64.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 60; Brian Anderson, "Indian Patrol's First Night Quiet Seeking Harassment by Police," *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 25, 1968, Folder "MPLS: Indians 1967/68," MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>161</sup> "Indians Vote to Continue Franklin Patrol," *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 28, 1968, Folder "MPLS: Indians 1967/68," MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>162</sup> Anderson, "Indian Patrol's First Night," *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 25, 1968, Folder "MPLS: Indians 1967/68," Minneapolis Public Library.

<sup>163</sup> "Indians Vote to Continue," *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 28, 1968, Folder "MPLS: Indians 1967/68," Minneapolis Public Library.

After developing the Patrol, AIM delegated program oversight to Harold Goodsky, a local Minneapolis Indian, who became AIM Patrol's first leader. Goodsky's responsibilities consisted of knowing patroller whereabouts and providing equipment to volunteers.<sup>164</sup> Patrollers wore red jackets and red berets – mimicking the Panther's black jackets and black berets – and drove red cars so Phillips residents would recognize the Patrol and understand their presence.<sup>165</sup> Patrolling occurred only on weekend nights because of the heightened police activity during evenings. Patrollers met at the Indian American Youth Center at 10:30pm to make preparations. They hit the streets around 11:30pm, monitoring major neighborhood arteries, side streets, and alleyways. Duties consisted of noting street activity and recording police license plate numbers to document the number of police in the area on a given night.<sup>166</sup>

Upon hearing an officer dispatched, Patrollers drove to the scene. They documented the encounter in case of brutality.<sup>167</sup> Occasionally, Patrollers followed police cars to crime scenes involving Indians to document police-Indian interactions, vowing not to “physically interfere with police action.”<sup>168</sup> Often patrollers arrived at the scene before police – generally because police were slow to answer Indian neighborhood calls. In the vast majority of police-Indian conflicts, patrollers felt utilizing violence

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<sup>164</sup> Cohen, “The Indian Patrol in Minneapolis,” 60.

<sup>165</sup> Couture, “The American Indian Movement,” 58; Banks and Erdoes, *Ojibwa Warrior*, 63.

<sup>166</sup> Cohen, “The Indian Patrol in Minneapolis,” 58-64.

<sup>167</sup> Banks and Erdoes, *Ojibwa Warrior*, 63.

<sup>168</sup> Kae Cheatham, *Dennis Banks: Native American Activist* (Springfield, NJ: Enslow Publishers, Inc., 1997), 23; Edmonds, “Indians to Patrol,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 20, 1968, Folder “MPLS: Indians 1967/68,” Minneapolis Public Library.

would be excessive, choosing instead to photograph the encounter in order to deter misconduct and brutality.<sup>169</sup>

Patrollers worked preemptively to prevent police intervention in conflicts between Indians. These conflicts mainly consisted of fighting. Another preemptive strategy to prevent Indian arrests was to get those intoxicated off the streets and escort them home safely before police arrived. When arrests occurred, AIM assisted the arrestee in finding a lawyer.<sup>170</sup>

Patrol safety was also a concern for AIM. Volunteers met around 12:30am to check-in and discuss observations and conflicts encountered prior to their busiest time – after bars closed. Typically, the 12:30am meeting was the final interaction between patrollers for the night since they could complete most volunteer obligations on their own. At the end of the evening, patrollers reported back to Goodsky between 1:30am and 2:00am to turn in their list of squad car plates.<sup>171</sup>

AIM Patrol had effective results. When confronting police arresting Indians, patrollers often convinced the officer to release the arrestee to them.<sup>172</sup> Additionally, AIM and police established an amicable relationship during Patrol's initial implementation under Goodsky. Despite tensions surrounding the MPD and AIM, police left patrollers to their work, allowing the volunteer program to proceed.<sup>173</sup> In a March

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<sup>169</sup> Means and Wolf, *Where White Men Fear to Tread*, 163.

<sup>170</sup> Banks and Erdoes, *Ojibwa Warrior*, 64.

<sup>171</sup> Cohen, "The Indian Patrol in Minneapolis," 65.

<sup>172</sup> Schuttler, "The American Indian Movement," 21.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 22; Cohen, "The Indian Patrol in Minneapolis," 64.

1970 interview with the *Minnesota Motorist* newspaper, Mitchell reflected on the Patrol's initial efforts and effectiveness, saying:

Originally, the patrol was designed to curb police harassment. It witnessed arrests by police... just watched them... to make sure there was no rough treatment. The Patrol took Indians home when they'd had too much to drink and put them in bed... yes, and some whites, too. Then, when there was a gun battle going on in a house near here, the patrol helped break it up. Thereafter, the police started calling the patrol for help in some situations. We gave it to them. We think it's [sic] done a good job.<sup>174</sup>

After the first six months of patrolling, the Indian jail population in Minneapolis and Hennepin County dropped dramatically from 70 to 10 percent.<sup>175</sup> During the Patrol's first year, there were no Indian arrestees charged with alcohol related violations for twenty-two weeks straight – the stint was broken when the Patrol “loosened up.”<sup>176</sup> AIM Patrol's effectiveness was even reflected on in a report by the U.S. Congress and Senate Committee on the Judiciary in 1976:

A catalyst for AIM in 1968 in the city of Minneapolis was the pervasive police harassment of Indian people. While Indians represented only 10% of the city's population, 70% of the inmates in the city jails were Indian. To divert Indians from jails, AIM formed the ghetto patrol, equipped with two-way radios which monitored the police radios. Whenever a call came over involving Indians, AIM was there first, and for 29 [sic 22] consecutive weekends prevented any undue arrests of Indian people. The Indian population in jails decreased by 60%. And out of the patrol evolved the federally funded Legal Rights Center, where established attorneys donated up to 80% of their time to serve poor people.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Johnson, “Faces of Minnesota,” *Minnesota Motorist*, March 1970, 5, Folder “Minnesota Indians: 1969, 1970, 1971,” Minneapolis Public Library.

<sup>175</sup> Means and Wolf, *Where White Men Fear to Tread*, 163; Banks and Erdoes, *Ojibwa Warrior*, 63.

<sup>176</sup> Banks, interview by McClendon, *The Black Scholar Interviews*, 29; “Bellecourt asks aid for patrols,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, Folder “MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife” Envelop #1, MHC, Minneapolis Public Library, Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>177</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate Select Committee on the Judiciary, *Revolutionary Activities Within the United States: The American Indian Movement* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1976), 90.

Doug Hall, a Minneapolis attorney and executive director of the Legal Rights Center, noted how normally Indians never refuted their charges, even if they were wrongfully accused, until AIM Patrol's creation.<sup>178</sup> An explanation of this shift was illustrated in a May 1969 statement Bellecourt co-authored with anthropologist Dr. Fay Cohen – then a University of Minnesota PhD candidate. The statement provided AIM Patrol's brief history, developments, and analysis of recent achievements. It suggested Minneapolis Indians were becoming more concerned with protecting their civil rights and “prefer[red] to have a fellow Indian, rather than a non-Indian officer, provide law and order... the patrol [had] the potential for operating as a buffer between the individual and the arresting officer.” Bellecourt and Cohen concluded that the newly emerging dynamic constructed by Indians, police and AIM Patrol facilitated empowerment and pride among urban Indians<sup>179</sup> – and provided the confidence and assertiveness needed to combat police wrongdoings.

However, weather conditions became an obstacle for AIM Patrol during the winters of 1968 and 1969. Patroller participation declined drastically once the bitter cold Minnesota winter arrived. Participating volunteers generally patrolled in cars rather than on foot.<sup>180</sup> Patrolling by car created a more limited view of Phillips activity, therefore patrollers “often centered their attention on keeping a close check on the concentration

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<sup>178</sup> Baylor, “Modern Warriors,” 77.

<sup>179</sup> Cohen and Bellecourt, Folder “Indians: American Indian Movement (AIM),” 6, Minneapolis Public Library.

<sup>180</sup> Cohen, “The Indian Patrol in Minneapolis,” 63.

and activity of squad cars in the area.”<sup>181</sup> Some nights, no one would volunteer because of the cold, leaving Goodsky to patrol unaccompanied.<sup>182</sup> Even Banks would not patrol in winter.<sup>183</sup> From February 1 - March 8, 1969, not a single person patrolled for approximately half of those weekends.<sup>184</sup> Though the program struggled to continue during the winters of 1968 and 1969, AIM Patrol “regrouped” once spring set in. AIM patrollers continued their mission “to observe incidents involving Indians and police in order to assure that proper law enforcement procedures were followed and... to help Indians avoid trouble, e.g. by taking intoxicated individuals home.”<sup>185</sup>

As the spring of 1969 proceeded, AIM Patrol made strides. In Bellecourt and Cohen’s statement, they discussed AIM Patrol’s brief history and recent developments. However, the statement released by Bellecourt and Cohen provides no information regarding the statement’s intended audience, who received it, who read it, or specifics regarding its purpose. Cohen wrote a cover letter to accompany the statement, disclaiming that the document was “by no means... the finished, final report of an expert,” and also that information was not to be quoted without AIM’s consent. Since then, the statement was donated to the Minneapolis Public Library Special Collections for public use.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 63; Cohen and Bellecourt, Folder “Indians: American Indian Movement (AIM),” 2, Minneapolis Public Library.

