

The Native American Occupation of Alcatraz Island: Breaking  
National Barriers in Indian Rights and Activism

Rosie Hampson

Junior Division

Historical Paper

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*“It is a lengthy story to get across what the Indian is all about in America.”<sup>1</sup>*

Native American discrimination and the consequent fight for equality, otherwise known as the Red Power Movement, is an extremely underrepresented part of American history. Nonetheless, Native American activism and the quest for civil liberties, or self-determination, has been exemplified throughout the course of history, one of the most significant instances being the American Indian occupation of Alcatraz Island. On November 20, 1969, an organization of Native American activists took control of Alcatraz Island, in San Francisco, to protest tribal discrimination and to enforce the concept that unused federal land should be returned to indigenous people.

Despite failing to achieve its initial goals, the occupation broke legal barriers in civil rights, influencing the federal government into recognizing and taking action concerning Indian rights issues. The occupation also broke barriers in activism as it remains a powerful symbol for Native American civil rights advocates today.

### *Background: Native American Rights During the 19th-20th Centuries*

Native Americans have a long and under documented history which extends back far before white settlers “discovered” America. Since then, Americans have been promising

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<sup>1</sup> “News Footage from the Trial of Dennis Banks and Russell Means, Indicted on Charges Related to the Wounded Knee Occupation, January 8, 1974.” News footage from the trial of Dennis Banks and Russell Means, indicted on charges related to the Wounded Knee occupation, January 8, 1974. | DPLA, accessed April 14, 2020, <https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/the-american-indian-movement-1968-1978/sources/1333>)

indigenous people rights, guaranteeing them safety and sovereignty.<sup>2</sup> Most of these promises, however, have been broken and disregarded.

For centuries Native Americans have been forced from their native lands onto barren reservations, such as the Cherokee relocation in 1838, known as the “Trail of Tears,” in which thousands of Native Americans were removed from their homeland for the benefit of white settlers, many perishing of diseases and starvation during the tortuous journey.<sup>3</sup>

In 1851 the Indian Reservation System was enacted, forcing Native American tribes to live on reservations. Conditions on reservations were often terrible, with little space (often resulting in the spread of contagious diseases) and Indians were forced to convert themselves to the ways of American society. They were made to wear different clothes, learn English, sew, and farm rather than hunt, while Missionaries tried to eliminate their beliefs and culture by converting them to Christianity.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the United States government often decreased indigenous land and resources, resulting in frequent starvation among the Native Americans.

Throughout the late 1800s, events such as the murder of Sitting Bull and the Wounded Knee Massacre illustrate the cruelty displayed by white Americans toward Indians. Sitting Bull was a powerful Indian chief who led his people against American invaders that violated a treaty by invading the sacred Black Hills to search for gold. He was later dragged out of his cabin and

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<sup>2</sup> “A Civil Rights History: Native Americans,” A Civil Rights History: Native Americans |, accessed April 14, 2020, <https://knightpoliticalreporting.syr.edu/?civilhistoryessays=a-civil-rights-history-native-american-s>)

<sup>3</sup> History.com Editors, “Trail of Tears,” History.com (A&E Television Networks, November 9, 2009), <https://www.history.com/topics/native-american-history/trail-of-tears>)

<sup>4</sup> History.com Editors, “Indian Reservations,” History.com (A&E Television Networks, December 8, 2017), <https://www.history.com/topics/native-american-history/indian-reservations>)

shot in the head by police officers.<sup>5</sup> The Wounded Knee Massacre involved the murder of 150 to 300 Lakota Indians by the United States Army.<sup>6</sup> Although tragic, both of these events became powerful symbols encouraging Native American activists to combat discrimination and brutality later during the 20th century.

Conditions for Native Americans remained the same throughout the early 1900s, but their lifestyles were soon further disrupted come the middle of the century.

Following World War II, many of the approximately 44,000 Native Americans who had served the United States returned to integrate into mainstream American society.<sup>7</sup> They had displayed great loyalty and courage during the war, but the respect they had gained did not last long following their integration into society. American Indians faced discrimination, were considered to be second class citizens, and in many states were declined the right to vote, even despite being granted citizenship by the Indian Citizenship Act in 1924.

