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A Capstone Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree Bachelor of Arts in English Literature
with Honors College Graduate Distinction at
Western Kentucky University

By
Sarah D. Spalding

May 2018

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Western Kentucky University
2018

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ABSTRACT

When over 90 Native Americans first made the voyage to Alcatraz Island on a November 1969 morning, there was little that could be predicted about what would unfold in the coming years. Alcatraz Island, the infamous prison that held criminals on the forefront of world news in the early twentieth century, would soon become an activist symbol. What followed November 20, 1969 was almost two years of continued Native American occupation of the island and a whirlwind of both media and federal attention. By the end of 1971, the remaining occupiers of Alcatraz were forcibly removed by federal marshals. However, the movement was successful in bringing Native American activism to the forefront of the consciousness of the American people, and the federal government. The impact of the almost two years of demonstrations on Alcatraz prove that failure is subjective and impact can reverberate throughout subsequent years in ways the original occupiers never thought possible or intended. This capstone project argues that though the protestors were eventually removed from the island and the occupation technically considered a failure, the occupation of Alcatraz was impactful in the continuously weaving tapestry of indigenous rights activism.

Key Words: Alcatraz Island, Native Americans, Red Power, Activism
Dedicated to those who have, and still are, fighting tirelessly for Indigenous rights. Their efforts deserve visibility.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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To my sisters, friends, and family: thank you for your selfless support as I’ve worked on this project. Thank you for listening to the phone calls, the exasperated
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“To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.”

-Alfred, Lord Tennyson

_Ulysses_
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INTRODUCTION

Rocky coast and the ghost of the nation’s most famous penitentiary were all that the jagged land of Alcatraz Island had to welcome dozens of Native Americans on November 20, 1969. The island held a storied past, but a new chapter was still brewing that would turn Alcatraz into the site of a movement and transform those dark cells into the heart of an occupation. The Native American population in the U.S. has undergone intense periods of hardship that have severely tested and challenged the system and integrity of the Nation’s government. As such, Native American groups and tribes have been continually aggravated in order to make space for the building of the country. Indian termination policies occurred as late as the mid-twentieth century. By the 1960s, Native Americans were still receiving unfair treatment regarding tribal sovereignty and land rights, and the policies of termination were still very real threats to the self-determination of each tribe. However, at this same point in American history, the Red Power movement was beginning to thrive. The naming of this movement has been attributed to the 1961 American Indian Chicago Conference- a convocation of Native American Indians from around the nation that would put a powerful name to the socio-political consciousness that the many in the Native American community were continually...
building.\textsuperscript{1} From the start of the Red Power movement emerged the landmark occurrence of the 1969-1971 Indian occupation of Alcatraz Island.\textsuperscript{2} This almost two-year occupation of Alcatraz by Native Americans from tribes across the nation can be claimed as a major and groundbreaking instance of Native American direct action and activism. It called attention once again to the Indian population in the U.S and shed light on the desire for self-determination and recognition within the country as a whole. What makes the Alcatraz occupation especially impactful is the way in which it generated a platform in major media and across the nation for Native Americans to have their voices heard. This surge of Red Power and non-violent direct action by representatives from the Native American population as a whole in 1969 galvanized the Red Power movement. The occupiers had outlined a set of goals prior to the initial taking of the island, but at the point of the final stage of the occupation, the removal, almost none of those goals were achieved; they remain unmet today. However, the concept of failure within the context of Alcatraz as an activist movement is a definition that will not be fulfilled. While the occupation didn’t meet the goals it initially desired, it still succeeded in being undeniably impactful for the Native American community in terms of visibility and legal ramifications. Beginning with the American Indian Chicago Conference, what was


officially known as the “Red Power” movement set the stage for activism at Alcatraz, which became an event that fought for Native American rights prominence, impacted legislation, and displayed the restlessness of the American Indian people. The Alcatraz occupation managed to have a colossal impact on the society of the day and the Native activism of the future.
CHAPTER ONE:

THE ORIGINS OF RED POWER AND THE CHICAGO CONFERENCE

The key to understanding the movement that occurred on Alcatraz Island in the late 1960s and early 1970s lies within uncovering the context of the Red Power movement at the time and in years past. The movement by no means began with the Alcatraz occupation in 1969. Rather, the tumultuous environment of the 1960s produced the modern Native activist movement that would become Alcatraz. Part of this background of Red Power comes in the form of preexisting indigenous rights events such as the “Fish Wars” of the Nisqually people and the American Indian Chicago Conference of 1961.

Between June 13-20 of 1961, 467 American Indians hailing from 90 different communities met at the University of Chicago to collaborate on varying opinions of the state of Indian affairs in the U.S. This large summit signaled a change in the air regarding the subject of indigenous rights in America. The conference marked a new age of radical Indian policy strategy and the addressing of Native American issues by Indians of all tribes across the nation, which was one of the first times such a gathering had occurred. Nancy Lurie, who created the report on the conference in 1961, stated, “Through a free exchange of Indian experiences, feelings, and views, they sought to find sources of agreement on which future Indian
policy could be built.” This conference was the coming together of Indian nations in order to address the grievances that these peoples had against the country that housed them. By 1957, it was apparent to American Indian populations at the time that the federal government’s methods of “reform and regulation” were not going to be effective or efficient. However, private studies were in the works of being funded. One such example was the Commission on the Rights and Responsibilities of the American Indian. By 1960, two new presidential candidates came forward, neither of which being committed to indigenous policy as it stood and both of which recognizing the need to revisit the subject of Indian Affairs. With Kennedy’s election that same year, the ability for hope arose at the prospect of a President whose platform coincided with the aims of the National Congress of American Indians. Nancy Lurie, one of the key figures organizing the conference stated, “The possibility of a sympathetic administration was, however, not enough; a sound new policy acceptable to Indians had to be developed.” Thus, the idea for a gathering that called together Native representatives from across the U.S. began to take form.

As the conference came into being, the need for leaders and organizers to begin the process of orchestrating a gathering of Native representatives from across the U.S. arose. The leadership for this task came in the form of Sol Tax, one of the main orchestrators of the conference. A Native and an anthropologist, Tax had been working with a collective of his students to create what he called Action

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Anthropology. Tax’s objective was to begin taking a representative sample of the perspective of the Native American people, but could not foresee an avenue for doing so. As a result, the AICC developed as a setting to conduct this research, as it would gather a diverse population of Native American leaders. In a letter to the Schwartzhaupt Foundation, asking for funding, Tax wrote, “The time is ripe to put together what we know for the guidance of American Indians, government agencies, voluntary organizations…” This moment served as the turning point for the surge of Red Power that characterized the movement at Alcatraz just eight years later. Tax was one of the key organizers and visionaries that made the AICC dream a reality.

One of the major consequences of the Chicago conference came in the form of a new and unprecedented national stage for pan-tribal Native American activism. The conference was credited with the creation of a new Indian organization, the National Indian Youth Council. Prior to the inaugural conference in 1961, Native American youth were participating in local Indian clubs, school organizations, and small Indian Conferences as early as 1952. Thomas Niermann writes, “Other Indian leaders credit these conferences as early training grounds for developing political and organizational skills necessary in setting up a national organization. These were

4 Ibid, 481.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid, 482.
abilities that surprised the older generation of Indian leaders, who were the source of so much frustration for Indian youth organizers.”

Students who were participating in “Kiva Clubs,” organizations designed to discuss the state of Indian youth affairs, recognized the 1961 conference as the catalyst for finally and officially creating the National Indian Youth Council. Though not formally invited, students from these programs attended the conference and began participating in the democratic process, volunteering for committees, and even leading discussion in groups. However, there was not an instantaneous feeling of unity between the conference leaders and the youth attendees. Mel Thom, one of the student participants stated, “We saw the ‘Uncle Tomahawks’ fumbling around, passing resolutions, and putting headdresses on people. But as for taking a strong stand, they just weren’t doing it.”

The opinion of the students was that the elders leading the conference were not focused securely enough on modern approaches to the issue, favoring traditionalism and lacking definitive direction and purpose.

The narrative espoused by the youth attendees of the conferences was of the “Uncle Tomahawks” who had no specialized concept of activism on behalf of the Native population. However, this vision is not an accurate one and characterizes one of the key differences between rising Indian activists at the AICC. The goals that were burgeoning anew in the 1960's for Indian activism were more socially targeted rather than the divisions over tribal sovereignty that characterized much of earlier

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8 Niermann, 144
9 Ibid, 150.
10 Niermann, 149.
Native Activism, and were even still occurring. One such example of this comes in
the form of the “Fish Wars” that characterized the Pacific Northwest. By the 1940s
and 50s, Indian termination policies were to end within the Federal government and
would take away treaty sovereignty and land rights that Native Americans used to
protect themselves against seizures and discriminatory practices.\(^{11}\) The altercations
that occurred at Frank’s Landing were over the habitat destruction and the alleged
wasteful and harmful fishing practices of the Native Americans in the area in
Washington.\(^{12}\) The Fish Wars are just one example that there was most assuredly
activism that indigenous peoples were engaging in during and before the AICC. The
younger generation at the conference, like the students occupying Alcatraz a few
years later, were more concerned with the social movement aspect of Native
American rights activism as it garnered more widespread popularity among the
community. The idea of Native peoples having sovereignty constitutes the
following: “powers not limited by federal statute, by treaty, by restraints implicit on
the protectorate relationship, or by inconsistency with their status remain with
tribal government or reservation communities.”\(^{13}\) This desire for tribal sovereignty
and control over their affairs for specific Indian nations was the main focus of
movements such as the “Fish Wars” of the Nisqually of the Pacific Northwest.

Wilkinson writes, “They had no truck with the Washington state courts, but they had

\(^{11}\) Charles F. Wilkinson, *Messages from Frank’s Landing: a Story of Salmon, Treaties,
\(^{12}\) Wilkinson, 31.
\(^{13}\) Charles F. Wilkinson, *Indian Tribes as Sovereign Governments: A Sourcebook on
Federal-tribal History, Law, and Policy.* (Oakland: The University of Michigan, 1988),
32.
faith that the federal judiciary would honor their treaties. They used the term ‘

supreme law of the land’ and they understood what it meant.”

The fight for treaty sovereignty between the U.S. government and specific

tribes was the focus of much of the activism occurring thus far in areas such as the

pacific northwest, but it would not be the focus of the Alcatraz occupiers, or of the

younger generation in the National Indian Youth Council. Therefore, the comment

that Mel Thom makes at the AICC is an incorrect one in his implication that the older

generation at the conference were characterized as “Uncle Tomahawks” who had no

concept of activist culture. Charles Wilkinson of Messages From Frank’s Landing

writes, “By the mid 1960s Frank’s Landing... had become the focal point for the

tribal assertion of treaty rights in the Northwest.... The movement also lay at the

moral center of tribal sovereignty nationally, as tribes began to climb out of the

termination abyss of the 1950s.” The demonstrators at Frank’s Landing were

arrested, beaten, and endured intense mistreatment at the hands of the local and

federal government. In 1968, Congress passed the Indian Civil Rights Act, which

applied the bill of rights to tribes. Previously, tribal groups had been exempted from

the protections of the bill of rights, but elements such as the due process clause

would be incorporated. The ICRA would allow federal courts to intervene in tribal

court decisions and intertribal disputes. However, the Supreme Court did offer

15 Wilkinson, Messages from Frank’s Landing: a story of salmon, treaties, and the
Indian way, 34.
16 Ibid, 40.
protections from ICRA in certain tribal disputes such as membership. Regardless, the act demonstrates how tribal sovereignty was being threatened at the federal level during the Nisqually fight and very shortly before the Alcatraz occupation, which was heavily concerned with the ability for Native Americans to enjoy control over their own affairs.