<sup>182</sup> Cohen, “The Indian Patrol in Minneapolis,” 63.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>185</sup> Cohen and Bellecourt, Folder “Indians: American Indian Movement (AIM),” 2, Minneapolis Public Library.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., cover letter.

According to Bellecourt and Cohen's statement, the group acquired a radio operator's license. The Patrol was also awarded a Minneapolis Urban Coalition grant to pay for legal counsel and to install radios in patrol vehicles – which was a tremendous financial help.<sup>187</sup> Furthermore, the most significant aspect of the Urban Coalition grant was a clause obligating the MPD to work cooperatively with the Patrol and issue AIM patroller identification cards.<sup>188</sup> This clause demonstrates AIM's grassroots and direct action efforts effects on reforming Minneapolis policing, for AIM was now to be an institution included in administering and facilitating internal policing affairs and procedures. The group was to function as the liaison between the Minneapolis Indian community and police by representing Indians while having a contractual, mutual obligation to collaborate with MPD officers.

Bellecourt and Cohen further demonstrate the collaborative relationship AIM and the MPD shared by providing a written statement describing their efforts. For instance, AIM Patrol took care of crowd dispersal, broke-up fights, and aided intoxicated individuals – allowing MPD officers to focus on crime violations in Phillips, such as theft and murder.<sup>189</sup> Also, MPD officers sometimes turned over apprehended Phillips residents to AIM patrollers. For example, five Indian youths were apprehended by the MPD, however, officers turned the youths over to AIM instead of the Juvenile Center. AIM warned the youths that future misconduct would result in arrest, and in turn, would

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

“reflect poorly on AIM and its ability to maintain order.”<sup>190</sup> AIM believed the continuation of assisting police in Indian apprehension would further facilitate a cooperative relationship with police to maintain and develop order in Phillips, mainly through Indians overseeing Indian wrongdoers.<sup>191</sup>

However, the civil relationship between police and AIM ended, for the police eventually began to despise the group for establishing AIM Patrol, though many Minneapolis Indians remained grateful.<sup>192</sup> The 1971 League of Women Voters of Minneapolis report noted this shift stating, “[some] police resented the interference of some Indians in what were considered police matters and charges of harassment and brutality. There was also a pattern of conflict between some of the leaders of AIM and some members of the police department.”<sup>193</sup> Much of the police resentment stemmed from feeling AIM had tainted their public reputation, which further created police distrust towards AIM.<sup>194</sup>

Tony LeDeux is an Indian residing in Minnesota and long time police accountability activist. He married Banks’ cousin in 1968 and joined AIM that same year. According to Mr. LeDeux, MPD officers worked to intimidate AIM activists. Some officers physically assaulted black and Indian AIM activists and AIM lawyers. There were a few instances where officers threw AIM activists in the Mississippi River. Additionally, the MPD would often monitor the AIM office, parking paddy wagons down

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>192</sup> Salomon, *Roots of Justice*, 131.

<sup>193</sup> League of Women Voters of Minneapolis, *The Police and the Community*, 17.

<sup>194</sup> Schuttler, “The American Indian Movement,” 22-23.

the street. When there would be a group of AIM members standing in front of the office, police often loaded them into the paddy wagon or threatened arrest.<sup>195</sup>

Minneapolis residents who did not support Patrol efforts voiced resentment. Acclaimed political journalist and author, Molly Ivins worked as a staff writer for the *Minneapolis Tribune* in the late 1960s. Ivins wrote in one 1969 *Minneapolis Tribune* article that “Anti-AIM folks dismiss this effort with snorts of derision, saying that [AIM Patrol] only antagonized the police and makes martyrs of patrol members.”<sup>196</sup> According to Mr. LeDeux, the Minneapolis residents were divided about AIM initially, but when they saw what AIM was doing, “many changed their minds.”<sup>197</sup>

During the remainder of the 1960s, AIM Patrol persisted, with volunteers and leaders carrying the project well into the 1970s.<sup>198</sup> During this time, the Patrol worked to increase volunteer participation and add patrol vehicles to cover greater territory.<sup>199</sup> Ultimately, as stated in the League’s discussion of AIM Patrol, “After two years of operation there has been a considerable improvement in Indian-police relations. A policeman now [1971] sits on the board of AIM.”<sup>200</sup> Though AIM and the MPD made strides in remedying policing issues through collaboration, relations became shaky when AIM’s chairman, Clyde Bellecourt began experiencing frequent arrests.

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<sup>195</sup> Mr. Tony LeDeux, telephone interview, April 3, 2009.

<sup>196</sup> Molly Ivins, “Indian Group’s 1<sup>st</sup> Anniversary Called ‘Miracle,’” *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 3, 1969, Folder “Indians: MPLS American Indian (AIM)” Envelope #1 Early thru 1983, MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>197</sup> LeDeux, telephone interview, April 3, 2009.

<sup>198</sup> For information on AIM Patrols work throughout the 1960s and 1970s, read Dr. Fay Cohen’s dissertation, “The Indian Patrol in Minneapolis.”

<sup>199</sup> Cohen and Bellecourt, Folder “Indians: American Indian Movement (AIM),” 7

<sup>200</sup> League of Women Voters of Minneapolis, *The Police and the Community*, 17.

### Clyde Bellecourt's Arrests

An active AIM member and frequent AIM patroller, Jon O'Brien, was pulled over and arrested Tuesday March 18, 1969, around 1:30 am, for an alleged traffic violation on Franklin Avenue. O'Brien claimed he was punched twice in his stomach while handcuffed by an officer. Bellecourt was O'Brien's passenger and allegedly interfered by grabbing arresting officer, Patrolman Richard Johnson, "from the rear" and stating, "You don't have to hand cuff him [O'Brien] for speeding."<sup>201</sup> A warrant for Bellecourt's arrest was issued for "obstructing an arrest."<sup>202</sup> Bellecourt claimed his only interference was asking if he could speak with O'Brien.<sup>203</sup> O'Brien's arresting officer radioed for backup, and soon after there were 13 squad cars at the scene. During O'Brien's arrest, Bellecourt felt threatened by an officer, claiming the policeman said, "I'm going to get you. I'm going to file a complaint."<sup>204</sup>

Bellecourt's interpretation of the encounter clearly illustrates how this was a threatening situation – he and O'Brien were two Indians, in an Indian neighborhood, being pulled over by police around bar closing time. From working AIM Patrol and

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<sup>201</sup> "Testimony opens in tribal of Indian," *Minneapolis Tribune*, May 28, 1969, Folder "MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife," Envelop #1, MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>202</sup> Bob Schranck, "Indian protest leader arrested," *Minneapolis Tribune*, March 21, 1969, Folder "MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife," Envelope #1, MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>203</sup> "Indian Charges Brutality," *Minneapolis Tribune*, March 22, 1969, Folder "MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife," Envelope #1, MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>204</sup> Schranck, "Indian protest," *Minneapolis Tribune*, March 21, 1969, "MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife," Minneapolis Public Library.

living in Phillips, they knew this scenario often resulted in police brutality. Additionally, they felt threatened by the police officer's clearly stated intention to "get" Bellecourt.

Later that week, on Thursday March 20<sup>th</sup>, Bellecourt rallied approximately 30 Minneapolis residents in front of City Hall, calling attention to police brutality and harassment of local Indians. The rally focused on two incidents: O'Brien's assault and the dispatch of "four squad cars, a paddy wagon and ambulance to the scene of an Indian dance" – an excessive number of police – after a fight broke out between two Indian men.<sup>205</sup> The rally was an organizational, direct action tactic designed to confront the civic establishment, which was at the heart of AIM's grievances with police brutality and excessive patrolling in Phillips.