In 1953, under unanimous consent of Congress, the federal government officially instituted the tribal termination and relocation policy with House Concurrent Resolution 108. This termination policy was aimed at the assimilation of Native Americans into mainstream American society, and was supported by both those intent on Westward expansion and Indian supporters.<sup>8</sup> Americans intent on Westward expansion saw the disposal of tribal reservations as a triumph as they would be able to claim the previously Indian land. Indian supporters believed

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<sup>5</sup> "Sitting Bull," Biography.com (A&E Networks Television, October 24, 2019),

<https://www.biography.com/political-figure/sitting-bull>)

<sup>6</sup> Myles Hudson, "Wounded Knee Massacre," Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., January 17, 2020), <https://www.britannica.com/event/Wounded-Knee-Massacre>)

<sup>7</sup> Admin, "WWII and American Indians: After the War," Native American Netroots, August 7, 2010, <http://nativeamericannetroots.net/diary/623>)

<sup>8</sup> Troy R. Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island: Indian Self-Determination and the Rise of Indian Activism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996))

that integrating Indians into mainstream society would help them adapt to and receive all the benefits of the modern world. They thought that eliminating reservations, tribal structures, beliefs, and overall Indian culture would help Indians assimilate into society.<sup>9</sup>

*House Concurrent Resolution 108* also ended the Native American status as government wards, so that American Indians would “assume all the responsibilities of full citizenship,” including being subjected to the same laws and granted the same privileges as all citizens of the United States.<sup>10</sup> Although many had believed this act would benefit Native Americans, the effects were disastrous. Stephen Pevar stated, “Nothing else that Congress can do causes tribal members to lose more of their rights than termination. Termination is the ultimate weapon of Congress and ultimate fear of tribes.”<sup>11</sup> As Pevar writes, the termination policy deprived Native Americans of their culture and land (and further their rights), forcefully integrating them into mainstream society. Tribal beliefs and history were destroyed, and the loss of culture and rights soon resulted in the notion of Red Power.

### *Buildup: Discrimination and the Consequent Rise of the Red Power Movement*

The policy of tribal termination continued throughout the 1960s, resulting in the termination of over 100 tribes.<sup>12</sup> The Native Americans were assimilated into urban areas, where

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<sup>9</sup>Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island*

<sup>10</sup> Digital History, accessed April 15, 2020, [http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp\\_textbook.cfm?smtid=3&psid=726](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtid=3&psid=726)

<sup>11</sup> Qtd. in “Congress Seeks to Abolish Tribes, Relocate American Indians - Timeline - Native Voices,” U.S. National Library of Medicine (National Institutes of Health), accessed April 15, 2020, <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/nativevoices/timeline/488.html>

<sup>12</sup> “Northern Plains: Termination Policy: PWNA Resources - Partnership With Native Americans,” Northern Plains: Termination Policy | PWNA Resources - Partnership With Native Americans, accessed April 15, 2020,

they faced racial profiling, were unrepresented and imprisoned.<sup>13</sup> In response to the discrimination, the concept of Red Power originated. The goals of the Red Power movement were to be recognized by the U.S. government and citizens, and to achieve self-determination, or the right to make their own decisions rather than be ruled by the federal government.

One of the first organizations this movement encompassed was the National Indian Youth Council, founded by American Indian college students and graduates in 1961 to combat discrimination.<sup>14</sup>

In 1963, the United States declared Alcatraz penitentiary, off the coast of San Francisco,<sup>15</sup> to be “surplus federal property.”<sup>16</sup> American Indian activists saw this as an opportunity to remind the government of the broken Sioux Treaty of 1868, which declared that unused federal land be returned to the indigenous people.<sup>17</sup> Thus, on March 9, 1964, activists of the Sioux Indian tribe, led by Richard McKenzie, proceeded to occupy Alcatraz Island for several hours. This would mark the first, and briefest, of the three occupations of Alcatraz. The activists hoped to remind the government of the broken treaties that had been made, and to draw attention to the American Indians’ utter lack of rights and respect.

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[http://www.nativepartnership.org/site/PageServer?pagename=PWNA\\_Native\\_History\\_terminationpolicyNP](http://www.nativepartnership.org/site/PageServer?pagename=PWNA_Native_History_terminationpolicyNP)

<sup>13</sup> “Northern Plains: Termination Policy”

<sup>14</sup> “National Indian Youth Council,” Dictionary of American History (Encyclopedia.com, April 14, 2020),

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/national-indian-youth-council>

<sup>15</sup> See Appendix A

<sup>16</sup> “Alcatraz Proclamation and Letter: Indians of All Tribes (December 1969),” Alcatraz Proclamation and Letter | Indians of all Tribes (December 1969), accessed April 15, 2020, <http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/alcatrazproclamationandletter.html>

<sup>17</sup> Frances Zepher et al., “Native American Activism: 1960s to Present,” Zinn Education Project, accessed April 15, 2020,

<https://www.zinnedproject.org/materials/native-american-activism-1960s-to-present/>

In 1968, AIM, or the American Indian Movement, was founded in Minneapolis. Initially aimed at combating police brutality, poverty and the highest unemployment rates existing in any ethnic group, AIM soon began to grow.<sup>18</sup> AIM's demands encompassed all Indian rights issues, including restoration of previously indigenous lands and the right to self-govern tribes.<sup>19</sup> AIM was one of the chief supporters and organizers of the occupation of Alcatraz Island, which would take place the following year.

