

## **Dennis Banks, Leech Lake, MN**

Dennis Banks - Native American leader, teacher, lecturer, activist and author - is an Anishinabe born on Leech Lake Indian Reservation in northern Minnesota. In 1968 he co-founded the American Indian Movement (AIM), and establishing it to protect the traditional ways of Indian people and to engage in legal cases protecting treaty rights of Natives - such as hunting and fishing, trapping, wild riceing.

AIM has been quite successful in bringing Native American issues to the public. Among other activities. In 1972 it organized and led the Trail of Broken Treaties' caravan across the U.S. to Washington, D.C. calling attention to the plight of Native Americans. They anticipated meeting with Congressional leaders about related issues; however, government officials refused to meet with delegates of this group which resulted in the seizure and occupation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs Office.

It also spearheaded the move on Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota in 1973 to oust corruption and the U.S. appointed chairman. These activities led to the occupation of Wounded Knee and a siege of 71 days which received national attention. Banks was the principal negotiator and leader of the Wounded Knee forces.

Under the leadership of Dennis Banks, AIM led a protest in Custer, South Dakota an 1973 against judicial process that found a white man innocent of murdering an Indian. As a result of his involvement in Wounded Knee and Custer, Banks and 300 others were arrested and faced trial. He was acquitted of the Wounded Knee charges, but was convicted of riot and assault stemming from a confrontation at

Custer. Refusing the prison term, Banks went underground, later receiving amnesty in California by then Governor Jerry Brown.

During this time in California, from 1976 to 1983, Banks earned an Associates of Arts degree at Davis University and taught at Deganawida Quetzecoatl (DQ) University (an all Indian-controlled institution), where he became the first American Indian chancellor. He also established the first spiritual run from Davis to Los Angeles, California in 1978 (now an annual event) and organized the Longest Walk from Alcatraz to Washington, D.C. that same year. This 3,600 mile Walk was successful in its purpose: to gather enough support to halt proposed legislation abrogating Indian treaties with the U.S. government. In the Spring of 1979 he taught at Stanford University.

After Governor Brown left office, Banks received sanctuary on the Onondaga Nation in upstate New York in 1984. It was while living there that Banks organized the Great Jim Thorpe Longest Run from New York City to Los Angeles, California. A spiritual run, this event ended in L.A. to begin the Jim Thorpe Memorial Games where the gold medals Thorpe had won at the 1912 Olympics were restored to the Thorpe family.

In 1985 Banks left Onondaga to surrender to law enforcement officials in South Dakota and served 18 months in prison. When released, he worked as a drug and alcohol counselor on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.

During 1987 graverobbers in Uniontown, Kentucky were halted in their digging for artifacts after they had destroyed over 1,200 American Indian grave sites. Banks was called in to organize the reburial ceremonies for the uncovered remains. His activities in this state resulted in Kentucky and Indiana passing strict legislation against grave desecration.

His autobiography Sacred Soul was published in Japan in 1988 and won the 1988 Non-fiction Book of the Year Award.

Banks received the idea of traditional sacred running in 1978 when he began Sacred Run. Since then it has become a multi-cultural, international event with participants from around the world joining Native American runners to carry the message of the sacredness of all Life and of humankind's relationship to the planet, Mother Earth. Each year, Banks leads Sacred Runs. As of 1996, Banks has led runners over 58,000 miles through the United States, Alaska, Europe, Japan, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

In 1994, Banks led the four month WALK FOR JUSTICE (WFJ) from Alcatraz Island in San Francisco to Washington, D.C.. The purpose was to bring public awareness to current Native issues.

Banks agreed to head the "Bring Peltier Home" Campaign in 1996 bringing Native Americans and other supporters together in an international drive for executive clemency for political prisoner Leonard Peltier.

He has had roles in the movies War Party, The Last of the Mohicans, and Thunderheart. A musical cassette "STILL STRONG" featuring Banks' original work as well as traditional Native American songs was completed in '93 and a musical video with the same name was released in '95. He can also be heard on other musical CD's: Peter Gabriel's "Les Musiques duMonde", Peter Matthiessen's "No Boundaries", on WORX-FM's "Tim Hain & the Worx", and with Cherokee Rose. His autobiography "The Longest Walk" is to be released in late 1997.

Dennis Banks stays involved with American Indian issues, AIM activities, Sacred Run, and travels the globe lecturing, providing drug and alcohol counseling, and sharing his experiences.

Source: <http://members.aol.com/Nowacumig/biograph.html>