At 4pm on March 20<sup>th</sup>, Bellecourt, Banks, O'Brien, and a few other AIM members had a meeting with MPD Chief Donald R. Dwyer (formally Police Inspector Dwyer), where he agreed to attend the next AIM meeting to discuss Indian-police relations. However, in his March 21, 1969 article, "Indian protest leader arrested," then *Minneapolis Star* staff writer, Bob Schranck, wrote that upon leaving the meeting with Dwyer, Bellecourt "told friends... that he had a 'feeling he was going to be arrested.'"<sup>206</sup> Schranck, however, did not provide Bellecourt's reasoning for this belief. Ultimately, the leader's notion was vindicated when he was arrested early the next morning – Friday March 21<sup>st</sup> – after an officer saw him at Beanie's bar in Phillips. This officer had earlier

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid.; "Indian Charges Brutality," *Minneapolis Tribune*, March 22, 1969, Folder "MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife," Envelope #1, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>206</sup> Schranck, "Indian protest," *Minneapolis Star*, March 21, 1969, "MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife," Minneapolis Public Library.

threatened Bellecourt regarding a claim he had filed. During his arrest, Bellecourt's friend, Roberta Brown, was also arrested for "profanity in public" when defending AIM's chairman. According to Bellecourt, he was taken to jail without ever being read his rights.<sup>207</sup> Bellecourt checked into Hennepin County General Hospital at 4am, receiving treatment for "raw chafed wrists" after his arresting officer, Patrolman Richard Johnson, allegedly twisted the cuffs.<sup>208</sup> After being released from General Hospital, AIM members brought Bellecourt home, documenting his injuries.<sup>209</sup> Additionally, AIM responded to the incident by placing signs in AIM headquarter windows saying, "Police are no good without their guns" – a way of drawing street traffic's attention to neighborhood police brutality.<sup>210</sup>

Like the evening of O'Brien's arrest, Bellecourt's story directly parallels the typical arrest scenario of a Phillips Indian – an Indian at an Indian bar late night being arrested shortly after closing. However, what was atypical about Bellecourt's specific situation was that his arrest occurred during a weeknight, rather than a weekend. Essentially, Bellecourt was arrested when AIM Patrol was not operating – if they had, patrollers presumably would have arrived at the scene quickly to defend their chairman.

The afternoon of March 21<sup>st</sup> – the day of Bellecourt's arrest – Bellecourt, O'Brien, Roberta Brown, and others met with Dwyer to discuss Bellecourt's incident.

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.; "Indian Charges Brutality," *Minneapolis Tribune*, March 22, 1969, Folder "MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife," Envelope #1, Minneapolis Public Library Archives.

<sup>209</sup> Schranck, "Indain protest," *Minneapolis Tribune*, March 21, 1969, "MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife," Minneapolis Public Library.

<sup>210</sup> Indergaard, "Urban Renewal and the American Indian Movement," 79.

During the meeting, AIM members and Dwyer discussed Bellecourt's incident, where Dwyer asserted, "the investigation will continue but no action will be taken until a court trial is complete." Lillian Anthony, Civil Rights Department director, committed her department and the Urban Coalition to provide additional investigation of Bellecourt's claim. Further, when Dwyer met with AIM members he reiterated his intent of attending AIM's next meeting, scheduled for Tuesday March 25<sup>th</sup>.<sup>211</sup> The involvement of multiple members of the civic establishment suggests that AIM and AIM Patrol had drawn enough attention to their police brutality cause that Minneapolis officials could not ignore an alleged brutalization of a high profile AIM activist and leader – they had to react and demonstrate a commitment to investigating such an allegation.

A meeting regarding Bellecourt's brutality case was held at the Indian Youth Center on March 24<sup>th</sup>, using the incident as leverage for further organizing against police brutality in Minneapolis. Approximately 200 individuals showed, demonstrating their support and concern for Bellecourt. Those in attendance were asked to sign a list if they had ever been victims of police harassment and/or brutality – creating a visual due to the volume and frequency of such occurrences. At the meeting one woman declared, "You've either got to be an affluent white or a black militant to get anything done"<sup>212</sup> – suggesting you had to be a privileged white or an aggressive person of color to

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<sup>211</sup> "Indian Charges Brutality," *Minneapolis Tribune*, March 22, 1969, Folder "MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife," Envelope #1, Minneapolis Public Library Archives.

<sup>212</sup> Cohen, "The Indian Patrol in Minneapolis," 70.

experience justice. Her statement was met with expressions of agreement and solidarity with applause and enthusiastic shouts.<sup>213</sup>

The next day Dwyer fulfilled his commitment to attend AIM's March 25<sup>th</sup> meeting, along with approximately 250 individuals present. Jim Jones' *Minneapolis Star* article, "Indians accuse city police of brutality," states that Bellecourt "complained of his arrest by police last week on a warrant charged in obstructing the arrest of Jon O'Brien" and "Bellecourt said he suffered chafed wrists from handcuffs being twisted by one of the arresting officers." Dialogue opened to reviewing MPD procedure of police brutality. Dwyer assured AIM that MPD officers are frequently screened in an effort to rid the force of "bad" police. Additionally, white-to-non-white police officer ratios were discussed in-depth; Dwyer stated, "There should be about 40 minority policemen on the force, according to a population breakdown on a racial basis [however]... There are only 11 minority persons employed by the department."<sup>214</sup> Therefore, the 1969 MPD consisted of 28 percent fewer non-white officers than needed to represent Minneapolis' population dynamics. Thus, Minneapolis communities of color were predominantly dealing with white officers living outside their neighborhoods. Dwyer's attendance at an AIM meeting held significance, for it illustrated how AIM was working cooperatively to reform Minneapolis policing in Phillips and to apply pressure to the MPD police chief to participate in meetings held in a Phillips' public venue – outside the comfort of civic government offices.

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Jim Jones, "Indians accuse city police of brutality," *Minneapolis Tribune*, March 26, 1969, Folder "MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife," Envelope #1, MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

Bellecourt was arrested again on April 2<sup>nd</sup> – eight days after AIM’s meeting with Dwyer – for four traffic violations: driving without lights, a semaphore violation (improper use of arm signals), a stop-sign violation, and careless driving. Bellecourt stated he was made nervous when followed by several officers that evening, including some “plainclothesmen” – undercover police – driving off once he felt safe. The *Minneapolis Tribune* stated instead that Sergeant Robert Collins signaled for Bellecourt to pull over, and Bellecourt “evaded,” a chase ensued which ended with his arrest.<sup>215</sup> Though AIM’s chairman was arrested on four driving violations, only careless driving was drawn up in the formal complaint. He was not charged with attempting to evade arrest.<sup>216</sup>

Bellecourt was convicted of careless driving on Monday April 28<sup>th</sup>, with Judge Leslie saying he could not understand why Bellecourt did not pull over, “I would,” he stated. AIM attorney William Briere argued, “That would be [you], your honor, but Mr. Bellecourt has received some unfortunate treatment from police officers.”<sup>217</sup> Judge Leslie’s statement demonstrates contrasting experiences – Judge Leslie held an elite position within the Minneapolis law enforcement system, with police as colleagues, and a personal trust in the system; while Phillips ghetto resident, Bellecourt, witnessed and

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<sup>215</sup> Bob Schranck, “Police accused of harassment by Indian facing traffic count,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, April 2, 1969, Folder “MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife,” Envelope #1, MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN; “Bellecourt Convicted of Careless Driving,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, April 29, 1969, Folder “MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife,” Envelope #1, MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>216</sup> “Bellecourt asks aid,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, April 10, 1969, Folder “MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife,” Minneapolis Public Library.

<sup>217</sup> “Bellecourt Convicted,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, April 29, 1969, Folder “MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife,” Minneapolis Public Library.

experienced police brutality on a regular basis. Ultimately, Bellecourt was sentenced to 15 days in jail or \$75 fine, both with a 10-day stay for appeal.<sup>218</sup>

Late morning on Thursday May 22<sup>nd</sup> – approximately a month and a half after this last arrest – Bellecourt and Dwyer met to discuss Minneapolis Indian-police issues. However, immediately following the meeting, Dwyer arrested Bellecourt, for an arrest warrant was issued a few days prior to the meeting.<sup>219</sup> On Sunday May 18<sup>th</sup>, James Lindorff was robbed and assaulted on Franklin, allegedly by two Indian men, believed to be Bellecourt and his brother, Leonard.<sup>220</sup> There was a sense of irony surrounding Dwyer’s arrest of Bellecourt – the two met and discussed policing issues to mend Indian-police tensions and, directly following the discussion, the MPD chief arrested AIM’s chairman.

