Listening to Indians

FRED HARDEN, Winnebago
October 28, 1975
Salt Lake City, Utah

This transcript is one of a series of interviews with American Indian people throughout much of the United States by S. I. Myers of the History Department of St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley, St. Louis, Missouri, 63135.

The purpose of these interviews is to bring the Indian peoples' own comments to students in classrooms, and to foster greater understanding among the peoples of the United States by providing Indians the opportunity to express their ideas and opinions to a wider audience.

This transcript has been edited for clarity and ease of reading, but every effort has been made to preserve the original feeling. Conversations and opinions were encouraged on any subject of interest to interviewees; questions and responses do not necessarily reflect the viewpoint of the interviewer, the National Endowment for the Humanities, or St. Louis Community College.

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NO. 90

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Salt Lake City, Utah

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Sam Myers:

Today I'm in Salt Lake City at the University of Utah, talking with a young man here named Fred Harden. Fred, what tribe are you from?

Fred Harden:

I'm a Winnebago, a full-blooded Winnebago from a band of Winnebagos that are from Nebraska.

SM: They had been from Wisconsin area before that?

FH: Well, I think the government had moved the Winnebagos a number of times, probably four, five times, to different areas, including South Dakota and Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois. We now have part of the reservation that the Omaha Indians had; we're a kind of back-to-back situation over there, Winnebagos and Omahas.

SM: Were you born in and did you grow up in this country then?

FH: I was born and raised in Winnebago, Nebraska.

SM: There's a town named Winnebago there?

FH: Oh yeah, there's one in Wisconsin and one in Minnesota.

SM: They named these motor homes after the people, and that's one of the big success stories of the century.

FH: Oh yeah, I know that, like the window washer, for instance. He invested $1,000 and became a millionaire in Winnebago Motor Homes. That place, incidentally, is right across from our reservation, right across the river. That's right.

SM: Is that over in Iowa?
FH: Yeah.

SM: Well, you went to school there then. Through grade school, high school?

FH: Yeah, I went through grade school, of course, and boarding schools.

SM: BIA schools?

FH: I never did actually finish high school, you see. I joined the Navy, I got out of the Navy, I went on relocation, vocational education programs, you know, sponsored by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. I went to electronic school.

SM: Where was that?

FH: RCA school which originated out of New York, and then to Los Angeles.

SM: So then you ended up in Los Angeles for a while?

FH: Yeah, I lived in Los Angeles for about six years. Then I moved to Phoenix. I lived there for about six, seven months, I worked there, moved back to the reservation, then I went down to Utah, and I stayed there, you know. I like it here because the first thing I liked about it is that it's not so prejudiced as around the reservation.

SM: Have you any reason or explanation for that?

FH: Definitely.

SM: The border towns are sort of known for being prejudiced places?
FH: Oh yeah. Especially in this time and this age that civil rights became a controversial issue. People act on it, and people have paid more attention to it, and the Indians themselves recognize the fact that they have rights just like anybody else. I want to talk about general things about Indians or native Americans, and then talk in terms of what I think and what I know, and then somehow relate it to the dominant society, and then finally end up with what things can be done in terms of the problems of native Americans, which really isn't an Indian problem. It's society's problem in general. First of all, let me say, you know, when I first met you a few minutes ago, that, you know, you seem to be going around talking to different tribes, different Indians and different organizations, and different areas. And I think that you probably now found out that you cannot express Indian feelings in a sentence. I mean, they're so diversified in many areas, they're so spread out, if you took a continuum of Indians and you would run into, say traditional Indians who do not talk English, who believe in the Indian traditional concepts, and who stick by those, and who, say live in that sense, you know, like 50 years ago, 100 years ago, you'd find, along this continuum, from that point all the way to what a lot of people term progressive urban Indians, you know, from one side of the continuum all the way to the next, where that Indian, you could almost say, is almost a white person.

SM: Almost completely assimilated?

FH: Assimilated? I don't like that word.

SM: How would you correct that?

