Listening to Indians

SYLVESTER ROUBIDEAUX, Sioux

May 23, 1975

St. Louis, Missouri

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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May 23, 1975

St. Louis, Missouri

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Sam Myers:
We're talking today with Sylvester Roubideaux [he pronounced it Rō-bē-dōō] who lives in St. Charles, Missouri. Roubideaux—is that a French name?

Sylvester Roubideaux:
Yeah, it is a French name.

SM: You're a full-blooded Sioux, aren't you?

SR: Yes, I am.

SM: In your language that would be a Dakotah?

SR: Actually my father's name is Bear Shield. But they split us up into different names. See, back in 1890 they had what they called Bureau of Indian Affairs. I come from the Brule [Bru-Lē] clan of the Sioux Nation. They took the French traders . . . the nuns that were on my reservation, the nuns, the priest, took their names, and they used them for enrollment purposes. Right now there is quite a few of us. Since then there is about five brothers that came out by the name of Roubideaux, and they just spread. So there's quite a few of us Roubideaux. O.K., you got Roubideaux, you got Budeaus, you got Ladues, and others, almost all French, because the French traders were up there in that territory at the time.

SM: Now, 1890 we were talking about, but you weren't living then. When were you born?

SR: O.K. I was born October 21, 1934, on the Rosebud Reservation, a place called Parmelee.

SM: Parmelee, South Dakota?
SR: Yes. South Dakota. I grew up there, and my father went to the Service, and in 1944 he was killed overseas.

SM: In World War II?

SR: Yes. He was killed in Europe. He was killed over there. So my mother got $10,000 insurance on him, and all we had was about five head of horses at the time. My mother got that, so we had a whole stock of horses. On the reservation, you know, we travelled together, most of us the same age group.

SM: Do you mean the boys of your age?

SR: Yeah. And we learned quite a bit from our grandfathers—about different herbs and about different roots; and how to fish and how to sneak up on a deer, rabbit, or even a snake; what to do, how to eat it. We were always curious about it, so we travelled a lot, but if it was sumpin' that we didn't understand, we'd go home and we'd find out.

SM: From your grandfather usually?

SR: Yes. Mostly the elders. They knew. So they'd tell us what to do.

SM: The elders had quite a bit of respect in your community life there?

SR: Yes, they did. And they tried to teach us. I was twelve years old when I learned how to speak English.

SM: Well, you speak clearly now. Did you go to school then speaking Brule?

SR: Yes. Well, O.K., I'll come to that. My first language, of course, was my native tongue, which is Sioux. So I went to a school called
St. Francis, St. Francis, South Dakota. It's a mission school. I went to school there.

SM: Was that in your native language?

SR: No. That was our problem. See, when we went to school there, we weren't permitted to speak Indian. We had to speak English. If we didn't we were punished. Now they're teachin' them how to speak their native language, but that time they didn't. We used to get punished if they caught us speakin' our language.

SM: Well, we've improved that one little thing, at least a little?

SR: Yes. So now, they turn around and they're teachin' the culture and the heritage and the language back to the Sioux--back to the people.

SM: Do they have quite a few Sioux teachers also?

SR: Yes, we have some. In about every school back home they have one teacher that teaches nothin' but Indian language--the tongue, you know, our language. But at that time they didn't. So from there, when I finished grammar, finished eighth grade, my older sisters--I have three of them . . . well, I got two, one died--they wanted me to have a higher education, so they took me to Rapid City, South Dakota, and put me into a white man's school, so I went through there.

SM: How old were you then?

SR: I was fifteen, but they set me back, because the school, St. Francis, they didn't have that much education to really keep up with the rest of the generation. So when I went there I took a test, and they set me back another grade, so I had to take the eighth grade over again. Because on the reservation at the time they didn't have the adequate books and the knowledge of the teachers to give us the education that
should have been in the mainstream of society at the time. So I studied—I studied real hard, and I picked up the English language, and I went to school with the non-Indians, the white people, and I picked up my language faster.

SM: In Rapid City, were most of the kids white?

SR: They were all white. There were only three of us. There were 300 freshmen, and out of that I was only one Indian, and there were two sixth graders.

SM: That was a little unusual in Rapid City, South Dakota, too, wasn't it?

SR: Yes, at the time it was. But now the population is really expandin', you know, in the city.