What the activism at Frank’s Landing demonstrates is that despite the beliefs of the younger cohort at the conference, Native activism at the current moment was not made up of “Uncle Tomahawks” that merely upheld ceremonial practices and beliefs. Indigenous rights advocates participating in events such as the “Fish Wars” simply had a different set of objectives than did the Alcatraz occupiers and the young Natives at the AICC. The demonstrations, along with the AICC, were part of a larger context of Native activism that would include the occupation at Alcatraz and would help to characterize “Red Power” as it surged in the 1960s and onward.

That generational divide at the AICC resulted in a small separate conference to discuss the aims of those in attendance for the purpose of the Youth Council. Ultimately, a statement of purpose was drafted that modelled itself after the same document that would be drafted by the assembly at large for the conference. Elements from the Founding Resolution from the conference exhibit that though the burgeoning youth group didn’t ultimately agree with the methods of the elders

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within the AICC, their aims for Native Rights were of the same principal. The statement reads,

Whereas, the National Indian Youth Council holds it to be in the best interest of Indian people for better understanding of conditions for all Indians to carry forward our policies to make clear the inherent sovereign rights of all Indians; Whereas, the National Indian Youth Council recognizes the inherent rights guaranteed all people in statutes of the United States and holds Indians must exercise their rights. Now therefore be it resolved, that the National Indian Youth Council endeavors to carry forward the policy of making their inherent sovereign rights known to all people.\textsuperscript{18}

With a founding resolution in writing, the National Indian Youth Council was officially underway. At the first meeting, ten participants were present and a leader, Mel Thom, was elected.\textsuperscript{19} However, the NIYC was not the only significant development to come out of the American Indian Chicago Conference in 1961.

The American Indian Chicago Conference additionally put forward its own piece of legislation- the Declaration of Indian Purpose. The Declaration was one of the single most important consequences of the conference itself. This document called for the recognition of equality in regards to the Native American population within the rest of the nation. The language of the document encapsulates the Indian sentiment at the time and portrays the perspective of the majority of the representative population as a whole. It reads,

In order to give due recognition to certain basic philosophies by which the Indian people and all other people endeavor to live, We, the Indian people,


\textsuperscript{19} Niermann, 154.
must be governed by high principles and laws in a democratic manner, with a right to choose our own way of life. Since our Indian culture is slowly being absorbed by the American society, we believe we have the responsibility of preserving our precious heritage; recognizing that certain changes are inevitable. We believe that the Indians should provide the adjustment and thus freely advance with dignity to a better life educationally, economically, and spiritually.20

Of particular relevance to the later occupation of Alcatraz Island is the following excerpt from the Declaration:

When our lands are taken for a declared public purpose, scattering our people and threatening our continued existence, it grieves us to be told that a money payment is the equivalent of all the things we surrender. Our forefathers could be generous when all the continent was theirs... [Indians] have in mind that the land supported a universe of things they knew, valued, and loved. To complete our Declaration, we point out that in the beginning the people of the New World, called Indians by accident of geography, were possessed of a continent and a way of life. In the course of many lifetimes, our people had adjusted to every climate and condition from the Arctic to the torrid zones. In their livelihood and family relationships, their ceremonial observances, they reflected the diversity of the physical world they occupied.21

The Declaration’s influence extended beyond simply defining the conference. It was presented at the federal level as well in order to advocate for government recognition of certain Indian communities that were unprivileged under the law. Lawrence Hauptman and Jack Campisi, scholars writing on the importance of the conference in regards to federal recognition, assert the following about the document:

21 “The Declaration of Indian Purpose.”
On 15 August 1962, 32 Indians active in AICC presented the Declaration of Indian Purpose to President John F Kennedy at a special ceremony at the White House. Nine Indians from non-federal recognized communities attended the ceremony, including two Chickahominie, four Alabama Creek, one Lumbee, one Narragansett, and one Ottawa. Helen Maynor [Schierbeck] of the Lumbee and Chief Calvin W. McGhee of the Alabama Creek, both of whom had played important roles in the acceptance of the AICC in the South, were there along with Robert Burnette, executive director of the NCAI, to push for improvement of Indian conditions in the United States.22

While its influence is undeniable, the fact that the organizers achieved cohesion to be able to draft such a document is indicative of the manner in which the conference was run. Similarly to how the Alcatraz occupation of 1969 would initially be organized, preliminary rules and policies were enacted to try and establish order. Niermann writes, “This opportunity to talk with one another occurred primarily because the various committee meetings and general assemblies were conducted as though they were tribal council meetings. At the outset of the conference Roberts Rules of Order had been accepted as the official set of procedures for conducting business during the conference.”23 This order allowed for the documents that are so critical for the impact of the AICC to be produced.

One of the most important occurrences in the period directly before the Alcatraz occupation was the development of the phrase “Red Power” in order to colloquially name the movement of indigenous rights that was occurring. By giving this activism a name, proponents could “invoke” the idea of Red Power as a source

23 Niermann, 91.
of enablement in their struggle. The often heard definition of "Red Power" that is accepted as the standard does little to encapsulate the spirit behind the phrase. *The Oxford English Dictionary's* definition is, “Red Power n. N. Amer. a movement advocating greater rights and political power for North American Indians; usually *attrib.*, esp. in Red Power movement; cf. black power.” Red Power is a phrase that instills heart, hope, and passion in those whom it affects. Part of what makes the American Indian Chicago Conference so integral to the narrative of the Alcatraz occupation is that Red Power, which is the very essence of the story of Alcatraz, is born from the leaders and programs that began their journey at the Chicago Conference. The person who coined this phrase was Vine Deloria in 1966. Deloria, who wrote the extensive work, *The Rise of Indian Activism*, used the phrase at the national conference gathered for the National Congress of American Indians. The first use of this phrase gives the Native American activist movement an identifier. It gives it a place and a period in history. The creation of this identity gives the basis for further activism in the field to arise. By giving a name to the movement, it solidifies it in the consciousness of the community and provides validity.

The 1961 American Indian Chicago Conference was critical in igniting the Red Power movement through its formation of Indian governed and supported organizations, such as the National Indian Youth Council, and the creation of the

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25 Niermann, 169.
Declaration of Indian Purpose. Native American tribal groups came together under the goal of uniting their people in order to solidify their place as citizens within the broader U.S. Concurrently with the AICC and Alcatraz, Native American activism was mainly concerned with specific tribal sovereignty, rather than the larger scope of pan-Native visibility that Alcatraz would advocate for. This is one of the factors that would make Alcatraz an outlier in the culture of Native activism. Like other groups that had and still did occupy marginalized space, groups of Native Americans were prepared to demand the rights promised to their ancestors in the past and more easily afforded to majority groups. The Declaration states, “What we ask of America is not charity, not paternalism, even when benevolent. We ask only that the nature of our situation be recognized and made the basis of policy and action.”

The goals outlined in the declaration mirror those that came from Alcatraz eight years later.

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26 Ibid.
CHAPTER 2:

THE BEGINNING OF A MOVEMENT

When the Federal prison closed on Alcatraz Island permanently in 1963, there were several different plans as to what kind of structure or company would take its place. Ideas ran the gamut from a bird sanctuary to the proposal of wealthy Texas oilman, H.L Hunt, offering that the land be made into a theme park and dedicated to the rising interest in space travel and exploration mounting in the U.S. However, the government continued to allow the island to lay in disuse, unaware of the Native American unrest that was brewing and gathering support to turn Alcatraz into something that the federal government had not anticipated, and would not be complacent to allow.

The First Occupations

While the most famous and well-publicized occupation of Alcatraz was the 19-month long 1969 event, Native Americans were making headway on the island years before. The first attempt to occupy Alcatraz Island in the name of Indian self-determination came on March 9, 1964. Just five men of the Sioux tribe journeyed out from the shore to the island to claim Alcatraz in the name of an 1868 Treaty between the Sioux Nation and the federal government. The Treaty of Fort Laramie inspired the men to travel to the island because it claimed that federal land that had
fallen into disuse could be reclaimed by the Native group from whom it was originally seized. This initial occupation lasted only a few hours. 27 The intention was to display Native unrest rather than to set and achieve long-term goals, as the much longer 1969-1971 occupation would attempt to do. At the time of this first occupation in 1964, the Island of Alcatraz was claimed as federal excess after the closing of “The Rock” as a prison in 1963 and was placed under the jurisdiction of the Department of General Services. As a result, the only government official residing on the island at the time of the primary occupation was one of the two caretakers, A. L. Aylworth, who along with Acting Warden Richard Willard, had been assigned to stay on at the Island. On April 4, 1963, the General Services Administration officially accepted Alcatraz Island as “Excess Real Property” after the official announcement of its closure less than a month earlier. 28 The tall and proud lighthouse that the island sported and its guiding partner, a foghorn, were under automatic operation. However, the upkeep of these two pieces of equipment and the island’s security became the responsibility of the General Services Administration. The Sioux men, all locally coming from the Bay Area, had simply rented a boat and travelled out to the abandoned property and staked their claim in the name of the 1868 treaty. Additionally, the goals of these occupiers was to simply raise a sense of consciousness for the treaties that had been made and broken within the Native

28 Johnson, 25.
American community over the last hundred and fifty years. The 1964 invasion by the five Sioux only lasted approximately four hours. However, the small act of defiance garnered some adequate media coverage. Several local papers ran coverage of the story, with The San Francisco Examiner calling the occupation “wacky.” 29 As part of the compensation for the lands stolen in the California gold rush from Indian hands, the U.S. government was offering 47 cents per acre, which was an embarrassingly low price of compensation.