FH: Assimilation to me means sharing two cultures in this instance, and I don't see that happening. I see a superordinated type of situation where one society dominates another. To me that's not assimilation,
and if it were assimilation, I think that a lot of us Indians would be a lot better off in terms of treatment, in terms of opportunities in different areas, jobs, education, general treatment. But, in looking at that, you would find all the in-between kinds of people diversified by religions, different philosophies, where some tell-tale type of situation would be where somebody is . . . well, let me give you an example. Say somebody on my reservation left--two people left--they grew up together, they were young, they finished high school. One was a half-breed, O.K.? He's half white and half Indian, and the other was full blood. And so they leave; they go out of the state to get an education, they get a degree, they get the same types of degrees, they come back to the reservation to work for the tribe. O.K. And then as they progress along, one of them begins to rip off his own people for himself. The other jeopardizes his job so that the people in general can get ahead both economically, socially, educationally, and healthwise. The one who begins to rip off and looks for all this prestige and looks for raises for his own self, is constantly being patted on the back, you know, from higher-ups in the government, because he more or less is a puppet, in a sense. O.K., now we find out that the guy who was jeopardizing his job and trying to do all these things for his own people is the half-breed, and the full blood is the one ripping off. O.K., now when you look at a situation like this, who really is the Indian here?

SM: The half-breed would be the better Indian, wouldn't he?

FH: Yeah, in my way of thinking, in that instance. If you look at this continuum, and look at the American Indian Movement, or some people affiliated with it--and I'm not talkin' about their philosophy, I'm not talkin' about any specific person in there--I'm talkin' about some people that I have met who come to other Indians and tell these people what to do, and they start to push their values off on them, although both are lookin' for the same long-range goals, you see. But
the methodology, the methods are completely different, and so this AIM person who is trying to get something done, the same goals and objectives as the Indians, say in a community, pushes his values off and says, "You do this, and if you're not, you're an apple," you know, really a shoots a person or persons down, when actually he's doin' the same thing with the Bureau of Indian Affairs that he's accusin' us of doing. You understand?

SM: Yes.

FH: And so, in essence then he's a figurehead, he's doing these things, he's shooting down the Department of Interior, and different people within its structure, Morton, down to the commissioner, and the land management, and so on. And he's actually doin' the same thing. O.K., look at the diversity in Indians themself, look at the diversity in organizations. In essence this is a good factor. Let's take NCAI who deals with and goes through channels, say, to accomplish certain kinds of things. The American Indian Movement, looking at a continuum in organization structure. Maybe they're all looking at the same things, the same goals, but their methods are different. American Indian Movement started using demonstrations because they run into a brick wall each time they try to do something--that's the history. Consequently it grows into violence. Or at the other end of the continuum, CNCI deals with legal channels, and all the ones that are in between--all the Indian clubs, spiritual clubs, traditional clubs, the Indian centers, all the methods are completely different, and this is a good approach, because all methods are being tried then to see which ones are more effective. Maybe together they work in a total sum, a good unit, all of them put together. Certainly you can't deny that the American Indian Movement, through the Bureau of Indian Affairs building takeover, as well as Wounded Knee, has generated a lot of concern internationally. This is indicated by sales of Indian books. Maybe this is partially the cause of your being here today.
And so, I'm saying this because I don't believe that you're goin' to find the same kinds of responses from every Indian that you talk to.

SM: No, I get a great variety.

FH: O.K. There's gonna be some who talk from the standpoint of the white person, some who will talk from the standpoint of traditionalism, and who has been reared and brought up by inculturation, others by acculturation, whose philosophies will vary, whose methods will vary. And looking at the situation of Indians today, I don't look at it as an Indian problem, I look at it as a problem of society, total society. I believe that some of the ways to overcome my own thing, my own problems, my own family, my own situation, I'll have to devise myself, and that I will utilize all the tools and methods that I can. I believe that I can live among blacks, work among blacks, function well with blacks, as well as Chicanos, Caucasians, and retain and maintain my Indian-ness.

SM: You've been doing that.