Six days after being arrested for aggravated robbery, Bellecourt’s alleged obstruction of Jon O’Brien’s “lawful arrest” went to trial by jury. O’Brien’s arresting officer asserted justification for pulling over O’Brien due to careless driving and possible intoxication. Further, Johnson testified Bellecourt “grabbed [him] from behind.” Bellecourt denied the accusation.<sup>221</sup> Ultimately, on Thursday May 29<sup>th</sup>, Bellecourt was

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> “Bellecourt Arrested on Robbery Charges,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, May 23,, 1969, Folder “MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife,” Envelope #1, MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.; “Bellecourt bound over in theft case,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 11, 1969, Folder “MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife,” Envelope #1, MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>221</sup> “Bellecourt found guilty by jurors,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, May 30, 1969, Folder “MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife,” Envelope #1, MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

found guilty of obstructing a lawful arrest.<sup>222</sup> Then in early November, Bellecourt's simple assault complaint against Johnson for his wrist injuries went to trial, where Roberta Brown testified that it was Bellecourt who had inflicted his own wrist injuries by rubbing his cuffs against bars in his jail cell.<sup>223</sup>

Early Friday morning, June 13<sup>th</sup>, Bellecourt was arrested for drunk driving by officers Kenneth Tidgwell and Welton Kopp. After entering a plea of not guilty, he went to Inspector of Detectives Wayne Sherman, to report a pattern of misconduct carried out by MPD officers against him – including that morning's incident. Bellecourt told Sherman he was falsely arrested – he had only one drink that evening and the officers refused to administer a breathalyzer test. Additionally, Bellecourt told Sherman he was “slapped” at the scene by an officer. Bellecourt requested that Sherman require that a lie detector test be administered to his arresting officers, and Bellecourt himself, regarding the alleged harassment and brutality suffered. Sherman referred the request to Dwyer – who had arrested Bellecourt three weeks earlier.<sup>224</sup>

The following day, June 14<sup>th</sup>, Bellecourt was interviewed by the *Minneapolis Tribune*, describing correlations between his April careless driving arrest and his June drunk driving arrest. According to Bellecourt, both incidents occurred after he had one drink at the same nightclub and left around closing time. Additionally, the newspaper

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> “Companion Says Bellecourt Concocted Injury Charge,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, November 5, 1969, Folder “MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife,” Envelope #1, MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>224</sup> “Bellecourt facing drunk-driving charge,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 13, 1969, Folder “MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife,” Envelope #1, MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

recorded that, in both instances, Bellecourt asserted that he was followed by a squad car, refused a breathalyzer, and “roughed up” by officers.<sup>225</sup> Three days later on June 17<sup>th</sup>, Bellecourt was convicted of obstructing an illegal arrest and sentenced to 60-days in jail, a punishment that was stayed for one year – meaning he would “not have to serve the sentence if his record is clear for one year.”<sup>226</sup>

Two months later on Thursday August 15<sup>th</sup> at a hearing for his burglary case, Bellecourt, surprisingly, plead guilty, not to burglary, but to simple assault. However, Judge Anderson did not accept the plea due to sufficient grounds to further investigate his aggravated burglary charge. Justification for Bellecourt’s simple assault plea stemmed from an alleged incident that occurred the same night, but separately from the burglary. Supposedly, Bellecourt grabbed James Lindorff – the man who had been robbed – because someone in his party called Bellecourt’s friend a derogatory name. Bellecourt admitted to assaulting Lindorff, but continued to deny robbing him. Further, Leonard Bellecourt plead guilty to theft, admitting he picked up Lindorff’s wallet from the ground during his brother’s confrontation and took the money. Leonard Bellecourt’s plea was

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<sup>225</sup> “Bellecourt Walks Out on Youth Forum,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 14, 1969, Folder “MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife,” Envelope #1, MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>226</sup> “60-Day Sentence for Bellecourt Stayed 1 Year,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 17, 1969, Folder “MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife,” Envelope #1, MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

accepted in court.<sup>227</sup> One month later, on September 17<sup>th</sup>, Bellecourt's simple assault plea was accepted and he was sentenced to one-year probation.<sup>228</sup>

In 1970, approximately one month after Bellecourt's simple assault probation ended, he was pulled over for four traffic violations: three counts of failure to signal and one count of driving on the wrong side of a roadway. Judge Riley dismissed the case, stating on the court record that Bellecourt – contrary to the arresting officers' assertions – had followed all legal driving procedures. While in court, Bellecourt took the opportunity to assert his belief that he was victim of MPD officer harassment.<sup>229</sup>

Despite intense controversy surrounding O'Brien and Bellecourt's arrests, the two incidents – along with excessive police presence at the Indian dance – reinvigorated activism in Minneapolis regarding police brutality against Indians. Additionally, Dwyer refused to discipline the officer who allegedly assaulted Bellecourt, which further angered the Indian community, and rekindled a desire for a strong Indian-run patrol. AIM Patrol participation increased and occurred more frequently during weekends.<sup>230</sup> Banks and others who had discontinued their Patrol participation became active in the effort once again.<sup>231</sup> Further, AIM intensified their Patrol training – volunteers were now

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<sup>227</sup> Bob Lundegaard, "Court Rejects Bellecourt Plea of Guilty to Assault Charge," *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 15, 1969, Folder "MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife," Envelope #1, MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>228</sup> "City Indian activist receives 1 year probation for assault," *Minneapolis Tribune*, September 17, 1969, Folder "MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife," Envelope #1, MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>229</sup> "Bellecourt traffic charges dismissed," *Minneapolis Tribune*, October 16, 1970, Folder "MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife," Envelope #1, MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>230</sup> Cohen, "The Indian Patrol in Minneapolis," 72.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

required to be educated in policing law and to know first aid and self-defense, including how to protect yourself against the use of weapons.<sup>232</sup>

The ultimate goal of AIM Patrol and the rallying of Minneapolis Indians around police brutality was to reform civic policing in the late 1960s in Phillips. AIM worked to create a safe climate in Phillips – one where residents trusted that police would be held accountable for misconduct. Facilitating development of such climate emerged as AIM Patrol (Indians monitoring Indian neighborhoods) presented MPD officials with documented police misconduct to enable officers to be held accountable. AIM’s effort in developing a cooperative, collaborative relationship with the MPD was also encouraged through holding meetings with Dwyer to discuss grievances, thus, attempting to seek agreeable remedies.

Before Bellecourt became politically active in AIM, he was arrested by the MPD 13 times between 1954 and 1967 – an average of one arrest per year. However, once Bellecourt became a public figure as AIM’s chairman in October of ’68,<sup>233</sup> his arrest rate dramatically increased. Though Bellecourt was not arrested in ’68, he was arrested six times in ’69. Four of Bellecourt’s arrests happened in consecutive months: March, April, May, and June.<sup>234</sup> Three of these four arrests occurred on a weekday night around the time bars closed and when AIM Patrol was not on duty. Additionally, Bellecourt filed

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>233</sup> “Indian Group elects Officers,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, October 30, 1968, Folder “MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife,” Envelope #1, MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>234</sup> Minneapolis Police Department Bureau of Identification Unabridged Record: Bellecourt, Clyde H., Minneapolis Police Department Records Division.

his brutality complaint against Sgt. Johnson in March, thereafter Bellecourt was arrested once a month for the following consecutive three months.

Four of Bellecourt's six arrests occurred early Friday mornings. Therefore, the majority of his arrests took place at a time when few people were on the streets and right before the weekend began, when it would be potentially difficult to bail him out before the weekend. The other two of six arrests also occurred during the week, one on a Wednesday, the other on a Thursday. Thus, AIM's chairman was never arrested in 1969 when AIM Patrol was on duty, but was arrested four times the morning before they began patrolling. Arresting AIM's chairman immediately before launching their Patrol for the weekend potentially shook patrollers' nerves. All but one of Bellecourt's alleged traffic violation charges were dismissed in court, suggesting they were false charges. Such arrest patterns provided substantial reasoning for Bellecourt's belief that MPD officers harassed him during this time.

Though police and AIM initially worked collaboratively in the streets (e.g. turning arrestees over to AIM patrollers) this collaboration dwindled as officers began to resent and distrust AIM. Police and AIM relations became polarized as distrust prevailed and grew as police harbored resentment and anger towards AIM. This resulted in AIM's observations of a continuation of police misconduct and the resultant frequent arrests of Chairman Bellecourt.

**CHAPTER 4**  
**MINNEAPOLIS TRIBUNE & MINNEAPOLIS STAR NEWSPAPER COVERAGE**  
**OF AIM & POLICE BRUTALITY**

In the late 1960s, the black Civil Rights Movement received significant media attention, bringing public focus to movement efforts. Black Panther Party leader, Huey P. Newton, explained the need for media attention stating, “In order for the Black Panther Party to maintain momentum... they needed regular exposure not only in the black communities, but also through the mass media – radio and television, in addition to newspapers.”<sup>235</sup> As a result of Panther efforts and the efforts of other Civil Rights factions, marches, demonstrations, and rallies, grievances aired regularly on radio, television, and appeared in newspapers. AIM interpreted the media coverage afforded the Black Panther Party as a means to gain desired change and to obtain public attention to grievances.<sup>236</sup> AIM felt that if they failed to gain media attention this would prevent their group from producing beneficial change for Minneapolis Indians.<sup>237</sup> It benefited AIM that Minneapolis’ Indian population in the late 1960s was large enough – as 10 percent of the city’s population – and Minneapolis was small enough – substantially less than half a million total urban residents – that it was not difficult for AIM to get the media’s attention.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> David Hilliard with Keith and Kent Zimmerman, *Huey: Spirit of the Panther* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2006), 61.