These grievances led a total of approximately 40 people to Alcatraz that day in 1964, five of which intended to be the “homesteaders.” With them came their lawyer, Elliot Leighton, a wave of press, and members of the Bay Area Council of American Indians. Among them was Adam Fortunate Eagle, who would become a key figure in the ensuing long-term occupation. The five main occupiers were all members of the Indian Council; among them was Garfield Spotted Elk, Walter Means, Richard McKenzie, Mark Martinez, and Allen Cottier, who was the main spokesperson at approximately 43 years of age. 30 Surprisingly for the occupiers, their initial reception to the island was for all intents and purposes, friendly. The caretaker who was living on the island at the time, A.L. Aylsworth, seemed almost keen to be seeing some sort of commotion happening on the rock since the last prisoners left over a year previously. When the occupiers informed him of their purpose in coming to Alcatraz that morning, he casually said to Leighton, “Well... I

guess if you want it, you can have it.”31 Writing from his own perspective on the occupation from his account, *Alcatraz! Alcatraz!* Adam Fortunate Eagle writes of the day, “[There was] a good humored tone to the whole undertaking. In fact, throughout the homestead claim the Indians were never anything but dignified and amiable, in contrast to some of the government people who arrived later.”32 Five years into the future, the occupiers on Alcatraz would offer to buy Alcatraz Island for an almost comical price. The party in 1964 was the foundation for this later statement. Ironically carrying the American flag before them, the occupiers walked the grounds, stopping to read a proclamation. Cottier came forward from the throng and, in the name of the 1868 Treaty, offered to buy the land from the U.S. government in a show of fortitude. While the 1868 treaty was actually nullified in a 1934 Congressional decision, there was a special provision made for the exception of the Sioux, whose land had been taken particularly for construction purposes. Therefore, this so-called “invasion” was actually deemed as a perfectly acceptable land claim, rather than a defiant and illegal act. The catch was that the tribes were offering the same 47 cents per acre that the federal government was currently offering as compensation for the Gold Rush lands. They offered $9.40 for the entire piece of land and $6.54 for what they deemed usable.33

With Aylsworth’s perceived indifference to the island signifying an unexpected successful claim, the occupiers began to explore, looking for a corner to

32 Ibid.
33 Ibid, 17.
make their own. Each claim was written, in ink, on a piece of hide and crudely staked into the ground with sticks or mop handles on each Native’s sector that they had claimed. A traditional Indian victory dance was performed in the shadow of the government operated coast guard lighthouse, in celebration of what they believed had just been achieved. A claim was even filed with the Sacramento Bureau of Land Claims to make the land a federally recognized Indian owned territory once again. Because the men had believed that their claim was legitimate, it was an unwelcome occurrence when the island’s current warden arrived in fit of anger. Richard J. Willard claimed that the law had been violated, and even got physically combative with a member of the press who had come to cover the story. He threatened felony charges. Soon after Willard’s arrival, the occupiers and their party left the scene, hoping to return again eventually. 34

The *San Francisco Examiner* described the brief occupation as an “invasion” of sorts. On March 8, before the invasion, the article describes that the occupation may occur. Sam Blumenfeld writes for the *Examiner* in an article titled “Sioux of the Warpath”

An American Indian “rights” movement to invade and take possession of Alcatraz is planned here by members of the Sioux tribe, *The Examiner* learned yesterday... Tribal leaders say they have a right to claim the island under a provision of old treaties and they plan to parcel the land into homesteads. A boatload of claimants and their supporters will land on the bleak island and file claim to it “possibly” today, a spokesperson said last night The leader of the group is Richard McKenzie. The group will land later that night equipped with a tent and provisions... “We’re entitled to the land

free under the law... we feel the rights given to the American Indian should and can be exercised. 35

The tone of this article reveals the climate surrounding the occupation. Titling the article “Sioux of the Warpath” connotes a sinister purpose for the occupiers, which was not the intention in any sense of the event. Additionally, the article cited McKenzie as the leader, when in actuality it was Allen Cottier who was the frontrunner. The article exhibits the relative disinterest of the population at the time. The occupiers were being dismissed, much how the warden, Willard, dismissed the idea of a land claim, even with the 1934 Congressional provision, as trespassing and worthy of a felony charge. Additionally, McKenzie’s quote in the article displays the notion of overall Native self-determination that the occupiers were calling for.

While there may have been holes in the media coverage, it was by no means ineffective. Adam Fortunate Eagle writes,

The event was publicized and remembered, and it also made some of us wonder if that gloomy and crumbling fortress would one day be turned into a resource for Indian people... I have to admit, all that media coverage was pretty heavy stuff, but there was also a negative aspect that affected the events of the next occupation... Some of thought that if the public was informed of our needs, then maybe there would be pressure on the government... We overestimated the power of the media to affect policy and bring about positive change.36

The media coverage of the 1964 invasion was extremely impactful for the progression of the Red Power movement, leading into the 1969 invasion. However, while the occupiers desired the land claim they had travelled to Alcatraz to seek out, many of the occupiers viewed the 1964 landing as an act of publicity for the Red Power movement, as did much of the media coverage. Walter Means and his 26-year old son, Russell, viewed the event a publicity stunt of sorts, recognizing that the treaty claims were feeble. Despite this, the father and son participated in the landing because of the message that the brief occupation would be sending to the United States government, to the white population, and to the rest of the Nation’s Native American population. The brief “occupation” exhibited that the treaties enacted between the U.S. government and the Indian forefathers were not merely relics from the past, but were still pieces of living history that had relevance to the decedents of those who had signed those same treaties. 37 Fortunate Eagle compares the occupation to a publicity stunt on the level of the Boston Tea party; a dramatic display that nonetheless has a profound impact and sends the desired message to the ruling party and its constituents. 38

After the 1964 invasion on March 9, the question of what would become of Alcatraz Island became particularly relevant and contested. A presidential commission met to determine what would begin to become of the land. As early as March 21, 1964, the committee was chartered out to Alcatraz Island to hold public

hearings focused on the presentation of ideas regarding the transformation of the island into a usable parcel. The chairman and vice chairman were Senator Edward Long of Missouri and the California Lieutenant Governor Anderson. The first hearings for the disposition of Alcatraz Island after its decommissioning as a federal prison were heard on April 24, 1965, a little over a year after the initial invasion.  

As for what would actually become of the land, there were several recommendations from both the public sector and private corporations. It was not a groundbreaking phenomenon to have a discussion regarding the prison’s property. In fact, while it was still a prison in the 1950s, the United Nations Association proposed raising $3,000,000 to create a statue that would function as the Statue of Liberty for the west coast, welcoming travellers into the U.S. by way of the Bay Area. This idea was deemed inappropriate for the land while it was still functioning as a major prison. By May 15, 1965, when the commission met for the first time to review the proposals, over 500 letters had come in with suggestions for what was to become of the land. One of the most notable came from a wealthy Texas oilman, H. Lamar Hunt. Hunt’s proposition was to turn Alcatraz into an area for apartments, shops, and several restaurants. The most important facet of his plan included an idea for a museum and amusement park dedicated to the concept of futuristic space travel and exploration, which was particularly relevant in the mid-1960s. Hunt’s

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39 Johnson, 62.
41 Smith, 12.
proposal garnered serious consideration from the San Francisco Board of Advisors. For the Native American agenda, this was an unwelcome roadblock.

Adam Nordwall, a Bay Area resident who had moved from Minnesota in 1951, was one of the local leaders for the United Bay Area Council of American Indian Affairs. Since the 1964 landing, Nordwall and a committee at the United Council had been planning various proposals to offer forward for the use of Alcatraz Island. Their aim was for the island to be used as an Indian cultural museum and community center. While Hunt’s plan was never adopted, it spurred activists like Nordwall to take more drastic forms of action, which would eventually lead to the 1969 occupation. 42 If Hunt’s proposal was adopted, it would mean that Alcatraz would fall into the hands of private developers and a huge influx of commercial activity would flood into the bay area. Alcatraz would be permanently lost for the Indian people. In addition to Indian protest, a large amount of non-Indian voices in San Francisco rose up against Hunt’s proposal, arguing it would bring an unwelcome sense of inauthentic tourism activity and compromise the integrity of the area. Due to the public outcry, Hunt’s proposal was rejected.

The second event that troubled the Indian community was the burning of the Indian Cultural Center in October of 1969. There was never a confirmation officially as to the origination of the fire, whether it was an unfortunate accident or the consequences of arson. Regardless, the new absence of the center as a place for Indian identity to be found and community to be shared was being acutely felt. The

42 Ibid.
rush from the panic of the possibility of Alcatraz as a space exploration amusement park and then the distress of the burning of the center, which created a need in the Indian community, led to a shift from a passive interest in Alcatraz, to a desire to act immediately. 43 With the threat of the repurposing of Alcatraz for commercial gain and the gap left by the lack of an Indian center in the Bay Area, it was time to take an active interest.

The United Bay Area Council of American Indian Affairs, an important and cohesive group for the representation by and for the Bay Area’s Native population, eventually became an integral piece in the organizing and execution of the ensuing occupation. By 1969, the Council was meeting every other Wednesday at a center called the Friendship House. The Council’s primary role thus far in the area was to attempt to discuss Indian issues within the community and provide a forum for Native expression and education. With Alcatraz now on the front burner, those meetings became war cries from the Bay Area Indian people for a movement to make their voices heard.

Adam Nordwall, who eventually was known as Adam Fortunate Eagle, met with Richard Oakes, a student activist with the same degree of passion as Nordwall, to discuss what the next steps would be after the burning of the Indian center on October 10, 1969.44 Paul Chaat Smith, one of the leading experts on Alcatraz Island and its ties to Native activism writes,

The occasion had a touch of bizarre to it. For one thing, it was at a Halloween party. For another, the party was at the home of a {San Francisco Chronicle

44 Smith, 12.
reporter Tom Findley. Nordwall had told a roomful of journalists all about the planned invasion, including the date, and then swore them all to secrecy... Nordwall told Oakes of his plans and asked if I would join the effort. Oakes agreed immediately. Then Nordwall briefed the reports and warned them that if the news broke before November 9th, the newly chosen date, then the event would be called off.... Nordwall wondered about his new ally... [Oakes] drank too much and became belligerent.45

Here is exhibited, even in the earliest stages, the personality and tone that the occupation took on. It was about people and was born out of passion and fire. Nordwall and Oakes were to eventually morph into the occupation's biggest supporters, organizers, and spokespeople; their interactions at the beginning of the planning stages exhibit the characteristics that they would bring to the occupation of Alcatraz that would swiftly be approaching.

The United Council meetings became a forum for the planning of the Alcatraz occupation. The intention from the beginning was not to have a small-scale invasion on par with what had occurred in 1964. The plan was coming together for a full-scale occupation. The date was set for November 9, 1969. The students in the United Council suggested waiting until winter break for the local universities, but Nordwall in particular, the leader of the Council, preferred to stage the occupation for a point soon enough after the burning of the center that the local and federal government would be taken aback by the occupation. 46 Nordwall, now writing as Fortunate Eagle, comments on the occupation,

Everyone agreed that we wanted to promote a movement, rather than any one individual. Secondly, because we also did not want to promote any one tribe, we wanted to find some designation that would promote our unity. The 1964 invasion had been an exclusively Sioux action because it took place

45 Smith, 13.
46 Eagle, 42.
under the terms of the Sioux Treaty of 1868, but this was different... We all then agreed that our proclamation, under the name of Indians of All Tribes should be a mixture of humor, serious intentions, and hope. But the humor should not just be the laughing kind; it should also have a sting.  

The Proclamation that arose from the planning of the Alcatraz occupation is a document that combines the hurt, anger, and biting irony that had characterized Indian treatment under the federal thumb for the last 200 years. The document begins with the following invocation, “We, the Native Americans, re-claim the land known as Alcatraz Island in the name of all American Indians by right of discovery.”  