FH: Yeah, I have. And so, what do I do? I maintain that I am an Indian, but I utilize different tools and different methods, and different various ways to attain what I feel I should attain for my family, and looking at my value system, I make priorities and use the things that I can, and still call myself an Indian. Because I don't know anybody, anybody else or anybody at all who can adequately define Indian for me. I mean, what is an Indian? There's been so many kinds of definitions and defined by Senators, by Congressmen, by heads of different departments within the government structure, by supposedly authoritarians on native Americans. You know, that's a name. Somebody who's an authority on Indians, who most of the time says, "I lived with Indians," you know, lot of times that's not true, because they've lived geographically where the Indians are, but they don't live with
them, they don't go down there and starve with them, and be cold with them, and suffer with them. They have a picket fence around an Indian reservation, and so this is where supposedly his expertise comes from. And so I believe that, in my own definition, that Indian is a person who can gather the things and the tools, the ways and methods that he can best attain whatever his goals may be. And this may be coupled with it, that a person, an Indian, who retains, recognizes and is conscious of his heritage, and looks at the different concepts of traditionalism, as far as native Americans are concerned, apply them to contemporary issues, and make them work for him, see. And not necessarily address rhetoric, diction, but can be within an Indian scope of function. To me, then, if I were to take somebody's definition, I would have to change my whole lifestyle.

SM: Somebody else's definition?

FH: That's right.

SM: You're going to take your own and use it?

FH: That's right. To be the best person that I can, that's part of being Indian, as far as I'm concerned. To function smoothly, comfortably, and get whatever you want out of life and for your kids and for your unborn children and for your people in general. See, that, in my mind at least, constitutes an Indian. If you can put that whole definition into one, I don't know, but it's mine, what I think. And it's just not a member of a tribe who's recognized by the U.S. Government, like so many people. Even in the education, it's gone down to anybody who's an Indian that qualifies for financial aid or assistance from the government is one--it's got down to this point, where the general concept was that you be one-quarter native American or Indian blood, and it's got down to now where a relative or grandfather or great grandfather can identify you as an Indian, and it's got that far.
SM: And you don't have to be the quarter blood?

FH: In some sections of the different education acts, and the most recent ones published and passed as an act, January of '73, I believe it was, but I know those are the qualifications for that particular title.

SM: That has changed too. The census has another definition.

FH: Anybody who says they're Indian is Indian.

SM: So the census bureau figures don't mean too much.

FH: That's for sure, and so you really can't blame them, because there's nobody that can give a definition of Indian.

SM: One family in Arizona said that being Indian is more a state of mind than how much blood you have. And the grandmother of the family, even though she was not quite a full-blood Nez Perce, was thoroughly Indian, and she taught all her grandchildren the ways of her people. In fact, she didn't pay much attention to anything non-Indian, it just wasn't important to her.

FH: In other words, somebody who lives and thinks Indian, in a sense ... even that is not really defined. You know, to "think Indian" what does that mean?

SM: Because there are so many different kinds of Indians. This is one thing, Fred, that has impressed me tremendously, the vast variety and complexity of the whole situation.

FH: You know, one thing about it, when you mention this, it brought to mind that I indicated the diversity. Even through the diversity in
language, the diversity in lifestyle, in a sense. It depends on the
topography, the climate, the geographical location, O.K. But one
thing, as far as I'm concerned, is there and is present, is common
to all Indians, you know, and this is this basic belief that is
different from the dominant society who, in my mind, is constantly
lookin' at the dollar bill there. Like my father used to say, "A
white man is a person who knows the price of everything and the
value of nothing," and their whole value system rests on the dollar
bill. And it's not so, as far as the basic, traditional Indian is
concerned. His value system centers around more spiritual things.
This I'm sure of, 'cause all tribes had existed and lived in that type
of lifestyle, as the idea of sharing and giving, you know, has meant
more to the traditional Indian than receiving, which certainly has
merit, and spiritual merit too. And again, the lifestyle's derived
from topography, the animals, the climate and the location. Just
like a Navajo lifestyle and a way of life is not really consistent
with the woodland Indians. You see what I mean?

SM: They've different geographical environments.

FH: That's right, and the topography is different as to the coastal Indians.
And so I guess what I'm sayin' is that that's the only difference
besides language. But the basic concepts of tradition are still
there.

SM: But in this infinite variety there are similarities that pervade all
the different Indian groups. That's what you're saying?