<sup>236</sup> Indergaard, “Urban Renewal and the American Indian Movement,” 73; Couture, “The American Indian Movement,” 59.

<sup>237</sup> Couture, “The American Indian Movement,” 59.

<sup>238</sup> Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 128; Banks and Erdoes, *Ojibwa Warrior*, 69.

When AIM was first established, group leaders sought media attention in Minneapolis to draw attention to Indian issues. Specific AIM actions were elaborate and risky, catching media attention, bringing the group into public view and providing an Indian voice featured in media.<sup>239</sup> Additionally, AIM held press conferences to discuss police brutality against Minneapolis Indians whenever possible,<sup>240</sup> and thus created a dialogue that included the group's voice. AIM generally succeeded at capturing media attention.<sup>241</sup> This chapter examines how Minneapolis' local newspapers, the *Minneapolis Tribune* and the *Minneapolis Star*, treated the subject of police brutality as related to AIM.

The general public has a limited attention span and tends to skip from one topic to another when reviewing media features. Therefore, social organizations have a short amount of time to get their message across in media<sup>242</sup> – every quote, photograph, and action must hold their attention. Thus, “Those agencies able to offer a concise summary of important information wield considerable power.”<sup>243</sup> Additionally, small grassroots movements typically have limited means to spread their message, relying heavily on media exposure to do so – the more dramatic the organization's event, the higher the

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<sup>239</sup> Karren Baird-Olsen, “Reflections of An AIM Activist: Has It All Been Worth It?,” *American Indian Culture & Research Journal* 8, no. 4 (1994): 245; Segal, “The American Indian Movement,” 95.

<sup>240</sup> Means and Wolf, *Where White Men Fear to Tread*, 163.

<sup>241</sup> Wilkins, *American Indian Politics*, 228.

<sup>242</sup> Tim Baylor, “Media framing of movement protest: The case of American Indian Protest,” *Social Science Journal* 33, no. 3 (1996): locator DISCUSSION.

<http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=1&hid=116&sid907647>.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, MEDIA FRAMING AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS.

likelihood of coverage.<sup>244</sup> Police brutality against Indians was considered an eye catching subject at the time, for police violence against communities of color – particularly blacks – was drawing attention by the Civil Rights movement and the Kerner Report.<sup>245</sup> Furthermore, police brutality was a violent subject matter and, according to historian Donald Fixico in his book, *The Urban Indian Experience in America*,

Magazines and newspapers report on current problems or troubles concerning Indians, and this information is usually not objective or balanced. The primary purpose of reporting the news is to attract attention and readers. People habitually tend to be more interested in reading about vices and the unfortunate in society than in stories about positive accomplishments and joyful events.<sup>246</sup>

Therefore, a controversial and violent subject like Indian-police brutality activism would presumably catch the public’s eye, hold their short attention span and, thus, sell *Minneapolis Tribune* newspapers.

In sociologist Tim Baylor’s academic article, “Media framing of movement protest: The case of American Indian Protest,” Baylor discusses the “frames” in which the National Broadcasting Company’s (NBC) television news portrayed AIM’s activities between 1968 and 1979. Frames are summarized as “represent[ing] a set of ideas that interpret, define and give meaning to social and cultural phenomenon. Thus media agents will use frames that are familiar and resonate with both themselves and the

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid., locators MEDIA FRAMING AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, NEWS BIAS.

<sup>245</sup> The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, also known as the Kerner Commission, wrote a controversial report discussing urban police brutality against blacks. The findings of the Kerner report are assessed in Chapter One of this thesis.

<sup>246</sup> Fixico, *The Urban Indian Experience*, 33.

public.”<sup>247</sup> The media worked to portray issues in a light both journalists and the general public could identify with and draw from previously established associations pertaining to editorial topics.

According to Baylor, there are five media frames into which AIM was placed: Militant, Stereotype, Factionalism, Civil Rights, and Treaty Rights. Militant, Stereotype, and Factionalism are negative frames. A Militant frame depicts participants as violent and/or without regard for law or any established order. The Stereotype frame illustrates Indians in any stereotypical fashion regarding “artifacts, actions or characterization.”<sup>248</sup> Factionalism framing features Indians in opposition to “their [tribally] elected representatives” or other Indians. Civil Rights and Treaty Rights are positive frames. The Civil Rights frame “focuses on basic social and economic issues,” while the Treaty Rights frame focuses on the rights of Indians specifically addressed in treaties with the Federal government. A media feature can consist of one or multiple frames as stories and portals interconnect.<sup>249</sup>

For the purposes of this thesis, Baylor’s “frame” model is applied to the *Minneapolis Tribune*’s newspaper articles from 1968 to 1969 pertaining to Indian-police brutality issues – the vast majority of which pertain specifically to AIM. This discussion will begin with articles that predominantly – however, not exclusively – utilized Civil Rights frames, leading into a discussion of Militant frames. The Stereotype frames accompanied Civil Rights and Militant frames, therefore discussion of Stereotype frames

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<sup>247</sup> Baylor, “Media framing of movement protest,” *Social Science Journal*, locator MEDIA FRAMING AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, FINDINGS.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*

will be woven in with Militant when appropriate. However, Treaty Rights framing does not apply to police brutality in the context of this thesis, for it does not pertain to Federal treaty obligations. The Factionalism frame also does not apply, for this thesis examines the relationship between a non-tribal police department. Therefore, analysis of Treaty Rights and Factionalism frames will not be applied.

### **Civil Rights Frame**

In April 1968 – three months before AIM’s establishment – *Minneapolis Tribune* staff writer, Lee Kottke, wrote the editorial “Indians Assail Legal, Educational System.” This editorial frames police brutality against Indians as a Civil Rights issue. Kottke stated that police “dehumaniz[ed]” communities of color, for Minneapolis Indians were arrested regularly for public intoxication, as opposed to whites, who were seldom arrested for drunkenness.<sup>250</sup> That same April, Kottke wrote another article emphasizing police brutality as a Civil Rights issue, discussing a 1968 League of Women Voters report. The article shared report conclusions. For instance, Indians, generally, did not feel confident in the Minneapolis Police Department’s (MPD) ability to view their case objectively and feared police retaliation.<sup>251</sup>

*Tribune* staff writer, Brian Anderson wrote an article about AIM Patrol’s premiere evening, “Indian Patrol’s First Night Quiet: Seeking Harassment By Police.” The Patrol

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<sup>250</sup> Lee Kottke, “Indians Assail Legal, Educational System,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, April 25, 1968, Folder “MPLS: Indians 1967/68,” MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>251</sup> Lee Kottke, “Report: ‘We Don’t Reach Indians,’” *Minneapolis Tribune*, April 3, 1968, Folder “MPLS: Indians 1967/68,” MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

premiered on August 23, 1968 and Anderson wrote the article on the 24<sup>th</sup>, describing how patrollers had organized themselves for the evening (e.g. base station location and the delegation of duties). Anderson also wrote about why the evening was “quiet” – patrollers were out to monitor police misconduct, but there were hardly any police to monitor. Two photographs appeared with the article.<sup>252</sup> One was of AIM patroller, Jon O’Brien, carefully assisting a man out of a car, the other was of Dennis Banks sitting and using the base-station dispatch radio. Neither of these pictures depicted O’Brien or Banks as aggressive lawbreakers, but rather as activists calmly and legally working within their community.

In November of 1968, MPD Officer Douglas Danielson was accused of brutalizing a 16 year-old Indian youth. The *Star* article places a Civil Rights frame around AIM, for it voiced calls for justice. Officer Danielson’s alleged assault was featured in a November 13, 1968 article entitled, “‘Brutality’ Claim Probed at 3 Levels.” The article does not discuss AIM or any Indian activism specifically, only quickly referencing a “group” complaint to Senior Assistant city attorney, Milton Gershin. Gershin’s perspective on the incident was described in detail, asserting his belief that an officer had in fact assaulted the youth. However, there was also some Stereotype framing

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<sup>252</sup> Anderson, “Indian Patrol’s First Night Quiet Seeking Harassment By Police,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, Folder “MPLS: Indians 1967/68,” MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives.

placed within the article, for there is great emphasis on the youth's alleged alcohol consumption.<sup>253</sup>

Another article was written about the incident by *Tribune* staff writer, Finlay Lewis, describing the incident in a Civil Rights frame by reporting civic official and activist assertions that an investigation was needed and a charge issued against Danielson if appropriate.<sup>254</sup> The accusation received *Tribune* attention again on November 15, 1968. The article, "Policeman Charged in Indian Assault." The article briefly touches on Bellecourt's call for Danielson's suspension from the force and states MPD Chief Dwyer's willingness to meet with Indian leaders about the issue.<sup>255</sup> The article places a Civil Rights frame around AIM, for it voices a call for justice.