SM: Do you know how many Indian students there are in Rapid City schools now?

SR: I haven't been there for years, and I really wouldn't know.

SM: But you think there would be many more Indian students?

SR: Oh, there's quite a few. There must be at least 2,000 in Rapid City that's goin' to school now.

SM: In the various schools?

SR: In different schools.

SM: Because Rapid City is a good-sized town?

SR: Well, they're all distributed all over. I imagine there's about 2,000
or maybe more, because they have a village there now--Indian village
where all Indians live. So then, in my senior year in 1951, I went
to the Service. In my first semester I went to the Service, and I
spent five years in the Service. So while I was in there I picked up
my English more, because I wasn't talkin' to no Indians, I was talkin'
strictly to the white people.

SM: That's the best way to learn, isn't it? If you have to use it you do
learn it faster. You were in the Service for five years; was that
the Army or the Navy?

SR: Yes. The Army. Five years.

SM: What years were those?

SR: '51.

SM: Were you in Korea then?

SR: Yes. I was in Korea. I got wounded up there.

SM: Did you get the Purple Heart?

SR: No, it wasn't enough to merit a Purple Heart. So I came back to
stateside and I was stationed at North Carolina, and I got out and I
went home, and I just . . . started back into my history.

SM: When you go home, that means you go back to the Rosebud Reservation in
South Dakota?

SR: Yes.

SM: Is there a town that you think of particularly as your own?
SR: Yes. Parmelee. I was born and raised there. Parmelee is small—about what you call a "one-horse town." It's very small, the whole village is. I've got my daughter livin' there, and my oldest son lives in St. Francis. He goes to school there now. He's in high school right now.

SM: You got back from the Korean War, and you got out of the Service—you were in North Carolina—then you went back home?

SR: Back home after I got discharged. And then I start workin' on various ranches—that's about all we can find is ranch work—so I worked on ranches and then I started into rodeos. I started ridin' rodeos.

SM: Bucking horses and all that?

SR: Yes, I ride Brahma bulls.

SM: That seems dangerous.

SR: I'm a small man; I'm light, so I can't handle the big saddle broncs, so I do better on Brahma bulls than I do on saddle broncs.

SM: Did you ever get hurt badly?

SR: Oh yes. See my nose? A bull caught me right there one time.

SM: Does it bother your breathing?

SR: Yes, it does. My nostril on this side is kind of bad.

SM: It moved your nose to the side a half inch, didn't it?

SR: See, it split my skull up here.
SM: You must have had a horrible concussion.

SR: Really. So they couldn't set it straight. If they did it would push that against my brain.

SM: But you pulled out, didn't you?

SR: Yeah. I healed up pretty good. Then I kept ridin' and that's how I met my wife.

SM: Oh, Diane, you mean?

SR: Yes. The American Indian Movement that started lately--we was fightin' before then. We were fightin' because ... 0.K., I own 160 acres back home which is mine. And there's another half a section that my sisters and I, we will share. 0.K., that land is ours. I knew a little about cattle, and I wanted to start a ranch on it. So I go to the BIA and I ask them for a loan--you know, at least 30 head of cattle and a tractor, a mowing machine, I needed those real bad, but they tell me, they said, "No, in the treaty it says you're incompetent, you can't."

SM: The treaty says you're incompetent?

SR: Incompetent. That I cannot do it. They was goin' by that old treaty. So then I goes to the white man's bank, but I can't put my land in for collateral, because they can't collect because the government will stop them. But I could go ahead and sell it if I wanted to. I could sell it to anybody I want, but to put it up for collateral, if the bank wants to collect from me, they're gonna have to go against the government.

SM: So they wouldn't give you a loan using that as collateral?
SR: Yeah, they wouldn't give it to me. So that is one of the main reasons why we fought at Wounded Knee. Now what I brought here, I want to lend this to you; I want you to read 'em. Everything that was in here was promised to us, if the sum came through.

SM: You mean this was promised before Wounded Knee?

SR: Yes. These came back in 1930. Back in the '30s.

SM: You're talking about the resolutions in 1934, the Indian Reorganization Act. This was called the Indian New Deal at the time.

SR: Yeah, at the time.

SM: I thought at first you were speaking of the Wounded Knee incident of 1972.