FH: That's what I'm sayin'. The basic concepts.

SM: A greater spiritualism, a greater concern for the environment they
live in, and a lesser concern for the material or for . . . say the
time. Four o'clock, that isn't as important a thing as that I get
there when I think I should be there, that sort of thing.
FH: Let me put it this way. A traditional Indian as opposed to a progressive, urban Indian, in a general statement—I know this is not absolute, but an urban Indian, say, could dress with braids on him, dress with a headband and Indian types of things he's wearin', could be a good dancer and could be a good singer of Indians, but the difference is between that person and what I would term a traditional Indian. That person lives a kind of lifestyle centered around the belief that materials are not that important, material goods and the dollar bill isn't that important. He's non-material minded, in a sense, where that urban Indian is very material minded and is constantly lookin' for that dollar bill.

SM: He's picked that up from the other society?

FH: Right. And so that I believe constitute the big difference between what I call traditional Indians and the urban, although there can be progressive traditional Indians also. And the idea, you know, leaning towards success and not being success, I don't know what success is, really.

SM: That's a good question.

FH: And if a person can exist and function smoothly and operate properly within that whole continuum, it may be a step toward progression or success. You see, where he can be living on the reservation and be progressive and be traditional, and he can very well live in an urban area and maintain a status of a so-called urban Indian and social function and these kind of things. To live in that whole continuum of living in a country, in a city, on a reservation or wherever.

SM: One man was describing what a lot of people do that have adjusted comfortably to both situations. He said for the eight hours of the work day they're pretty much like any other non-Indian person, and then
when they go home, they drop into a different world, and live their old way themselves, in their own homes, and so on.

FH: This is really true. Let me give you just a minute of an example. Last summer I was in school. I was going to school here, taking a summer course, and I got a letter from a medicine man from Rosebud, and I obligated myself and pledged myself to participate in the Sun Dance, at which time I responded and said I would be over there, because it was something I had promised, because he had done something for me. He did a healing ceremony. And so I did, and when I first got to that reservation, I was with my brother, and I told my brother, "I don't think I'd want to live around here, it looks like it's really dead," although that place was beautiful right in this area, which was Grass Mountain in Rosebud. And so we lived in a tepee during this time.

SM: You have to spend about a week getting ready, don't you?

FH: Yeah, it varies. And we more or less lived off the land, ate a lot of raw meat, and went to a lot of sweat ceremonies, and then finally the Sun Dance itself. And by the time that I was finished I felt so good and so cleansed, spiritually and physically, that I wanted to stay, and my brother also wanted to stay. And, of course, we've got our obligations, but I wish that every so-called Indian—not only Indians, society, everybody—should have an opportunity to go out and spend a week or two, as much as they possibly can, just living with the elements, nature.

SM: Going through an experience like that must have had a tremendous impact on you.

FH: Oh, it did. It did. It really did. It was something that I'd never experienced in my whole life, you know. It was new to me, but it was
really a positive experience to help me to do a lot of things and to help me adjust to my situations more.

SM: The Sun Dance is still being performed, isn't it?

FH: Oh, it always has. Of course it was underground.

SM: It was underground for 50 years or so, wasn't it?

FH: It was more than that. After the last wars, you know, in 1881, the rationing system and the reservation system was set up, and when they performed the Sun Dance and other ceremonies, it was a threat to the Cavalry, it was a threat to the white population in general, that Indians should rejuvenate themselves both spiritually and physically.

SM: The gathering together of a lot of Indians seemed like a threat, even though it wasn't, sometimes. Like the Ghost Dance ceremonies, they were no threat at all, it was peaceful, but they scared the troopers too.

FH: That's right.

SM: We've got documentation where they reacted in panic almost in some cases, because of a Ghost Dance collection.

FH: Now there are two separate things, the Ghost Dance and the Sun Dance. They're two different things.

SM: Oh yes, they're vastly different.

FH: Peyote-ism, the Handsome Lake Religion, a spiritual type of set-up of the Iroquois.