### *19 Months at Alcatraz*

On November 9, 1969, a small group of Indian activists, supported by the American Indian Movement, arrived by boat on Alcatraz Island, San Francisco.<sup>20</sup> They claimed the island under the rights promised by the Sioux Treaty of 1868, which stated that vacated federal land be returned to the native people. The activists were immediately removed by the Coast Guard, but a second group returned later, stayed overnight, and left the following day.<sup>21</sup>

Ten days later, on November 20, 1969, 89 American Indians, led by Richard Oakes, departed to reclaim Alcatraz Island as Indian territory for the third time in history. However, all except 14 of the activists were blocked from landing by the U.S. Coast Guard. Upon the

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<sup>18</sup> "American Indian Movement," Extremist Groups: Information for Students (Encyclopedia.com, April 13, 2020), <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/united-states-and-canada/north-american-indigenous-peoples/american-indian-movement>)

<sup>19</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "American Indian Movement," Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., April 26, 2018), <https://www.britannica.com/topic/American-Indian-Movement>)

<sup>20</sup> See Appendix B

<sup>21</sup> 1969 Occupation of Alcatraz and the Alcatraz Proclamation, accessed April 17, 2020, [https://www.nativevillage.org/Inspiration-/Occupation of Alcatraz and the Alcatraz Proclamation alcatraz\\_proclamation.htm](https://www.nativevillage.org/Inspiration-/Occupation%20of%20Alcatraz%20and%20the%20Alcatraz%20Proclamation%20alcatraz_proclamation.htm))

victorious arrival of these 14,<sup>22</sup> the solo guard of Alcatraz Island delivered the message, “Mayday! Mayday! The Indians have landed!”<sup>23</sup>

Upon arriving, the occupiers established a council and roles for the inhabitants, with all the decisions “made by unanimous consent of the people.”<sup>24</sup> Following the arrival of the Native Americans, the federal government ineffectively barricaded the island to stop supplies from arriving at Alcatraz, and demanded that the Native Americans leave the island. However, the Native Americans pleaded to have their requests listened to, and were allowed to negotiate with the United States government. They appealed for the deed of Alcatraz Island, a museum, a cultural center, and an Indian university.<sup>25</sup> Their requests were refused and they were again ordered to vacate the island. A group known as NEGRO, or National Economic Growth and Reconstruction Organization, attempted to “force a resolution between two forces, the Indians and the federal government”<sup>26</sup> but failed to negotiate a deal between the two.<sup>27</sup>

The activists on Alcatraz received much widespread support, with crowds of supporters arriving on Thanksgiving to celebrate the protest. Some government officials, however, claimed that the American Indian Movement was a “radical subversive organization” and maintained there were “demonstrable ties between the American Indian Movement and the various

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<sup>22</sup> See Appendix C

<sup>23</sup> Qtd. in “We Hold the Rock,” National Parks Service (U.S. Department of the Interior), accessed April 15, 2020, <https://www.nps.gov/alca/learn/historyculture/we-hold-the-rock.htm>

<sup>24</sup> “We Hold the Rock,” National Parks Service

<sup>25</sup> “We Hold the Rock,” National Parks Service

<sup>26</sup> Leitura Mesa Resinada, “‘NEGRO’ Group Tries To Broker A Deal For American Indians Occupying Alcatraz,” ‘NEGRO’ Group Tries To Broker A Deal For American Indians Occupying Alcatraz - Bay Area Television Archive, accessed April 15, 2020, <https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/sfbatv/bundles/238559>

<sup>27</sup> “‘NEGRO’ Group Fails to Broker Deal for Alcatraz,” ‘NEGRO’ group fails to broker deal for Alcatraz - Bay Area Television Archive, accessed April 15, 2020, <https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/sfbatv/bundles/238580>

Communist movements that (existed) in (the) country.”<sup>28</sup> Most were likely unwilling to fulfil the Indians’ requests or were afraid of recognizing them as equal to native citizens, and therefore made claims denouncing their actions. Excluding these officials, however, support for the occupation was widely recognized across the country by Indian activists and others alike.