Nearly a week later, *Star* reporter, Schranck, wrote another article addressing police brutality against Indians in a Civil Rights frame. One November 20, 1968, the *Star* featured the article describing Danielson's testimony to emphasize the officer's aggression. For instance, in Danielson's testimony, he specifically states, "I opened the door and grabbed the driver by the neck to get him out of the car." Additionally, the youth was accompanied by a friend during the incident, and Schranck provides her

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<sup>253</sup> "'Brutality' Claim Probed at 3 Levels," *Minneapolis Star*, November 13, 1968, Folder "MPLS: Indians 1967/68," MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>254</sup> Finley Lewis, "Indian Group Wants Policeman Charged," *Minneapolis Tribune*, November 13, 1968, Folder "MPLS: Indians 1967/68," MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>255</sup> "Policeman Charged in Indian Assault," *Minneapolis Tribune*, November 15, 1968, Folder "MPLS: Indians 1967/68," MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

testimony of the incident.<sup>256</sup> Danielson was acquitted on November 21, 1968 of his brutality charge and the *Star* covered the story. The *Star*'s article described the alleged incident and discusses AIM's "bitterness" about the verdict, "You damn well believe we'll try again [to charge abusive officers]." The article cites AIM's reasoning for their frustration, stating, "Indian spectators ... felt medical evidence and pictures of the youth's injuries should have been introduced in evidence."<sup>257</sup>

Certain articles about Chairman Clyde Bellecourt's brutality case against Sgt. Johnson<sup>258</sup> applied a Civil Rights frame. The morning of the incident, March 21, 1969, the *Minneapolis Star* published an article describing in detail what had happened that morning. Staff writer, Bob Schranck, focused mainly on telling Bellecourt's story and reported about AIM's support of their chairman in a sympathetic light.<sup>259</sup> Schranck also discussed AIM grievances with police brutality and excessive police patrolling in Phillips.<sup>260</sup> However, Bellecourt's featured photograph was part of a more Militant frame, for it depicted Bellecourt stone faced with his closed fists to his chest to show off his bandages. On March 22<sup>nd</sup>, the article, "Indian Charges Brutality" was featured in the

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<sup>256</sup> Bob Schranck, "Accused Patrolman Describes Incident," *Minneapolis Star*, November 20, 1968, Folder "MPLS: Indians 1967/68," MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>257</sup> "Patrolman Acquitted of Assault Charge," *Minneapolis Star*, November 21, 1968, Folder "MPLS: Indians 1967/68," MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>258</sup> Chapter Three of this thesis hosts a detailed discussion regarding Bellecourt's police brutality case against Sgt. Johnson.

<sup>259</sup> Schranck, "Indian protest leader arrested," *Minneapolis Star*, Folder "MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife," Envelop #1, MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*

*Star*, providing readers with a synopsis of Bellecourt's police brutality case, focusing primarily on civic officials' promises to address the alleged incident.<sup>261</sup>

On April 2, 1969, two weeks after Schranck's first *Star* article on Indian-police issues, he wrote another article about Bellecourt, but this time regarding his traffic violation charges. Again, the Civil Rights frame was used by Schranck as he told Bellecourt's story and justifications for his action,

Bellecourt termed his arrest as 'more police harassment.' He said he had been followed throughout the night by a number of police, including some plainclothesmen [undercover officers] in a 1959 Chevrolet. He said he counted nine squad cars in the immediate area after he was stopped at 12<sup>th</sup> St... 'I [Bellecourt] was nervous when I was being watched, so when I thought the coast was clear, I jumped in my car to drive home' he said.

Schranck's article also shared arresting officer Sgt. Robert Collins' story as well, including justifications for arresting Bellecourt.<sup>262</sup>

Howard Erickson, a staff writer for the *Tribune*, wrote a detailed biography of Bellecourt for the April 21, 1969 issue. The article began with a Militant frame, describing Bellecourt's extensive arrest record and sharply asked if Bellecourt was a suitable leader, "Is he the educated, intelligent, articulate, courageous spokesman that the local Indian community has always needed? Or is he, as some policemen put it, a professional burglar-turned-opportunist?" However, Erickson goes on for the duration of

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<sup>261</sup> "Indian Charges Brutality," *Minneapolis Star*, Folder "MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife," Envelop #1, MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives.

<sup>262</sup> Schranck, "Police accused of harassment by Indian facing traffic count," *Minneapolis Star*, Folder "MPLS: Indians 1967/68," MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives.

the article – several columns in length – describing Bellecourt’s personal history as a triumph, despite his run-ins with the law.<sup>263</sup>

On June 13<sup>th</sup> 1969, Bellecourt was arrested for drunk driving. A *Star* article was written that morning and placed the incident in a Civil Rights frame. The article describes how Bellecourt was arrested without being given a breathalyzer test after requesting attorney presence during the test. The article also includes Bellecourt’s request to Inspector of Detectives, Wayne Sherman, asking for a lie detector test to be administered to both officers at the scene and to Bellecourt himself.<sup>264</sup> The article’s discussion of this scenario places more emphasis onto Bellecourt’s rights being withheld than it does on the alleged crime.

On June 14<sup>th</sup>, an article titled, “Bellecourt Arrested on Driving Charge,” appeared in the *Tribune*. The article was placed in a Civil Rights frame, for it provided readers with correlations between two of Bellecourt’s arrests that supported Bellecourt’s claim he was being harassed by the MPD.<sup>265</sup> Acclaimed journalist, Moly Ivins, wrote a *Tribune* article approximately three weeks later entitled, “Indian Group’s 1<sup>st</sup> Anniversary Called

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<sup>263</sup> Howard Erickson, “Clyde Bellecourt Tries to Blaze New Trail for Fellow Indians,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, April 21, 1969, Folder “MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife,” Envelop #1, MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>264</sup> “Bellecourt facing drunk-driving charge,” *Minneapolis Star*, Folder “MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife,” Envelop #1, MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives.

<sup>265</sup> “Bellecourt Arrested on Driving Charge,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 14, 1969, Folder “MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife,” Envelop #1, MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

‘Miracle, ’” also applies a civil rights frame. In this summary of AIM’s first year, Ivins shares AIM’s desire to improve police-community relations through Patrol operations.<sup>266</sup>

### **Militant Frames**

Rich Edmonds’ August 20, 1968 article placed AIM Patrol into a Militant frame in his *Tribune* article discussing the Patrol’s upcoming August 22<sup>nd</sup> launch. In the article, Edmond provides a detailed description of the Patrol’s intended actions; that Indian volunteers were going to walk the streets to monitor police behavior and quoted Banks stating, “he was ready ‘to bring my people to the brink of violence if I have to,’ because ‘the only way to get any action is by show of force.’” Therefore, Edmond’s article also applies the Stereotype frame by conveying that Indians in AIM were aggressive. However, Edmond also frames AIM Patrol as Civil Rights, for he also points out several of AIM’s police grievances, such as: brutality, “sluggish” handling of Indian complaints, and excessive police presence.<sup>267</sup>

The *Tribune* November 21, 1968 article, “Policeman Cleared of Assault,” discussed the jury’s verdict in Officer Danielson’s alleged brutality case against a 16 year-old Indian youth. The article places a Militant frame around the incident. The only quote by an AIM member was from Harold Goodsky asserting, “It was our first try,” however, “you can damn well believe we’ll try again [to have an officer charged with

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<sup>266</sup> Ivins, “Indian Group’s 1<sup>st</sup> Anniversary Called ‘Miracle, ’” *Minneapolis Tribune*, Folder “Indians: MPLS American Indian (AIM),” Envelop #1, MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives.

<sup>267</sup> Edmonds, “Indians to Patrol Franklin Av. to Deter ‘Harassment’ by Police,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, Folder “MPLS: Indians 1967/68,” MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives.

brutality].” The article concluded with a quote from Danielson’s attorney stating, “(i)f every person arrested swears out a complaint, I don’t know how long we’re going to keep police officers on the force. They’ll be spending 90-percent of their time in jail.”<sup>268</sup> The article does not provide a context for Goodsky’s assertion, simply leaving his quote framed as a direct threat against the MPD. Danielson’s attorney’s quote infers that “victims” of police brutality often lie or exaggerate their experiences and, thus, their claims are invalid.