SM: All these things are legal again now. A man from St. Charles, across
the Missouri from St. Louis was going out to the Sun Dance this summer, and he went, he said, with some apprehension. He was scared, he said. You know what that's like, because you went through it yourself.

FH: He's got reason to be scared.

SM: Well, did it work out? Did everything go as you hoped?

FH: It was positive. I came out . . . I don't know, I suppose I could say more of an Indian man than I ever was.

SM: It used to be, and it still is, the high point of the whole year, isn't it, for the people?

FH: For many people that's true, yes, and it's kind of a shame that a lot of, I don't know, maybe I'll choose a word, pseudo Indians, don't even know, never attended, don't bother to be interested in some of the traditional ceremonies that are performed and that have gone underground and come out, and it's also a shame that some tribes like where I come from, that they don't have too many of these kind of situations, that I had to go to another tribe like the Sioux. In Wisconsin, though, I don't have to do that. I could go there, but it's a long ways from here.

SM: Some of the older Sioux people said that when the sweat baths and the Sun Dance fell into disuse, that was the thing that sapped the strength of the people too. So they named this as the sort of turning point and they went downhill ever since.

FH: Sure. If you take away from a man his role in the family, you take away his dignity and his pride, and disrupt his culture, and then take away his religion, you see, this is in essence what happened. So what have you got left? That naturally got to be a turning point..
SM: Now the current movements going on in the country. Have you had any experience with them?

FH: In what areas?

SM: Well, like at one point you mentioned something about the BIA takeover. Do you know anything about that?

FH: Sure. I was there.

SM: Can you tell us anything about the BIA takeover then?

FH: Yeah. At the time I was director of what they called the Indian Walk-ins. It was actually that, a hole-in-a-wall, walk-in service, or whatever we were able to do for Indians, and that some of the people who were my clients that left with the Trail of Broken Treaties Caravan that originated in San Francisco, the one that had gone through here.

SM: Is that where it started, in San Francisco?

FH: No, it actually started in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, and Alaska, and these caravans then, supposedly, were to go through the different parts of the country, mainly Indian communities and reservations, and meet in Sioux Falls. And in Sioux Falls go through Minnesota and end up in St. Paul, which they did, and from there to go, you know, to Chicago, to Cleveland, and then up to Washington, D.C. And the whole purpose of the Trail of Broken Treaties was to recognize and bring national and international attention to the fact that all these treaties were ratified and existed and were broken by the dominant society, and to bring about justice somehow, or some of the justice. I don't know what the people's definition of justice is really, but there should be some kind of a system whereby native
Americans can be allowed to assist themselves in the various areas of health, education and welfare, and traditional types of things. As far as the takeover was concerned, it was not planned that the building be taken over. It was a situation of misunderstanding, lack of communication that started it off. If this were planned, certainly Indians are not that dumb not to engage in a confrontation without weapons, you see. They would have brought weapons with them, but there was no weapons. As a matter of fact, we had medicine men who were part of the leadership, who were part of counsel for the people, for the Indian people in general, who were acting in their capacity as medicine men. I was involved in the first confrontation, and before anything was happening there was a shock troop unit that came in--these guys were armed with all their paraphernalia--and we just blocked up that door. They said they were going to come to the other door, so we blocked up, we blockaded those doors and those windows.

SM: These were federal officers?

FH: Definitely. It was like a shock team. And so it took place like that and was definitely not planned, at least not by the American Indian.

SM: Before you got to the point of barricading the doors, you had some meetings with officials in Washington?

FH: Definitely yes.

SM: Were you in that meeting with Louis Bruce?

FH: There was a lot of meetings with Louis. There was one important meeting there. I can tell you where the feelings of animosity had entered the picture--they were already present, but they came out--when Harrison Loesch and Mr. Bruce and the lady who worked here in this state at the Intermountain School at Brigham City was present.
She was part of the administration at the school, the Indian school, which had done some discriminating things toward Indians. One of the things that they used to do is when the Navajo kids came in from the reservation that they would assemble the Indians and go through their belongings and take their medicine pouches and take their traditional kinds of things they kept close to them, and they'd pile them up and they used to burn them. They would punish them for not talking English. They received punishments for all different kinds of Indian types of functions that they did, that they were used to, and that they held dear to them. They stripped them of this, and attempted to what people call assimilation—I don't like the word—and had tried to change their lifestyle, until a certain thing had happened. Lee Brightman came over and he talked at the Utah State University, and they turned the electricity off at the school, and that started the whole investigation process, and it was at that time when Virginia Grass's granddaughter was there at the school and was mistreated there, that she approached this lady in Washington, and she actually got terminated from this school, and she was elevated in terms of the structure of the government, she was put into Washington.