Despite the support, life at Alcatraz was difficult, with frequent shortages of drinking water and lack of electricity. Sometimes the activists only had candles to use as a light source, although several generators were donated by supporters. Still, the Indians often needed to demolish wooden structures as a source of fuel.<sup>29</sup> The Indians stated that the rock, however, was “more livable than most of their reservations,”<sup>30</sup> and were determined to accommodate to their surroundings.<sup>31</sup>

In early 1970, the island’s council began to collapse following leader Richard Oakes’ departure from Alcatraz.<sup>32</sup> Two opposing groups struggled to gain authority over the island. Meanwhile, the government shut off the electrical power supply and, in June of 1970, removed

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<sup>28</sup> United States., “Revolutionary Activities within the United States the American Indian Movement : Report of the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the ...,” HathiTrust, accessed April 25, 2020,

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015077944851&view=1up&seq=10>

<sup>29</sup> “Indians Begin a Second Austere Year on Alcatraz Determined to Make the Federal Island Their Own,” The New York Times (The New York Times, November 22, 1970), <https://www.nytimes.com/1970/11/22/archives/indians-begin-a-second-austere-year-on-alcatraz-determined-to-make.html?searchResultPosition=2>

<sup>30</sup> “U.S. Weighs a Peace Offer by Alcatraz Indians,” The New York Times (The New York Times, March 1, 1970), <https://www.nytimes.com/1970/03/01/archives/us-weighs-a-peace-offer-by-alcatraz-indians.html?searchResultPosition=1>

<sup>31</sup> See Appendix D

<sup>32</sup> Evan Andrews, “Native American Activists Occupy Alcatraz Island, 45 Years Ago,” History.com (A&E Television Networks, November 20, 2014), <https://www.history.com/news/native-american-activists-occupy-alcatraz-island-45-years-ago>

the water barge that provided fresh water.<sup>33</sup> The water shortage then became a major problem for the Indian occupants.

Thomas Hannon, the regional administrator of the General Services Administration, claimed that the barge was “in need of repair” and that the government had no authority to return the water barge to the Indians.<sup>34</sup> Other problems besides water shortage arose, such as fires, drug use, and lack of resources, and the number of activists on the island dropped.

According to the occupants, the government had guaranteed no action would be taken against them while negotiations continued.<sup>35</sup> Despite this promise, in June 1971, government agents arrived at Alcatraz and forcefully removed the few remaining occupants, officially ending the third and 19-month-long occupation of Alcatraz Island. Government officials stated that the removal was due to the need of operating the island lighthouse, and because they were worried because the Indians had stated they would “do something” if their requests were not met.<sup>36</sup>

#### *Short-term Impact: the Federal Government Reacts to Alcatraz*

Preceding the occupation (until 1969), Congress has been recorded to have enacted 5,000 laws related to Indian rights, the vast majority reducing Indian power and transferring it to the

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<sup>33</sup> “We Hold the Rock,” National Parks Service

<sup>34</sup> Evan Andrews, “Native American Activists Occupy Alcatraz Island, 45 Years Ago,” History.com (A&E Television Networks, November 20, 2014), <http://www.history.com/news/native-american-activists-occupy-alcatraz-island-45-years-ago>)

<sup>35</sup> “American Indians Arrested & Taken Off Alcatraz Island,” American Indians Arrested & Taken Off Alcatraz Island - Bay Area Television Archive, accessed April 15, 2020, <https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/sfbatv/bundles/238480>)

<sup>36</sup> “American Indians Arrested,” Bay Area Television Archive

federal government<sup>37</sup>. However, the occupation of Alcatraz Island sparked a wave of Native American activism and federal action, breaking barriers in Indian rights worldwide.

During the occupation, on July 8, 1970, President Nixon made a speech condemning the termination policy and supporting self-determination. He stated that, “The time has come to break decisively with the past and to create the conditions for a new era in which the Indian future is determined by Indian acts and Indian decisions,”<sup>38</sup> and acknowledged the federal government’s failure to protect Native American people.<sup>39</sup> He directed the National Council of Indian Opportunity (NCIO) to form a sub-committee for Indian education, which would develop ways for Indians to become involved in their children’s education, and would provide technical assistance for establishing school boards.