SR: Yeah, that's what I was talkin' about. See, what they had here, what they got on paper, that's all. They didn't follow through with that, so these are the reasons why we fought at Wounded Knee.

SM: February, '73, were you with the AIM movement at Wounded Knee then?

SR: Yes. At the time, yes. There was quite a few of us who were there. It was a cause that we had to fight for. We had to do it, because if you don't we'll still be . . . O.K., right now the colored people, O.K., they say they're the minority. But they're not. We are the minority.

SM: A much smaller minority yet.

SR: Yes. O.K., they gettin' everything, and we ask for simple things--our own land we want to make use of--and they deny us; they won't give it to us because we want to make use of it. We want to be with
the ones . . . we want to pay taxes, but they hold us down. They say, "No," that the treaty says this and the treaty says that. So that is why we had to rebel against the government.

SM: Let's go back now when you came back from the Service, after the Korean War. You went out and were trying to get this land organized to use it for a ranch. What did you do then for the years after that? Did you get a job, or work at other ranches?

SR: Yeah.

SM: And then you got into the rodeos and so on?

SR: I start ridin' the rodeos, and then I got my high school diploma through the GED, and then I went to welding school at St. Paul and Minneapolis.

SM: Which school is that?

SR: A welding school. Then I came out and I was a certified welder.

SM: There're quite a few Indians in that area aren't there?

SR: Yes there is. You got Chippewas, you got Winnebagos.

SM: They get Chippewas from farther north, and you from the west and the Winnebagos from the east coming into the Twin City area.

SR: I wanted to make somethin' of my life. I didn't want to stay on the reservation and be reservation Indian, and just live on charity or somethin'.

SM: Did you work as a welder then?

SR: Yes, in Mora, Minnesota
SM: There used to be a factory there. Is it still there?

SR: Yeah. It was still there when I left there. We was buildin' boats, so I worked there as a welder. Then I went to Denver, Colorado, but in the summertime I travelled in the rodeo--rider.

SM: Then you worked as a welder in the wintertime?

SR: Yes. In off season I work as a welder, and I kept savin' my money. I figger some day I'm gonna own a store; I'm gonna open up a shop some place, because my people have to get out, and to show the people that the Sioux can do something. I didn't want to stay on the reservation and just rot away on a reservation.

SM: The Sioux people do not want their reservation taken away either, do they?

SR: No.

SM: They want it kept there, but they don't want to be forced to stay there, right?

SR: Right.

SM: Like the Menominees in Wisconsin, who had their reservation terminated. Now they've got that termination reversed.

SR: Yeah. So right now . . . see, our tribal council, O.K., it's just like United States. After we elect our president, vice-president, secretary, then, in each community--like I come from Parmelee--we elect what they call a councilman. O.K., he's our spokesman for our community. O.K., so all the councilmen, they have council meetings so the people meet together. O.K., they want to put a resolution in--they want to bring factories in to the reservation. So now they got
some factories comin' in to the reservation. So they worked that, and our tribal councilman, his name was Kenneth Longjean. He was very good at the time, but he resigned—he quit. He's like our president. O.K., he went to Washington, and he talked with the federal government affairs, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and he got it so that they can bring factories on to the reservation and have them be tax-exempt, if they hire over 75% Indian personnel.

SM: That is one of the rulings of the Supreme Court or the BIA, that these business ventures would be tax-exempt?

SR: Yeah. So they did. Now. O.K., there's one from here at St. Louis—it's a welding company. They make staircases and they make stairs—well, it's an all-welding outfit, is what it is. They're from here, but they're up there now.

SM: They have a factory on the reservation out there?

SR: On the reservation, yeah. And they teach on-the-job training too at the same time. And they got this fish-hook factory, then they got a pottery factory, and soon they get a moccasin factory, and there's a slaughterhouse outfit—a packing plant from Minneapolis that they'll be setting up there. It's a frozen food outfit; they slaughter right there and then they pack it right there and then they freeze it and then send it out. So these factories are comin' in. Before that, there was nothing there, that is why I had to go out and try to get on my own, best way I can.

SM: Travelling in the rodeos, and working as a welder?

SR: Yes.

SM: But now, things are looking up a little bit?
SR: Yes, they are, 'cause I have my own business, I have a beautiful wife, and I like it down here.