SM: They "kicked her upstairs"?

FH: That's true. And it was at this time when those bad feelings had appeared between Virginia Grass and this lady, and that sparked off other things, and some harsh noises by both sides, namely Harrison Loesch, who at that time when asked questions always would respond, "I don't know, I don't know." This is what he constantly said.

SM: What was his position?

FH: Yeah, he was in Morton's position, he was the Secretary of the Interior. And of course Louis Bruce was commissioner at that time.
And it was because of this takeover that Harrison Loesch was removed.

SM: Bruce eventually lost his job too, didn't he?

FH: He lost it because of it, as well as some different, pro-Indian type people who was trying to help, and then such as himself and Ernest Stevens who participated, and actually Louis stayed with the Indians and was ordered to get out, but he stayed with them anyway, by Harrison Loesch and other people. I think the time was appropriate, in that national attention had been focused on the takeover, and when people began to question why Indians had did this, and what was the situation, what was the condition of the Indians, this was when people began to pry and dig into Indian's kind of affairs, and begin to learn some truths.

SM: Find out what was bringing all this about?

FH: Right. And naturally the first thing that the U.S. Government did was to get other Indians to be on their side. Like one of the people here at the law school had been called directly to Washington at the time, and this is Martin Seneca, who is working with the Bureau of Indian Affairs now. They also called most tribal chairmen that they possibly could get in touch with to come to Washington, you know, and to try to hinder the Indian movement at the time.

SM: Speak out against it?

FH: And which they did. I have 16 copies of telegrams now that came from different tribal chairman who put down the Bureau of Indian Affairs building. As a matter of fact, I made a whole report out of it. At any rate it was not planned. It had taken a week, and I am sure that the people running for office in the whole structure of the government could have made some embarrassing movements at the time. If it was at
a different place at a different time, I'm sure that many of us would have been killed.

SM: Well, it was the appearance of the federal officers that caused the beginning of the barricading of the doors and that sort of thing?

FH: It was a misunderstanding of the security people down in the basement, or down below the ground floor in the Bureau of Indian Affairs, that did not understand what the situation was--which was, that the Indians were allowed to spend the night in the Bureau of Indian Affairs auditorium, because the place that they stayed the night prior had been in a beat-up church. It had a lot of rats, and just a dirty, filthy place. And they were allowed to do this, and the security didn't understand it and the confrontation derived from that.

SM: It started out that you were just going to use the auditorium for a place to spend the night?

FH: Um hm.

SM: And then one thing led to another?

FH: One of the building security people had called this tactical squad in, and they came in a minute, let me tell you, and this is when the barricade started, because it was an experience of some of the people who were there, that any time these people come they don't care if you plead, get on your knees, whatever, they'll do you in anyway. This is what was indicated at the time. And so that's how it began.

SM: Were you in there several days?

FH: I couldn't even remember if it was day or night half the time. We was in there seven days. The last of October into November.
SM: There has been considerable comment in the press about the destruction of records and artifacts and things like that. Is that true?

FH: Yes it is. O.K. Now let me tell you how that began. That began before the confrontation with the security people. We was up on the third floor, this was in Bruce's office, and close to his office I was talking to an aide of his at the time, James Thomas, a Winnebago. And we was reminiscing, we was talking, and there was a case that one of the southwestern Indians had looked at and talked Indian to the other. They busted it and took it and said, "This belongs at home, this doesn't belong to this building, this is not for public observation. This belongs to a medicine man there." And they were right. And it's comparable to digging up graves and putting on an exhibition, as far as these people were concerned.

SM: Or taking some sacramental equipment out of a church?