The intention of the Proclamation is to show those who read it that Alcatraz was now Indian land and that, with this official document, endorsed by the organization of Indians of All Tribes, it was the day in age for the Native American to draw their line in the rocky coast of a piece of land with such a rich and complicated history, much like the group themselves. The purpose of the document was to make clear what the Native American population who authored it desired from the local and Federal governments: to publicly

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47 Ibid, 43.
acknowledge plans for Alcatraz Island as reclaimed Indian territory, and finally, to shame their government for the egregious treatment they felt had been shown to them over the last two hundred years. 49 While previous and concurrent pushes for indigenous rights, such as the fishing wars, had focused on individual tribes, treaties, and sovereignty, the occupiers at Alcatraz wanted to shine a national spotlight on the state of Indian affairs as a whole.

The Proclamation cheekily included an offer of purchase for Alcatraz Island by Indians of All Tribes from the General Services Administration. In the 1964 invasion, the occupiers offered to purchase Alcatraz for the 47 cents per acre that the Federal Government had offered Native American tribes as reparations for their lands stolen in the California gold rush over 100 years prior. In the Alcatraz Proclamation, the drafters play on a similar concept. The document reads

We wish to be fair and honorable in our dealings with the Caucasian inhabitants of this land, and hereby offer the following treaty:

We will purchase said Alcatraz Island for twenty-four dollars ($24) in glass beads and red cloth, a precedent set by the white man’s purchase of a similar island about 300 years ago. We know that $24 in trade goods for these 16 acres is more than was paid when Manhattan Island was sold, but we know that land values have risen over the years. Our offer of $1.24 per acre is greater than the 47¢ per acre that the white men are now paying the California Indians for their land. 50

The Proclamation they produced asserts its point about Native American self-determination and the reclaiming of Alcatraz, while simultaneously embarrassing the U.S. Federal government over their treatment of Native Americans in the past.

49 Eagle, 46.
50 The Declaration of Indian Purpose.
Reaching this far back into Native and government history shows that this movement was concerned with changing the entire narrative of the Indian in the U.S. The authors use sarcasm and irony in their offer of payment for Alcatraz, which they would soon be occupying by right of discovery, regardless of their claim to ownership. The Proclamation continues,

> We will give to the inhabitants of this island a portion of that land for their own, to be held in trust by the American Indian Affairs [sic] and by the bureau of Caucasian Affairs to hold in perpetuity—for as long as the sun shall rise and the rivers go down to the sea. We will further guide the inhabitants in the proper way of living. We will offer them our religion, our education, our life-ways, in order to help them achieve our level of civilization and thus raise them and all their white brothers up from their savage and unhappy state. We offer this treaty in good faith and wish to be fair and honorable in our dealings with all white men.\(^5\)

The Natives makes reference to a “Bureau of Caucasian Affairs,” which is a play on the Bureau of Indian Affairs that was deemed wholly ineffective at the time and would see its own share of Native activism in the swiftly coming years. After the quip regarding the Bureau, the Proclamation takes on a noble and serious tone. It describes Alcatraz as a haven for Native American life, a place where children will be raised and taught the culture that the Federal government had once tried to eradicate. Alcatraz Island would become a place of refuge, rather than the dark and fearsome rock it had become for so many in years past. This transforming of Alcatraz into the sanctuary refuting marginalization about which they dreamed it would become was not done without goals in the minds of the occupiers. The

\(^{51}\) Ibid.
Proclamation continues by outlining the issues of the island and the ways in which those are to be addressed by the new governing regime.

We feel that this so-called Alcatraz Island is more than suitable for an Indian Reservation, as determined by the white man’s own standards. By this we mean that this place resembles most Indian reservations in that:

1. It is isolated from modern facilities, and without adequate means of transportation.

2. It has no fresh running water.

3. It has inadequate sanitation facilities.

4. There are no oil or mineral rights.

5. There is no industry and so unemployment is very great.

6. There are no health care facilities.

7. The soil is rocky and non-productive; and the land does not support game.

8. There are no educational facilities.

9. The population has always exceeded the land base.

10. The population has always been held as prisoners and kept dependent upon others.52

The authors, which are mainly Nordwall, Oakes, and the United Indian Council, here make reference to their grievances with the Island and argue that, in spite of these shortcomings for the rock of land that they would soon be laying claim to, their desire is still strong and fervent. The appeal tactic used in this instance was to make the land even seem undesirable so that, if the Federal government did not respond to guilt born from injustice, the General Services Administration may then see the

52 Ibid.
merit in simply releasing the deed to the island to any party that may be interested, despite the low relative costs.

The true purpose and intent in the Proclamation lies in its concluding lines. While a significant portion of the document makes use of snide commentary and appeals that the land is unusable for many other purposes, the final lines deliver the emotional purpose that truly motivated the Alcatraz occupation,

Further, it would be fitting and symbolic that ships from all over the world, entering the Golden Gate, would first see Indian land, and thus be reminded of the true history of this nation. This tiny island would be a symbol of the great lands once ruled by free and noble Indians.53

The vision created in the closing lines is reminiscent of the symbolic purpose of the Statue of Liberty that beckoned to immigrants arriving to the U.S. If one of the first signs of America for those coming to the west coast and the bay area was a piece of Native American governed territory that served the purpose of enriching Native lives, then the dream of the Indian in America would have been realized. It was signed “Indians of All Tribes,” which demonstrates the way in which the occupiers desired for this to be a display of activism that didn’t focus on one single tribe, but a more generalized Indian population and set of goals.

With this idealized representation of the goals of the occupation in mind, the plans for Alcatraz’s seizure moved forward. One of the largest facets for the November 9 takeover was to secure boat transport from the Sausalito shore over to the rock itself. Initially five small boats agreed to take the roughly 75 students over

53 Ibid.
the water early on that morning. The media had been alerted with Adam Nordwall warning reporters from major news outlets, such as the *San Francisco Chronicle*, that if the news were to be broken before the occupation occurred, it would not occur at all.\textsuperscript{54} What was colloquially being referred to as “D-Day” swiftly approached.

Nordwall arose and drove with his family to Fisherman’s Wharf, the area of San Francisco near Alcatraz and where the charter boats were to be waiting at Pier 39. What Nordwall and the accompanying party were met with was a swarm of media, but an empty boat dock. \textsuperscript{55}

Richard Oakes suggested that the party read the Proclamation that they had authored as a way to keep negative press at bay while the mechanics of the situation were handled. The five small boats that were intended to have carried the Natives, in full tribal dress, to Alcatraz had not arrived to make the journey. The assumption was that they’d heard about the true purpose of the passage they were to make and rejected the show of Native American activism. Adam Nordwall, desperately attempting to keep the operation together, enlisted the help of a large ship that was settling into a neighboring dock. He asked the owner of the *Monte Cristo*, Robert Craig, if he would be willing to take the Natives on board to the Island. Craig claimed he could take no more than 50 and that he was unable to dock onto the rocky coast of the Island, so he would merely tour the party around the rock, claiming that would make a sufficient point for the media, many of whom were on the boat and

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{54} Eagle, “Alcatraz! Alcatraz!: The Indian Occupation of 1969-1971,” 51.} \textsuperscript{55} Smith, 14.
one such reporter already docked on the island with a camera crew, preparing to film the landing. Nordwall expressed:

We took a head count and then started the unpleasant task of asking people to leave the boat. The media had to stay because without them, much of our plans and efforts would be wasted. If nobody could read about our actions or watch it on television, it might as well have never happened.... As somebody once said, if a tree falls in the forest and no one is around to hear it crash, does it make a sound?

Nordwall’s statement expresses a large element of what was transformative about Alcatraz as a Native American rights demonstration: it was a modern movement that desired national recognition. While the seizure of Alcatraz was important symbolically for the Native people as a whole, it was also meant to be seen by those outside of the community. This movement wasn’t just for those involved, for the sake of symbolism, or for the

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57 Ibid.
Indian amenities that would replace the burned cultural center. The media was integral to Alcatraz because what was happening was intended the change the way the entire nation viewed its Native American population.

Coming upon the rock, many of those on board knew that the *Monte Cristo* would not be docking upon the island because of mechanical issues. In a fit of passion, Richard Oakes leapt off of the boat and into the water. James Vaughn, Ross Harden, Walter Hatch, and finally, Joe Bill joined Oakes in the water. Figure 2 shows John Trudell’s hand written note from the first days of the actual occupation that details those who had jumped off into the water and those who had eventually returned to Alcatraz later in the night.\(^{58}\) Captain Craig, seeing the swimmers, had the immediate consideration of the ship flying the Canadian flag, worrying that carrying the Indians to Alcatraz to take the island could be viewed as an act of war. With Craig’s apprehensions and the tide sweeping the swimmers back towards the pier, the *Monte Cristo* returned its passengers to shore.

The consensus from the group of approximately 50 Native Americans was to return to the Island later that night to attempt to complete what had only sufficed as a symbolic occupation. For $3 per person, a fishing boat called the *New Vera II* agreed to ferry the returning Native Americans back to the Island in order for them to formally claim the land. A scarce amount of food and supplies were gathered for the purpose of a return trip to the island and the boat. 200 Indians had made the initial journey earlier in the day, with only 25 returning that evening to the island to

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\(^{58}\) John Trudell. "Notes." Outward, Box 3, File 9, Alcatraz File, San Francisco Public Library.
make a permanent claim. The New Vera II left hurriedly, as fears that the coast guard
had been alerted were made known. 59

As the boat approached the island, the Captain, who had not been told the
nature of the journey, became agitated that he had been made complicit in an act
that could possibly charge him with aiding and abetting an Indian activist takeover.
Once this was realized, he turned the boat around after only fourteen of the twenty
passengers had exited. A similar situation occurred with Captain Craig of the Monte
Cristo. Once non-natives realized the nature of the voyages they were fairing, they
became panicked and refused to aid any longer. While public opinion, largely, was
favorable, non-Native populations were wary to get involved. The Indians who had
made it onto Alcatraz spent their evening lying in the grass while the custodian, John
Hart, searched the island. Both the Coast Guard and the local media had alerted hart
to the presence of the Natives on the island for a second landing. Oakes recalls his
experience on Alcatraz in a publication from Ramparts Magazine titled "Alcatraz Is
Not An Island"

It was November 9, 1969, when we spent our first night on Alcatraz. We got a
ride over with some Sausalito yachtsmen. We landed at about six o’clock and
hid. I guess the caretaker was alerted that we had landed. I think by
newsmen. He, his three patrolmen, and their “ferocious” guard dog came out
and tried to find us. Even with their dog they couldn’t detect us. We could see
that dog, wagging his tail and barking occasionally. I guess he was used to us
by then. 60

Oakes, along with Jim Vaughn, John Martell, John Whitefox, John Vigil, Joe Bill,
Lanada Means, Shoshonne-Bannock, Dave Leach, Bernell Blindman, Rick Evening.