SM: Well, now we had you back in South Dakota, working in the rodeos and working as a welder, but then, when did you get into the little shop out here in St. Charles? What led up to that?

SR: O.K., like I said, I kept savin' my money. I had a bank in Denver, and every time I been in a rodeo, I didn't draw that--all my money.

SM: Your winnings--just salted away in the bank?

SR: Yeah. I saved it. I just saved it there. I was up there for a rodeo, and I met my wife there.

SM: She's from St. Louis?

SR: Yes, she's from here. You see, I danced professionally too. I dance with hoops.

SM: Are you called a hoop dancer?

SR: It's a fancy war dancer, is what I am. I do the hoop dance on the side. I mean, that's part of the show. A professional dancer among the Indians is one of the professionals, because, see, each tribe has different music. To be professional the person has to know each music when he goes to them. Now all Indians don't dance. They're a special group like singers. Everybody thinks that, because they're Indian, they can get out there and dance. But no. I grew up dancing. Ever since I was a little kid, my daddy used to sing for me when I was learning to walk, so then I learned how to dance. I knew the music. I know all the old music, which is getting to be a lost art. But I know all of them. I know all the old, and I know the meaning to them, I know the history behind them--all these sounds. So I
turned professional. I took two international championships.

SM: Where was that?

SR: In South Dakota and in Canada.

SM: That's quite a record!

SR: I have a two-feet trophy which is in the museum back home.

SM: I saw some pictures of you in the shop in St. Charles in costume. Was that one of the dance costumes you wear?

SR: Yes.

SM: They're very, very colorful. So then you won these championships, and you got into professional dancing. Still doing some rodeo work?

SR: Yeah. I still rodeo. Fact, the end of this month we got a rodeo.

SM: Are you still riding bulls in rodeos?

SR: Yes.

SM: You know, it makes me ache all over just to think of it.

SR: I quit every year, but it's in your blood, and you just can't quit.

SM: Well, in boxing when you get to be over 30 you're an old man. When do you get too old to participate in rodeos?

SR: Well, whenever your bones don't heal.

SM: When your bones get broken, and they don't heal, well, you'd better quit?
SR: I've been hit quite a few times. Had my vertebrae knocked in.

SM: And then that bash in the nose.

SR: Them are my two worst accidents I ever had. I had just about every bone broke in my body.

SM: And you're still doing it.

SR: Like I said, it doesn't happen every time you ride.

SM: And it is quite exciting and exhilarating?

SR: It's the crowd. Just like dancing. Dancing . . . O.K., the people, they know you, and I've been travelling through all the different reservations in the West. Just about ever'place I go they know me. That makes it more like, you know, I represent my people. Everything circles round my people, because I love my people, and I respect my people, and I want to bring them up as much as I can. Just as much as I can. I want to elevate them.

SM: You want them to succeed and be self-sufficient?

SR: Yes. I go back, and the younger generation . . . they c'n see what I've done. And I can inspire them into doin'--like I got a start in my own business. O.K., I got a business, I got a beautiful wife, I'm not livin' on a reservation or on no welfare or anything. I'm paying taxes.

SM: Now you're out there on Main Street in St. Charles?

SR: Yes, I am.

SM: And you have the store called "The Indian Den," and you sell Indian
jewelry, artifacts, beadwork. And your wife does beadwork?

SR: We do custom work.

SM: And the store is doing well, isn't it?

SR: Yes it is.

SM: How long have you been out there, Sy?

SR: Since August.

SM: Since August of last year. It'll soon be a year now. I heard about your store and about you from one of the book publisher's representatives, and he was much impressed with the things you had, and with you and with your wife. Now then, so you have the store, and you still dance and you're going to tackle rodeos again this summer.

SR: Yeah, sure. My wife doesn't like it. She won't see me ridin', and she doesn't want to come out and see me.

SM: She won't watch you?

SR: I just got back from puttin' on a show. I been puttin' on quite a bit of shows for the Boy Scouts. I'm of the Wolf Clan, and I tell them about my history, how I grew up on the reservation, and how I learned to respect the animals like my grandpa used to tell us, "Don't ever destroy anything unnecessarily, even the smallest bug, because the Great Spirit put them here for a purpose, and if he wasn't here for a purpose, you wouldn't be here for a purpose." Even the fruits--the cherry tree and the plum tree. We never break a limb off, not even a leaf off it. We get the fruit off, what we need, and that's all. These things we learned from our elders.
SM: And the elders are the source of wisdom among your people?