FH: Sure. As far as the Indians was concerned it was a sacrilege. And I believe that they had every right to take that and bring it back, because it was sacred.

SM: Did they get it back?

FH: Sure.

SM: And that started it?

FH: That's right. And when they looked at that and said, "That belongs," and different things are identified by different tribal people that came from their homes.

SM: And then is it true that many of those things were not destroyed, but were returned to where they had come from?
FH: O.K. At this particular time, then, the records that were there, and some of the leaders and some of the people had found out some very interesting things that had happened. More importantly, some of the legal theft that had taken place in prior years, and some of the promises that were made, and all the promises that were broken; they stopped calling them treaties, I believe, in 1887, and begin to call them agreements, still, in fact, treaties, that functioned just like they did before, putting different labels on different things for their own purposes. And so a lot of these things were found. And we found out a lot of things in different documents, you know.

SM: You had several days there. You could even have time to read some of them?

FH: Oh yeah, definitely.

SM: That's an explanation that we never heard before.

FH: This is really true about the media. At the time we had one little T.V. in the building, and we were watching it and we heard the media, we saw it on T.V. where there were out and out lies of things that took place. We know. We were there, we was doing it. When I came back here later, I was a director of the United Council of Urban Indian Affairs here, and then I would go around and try to spread the word in terms of truths about native Americans, the Bureau of Indian Affairs takeover, Wounded Knee, and then there would be people in the audience who would ask me, "Is this documented?" You know, the things I said. I was there, I was doing it. How much more can I document that?

SM: How did that Washington thing end then?

FH: Well, what had happened then, it kind of met at a stalemate, where they agreed that there would be an investigation of the charges, the
twenty-one point proposal that the Indians brought at the time, which they hashed over, and some of the things would help to bring about justice, equilibrium, and they promised that they would investigate that; go over the proposal; and they would also investigate the possibility of relieving some of the people of their duties, like John Crow and Harrison Loesch, which of course they did, as well as some of the pro-Indian type people that were in the offices of the Bureau of Indian Affairs within that structure. And that there would be no charges filed, and that they would pay to get the native Americans out of the country.

SM: Get them back home?

FH: Well, they were more anxious to get them out of there. And so that was resolved with again promises that there would be some investigations, some types of things that would consider all their points, that would consider all these moves, that there definitely had to be a move, that things were not running along smoothly, and Wounded Knee turned out to be the same type of situation, although it evolved in the center of something else.

SM: These investigations and promises, were they kept?

FH: No.

SM: They weren't kept? The investigations weren't made?

FH: Not to the extent where it made any significant value or changes.

SM: So it ended up then as another frustration for those people who hoped to get more accomplished?

FH: That's true, especially recognizing those treaties that were broken,
especially around the idea of sovereignty, and bearing in mind the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, which was brought up as an issue.

SM: Now you mentioned Wounded Knee. Will you go on about that? You were there too?

FH: Well, it turned out to be that it evolved and it stemmed from a local situation of the tribal chairman there, Dick Wilson, and some of the wrongdoings that was happening there, some rip-offs, some mistreatment, and some crooked kinds of dealing. He was the arm of the government, and he and his relatives dealt with traditional people the way he wanted to. The people themselves, the Pine Ridge Oglala, had asked the American Indian Movement to intervene and try to assist in some way. It turned out to be a kind of a government-people confrontation to a point where it got into other issues. And as that much attention had been focused on it, it had come back to the Fort Laramie treaty, uh . . . some proposal, I think it was a 10-point proposal, that would bring about, again, justice. It was a kind of a spinoff from the Bureau of Indian Affairs Trail of Broken Treaties 21-point proposal. It was a spinoff from that, recognizing some of the major issues, and also focusing attention on the situation there at Pine Ridge. And again, that was ended with more promises.

SM: They signed some kind of a statement that both sides came to agree upon?

FH: There was agreements that was signed.

SM: I remember I have a picture of the signing between Russell Means and somebody from the government. You knew all these people, then, who have been so much in the news these last few years, like Russell Means and Dennis Banks and the Bellecourt brothers? You know them all well?
FH: Oh yeah.