On March 22, the day after Danielson was acquitted, AIM held a demonstration outside of Minneapolis City Hall to voice their disagreement with the decision. The *Tribune* article was written in a Militant frame. It provided readers a list of AIM’s issues regarding the decision, however, without providing their reasoning for their grievances, simply providing a list of complaints. However, there is a Civil Rights frame as well, for the article briefly discusses how and why the mayor was going to address Indian community grievances, such as reorganizing the Indian-American Task Force.<sup>269</sup>

On March 26<sup>th</sup>, 1969, Jim Jones’ *Star* article, “Indians accuse city police of brutality,” also placed AIM in the Militant frame. Jones’ article discusses the Tuesday March 25<sup>th</sup> meeting between AIM members and Police Chief Dwyer. The first third of the article focuses on Bellecourt’s complaints of brutality against himself and other Minneapolis Indians. However, Jones’ review of Bellecourt’s statements is limited to

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<sup>268</sup> Bob Lundegaard, “Policeman Cleared of Assault,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, November 11, 1968, Folder “MPLS: Indians 1967/68,” MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>269</sup> “Naftalin Heeds Indian Demands,” *Minneapolis Star*, November 22, 1968, Folder “MPLS: Indians 1967/68,” MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

that: *complaints* about police. No quotes by any AIM leaders were provided regarding justification of grievances. In contrast, the last two-thirds of the article presented six quotes by Dwyer and one by mayoral assistant Eugene Eidenber. These quotes provided readers with the State's perspectives directly, and lacked the Indian activist voice. Their quotes provided clear rebuttals to Bellecourt's complaints and provided justifications for civic policing procedures regarding misconduct.<sup>270</sup>

A May 28<sup>th</sup> *Star* article reviewed the first day of witness testimony regarding Bellecourt's trial for obstructing a legal arrest, and placed Bellecourt and O'Brien in the Militant frame. Sgt. Johnson was the city's first witness to testify and the only witness discussed in the article. Ultimately, the article functioned as a summary of Johnson's perspective. The article shared Johnson's justification for arresting O'Brien and Bellecourt, "Johnson said O'Brien refused to get in the squad car and handcuffs were placed on him. While he was doing this, Johnson stated he was, 'grabbed from the rear' by Bellecourt, who said, 'You don't have to handcuff him for speeding.'"<sup>271</sup>

On Friday June 13, 1969, Bellecourt and other AIM members attended a Police-Community Relations Unit meeting. Bellecourt began speaking at the meeting and went beyond his allotted time to introduce himself and AIM. After Bellecourt was asked to observe the time limit, he walked out of the meeting with AIM's delegation following. The *Star* released an article about the meeting the next day. Unlike his March 26<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Jones, "Indians accuse city of police brutality," *Minneapolis Tribune*, Folder "MPLS: Indians 1967/68," MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives.

<sup>271</sup> "Testimony opens in tribal of Indian," *Minneapolis Tribune*, Folder "MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife," Envelop #1, MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives.

article, Jones utilized one negative and one positive frame – Militant and Civil Rights. For approximately half of the article, Jones provides readers with details about the AIM delegation’s abrupt exit. However, Jones spends the other approximate half discussing Bellecourt’s introductory statement about AIM Patrol’s effectiveness in mending Indian-police tensions and the increase of police accountability.<sup>272</sup>

The same day, June 13<sup>th</sup>, the *Tribune* hosted an article discussing Bellecourt’s exit from the meeting. “Bellecourt Walks Out on Youth Forum,” provides a Militant frame. In contrast to Jones’ article, it does not share the content of Bellecourt’s introductory statement. Rather, it focuses on Bellecourt’s curt response to imposed time limits and attacks on failed police-community relations with other organizations.<sup>273</sup>

The *Tribune* issued an article, also without author accreditation, covering another witness’ testimony in Bellecourt’s “obstruction of a legal arrest” charge. The November 5<sup>th</sup> article reported on the testimony of Roberta Brown, an Indian who was present for Bellecourt’s arrest. Brown was arrested the same night as Bellecourt for profanity in public after defending him. Brown testified that Bellecourt’s police brutality injuries were, in fact, self-inflicted by rubbing his cuffs against his cell bars. However, the article does not provide Brown’s reasoning for her accusation. The article focused on the witness’ safety, describing how AIM now posed a violent threat to her for her testimony. Brown had police escorts and surveillance for “several days” leading up to her court

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<sup>272</sup> Jim Jones, “Bellecourt, Indians leave ‘unity’ meeting,” *Minneapolis Star*, June 14, 1969, Folder “MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife,” Envelop #1, MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

<sup>273</sup> “Bellecourt Walks Out on Youth Forum,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, Folder “MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife,” Envelop #1, MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives.

appearance. The article states that Brown probably left after the trial to avoid reprisal. As in Edmond's article, this too is a media framing of "stereotype," for it portrays the Indian organization as extremely aggressive.<sup>274</sup>

## **Findings**

When AIM was first established in Minneapolis, the group sought media attention to focus eyes on police brutality and Indian activism. They succeeded in gaining the attention of Minneapolis' largest newspapers, the *Minneapolis Tribune* and the *Minneapolis Star*. Between 1968 and 1969, these newspapers featured 23 articles pertaining to police brutality against Indians. Out of a total of 23 articles addressing MPD brutality, only 3 did not specifically relate directly to AIM. Two of these 3 articles were written before AIM began and one just after the AIM was established – thus before the press may have deemed it unnecessary to discuss the group. Therefore, 87% of all articles pertaining to MPD brutality against Indians involved a discussion of AIM. *Minneapolis Tribune* and *Minneapolis Star* coverage of police brutality consistently linked the issue with AIM activism. Thus, the public was repeatedly exposed to links between MPD brutality and AIM activism.

Of the 23 articles, 10 framed AIM as Militant. However, 5 of these 10 simultaneously placed a Civil Rights frame around the story. Therefore, half of these 10 articles, and 22% of total articles framed AIM-police brutality issues strictly as Militant.

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<sup>274</sup> "Companion Says Bellecourt Concocted Injury Charge," *Minneapolis Tribune*, Folder "MPLS: Biography: Bellecourt, Clyde & Wife," Envelop #1, MHC, Minneapolis Public Library Archives.

By contrast, 18 articles framed the subject as Civil Rights. Twelve articles - 52% total articles – framed AIM-police brutality issues strictly in a Civil Rights frame. Both the *Star* and the *Tribune* generally placed a positive, Civil Rights frame around the topic. The public read these reports, which showed AIM in a generally positive light and provided justification for AIM's actions.

After Bellecourt accused Sgt. Johnson of brutality, the alleged incident gained attention by the *Star* and the *Tribune*. In the three weeks following Bellecourt's accusation, the *Star* featured three articles and the *Tribune* featured one article discussing the alleged incident. Not only was Bellecourt accusing an officer of brutality, however, the alleged incident was gaining noticeable attention and, thus, making the incident known. After Bellecourt made the accusation and received media attention, Bellecourt was arrested four times during four consecutive months – March through June.<sup>275</sup>

*Star* and *Tribune* updates on Indian community-police relations were only addressed when a dramatic event took place – such as the 16 year-old youth's incident or Bellecourt's case. There were no articles reporting solely on the cooperative relationship developed by AIM and the police.<sup>276</sup> Such updates were always afterthoughts when discussing violent events, and were not the primary focus of the article. Ultimately, however, AIM achieved their goal of bringing police brutality against Indians into public view through obtaining media attention. Ms LaDonna Harris is now director of Americans for Indian Opportunity in New Mexico. According to Ms. Harris, In the

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<sup>275</sup> Minneapolis Police Department Bureau of Identification Unabridged Record: Bellecourt, Clyde H., Minneapolis Police Department Records Division.

<sup>276</sup> The cooperative relationship AIM developed with MPD officials is discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis.

1969' and 1970's the general public knew little about contemporary Indian experiences, especially in urban centers. AIM's efforts made the general public aware of Indians and Indian issues. Before AIM and other Indian activist organizations, the general public did not necessarily realize there were Indians, let alone Indians who were "mad about something."<sup>277</sup> Minneapolis residents were suddenly being made aware that there were Indians in the city and they had grievances with MPD's treatment of their Indian community.

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<sup>277</sup> L. Harris, telephone interview, March 9, 2009.

## CONCLUSION

Late 1960s urban America was a time and place for change throughout the country.<sup>278</sup> Individuals from all walks of life came together in collaborative efforts to resolve injustices facing specific groups and communities. Police brutality and misconduct was an issue facing urban communities of color across the country. Many of these communities banded together and organized around the issue, asserting their desire to address this difficult and complex problem. The American Indian Movement (AIM) was one of those groups. AIM founders – particularly Dennis Banks – took time to learn what the various, diverse social movements and organizations were doing at the time in their search for justice, and became inspired by these actions. AIM founders reflected, realizing the need for an Indian voice in the national pursuit for change and justice.