SR: Yes.

SM: We're gradually approaching the point where we're becoming more respected, separate parts of one bigger society. . . .

SR: Yes we are. Like Wednesday night, we had a show, and we had this Round Dance. And I said, I invited everybody to participate in it, so we all hold hands in a round circle, because actually we are one people--just because we look different doesn't mean we're different--we're all one from the Great Spirit and Mother Earth.

SM: I've just been reading a book about Black Elk, and he spoke the same way. It wasn't the color of the skin that mattered, but the respect for each other that counted.

SR: That is the belief that we've been taught.

SM: Does your wife participate in the dances ever?

SR: She dresses up.

SM: Men and women have different roles in the dances?

SR: Yes they do. The women get up and have what they call the "Shawl Dance". They dance something like a real fancy war dance too, and they are very good. And the older women, they have a different dance that they do.

SM: You had a dance last Wednesday night in St. Charles, on the water-front there?

SR: Yes. The 200th anniversary of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, when
they came up this way.

SM: The 200th anniversary?

SR: The lieutenant governor was there at the time.

SM: And you invited the people, all the people, to participate in the dance. Did very many people take part?

SR: Yes, we had quite a few out there.

SM: A lot of people are shy about that, I suppose.

SR: Yes, but they all came in finally after the dance was half-way through; they all decided, you know, that there wasn't anything wrong with it.

SM: That it wasn't too hard.

SR: Wasn't too hard, so they all came in.

SM: Do you dance in a circle? All these things have symbolism, don't they, the circle and so on?

SR: Yes. The Round Dance is universal. All the tribes in the United States, they have this Round Dance. That way we know what the chant is, and we know what the symbol is—that means that we're united again.

SM: When we bring us back to the great circle, inside the fold of the great circle, this was the expression Crazy Horse used, and if you fall out of the circle, you're sort of out of grace.

SR: O.K., that's part of my hoop dance—that's the cycle of life. You
start from Mother Earth, you go back to Mother Earth. It's one complete circle--cycle of life.

SM: Very impressive, these symbols that Indian people use and keep in mind all the time.

SR: My beadwork here--the mountain design. See, that's the mountain design. That is my beadwork, that is my symbol. It used to belong to my grandfather. His name is Red Shirt. Long time ago. The mountain design means that if you wear mountain design . . . you go on top of the mountain--you're closer to the great spirits.

SM: You turn it this way, don't you, the peaks pointing upward? This green and yellow and red. What is this, soft white buckskin?

SR: Yes, that's buckskin. So the mountain design is my design. Each dancer has his different design.

SM: How are these worn?

SR: That's a cuff.

SM: It goes on the wrist?

SR: Yeah, that's how it goes.

SM: That's why one goes one way and one goes the other way. Obviously there's a right and left. More, though, about the situation out in Dakota. On the Rosebud Reservation, are things improving at all, or are they pretty bad now?

SR: No. It is improvin'. Like I said, they're gittin' the factories in, and, O.K., the health department and the hospital's improvin' quite a bit.
SM: Do they have a hospital out there now?

SR: Yes.

SM: They have a new school too, don't they?

SR: Yeah, they have a great big new school.

SM: You're right next door to the Pine Ridge Reservation—that is, they touch each other, don't they?

SR: Yeah, the reservation land is right between us—Pine Ridge and my reservation—so we're connected together. That is how we are. Then we have a junior college there now. It's called Spotted Tail College.

SM: At Pine Ridge?

SR: No, it's at Rosebud.

SM: Rosebud is east of Pine Ridge, isn't it?

SR: Yes, it is.

SM: Let's get back to this Pine Ridge thing in '73. That received a lot of publicity, and most everyone is well aware of it. You were a member of AIM then?

SR: Yes. Uh huh.

SM: Is it correct that a group of Chippewa men organized AIM?

SR: Well, Sioux and Chippewa. O.K., Bellecourt is Chippewa and Russell Means, the head man, he's a Sioux.
SM: How about Dennis Banks?

SR: O.K. Dennis Banks is a Chippewa.