59 Johnson, 119.
Ross Harden, and Adam Nordwall, stayed the night on the island despite detection and threats from Coast Guard employees. The next morning, Oakes and the rest of the party claimed the island for Indian purpose and vowed to return soon. Ross Harden, one of the occupiers, stated in his recollections in a 1970 interview for Duke University,

> They [GSA Officials] confronted us with questions.... We thought it would be better to go off peaceful, but we read our proclamation to them and told them that this is just the beginning of our protest, and that we’d be back with more Indians. We felt that fourteen of us would be easier to arrest than fifty or sixty people, and we wouldn’t be doing the movement any good in jail. Besides, this was just the beginning and there was a lot of planning to do... Basically now, when I speak of the movement, I mean Alcatraz and the awakening of the Indians.  

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The date was set next for November 20, 1969.  

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62 Johnson, 119.
CHAPTER 3:

AN INDIAN ERA RISING

The year was 1969 and the day was November 20th; the moon landing had occurred the same year and around two in the morning, Pete Conrad was preparing to return to earth and was at that moment uttering the first words ever sang on the moon. In this landmark year of firsts, it was only appropriate that at the very same time, over 90 American Indians, a majority of which were college students, were preparing on the Sausalito shore to make the five-mile boat trip across San Francisco Bay over to Alcatraz Island, the former infamous prison. The purpose of this trip was to claim the land by the right of discovery for most, but for some it was to demand for the U.S. government to honor the 1868 treaty made with the Sioux that stated, “Any Federal land that was not being used by the government automatically reverted back to the Indians.” Since this land was in disuse, the 90 Native Americans who set out across the bay intended to reclaim it for Indian use, and subsequently, occupied the land for nineteen long months.

The original intention of the occupation was to be, “a symbolic protest and

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64 Johnson, 64.
call for Indian self-determination for their own lives.”\textsuperscript{65} One of the most dynamic factors of the occupation was the fact that it brought together Indians from all over the continents of North and South America. As such, while the movement is often times credited to AIM (American Indian Movement), the driving force behind the Alcatraz occupation was the newly minted Indians of All Tribes.\textsuperscript{66} What started as a short occupation of just a few California college students on November 9\textsuperscript{th} turned into the nineteen-month long event that began on November 20.\textsuperscript{67} To express the passion behind the occupation, a San Francisco Sioux Native, stated in the \textit{Los Angeles Times} in 1970, "This will go down in history as the first time that Indians aggressively ever tried to take back some of their lost land... We've been turning the other cheek now for 150 years. It's the best thing that has happened for [pan] Indian unity since Custer’s last stand."\textsuperscript{68} This sentiment exemplifies how the struggle for Alcatraz was not even remotely about the physical land itself. It was about making the plight of Native Americans at the time and throughout history visible. It was about claiming self-determination and invoking Red Power.

Pushing off from the Sausalito shore in rented skiffs, over 70 Natives arrived onto the Alcatraz rock. \textit{The Los Angeles Times} writes on November 21, 1969 that Alcatraz “Falls to Indian Invaders.”

American Indians invaded Alcatraz for the second time in less than two weeks Thursday and the Coast Guard blockaded the former island prison. “The Rock” fell without resistance when five boatloads of 78 young demonstrators, representing more than 25 tribes, put ashore before dawn on

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid, 67.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid, 68.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
the island in San Francisco Bay. Thomas Hannon, regional director of the General Services Administration, which controls the surplus government property, visited the former federal penitentiary twice Thursday, attempting to persuade the invasion force to leave the abandoned prison. He was unsuccessful but vowed to continue his “friendly persuasion” today... The government ordered Coast Guard cutters to circle the island continuously to prevent reinforcements or supplies from reaching the invaders. The youthful Indians landed with bedrolls, crackers, meat, bread, and potato salad and vowed to stay on the island indefinitely. 69

The rhetoric of the newspaper calls the occupiers “invaders” that are “armed” with bedrolls and uses diction such as “fallen” to describe the island as a lost battle site. However, it also has a tone that favors the Indians and their cause through the repeated mention of their youth and the methodical way supplies are listed, specifically including potato salad. This is the once of the first signs as to how the media was reacting at the time to the occupiers and their mission. As will continually be described in detail, the public opinion suffered greatly from and ebbing and flowing spectrum of support and outrage.

The account mentions the supplies that the natives brought, which is telling of life on Alcatraz at least during those first few days. In the beginning, the occupation of the island was almost mystical in nature. Somehow, Alcatraz was different. From the nearly 80 demonstrators from over 25 different tribes, ages ranged from small children just 2-6 years old to elderly tribal leaders well into their 70s. Entire families came to lay claim to the rock and exemplify pan-Indian unity to gain recognition for a tide in the social climate regarding Native rights.

Federal officials, besides ordering the Coast Guard to circle the island in order to cut off further arrivals and a flow of reinforcing supplies, gave the Indian occupiers an ultimatum. The Government issued a warning that the Natives must vacate the island by November 22, two days after their arrival. Dennis Turner, one of the occupants, told reporters on the scene, “We won’t resist, but how will they find us? It’s why we’re here in the first place- we are the invisible Americans.”

Turner’s sentiment echoes why over 25 different tribes had come together for this common purpose. They were ensuring that they would be invisible no longer.

Once the Indian population had settled onto the island, a structure was put into place. Council was elected and leaders in the fields of sanitation, housework, cooking, and day care were all established with the recognition that a majority of the decisions would be made collectively, rather than having formally appointed leadership roles. Richard Oakes was considered to be the face or “chief” of the occupation, but the society was primarily egalitarian. In *The New York Times* in December of 1969, Earl Caldwell writes, “A beaten blue truck that had the words ‘Justice Department’.... Printed on it pulled up to the abandoned cellblock... It was loaded with supplies. Muscular Indian youths... pulled the boxes off the truck... baby food, beans, lasagna... collected by the Indian Center in San Francisco.”

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71 Johnson, 69.
72 Earl Caldwell, "Determined Indians Watch and Wait on 'the Rock','” *New York Times*, Dec 10, 1969: 43
On the day after the initial landing on November 9, Oakes and Elliot Leighton, the Native attorney who had been with the Alcatraz cause since its infancy, telephoned the regional coordinator of the U.S. Department of Interior. Part of these demands stated that Federal officials would return Alcatraz to Native ownership and thereafter provide funds for the building of a new university and Indian cultural center to replace the one that had been tragically burned previously. They also requested a meeting with the Secretary of the Interior in order to negotiate these demands in person, but only if their conditions were agreed to before the meeting took place. 73 In this statement, Oakes writes

> We Native peoples of North America have gathered here to claim our traditional and natural right to create a meaningful use for our Great Spirit's land. Therefore, let it be known that our stand for self-determination is on Alcatraz.74

By the second day, 40 more Indians arrived on the island to have their part in staking a claim on Alcatraz. The group began to operate under the name “Indians of All Tribes” to symbolize the collection of Natives from around the country representing different tribes, backgrounds, cultures, and histories coming together to assert their collective voice for the vindication of the injustice committed against them and their ancestors. Many who came were not prepared for a full-scale occupation. Though leaders and instructors had warned those planning on coming to the island to come prepared with warm clothing, a supply of food, and materials for an extended stay, many came with little to nothing in their possession. One food

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73 DeLuca, 14.
74 Indians of All Tribes Proclamation, November 20th, 1969.
supply boat was allowed through the Coast Guard blockade in order to aid the occupiers until their deadline of vacancy by November 21st was achieved.75 However, the occupiers had no intention of vacating the island at any point in the near future. Ross Harden, one of the Natives, recalls that an occupier by the name of Joe Bill actually broke the Coast Guard blockade in those initial few days in order to bring supplies back to the island. He slipped past the Coast Guard ships in a canoe and returned later than evening with supplies collected on the mainland. Harden recalls a ship called the Bella Donna that was able to deliver diesel fuel, 40 more occupiers, and supplies to the island after those on the rock distracted the Coast Guard boat with Molotov cocktails until the ship was able to deliver its cargo. 76 The government response to the occupation initially took the form of “watch and wait” wherein the coast guard sent a boat to circle the island indefinitely and to create a blockade that disallowed the entrance of occupiers to the island, and essentially, supplies as well.77 However, the blockade did little in the way of the island continuing to get its supplies. The New York Times on December of 1969, Earl Caldwell writes, “A beaten blue truck that had the words ‘Justice Department’... Printed on it pulled up to the abandoned cellblock... It was loaded with supplies. Muscular Indian youths... pulled the boxes off the truck... baby food, beans, lasagna... collected by the Indian Center in San Francisco.”78

75 Johnson, 150.
76 Ibid, 154.
77 Johnson, 152.
Life on Alcatraz began to take shape in those first few days of the occupation. Food was being brought in on a supply truck along with necessary materials for consistent survival. John Trudell, a 23-year-old Sioux, set up an arrangement with Radio Pacifica in Berkeley and Los Angeles in order to create a radio show that would be broadcasted to mainland listeners who could follow the development of the occupation and the Indian purpose. The community began to work regarding tasks on the island. Work was mainly separated on a gender basis, but women in the community reported feeling valued and free from gender-based oppression initially. Linda Aryanaydo recalls, “We usually choose men to be our spokesmen, for they are more experienced. But if a woman wanted to speak, she would.” The structure on Alcatraz represented the times in the gender dynamics that occurred, but those who were present for the occupation still felt a sense of freedom and autonomy in 1969. Occupiers made lists of their needs and attempted to create an organized structure on the island. Rooms previously reserved for the Warden and his family were turned into Indian common areas. Youths played

79 Kelly, 83.
80 Indians of All Tribes, ”List of needs from roundtable discussion.” Outward, Box 1, File 32. Alcatraz File, San Francisco Public Library.
basketball in what used to be inmate recreation yards. Within the first 100 days, an estimated 600 occupiers filtered through the island.81

One of the most striking features of the way that Alcatraz was changed at the time was the inclusion of Native graffiti over much of the federal signs and landmarks. Phrases such as “Indian Land” and “Federal ‘Indian’ Property” began appearing all over the island. The Indian messages being displayed across the island represented not only the newfound freedom of those occupying a space that had kept its previous occupants so restricted, but transformed the reinterpreted federal messages to become ones of Indian freedom. The symbolism is not lost on any visitor to the island or viewer of photos that what had once stood as a symbol of the power of the U.S. federal government in terms of the imprisonment system was now blatantly disregarded by Native paint and messages. The graffiti still stands today as a reminder of the continued impact of the Alcatraz occupation almost 50 years ago.