SM: This fellow Durham too. Do you know him? The one that's been accused of being an agent for the FBI, and who was a security man for the AIM?

FH: Yeah, he posed and he was going around acting as a security. And he later came out with the writings that he really shot the people down. Yeah, I just read that again last week. I went all through it.

SM: Are you familiar with the incident in Wisconsin at the monastery near Gresham?

FH: Not much in that. . . .

SM: It was a kind of a different thing, wasn't it?

FH: I believe that the Warrior Society and the Menominees sought justice. They were again, in my mind at least, seeking out justice that some retribution should be made for, again, legal theft, mistreatment; and that seemed to be the proper time and place, as far as they were concerned, and they were justified in doing it.

SM: Anyway, that was not quite the same thing. It wasn't actually started and headed by AIM itself, but rather by the Menominee Warrior Society.

FH: Yeah, but in essence, as an indirect example, you know, it's like a lot of people now indicate that the native Americans had taken action as an indirect influence of the black movement. It could be a possible way of looking at it, in terms of where they got the idea of doing that and making that type of move.

SM: I bumped into some interesting comments about all these things, like the black people want equality, but the Indians don't give a hoot
about equality, they just want to be themselves. Is that a fair statement?

FH: Well, I think that's a fair statement, and actually the feeling of a lot of native Americans who would like to get away over that paternity type of activity of the Department of Interior and the American Indian. "Let us be ourselves, let us do, let us help ourselves, and let us be self-governing and self-determining," and some say, you know, "We want our sovereignty and to be able to do these things in our own way." And you know, like the black situation, as far as I can see, and their culture, in looking at contemporary blacks, is a spinoff from the white people.

SM: Because it's a different situation, really. They were living within the limits of the non-Indian society for these three-four hundred years, five hundred years, whereas the Indians have kept their own culture, and that's what they want to continue doing, don't they?

FH: Sure. If you look at the Indians of this land, and look through history, and look at all the attempts by the dominant society and Europeans and all the other foreigners that come over here, who attempted genocide, complete extermination of the Indian, per se, and then, after this had failed, then attempting to . . . you know, even using germ warfare—smallpox in blankets and different kinds of situations and alcohol—and then going to an attempted paternalistic view, again using the word assimilation, but actually superordination, through the Bureau of Indian Affairs, through . . . you know the Bureau of Indians Affairs was a department of the Army, and then it was turned over, I believe, in 1949.

SM: In 1849?

FH: No, I mean was turned over to Interior.
SM: Yes, that was back there in 1849, except that they never had a clear-cut definition. . . .

FH: No, at that time it was under the Department of the Army.

SM: It started out with the Army.

FH: It turned back over to Interior in the 1900's.

SM: The date isn't as important as the fact that it was looked at differently. The first time it was under the War Department because these people were enemies, and then later on they became considered something else, wards of the country, and now. . . . Now that we've gone through all this, what does it look like from here on out? Is any progress being made, does it look bad or good?

FH: I've always indicated in any place I've ever gone or talked that the problem, the condition, the way it exists now, certainly had its causation factors so it certainly has an answer—even though people view that as a controversial type of thing and Indians are not ready for this kind of situation. But regardless of that, all things, if they're gonna turn out positive for all concerned, society in general has to begin a communication type of system. A communication system whereby understanding has to take place before anything happens. If this is set up, and if it's adequate, natural things will take place for the positive, at least in my mind.

SM: You have added, I think, immeasurably to that.

FH: I thank you. Well, it's always been my purpose, and I feel that I have an obligation to who I call my people, my red brothers, that I am obligated as a person to share some of the positive things that I know of, and if in any way that I can be of help I feel obligated,
because this has been my position before as director of different programs and in the efforts to try to procure a self sustaining, self determining people. You know they can be self actuating.

SM: Some have been doing very well, and others have not. Others have been even hurt worse. I keep hoping that it gets better. Would you mind if I take your picture? You'd make a good picture. You look like a very Indian person, and that's a good thing.

FH: Well, that makes me feel good. That's the best thing, the best compliment you could have paid me.

SM: I'll say thank you once more. I appreciate it, and I hope I'll see you again.

FH: I'm glad I could be of help.