SM: Russell Means is the Sioux of the three. There are two Bellecourt brothers, aren't there?

SR: Yes, they're two.

SM: Are you still in AIM?

SR: Yes I still am, but right now we're a little bit split up. O.K., after Wounded Knee I wanted to quit it because of the violence. But we had to do that at the time, so we done it. O.K., now, after that, the older people are driftin' away. They're still with the AIM, but they don't want the violence. And the younger generation, the young people--they range from 15 to 18 years old--they're the ones that want to go out and do the violent type.

SM: Confrontation sort of thing?

SR: Yeah. So we're kinda split up now a little bit.

SM: You've got two factions in AIM--the violent group and the non-violent group--is that right?

SR: Um hm. We don't want no more violence.

SM: Were you in Washington at the BIA take-over?

SR: No, I didn't go down at the time.

SM: At Wounded Knee last summer, someone there in the village said that
the church was burned down after the event was over, and that it was some young people, and they weren't sure, but they assumed it was young teenagers who wanted to . . . make an impression, I suppose.

SR: Yeah. There were . . . O.K., the tribal president, his name is Dick Wilson. He's the one that caused most of the trouble up there. He had a group--what they called the Goons--they're half breeds. They're not full bloods, they're half breeds. And the full bloods are going out--that's all the friction in Pine Ridge right now. The full bloods . . . to be enrolled as a tribal member, they want it either three-fourth or over.

SM: The old Census Bureau idea was one-quarter or over, wasn't it?

SR: Yeah. But now they want it--the full bloods they want it--three-fourth or over.

SM: And you're a full blood, aren't you?

SR: Yes, I am. So the half breeds--they're mostly white--they're the ones that are fightin' back. Now they're the ones that burned that church down after Wounded Knee.

SM: Is it known who did it, or is this just one faction's opinion?

SR: It's just one faction's opinion. You know it happened . . . so somebody set it on fire.

SM: One of the women who lives there in that housing development said it was some teenagers who did it about thirty days after the take-over ended.

SR: Yeah. O.K., that Lamont, the one that got killed there--that Indian that was shot--he's my first cousin. His mother and my dad are
brother and sister. But they live in Pine Ridge. O.K., he's my first cousin. But he's enrolled as a member of the Oglalas over in Pine Ridge. And I'm a Sioux, I'm a Brule Sioux.

SM: That's a little confusing to people who aren't familiar with all the different branches of the Sioux people.

SR: Yeah. See, we're all related. It's just for enrollment purposes is why they have different reservations, the Oglalas and the Brules. O.K., we were a clan, but we were also related to each other. But it's just the way that the white people expressed us.

SM: Well then, you're not active in AIM any more, although you still are a member of the organization, is that right?

SR: I'm still a member but . . . well, like I said, it's the non-violent group that I'm with.

SM: Would you put Russell Means on the violent or non-violent side?

SR: Violent side.

SM: You and he would have a little disagreement there?

SR: Yeah.

SM: How about Dennis Banks now?

SR: Dennis . . . they're having a little disagreement. He wants to be non-violent. O.K., like up in Wisconsin, when they took over this factory up there.

SM: The monastery?
SR: Yeah. O.K., they shoulda asked for it and they coulda got it, instead they just stormed it, and they started firin' right away, usin' weapons. Now that was unnecessary. If they ask for it, O.K., they got it now.

SM: The Menominee Tribe got it?

SR: Yeah. In the first place, if they ask for it, then they coulda got it; then they coulda resorted to something else. Well, insteada goin' over there and askin' for it, they went ahead, which was unnecessary.

SM: Well, that started out with the Menominee Warrior Society that began it, led by this "Mike the General" Sturdevant. And then AIM didn't get into it. That wasn't AIM was it?

SR: No. No.

SM: AIM came in later, after that.

SM: And then when they finally did get the settlement worked out, it was that the Menominee Tribe got the monastery, but not the Warrior Society.

SR: I don't know. You see, the reason Banks was against it was because if they get it, how's it gonna be run? The tribe, they can't appropriate enough money to run it. So what they was thinkin' about was gettin' contributions from people. But what if people don't contribute?

SM: Because it's an expensive place to operate. In fact, they were negotiating with the federal government for a grant to operate it as an alcoholic rehabilitation center at the time the Warrior Society moved in. Is that right?
SR: Yeah, that's right.