81 Ibid.
In another twist of irony, one of the first major events on the island following the landing was a well-publicized thanksgiving meal that was brought in by boat to the Natives on Thanksgiving Day of 1969. Even a rock band was brought to the island to play for the party. Just as the graffiti shows defiance for the practices of the federal government in their relation to Indian Territory, the thanksgiving meal achieved a similar purpose. One key feature was that the meal was made off site by white cooks in a restaurant near Fisherman’s Wharf in San Francisco. A *Los Angeles Times* article titled, “This Time It’s the Palefaces Who Bring Turkey to Indians: Rock Band Towed to Alcatraz on Barge Sits Down to Thanksgiving Dinner With Redmen Occupying Island”\(^{82}\) The article states, “Hundreds of letters sent to tribes on reservations have brought Thanksgiving guests from Oklahoma, Washington State, and other distant points... White men are not invited to the feast at Alcatraz, but the turkeys came already cooked from a white restaurateur”\(^{83}\) The thanksgiving meal, originally shared by the colonizers and the Natives in New England, was yet another symbol of dissent on Alcatraz in those early days. The thanksgiving narrative that has typically been espoused was one of communion between the white man and the Native American. The Native occupiers denied sharing their table at this time with the white men that the original thanksgiving included. Part of the Alcatraz occupation was this public and ironic form of pointed separation that invoked humor in order to convey a very serious message. Using humor in the face of

\(^{83}\) Ibid.
serious breaches of sacred treaty further removes Alcatraz from prior and concurrent indigenous rights movements that fought for the sanctity of treaties with the upmost brevity.

**Action and a Way of Life on Alcatraz Island**

By December 1969, the occupation was in full swing. Natives gathered around fireplaces in the warden’s home, and went about their daily activities, which included more than simply Native ceremonies, preparing foods, and exploring the island. Richard Oakes, and the rest of the occupants, began calling for the assemblage of more Natives on Alcatraz Island. On December 3rd of 1969, *The Los Angeles Times* reported in an article called, “Indians on Alcatraz: U.S. Officials Confer”

Oakes, who is president of the Student Council of American Natives at San Francisco State College, reiterated Tuesday that the Indians “are going to stay
on Alcatraz.” He said the Indian population of the island is expected to be increased to perhaps 1000 next Friday.84

At the time, roughly 200 Natives were occupying the island. In an effort to bring in more occupiers, the Natives released a letter on December 16th of 1969. It is signed “Indians of All Tribes” and lays out, for the general public, some of the details on the occupation. It also invited anyone of Indian blood who wishes to join the cause to come forth and do so. Authored mainly by Oakes, the letter states

While it was a small group which moved onto the island, we want all Indian people to join with us. More Indian people from throughout the country are coming to the island every day. We are issuing this call in an attempt to unify all our Indian Brothers behind a common cause.

We realize that there are more problems in Indian communities besides having our culture taken away. We have water problems, land problems, “social” problems, job opportunity problems, and many others. So we must start somewhere. We feel that if we are going to succeed, we must hold on to the old ways. This is the first and most important reason we went to Alcatraz Island.85

The occupiers state the goals that they had set forth in the proclamation and ask that on December 23, 1969; representatives from each Indian nation and urban

center come forward for a meeting to discuss the change in the tide of the
Indigenous rights community. 86

The Alcatraz occupation, for all of its seeming radicalization and bold
assertion, began receiving widespread support from various benefactors across the
nation. There was created a trust entitled “The Alcatraz Relief Fund” wherein
people from every end of the country could send in their contribution to the
occupiers at Alcatraz.87 Even those who would in no way be personally affected by
Indian termination laws sent money and support to Alcatraz. A letter signed “Alice
Feinstein,” A Jewish woman from San Francisco, enclosed $10 and wrote,

Dear Friends:

While there has been little publicity as to what your needs might be
(food, clothing, etc.) we feel that this check will not be unwelcome. Many of
the residents of San Francisco are on your side and feel strongly about what
you are doing. Publicity, even if it is just handing out fliers on market street,
would awaken many to this opportunity to share in the important work you
are doing. 88

This letter was dated for December 17, 1970, over a year into the occupation and
well into the point wherein the occupation had begun to seem threabare. However,
Mrs. Feinstein’s letter exhibits the sentiments of many who wished to show their
support for Alcatraz, even through offering advice such as promotion through fliers
on Market Street.

Letters also came in from as far away as Brooklyn, NY, which shows the

86 Ibid.
87 “Letters of Support” Box 1, File 7, Alcatraz File, San Francisco Public Library.
88 Alice Feinstein, “Letter to Indians of All Tribes” Box 1, File 7, Alcatraz File, San
Francisco Public Library.
impact that Alcatraz had on reaching a national audience, a feat that Native Activism up to that point had been largely unconcerned. In September of 1970, Wasu Duta, or Red Hall as it’s signed, wrote to John Trudell, one of the organizing occupiers. He begins by sending his “good thoughts” to those inhabiting the island, but soon reaches out to appeal to Trudell. He writes,

> Another invasion of the whiteman. There is a company, TIME CORPORATION, who is in the process of documenting an educational movie type on Indians. However, as always, THEY, want to do the editing and to have these rights before photographing begins and the recordings. My hope, that when the time arrives, you and your people will not permit these white people to begin again the cycle of the exploitation of Indians. Through all of you, we have a beginning and THEY must be stopped this time.  

Wasu Duta calls upon the occupiers at Alcatraz to begin to take on other aspects of indigenous rights activism. The reaching out of a person of Native descent from across the nation truly encapsulates what is arguably so effective about the Alcatraz occupation. The author states, “Through all of you, we have a beginning.” The display of indigenous rights advocacy that Alcatraz became was an event that, moving forward, galvanized the public into a greater sense of social responsibility. The entire nation knew what was happening on “the rock.”

Alcatraz was undoubtedly critical in the indigenous rights movement of the 1960s and beyond, despite Native American activism existing well before such a widespread display. The question begs, what made Alcatraz different? Part of what made this particular piece of activism particularly relevant was the widespread

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89 Wasu Duta, “Letters to John Trudell” Box 1, File 9, Alcatraz File, San Francisco Public Library.
90 Duta, 1.
coverage through the media it received. In the opinion of Paul Smith from *Like a Hurricane*

In one way... the new thing about Alcatraz was the media attention... the occupation was a fulcrum, a turning point, but it wasn’t the genesis or ground zero. And what had gone on in the years previous to Alcatraz and the forty-two months of intense activism that followed are at least as important as what happened during or after.  

While Smith makes a compelling argument, he takes a rather cynical approach to the media’s involvement in making Alcatraz the turning point that he, correctly, claims it is. Smith’s tone indicates that Alcatraz was only remarkable because people simply knew about it, but he downplays the importance of this effect. That is part of what is essentially different about the Alcatraz occupation in contrast to other forms of Native Activism at the time. This

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91 Smith, 36-37
paper has already made use of several newspaper articles that announce the beginning of Alcatraz and track it throughout its progression.

The media could have a very positive impact on the goals of the occupiers depending on the framing of the situation. Newspaper articles were a very prominent medium through which information was expressed. The initial announcement of the occupation’s occurrence and its primary months has already been discussed, but coverage continued throughout those 2 years, showing the transformation of Alcatraz. In a December 1970 *Washington Post* article, Colman McCarthy writes

> An Indianized Alcatraz is tying the Federal government into knots of anxiety and the Indians into an ever tightening bind of physical pain. Complex legal questions are involved, not to mention the ethical ones that inevitably arise when the poor and the government do battle. The Indians gave up their desire for publicity long ago. Gawking newsmen are no longer welcome... one of the rare and most recent non-Indian visitors to Alcatraz was Mrs. Robert F. Kennedy... to offer what she called “the hand of friendship”... More striking to Mrs. Kennedy than the grim past was the grimmer present: the Indians live by candlelight or flashlight, in a world of no heat, sanitary facilities, and, most crucial, no on island water supply.... “The deepest impression I came away with... is the falseness of the myth that the government can get the Indians off the island. This isn’t a political problem as most people are saying; it’s a human problem. People are suffering and it’s inhumane to ignore them. The government is playing a wait and see game.”  

First, the intense publicity that the Alcatraz occupation received is exemplified simply by virtue of Mrs. Robert Kennedy paying a visit to the island and expressing sympathies. This kind of gesture is a testament to the level superstardom that the

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Alcatraz occupation received. Additionally, the tone of the article, and the response of Mrs. Kennedy, are very sympathetic to the cause of the Native American occupiers. Kennedy reports on the deplorable conditions that befell Alcatraz, which is part of the reason for its implosion, and expresses her concern over the inhumanity of making the occupiers live in these conditions since their demands were not being met. This kind of sympathetic press from a major news source was part of increasing that visibility for the issues of indigenous rights that Alcatraz was critical in bringing about. Other forms of media other than newspaper came out of Alcatraz itself and helped to spread the message of the occupiers. John Trudell organized the Radio Pacifica broadcast that came straight from the island itself called “Radio Free Alcatraz.” Additionally, a newsletter was put in print by January 1970 called Indians of All Tribes Newsletter and was sent across the country. Unfortunately, the newsletter only saw a few issues to print. Refreshingly, broadcasters were reaching a national audience that was uncensored in its ability to speak the truth about their view on the state of Indian affairs and the condition of Alcatraz itself. This message became so pervasive, that even the rock band, Creedence Clearwater Revival donated $15,000 for the inhabitants to purchase a boat to run supplies.

Smith almost trivializes Alcatraz by implying that it was different from other forms of Native American activism just because it was highly covered in the media for a long period of time. Part of its virtue lies in its coverage and the tidal wave of

93 Johnson, 177-178.
94 Ibid, 179.
American citizen sympathy that it generated. Alcatraz helped to truly catalyze the red power movement in part because it made it visible nationwide.

The End Comes to Alcatraz

Despite the publicity and a rich first few months, the deterioration of life on Alcatraz began not long after the occupation itself. Paul Smith of *Like A Hurricane* writes, “A month into the occupation, the mood on the island had changed. Richard Oakes seemed not to be around as much after thanksgiving... Blame sheer boredom, exuberant anarchism run amok, or a youthful commitment to hard partying- fights and accidents became more common, as did a general lack of cohesion and purpose among those who weren’t part of the leadership.”95 The occupation was beginning to fail without having accomplished the goal of attaining the land for Indians of All Tribes and the cultural center. In addition to internal fights, outsiders from the movement began arriving to Alcatraz as well. The fact that the island contained no police monitoring or government intervention contributed greatly to the groups of so-called troublemakers who sought an environment free of legal constraint. This complicated both the reputation and goals of the Alcatraz leaders. 96 In addition to the introduction of outsiders, illegal substances and alcohol, which had originally been banned from the island, began to arise as problems. 97 One such group that had

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95 Smith, 31.
96 Ibid.
97 Johnson, 70.
caused significant issues for the movement was one that was intended to be protecting it. The “Bureau of Caucasian Affairs” was intended to be the security force for the island and its occupiers, but eventually evolved into a group of thug-like, resident bullies on the island that promoted the drug and alcohol culture that was beginning to arrive due to the nature of perceived lawlessness.  