Police brutality primarily stems from police feeling threatened by the communities they patrol.<sup>279</sup> This is particularly true in ghettos, where neighborhoods, their residents, and visitors are stigmatized. Officers are trained to “maintain” their “edge” when in ghettos, increasing the likelihood of excessive and brutal force, for their guard is constantly up.<sup>280</sup> Such attitudes lead to the “dehumanization” and “demonization” of civilians<sup>281</sup> – they are no longer seen as people, rather, they are strictly a threat. According to Senator Harris, oppressed peoples come to believe the assumptions and stereotypes dominant society holds. To change that, people must work to change consciousness, and communities must raise consciousness through

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<sup>278</sup> L. Harris, telephone interview, March 9, 2009.

<sup>279</sup> F. Harris, telephone interview, February 25, 2009.

<sup>280</sup> Holmes and Smith, *Race and Police Brutality*, 90.

<sup>281</sup> F. Harris, telephone interview, February 25, 2009.

confrontation.<sup>282</sup> This shift takes place when community members change their self-image,<sup>283</sup> and become empowered. AIM's mobilization around police brutality was a call to Minneapolis Indians to raise consciousness and realize they did not deserve police abuse.

AIM's efforts to achieve justice and raise consciousness among Indians began in Minneapolis. AIM demonstrated their commitment to addressing police brutality in their community immediately upon the group's inception. At the top of AIM's list of initial grievances was police brutality and, as seen in the group's first year of establishment, AIM worked intensely to directly tackle the issue. Modeled on the Black Panther Party's community patrol in Oakland, AIM's primary mechanism for confronting the issue began in 1968 with AIM Patrol – organized volunteers who monitored the streets of Phillips, seeking and documenting incidents of police misconduct against Indian residents. As AIM Patrol developed into 1969, the tactic matured to serve a deeper function as a means of reforming Minneapolis policing in collaboration with Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) officials. AIM's collaborative efforts with civic agencies went beyond police reform efforts. When the American Indian Urban Federation (AIUF) attempted to establish a “multi-purpose neighborhood facility” in Minneapolis, AIUF sought AIM opinions and perspectives on how to effectively work within the urban Indian community

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

on policing issues. AIUF appreciated and respected AIM's work on police brutality and wanted their input.<sup>284</sup>

Minneapolis Indians lacked confidence in the ability of police officers to remain objective when investigating their complaints. Indians residents were fearful of police retaliation for filing complaints. Thus, Indians generally did not trust the police to fulfill their prescribed function – to protect civilians and their property by upholding the law ethically. Additionally, only 11 minority officers were employed by the MPD. This number was woefully inadequate as, according to Police Chief Dwyer, the city needed to employ 40 minority officers in order for the force to fully represent Minneapolis' population demographics. Chief Dwyer did not delineate specify what positions the MPD's 11 "minority" employees held, however, it's highly probable, given that that Indians were only 10% of Minneapolis' population and had high secondary school drop out and unemployment rates, that few Indians served as police officers.

AIM Patrol was an effort to provide balance to Indian-police trust/distrust and population dynamics – they were Indian Phillips residents monitoring police behavior while attempting to work cooperatively with officers, defuse street confrontations, and assist fellow Indians when needed. An effective illustration of this balance was the Urban Coalition grant<sup>285</sup> awarded to AIM to further develop AIM Patrol. The grant provided funding for additional equipment and, most significantly, obligated the MPD to

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<sup>284</sup> "Rationale For A Multi-Purpose Neighborhood Facility of Model Neighborhoods," Folder "Model City Records," 120-J-17-10(1=), Minnesota State Archives, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.

<sup>285</sup> Cohen and Bellecourt, Folder "Indians: American Indian Movement (AIM)," Minneapolis Public Library. In this statement, Cohen and Bellecourt did not disclose the amount of the grant.

cooperate with the Patrol and issue identification cards to patrollers. Therefore, AIM patrollers were now provided civic government recognition as colleagues and intermediaries between the MPD and Indian residents. Kerner Report commissioner Senator Fred Harris summarized the significance of such a gesture when stating grassroots activism is “essential to police accountability” because it is damaging for communities to feel they are adversaries to government system, they must feel included in the system, and community policing is necessary to do this.<sup>286</sup>

AIM leaders arranged and attended meetings with police officers at City Hall, and even hosted a meeting in Phillips. This placed civic officials outside their usual government setting. Instead, they met in an Indian neighborhood to discuss Indian issues, typically as they pertained to brutality and excessive police patrolling. Indian-police relations were being discussed in the home venues of each group – government and Indian establishments. Such a gesture would seem to be an attempt at providing a sense of equality. However, given the frequent press coverage that AIM-policing issues received at the time Dwyer and AIM met in Phillips, the meeting may have been an attempt to have the MPD appear in a Civil Rights media frame. Such a frame would counter any negative perspectives Minneapolis residents may have developed from coverage of Bellecourt’s injuries.

Bellecourt had reason to believe MPD officers were harassing him. Once he became AIM’s chairman, Bellecourt’s arrest record increased. Between 1954 and ’67, he was arrested an average of once per year. This increased by 600 percent over his first

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<sup>286</sup> F. Harris, telephone interview, February 25, 2009.

year as AIM chairman. Police harassment by making frequent arrests to intentionally shake nerves constitutes as police brutality, for officers would be inflicting psychological harm. It was an attempt to instill fear in AIM and an intimidation tactic. According to Mr. LeDeux, MPD officers worked to divide AIM leadership through intimidation.<sup>287</sup>

Efforts to address and remedy police brutality and misconduct in communities of color appeared in many forms during the 1960s. One of the forms was through documentation in reports to government, the most famous of which was created by the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, which became known as the Kerner Report. The Kerner Report investigated urban black communities' grievances with police brutality throughout the United States. The report determined black civilians and police generally did not trust one another, for police were known for physically and verbally abusing blacks. Further, officers believed most blacks viewed police as enemies. Thus, adversarial tensions were rooted in urban police-black relations. According to Senator Harris, the Kerner Report findings not only reflected urban black-police dynamics, but also Indian-police dynamics. Therefore, it was apparent that adversarial tensions existed within the urban Indian experience.

The Kerner Report sparked a national interest in the subject of relations between police and communities of color and inspired the publication of subsequent reports. The League of Women Voters of Minneapolis researched policing in Minneapolis and compiled their 1971 report, "The Police and the Community." The League examined police relations in two communities of color: blacks and Indians. The most significant

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<sup>287</sup> LeDeux, telephone interview, April 3, 2009.

difference in the League's report on each community was the inclusion of AIM and the exclusion of black grassroots organizations. In fact, AIM was the only grassroots organization provided its own, specific section.<sup>288</sup> This section summarized the functions and effects of AIM Patrol and then current AIM-police relations and collaborations – such as a policemen sitting on AIM's board. The inclusion of AIM and the exclusion of other grassroots organizations was reflective of AIM's status in Minneapolis. The group was viewed as a legitimate institution that possessed influence in Minneapolis policing affairs and produced effective community results. The League's position on the work of AIM was very favorable. The League stated in Minneapolis that “[a]fter two years of [AIM Patrol] operation, there has been a considerable improvement in Indian-police relations.”<sup>289</sup> According to Ms. LaDonna Harris, AIM's mobilization in the Twin Cities created the strongest change in attitude towards Indians of all U.S. urban centers since the 1960s<sup>290</sup>

AIM's initial mobilization in Minneapolis around police brutality demonstrates the strength and ability of communities to organize when seeking justice. AIM, its Patrol, and leaders provide an example of what can be accomplished when people band together and organize at the grassroots level. AIM was inspired and learned from Panther tactics, influencing their approach to organizing around police brutality. Though grassroots organizations, like AIM and the Panthers, made strides in righting wrongs in police accountability, the struggle continues to this day. Police accountability activists

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<sup>288</sup> League of Women Voters of Minneapolis, “The Police and the Community,” 14-17.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>290</sup> L. Harris, telephone interview, March 9, 2009.

must continue to learn from one another, network, and collaborate as the quest for justice continues.

APPENDIX A<sup>291</sup>

## INITIAL GRIEVANCES OF AIM

1. Police Brutality
2. Slum Housing
3. 80% unemployment rate
4. Disgraceful if not shameful practices of the Minneapolis public school system and its lack of concern regarding Indian education
5. Racist and discriminatory policies of the Hennepin County welfare system toward Native American clients
6. Questionable behavior of federal government in its regard to Native policies

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<sup>291</sup> Dennis Banks, *Background – Why AIM was started*, <http://members.aol.com/nowacumig/backgrnd.html>.

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