SM: Well, anyway then, I think we've got a pretty good picture of your attitude about this sort of thing. I would guess that you have seen some value in some of these events, like Wounded Knee, and so on, but that you still prefer to be non-violent, so you have sort of withdrawn from the violent part of the action or movement. So the idea is to get things more fair for everybody and avoid violence if possible.

SR: Yes.

SM: One point of view, and maybe this is yours too, is that the violence, like the shooting that did occur at Wounded Knee--fortunately very few people were hurt physically--and the take-over of that monastery, tends to build resentment on the part of the main population toward the Indian people.

SR: O.K., now at Wounded Knee. Wounded Knee had to happen, and there was no resentment. We had a lot of backin' . . . lot of people. We had . . . O.K., there was five miles, four miles long people sittin' on the side tryin' to come in. They were black, they were white people; they wanted to come in and help us.

SM: Blacks, whites and other Indians wanted to come?

SR: Right. They had some Spanish there, but, like Russell Means told 'em, "This is our fight. This is the Indians' fight. This is a Sioux fight. We appreciate your help, but we can't use it, because we have to do it because this is our fight. It is strictly between us and the government."

SM: One man living there who is a Sioux man, and who didn't like the idea, so you know what position he would be on, said, "I don't know
what they were doing out here anyway. This is Sioux country, and those Chippewas didn't have any business coming in here."

SR: Well now . . . at the time they were all AIM members. O.K., we didn't have enough manpower, so other tribes that were there, they came in to help us.

SM: Do you mean you didn't have enough manpower among the Sioux, so that the Chippewas were invited in or came in to help?

SR: Yeah. We invited 'em in at the time, but they were Indian--that is the main reason--they were Indian, and the Indian is one.

SM: It was a good thing that the federal officials didn't try to move in, wasn't it?

SR: Yeah. Well, we had women and kids there, and the philosophy was--O.K., if they're gonna wipe us out, let 'em do what they done back in the 1800's.

SM: In 1890 you mean, at the other Wounded Knee?

SR: The other Wounded Knee. O.K., if they're gonna come after us, O.K., women and children . . . they stand up . . . and then they pulled back.

SM: Well, maybe the federal officials had this very sort of thing in mind, and that's why they carefully avoided closing in, because they didn't want to make it any worse than it was. Do you think so?

SR: Yeah because . . . O.K., Washington was getting a lot of pressure from Russia and China. They were gettin' lot of pressure, and if they wiped us out . . . if they came in and just stormed us and wiped us out . . . the government would never face it, would never live it down.
SM: What do you mean? Red China and Russia were pressuring the U. S. Government in favor of the people at the AIM movement there?

SR: They were sympathizin' with us. Yeah, at the Wounded Knee. So we had ... all over the world we had sympathizers. So that's why the government couldn't do anything.

SM: Well then, the government did not want to make things ... well, they would have simply created a bunch of martyrs, wouldn't they? And they didn't want to do that. So then it was finally settled after all those seventy days, seventy-one days?

SR: Seventy-two days.

SM: And do you feel that it accomplished what it set out to do?

SR: O.K., we accomplished quite a bit. O.K., now I can get a loan, I can run for my own cattle, I'm my own man.

SM: Oh, now you can?

SR: I can. But then, I got this store now, so I don't need that.

SM: So you still have the land out there though?

SR: Oh yeah, yeah.

SM: But you're not trying to farm it or run cattle on it?

SR: No, I got it leased out. My daughter gets all the lease money. She gets all the money out of it, you know, something like a thousand for it she gets.

SM: Does she live out there?
SR: Yeah. She lives with her mother on the reservation.

SM: Then her mother lives there, and you have your second wife here?

SR: Yeah, I was married before.

SM: So your daughter then has the income from this land. Can you get a reasonable price leasing land out now?

SR: Yeah. I c'n ask for anything I want.

SM: You can ask anything?

SR: I c'n tell the leaser I want $5.00 a head. If he doesn't want to pay me $5.00 a head, I said, "O.K., I c'n lease it to somebody else."

Note: The interview terminates here with the understanding that it would be resumed at a later date. The second interview with Sylvester Roubideaux was on June 17, 1975, at St. Charles, Missouri.