While the Alcatraz occupation never truly had a leader, Richard Oakes was one of the main organizers and faces of the movement. Complications regarding his position and family life truly affected the cohesiveness of the Alcatraz occupiers. Groups like the Bureau of Caucasian Affairs had already attempted to ‘overthrow’ Oakes of his power by November of 1969. What finally took the spirit out of this charismatic leader occurred on January 5, 1970. Oakes had come to island with his family, including his children, and on the 5th of January, Oakes’ 12-year-old daughter, Yvonne, fell down a stairwell to her death. In conjunction with the rumors regarding stripping Oakes of his power, allegations of Yvonne being pushed by the child of an opposition leader ran rampant and Oakes, in his desperation, even contacted federal authorities to do an investigation on the island that was housing the protests against the very institution of the U.S. government. After Oakes’ daughter’s death, the family left Alcatraz and the struggle for control escalated. On June 10, after he had left Alcatraz, Oakes was injured in a bar fight at a local pub in the bay area. After almost 2 weeks in a coma, he recovered after two tribal leaders

98 Kelly, 84.
99 Ibid.
performed a healing ceremony on him. On May 3 of 1971, Oakes returned for one final time, but by this point, the life had gone out of both him, and the occupation.100

Richard Deluca writes, "Daily life on Alcatraz had begun to deteriorate sharply. A physicians' inspection in February revealed that, while the Indians appeared healthy, hygiene on the island was "extremely poor, from sewage disposal to the preparation of food"; another report called the conditions 'deplorable.'"101 By July of 1970, the federal government was losing its patience with the occupation, and President Richard Nixon ordered that all power be cut to the island.102

In an interview conducted by Denny Smithson with John Trudell on the one-year anniversary of the occupation, Trudell describes the conditions on the island to a national audience. In November of 1970, the dialog is as follows

Denny Smithson: "How are conditions? What about water? Is the government still bringing in water?"

John Trudell: "No, they cut us off. They cut off the electricity to the lighthouse and they quit bringing water boats. We bring over 5 gallon buckets. We take 25 bottles over and fill them up at the pier every other day or so, or when they go empty. Electricity is a couple generator. 30 150 watt light bulbs. Couple refrigerators and washing machines. A few televisions, couple radios.

Smithson: "Any feelings you’d like to get out about Alcatraz? First anniversary."

John Trudell: “Wooahhh. We’re in the wake of some big shit..."103

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100 Ryan, 89.
101 Deluca, 18.
102 Ryan, 89.
A year into the occupation, Trudell is still outwardly positive to some degree, though the strain in his voice is evident in the radio recording. However, the occupation on Alcatraz was continuing to erode. Later in the interview, this becomes more evident.

**John Trudell:** “Back in November there was a lot of excitement, a lot of people. 200-300 people living out here at one time. Then schools were out for breaks and more people came out. At the time we were saying we wanted the deed to the island and money to build a cultural center out here. Since that time, the only thing we still want is the deed to the island, we don’t ask for the money anymore... We were very concerned with how the public would react to the occupation. We tried to cater the occupation so as not to offend the public because that was where our support came from, our sympathy, that has allowed us to stay here... Now we aren’t so concerned with what middle class America thinks of us, we’re concerned about our image with the Indian people...

**Dennis Smithson:** “What is life on Alcatraz like now? Roughly how many people are there? Are living conditions acceptable?

**John Trudell:** “We have about 80 people here. The whole number has changed. We’ve gone from large populations to small populations, back to almost the same number we started from... since the government took the water away and shut the power off, heating is difficult. We started tearing down wooden cottages on the island for firewood. We’ve got a 30kw generator, which supplies our electric needs... I compare it to living on a reservation. We’re used to it... these aren’t hardships to us, to white society it might be but this is what we’ve always lived in.”

The internal issues of the occupation continued to corrode life on Alcatraz until the federal government finally intervened in favor of removal by 1971. *The Los Angeles Times* writes, “The eviction was necessary because the Coast Guard ‘was prohibited from restoring inoperative navigational aid with threats of violence from the inhabitants’... the straw that broke the camel’s back [was] the reported theft of $680 worth of copper from the island.” Additionally, as the *Los Angeles Times*

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104 Ibid.
writes in 1971, “The eviction was necessary because the Coast Guard ‘was prohibited from restoring inoperative navigational aid with threats of violence from the inhabitants’... the straw that broke the camel’s back [was] the reported theft of $680 worth of copper from the island.’”\textsuperscript{106} Additionally, Hager writes, “Browning said that the ‘hostility’ of the inhabitants had prevented federal agents from gaining access to the island to investigate what he called, “allegations of violations of federal laws.’...A number of attempts to negotiate a settlement with government officials has failed.”\textsuperscript{107}

Finally, on June 10, 1971, Federal agents came to Alcatraz and evicted the remaining 15 occupiers.\textsuperscript{108} The occupation was over, and the goals outlined in the letter and the Alcatraz Proclamation would remain unmet. Regardless of the reported circumstances for the removal, the tone and title of the news article, “U.S Marshalls Oust Last of Alcatraz Invaders” encompasses the sentiment that both the public and the Federal government were tired of the Native American presence. The Alcatraz occupation, after approximately two years, came to a withering halt. At the end, the movement was a shadow of its former self

\textbf{CHAPTER 4:}

\textbf{FAILURE AND THE GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: HOW ALCATRAZ LEFT ITS MARK}

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid, 25.
\textsuperscript{108} Johnson, 74.
The idea of failure within society may seem more simplistic in definition than in actuality. The Oxford English Dictionary offers two definitions for the word “Failure.” First, “The fact of becoming exhausted or running short, giving way under trial, breaking down in health, declining in strength or activity, etc.” In this sense, the Alcatraz movement fulfills this definition. By the time the occupation ends, it’s a shell of what it formerly was. The second definition similarly follows suit, “The fact of failing to effect one's purpose; want of success; an instance of this.” In addition, the Alcatraz occupation failed to meet its goals in the end as well. However, despite the occupation fulfilling the two definitions set forth for the word “failure,” Alcatraz cannot be considered as such because of the reverberations it has had throughout the Red Power movement as a whole and the rights of Native Americans in the U.S. in regards to self-determination and federal policy. Thus, Alcatraz is not an activist movement that failed. Rather, it is a failed activist movement that ultimately succeeded in making a difference in its field.

A critical outcome of the movement additionally came through the reform of the federal government’s approach to Indian policy and affairs. Prior to the early

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110 Ibid.
1970s, Indian policy had largely leaned towards the government desiring to reform and have control over Native American tribes and culture. 111 The policy during the mid-20th century was one of ‘Indian Termination.’ The termination policies that the U.S. enacted essentially stripped Indian tribes of governmental protection, which would prove detrimental to Native community and economy.112 For a long period in the U.S, the way in which the federal government dealt with Native Americans centered around treating each tribal nation as an entity that was separate from typical U.S. citizens. Philip Deloria, a scholar of Native American studies, writes, “The political status of Indian tribes and the relationship to the United States is, then, the foundation for the entire structure of policies, programs, and laws, yet it is the one source of Indian status which, as a practical matter, probably cannot stand alone.”113 Termination policies attempt to undermine the tribal sovereignties that are the very foundation of the mutualistic relationship between specific Indian nations and the federal government. It is the idea of termination shifting into self-determination, which fosters respect for tribes and protections under the law, that creates the most workable relationship between Native peoples and the

government. Termination attempts to nullify any specialized treatment or protections under the law for tribes by the U.S. government, while self-determination would allow for Native Americans to enjoy tribal legal protections, but with full jurisdiction over their own specific tribal matters.\textsuperscript{114} Scholars who study the Native American history are eager to refer to the period of the 1960s and early 1970s as an era of "Indian Self-Determination" when this was more a period of transition from termination towards self-determination.\textsuperscript{115} Alcatraz as a grassroots effort was important in creating that visibility for Native American dissatisfaction.

This policy of Indian termination was not to last under Nixon's administration. Nixon's policy was to create "self-determination without termination."\textsuperscript{116} This is in part thanks to grassroots efforts, like the Alcatraz occupation, that brought issues of the Native American community to the foreground of discussion on the national stage.\textsuperscript{117} A more complicated issue to address is the explanation behind the government's relatively hands off approach to the occupation initially. While the large-scale base of support and recent unpopularity of the Vietnam War are part of the explanation, the racial element of the occupation must be considered.\textsuperscript{118} Within the same decade of the start of the

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{116} Kotowski, 202.  
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid, 204.  
\textsuperscript{118} Johnson, 71.
Alcatraz occupation, the transformative Civil Rights movement had exploded within America. While it’s widely known that the Civil Rights movement was a persistent struggle against government policy and public backlash, the Alcatraz occupation was much less radically received. One possible explanation for the discrepancy was President Nixon himself. Dean Kotlowski of the Pacific Historical Review quoted Nixon, “A grave injustice has been worked against [Indians]... the nation will appreciate our having a more active concern for their plight.”

Nixon had sympathies for the Native American population because their aims were deemed less radical. They were a smaller minority and were not calling for integrations, but, as Nixon saw it, the opportunity to embrace their heritage. Regardless, Nixon had grown weary of the occupation after two years, and this type of support was rescinded.

When Alcatraz was first seized in 1969, Nixon’s administration decided to adopt a policy of compromise, but not forcible intervention. The Washington Post reports in 1970, “The government could easily get the Indians off of the island by sending in its riot-trained National Guard. But the White House, still haunted by the Kent State killings, is reluctant to call up the troops.” Robert Robertson, the director of the National Conference of Indian Opportunity, was sent to Alcatraz to compromise with occupiers on the fate of the land. His proposition was one of establishing a park on the deserted island that would be intended for Indian use.

119 Kotlowski, 206.
120 Ibid, 207.
121 McCarthy, "The Indians on Alcatraz: Justice Or Lunacy?"
This proposal, however, was refused. Nearing a year into the occupation, the administration was wary of forcible removal based on the recent shooting as Kent State University. Therefore, continued non-violence and negotiations were pursued. By 1970, a few months into the occupation, the federal government was still adopting a “wait and see approach.” By August, the government gave the Bay Area Native American Council a grant of $50,000 in order to rebuild and Indian Cultural Center in place of the one that had burned down. With 40,000 bay area Indians to account for, this came to $1.20 a person. As a result of the occupation, members of President’s advisory team urged the President to view Alcatraz as a platform for a change in Indian policy. Vice President Spiro Agnew supported anti-termination policy by saying in 1970, “Rather than termination...our policy objective is that the right of choice for the Indian people will be respected.” President Nixon himself came out in public support of the abolition of the Indian termination polices. On July 8, 1970, the President delivered an address to Congress on the state of Indian affairs. “The first Americans--the Indians-are the most deprived and most isolated minority group in our nation. On virtually every scale of measurement--employment, income, education, health--the condition of the Indian people ranks at the bottom.” He goes on, “This, then, must be the goal of any new national policy

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122 Ibid, 208.
123 McCarthy.
124 Ibid.
toward the Indian people: to strengthen the Indian's sense of autonomy without
threatening his sense of community. “\textsuperscript{125}

Further in this address, he stated,

Federal termination errs in one direction, Federal paternalism errs in the
other. Only by clearly rejecting both of these extremes can we achieve a
policy which truly serves the best interests of the Indian people. Self-
determination among the Indian people can and must be encouraged without
the threat of eventual termination. In my view, in fact, that is the only way
that self-determination can effectively be fostered.\textsuperscript{126}

President Nixon came out highly favoring reform regarding the government’s
relations with Native American tribes, despite the federal intervention in the ending
of the Alcatraz occupation. Robert Cook, an expert in the field of Indian termination
reparations, states regarding the President’s address, “These words marked the
beginning of federal policies purporting to promote Indian self-determination.”\textsuperscript{127} In
an effort to paint the administration as sympathetic to the needs of the nation’s
minority groups, President Nixon chose to endorse reform of Native American
policy since there were fewer than 1 million of them living in the U.S., public
sympathy generally resided with them, and their problems seemed less likely to
attract opposition.\textsuperscript{128} The main significance of the occupation of Alcatraz Island is
the way it energized the conversation about Native American relations and

\textsuperscript{125} Richard Nixon, "Special Message to the Congress on Indian Affairs.," Online by
\textsuperscript{126} Nixon, "Special Message to the Congress on Indian Affairs.,"
\textsuperscript{127} Samuel Robert Cook, "Indian Self-Determination: A Comparative Analysis of
Executive and Congressional Approaches to Contemporary Federal Indian Policy,” 12.
\textsuperscript{128} Kotlowski, 205-206.
catalyzed the Red Power movement. Kotlowski states, “Nixon’s moderate advisors used the occupation to plead for a change in Indian policy.”\textsuperscript{129} The occupation at Alcatraz provided the opportunity for the issues of the Native American population to come to light and for reform to be made that improved the visibility of native populations. This desire was demonstrated by President Nixon’s comment in 1970 regarding Indian termination, “Self determination of Indian people can and must be encouraged without the threat of termination.”\textsuperscript{130}

However, what is contentious about Nixon’s response to Native American affairs is that he advocates for reform for the Native American population in the very capacity that would satisfy the goals of Alcatraz occupiers, but he does so for other indigenous causes. As evidenced by the $50,000 grant for a new cultural center, the Nixon administration was not directly opposed to Indian self-determination and reform, but was unsympathetic to the radicalism deemed to categorize the Alcatraz occupation. President Nixon desired to have his administration be the change for the termination policy, but in order to retain a degree of paternalism, he rectified indigenous claims on his own terms. An example of this comes in President Nixon’s address to Congress in 1970; his main recommendations regarding new self-determination legislation included restoring the Blue Lake region to the Taos Pueblo population. He stated,

One such grievance concerns the sacred Indian lands at and near Blue Lake in New Mexico. From the fourteenth century, the Taos Pueblo Indians used these areas for religious and tribal purposes. In 1906, however, the United

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid, 208.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
States Government appropriated these lands for the creation of a national forest. According to a recent determination of the Indian Claims Commission, the government "took said lands from petitioner without compensation."

For 64 years, the Taos Pueblo has been trying to regain possession of this sacred lake and watershed area in order to preserve it in its natural condition and limit its non-Indian use. The Taos Indians consider such action essential to the protection and expression of their religious faith.

The restoration of the Blue Lake lands to the Taos Pueblo Indians is an issue of unique and critical importance to Indians throughout the country. I therefore take this opportunity wholeheartedly to endorse legislation.\textsuperscript{131}

The restoration of the Blue Lake region to the Taos people demonstrated that the Federal government at the time was not unwilling to comply with Native American demands. However, the Blue Lake fight was one concerned with tribal sovereignty, not the overarching desire for self-determination and recognition that the Alcatraz occupiers were fighting for. This complete upheaval of social norms would be much more difficult for the Nixon administration to surrender to. Less than a year after Nixon's address to Congress, the Blue Lake land was returned to the Taos. However, the federal government refused to cooperate fully with the return of the Alcatraz property to the occupiers of Indians of All Tribes.

The lack of compliance with the demands at Alcatraz exhibits the paternalistic nature that Nixon displays. By returning land to certain individual tribes and abridging termination policies, the President's administration has the opportunity to offer some form of reparation to the Native American community while still retaining control over a more socially controversial occurrence: the occupation of Alcatraz. In a \textit{Washington Post} news article, Colman McCarthy writes

\textsuperscript{131} Nixon, "Special Message to Congress on Indian Affairs," 3.
The U.S government, with no experience of a similar case to draw from, is caught in a squeeze play between two sentiments. One view says that the Indians are breaking the law by trespassing on federal property. To let a band of rebels walk off with a piece of federal land worth more than $2 million not only mocks the authority of the government, but it also sets a precedent for other dissident groups to do likewise. 132

This complicated relationship between the governing and the governed further displays the impact of the Alcatraz occupation as an important historical occurrence with a message to convey about indigenous affairs and their continued intricacies within the bounds of its relationship to the federal government. This demonstrates that these issues persisted whether the aim of the indigenous activism was for treaty sovereignty regarding one specific tribe, or the overturn of how society at large and the federal government viewed Indian populations.

While the Alcatraz occupation was undeniably part of Native American relations to the federal government and change legislation, an extremely important aspect of its continued reverberations was the effect it had on the mindset of Native American people regarding the social climate of the time. John Trudell displays how the true goal of the Alcatraz occupation evolved to change the way the public thought of and controlled Native American affairs. Along with other Native activist movements at the time focusing on treaty sovereignty and land rights, Indian of All Tribes on Alcatraz was trying to rewrite the narrative of oppression that the Native American population had experienced since the founding of the Nation. In the same November 1970 interview with Denny Smithson, Trudell speaks to this effect.

132 McCarthy, "The Indians on Alcatraz: Justice Or Lunacy?"
John Trudell: We were very concerned with how the public would react to the occupation. We tried to cater the occupation so as not to offend the public because that was where our support came from, our sympathy, that has allowed us to stay here... Now we aren’t so concerned with what middle class America thinks of us, we’re concerned about our image with the Indian people. Under the name of Indians of All Tribes. Now what we’re working to do is create that image without our own people. Indian people are our own... we’d like to see a strong sense of Indian nationalism built and Alcatraz has started doing that and the follow-ups have helped, such as Hit River and the attention that has been put out on the Taoist people and Washington fishing rights. These are groups of people standing up to the government... when we’re right.... I see the Indian unity coming and that’s what our whole goal is now, our objective is now. Do it for the Indian people... The government solution is to take us off, that happens- we win. They give us the deed- we win... All we’re saying to outside society is get off of our back.133

A year into the occupation, the goals began to shift. This is the point where the supposed failure of Alcatraz as an activist movement comes into question because the goals of those who speak for the occupation begin to take the mindset of the Alcatraz movement as impactful just by it its existence. It was beginning to catalyze that sense of “Red Power” and find its true purpose. Trudell continues to describe the impact, in regards to the children of the occupation. He states

John Trudell: Young, middle aged, old. I see it. I see it through my feelings. I can feel the response... Indian people are holding Alcatraz on our own terms, this holds a lot of pride for people out on the mainlands. They want it. I asked young kids who George Washington was, Abe Lincoln, and they knew.

Our children are free. Reporters ask what kind of education we’re giving our children- they relate to propragandism. We try to give them some reading and arithmetic, but we’re giving them an education in freedom. They’ll never forget this. We are pumping political awareness into them, but it’s there for them to pick up on if they want to... Alcatraz is the return of the buffalo. It’s the coming back of the indian people and the return of the spirit. We have won... Alcatraz can’t lose and we like winning so we will continue to do so. This is our protest, we’ll do it our way and we’ll win.134

133 Ibid.
134 Ibid.
According to Trudell from both inside the occupation and through the travelling he was doing during it, Alcatraz Island was taking its place in the framework of Native Activism that helped to bring about change to federal policy and provide national visibility. Even the children of the occupation were gaining a foundation in Native American history and self-determination, thus changing the next generation as well. Trudell now recognizes that the occupation is much bigger than the square footage of Alcatraz as an Indian sanctuary, but as a symbol for Native Americans to view as inspiration for a new era of Indian interactions with the federal government. Trudell’s words are a spark that illuminates what the lasting impact of the occupation would be.
CONCLUSION:

ALCATRAZ’S CONTINUED IMPACT

Even though the Alcatraz occupation failed to achieve its aims of cultural centers and universities, it succeeded in helping to bring Indian rights to the foreground of policy discussions. Regardless of Nixon’s initial motivation, indigenous policy reform slowly came about. The Alaskan Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 allocated 40 Million acres of land and $1 Billion to Alaskan Native Americans. Federal spending was also increased for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, despite Nixon’s failure to reform the organization and give more control to actual native groups.¹³⁵ In addition to Nixon’s legislative contributions, Alcatraz also served as well-publicized platform for modern Native American activism that reached a national audience. Over 70 occupations following Alcatraz were participated in or organized by veterans of the Alcatraz occupation from 1969-1971. This includes groundbreaking occupations such as the BIA in 1972 and Wounded Knee II in 1973. ¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Ibid, 211.
¹³⁶ Johnson, 77.
This impact can be felt in a prevalent contemporary instance of Native American activism- the resistance to the Dakota Access pipeline. The pipeline is the current embodiment of the right to self-determination that the Indians of All Tribes, and Alcatraz, helped to create visibility for. The issue of tribal and land sovereignty is reminiscent of the activism that occurred over treaty sovereignty in the Pacific Northwest in the mid-twentieth century as well. The Sioux tribes have come together to oppose the creation of the Dakota Access pipeline near Cannonball, New Jersey; this pipeline endangers the water supply for the Sioux and the tribe’s surrounding neighbours and additionally, it violates treaty laws and the sovereignty of Sioux land. The Dakota Pipeline struggle marks the third time that treaties signed between the Federal government and the Sioux in 1851, and in particular, 1868, have been broken. Beginning in 2017 and on-going today largely in the courtroom rather than on the battleground of North Dakota itself, modern Native activism is in the public eye once again through opposition to the pipeline. The occupation of Alcatraz began and concluded with minimal physical harm or intervention. In contrast, protestors have been attacked and pepper-sprayed at Standing Rock. The fight at Standing Rock is a display of longitudinal Native American activism and Alcatraz is part of the narrative that set it all in motion. While the two do not bear striking similarity in execution, method, and ultimate goals, both Standing Rock and the occupation of Alcatraz Island are key events in the

138 Ibid.
139 Ibid.
Native American fight for self-determination and Standing Rock exhibits a continued fight for sovereignty.

Indian land has been and still is violated. The direct action catalyzed by Alcatraz has sent ripples through the Native activism community for the last 50 years and is part of the backstory that is still relevant to today’s activism. Were the goals that were originally set forth by the occupiers in San Francisco ever truly met? The answer would be “no.” When tourists visit Alcatraz Island when they move through the Bay Area, they won’t find a Native American sanctuary complete with totem poles and Indian schools. Instead, the National Parks Service operates the land. One may wander around the rocks and catch a glimpse of “Indian Land” graffiti, wondering what it may mean. A small room tucked away into a side passage has an exhibit on the occupation. Alcatraz Island in 2018 is not a shining monument to Native American self-determination. Despite this, through its impact on media, policy, and the nation’s outlook on indigenous rights, Alcatraz Island’s legacy for the Native American rights movement lives on in its activism every year since.
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