Nixon also recognized the importance and underrepresentation of urban Indians, naming them “this most deprived and least understood segment of the urban population.”<sup>40</sup> He established seven urban Indian centers and brought national attention to the conditions and poverty of urban Indians.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Dean Chavers, “9 Laws and Programs Passed for Indians After the Occupation of Alcatraz,” *Maven* (Indian Country Today, June 9, 2017), [https://indiancountrytoday.com/archive/9-laws-and-programs-passed-for-indians-after-the-occupation-of-alcatraz-bf04irLCzkqrwO\\_rBtoFAA](https://indiancountrytoday.com/archive/9-laws-and-programs-passed-for-indians-after-the-occupation-of-alcatraz-bf04irLCzkqrwO_rBtoFAA)

<sup>38</sup> Qtd. in “Termination Era Ends; Self-Determination Proposed - Timeline - Native Voices,” U.S. National Library of Medicine (National Institutes of Health), accessed April 16, 2020, <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/nativevoices/timeline/522.html>

<sup>39</sup> “Excerpt from an Oral History Interview with Ramona Bennett, Activist and Former Chairwoman of the Puyallup Tribe.,” Excerpt from an oral history interview with Ramona Bennett, activist and former chairwoman of the Puyallup Tribe. | DPLA, accessed April 17, 2020, <https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/the-american-indian-movement-1968-1978/sources/1334>

<sup>40</sup> Qtd. in National Council, “NCIO News. V.1 No.1-6 1970-1971.,” HathiTrust, accessed April 16, 2020, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015074181911&view=1up&seq=2>

<sup>41</sup> National Council, “NCIO News”

Following this speech, Nixon returned millions of acres of previously indigenous lands to tribes, including 48,000 acres to the Taos Indians, 40 million acres to the Navajo Indians, and 21,000 acres to the Yakima.<sup>42</sup> In 1970, Congress passed 22 legislative proposals on behalf of American Indians, with six being ratified as laws. Nixon additionally increased the Bureau of Indian Affairs budget by 224 percent, doubled funds for Indian health care, established the Office of Indian Water Rights and the Navajo Community College.<sup>43</sup> Overall federal spending on Indian behalf increased from 598 to 626 million dollars between 1970 and 1971.<sup>44</sup>

The occupation of Alcatraz also inspired immediate Indian activism, including the occupation of Mount Rushmore in 1970 to reclaim land promised by the 1868 treaty to the Sioux Tribe.<sup>45</sup> The occupation is further thought to have inspired the Trail of Broken Treaties Caravan in 1972 and the occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973.

### *Long-term Impact*

The occupation of Alcatraz preceded the institution of numerous laws and programs supporting American Indian rights, including the founding of the Administration for Native Americans (ANA) in 1974, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Act of 1975, and the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Troy R. Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island: Indian Self-Determination and the Rise of Indian Activism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), p.218)

<sup>43</sup> Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island*, p.218

<sup>44</sup> Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island*, p.218

<sup>45</sup> Frances Zepher et al., "Native American Activism: 1960s to Present," Zinn Education Project, accessed April 15, 2020,

<https://www.zinnedproject.org/materials/native-american-activism-1960s-to-present/>)

<sup>46</sup> Chavers, "9 Laws and Programs"

Not only did the occupation break legal barriers throughout the 1970s, it broke barriers of activism and inspiration nationally. The occupation was one of the first times multiple tribes gathered to strike for a common cause, inspiring thousands of American Indians to seek equal rights, with a legacy that remains visible today. In fact, the occupation has been deemed, “The cradle of the modern Native American civil rights movement.”<sup>47</sup>

The wave of American Indian activism began shortly after the occupation, and remains prominent in modern day America. For example, the 2011 Keystone XL Pipeline protest involved indigenous people pressing President Obama to reject the pipeline project which would damage tribal lands and water sources. The protest was successful, as Obama rejected the proposal in November of 2015.<sup>48</sup>

A second instance of modern Native American activism is the Havasupai Lawsuit. On March 7, 2013, the Havasupai Tribe filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Forest Service, which had consented to operate a uranium mine near the Grand Canyon without tribal permission.<sup>49</sup> Although this lawsuit failed to halt uranium mining, it exemplifies the activism inspired by the occupation which continues today.

Even more recently, in 2016, the Standing Rock Sioux founded a Spirit Camp to protest the proposed Dakota Access Pipeline, which would pose a threat to people’s health and the environment.<sup>50</sup> This protest remains active currently.

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<sup>47</sup> 1969 Occupation of Alcatraz and the Alcatraz Proclamation, accessed April 16, 2020, [https://www.nativevillage.org/Inspiration-/Occupation of Alcatraz and the Alcatraz Proclamation alcatraz\\_proclamation.htm](https://www.nativevillage.org/Inspiration-/Occupation of Alcatraz and the Alcatraz Proclamation alcatraz_proclamation.htm))

<sup>48</sup> Zephier et al., “Native American Activism”

<sup>49</sup> Zephier et al., “Native American Activism”

<sup>50</sup> Zephier et al., “Native American Activism”

These cases of American Indian activism and the acts instituted on behalf of Indians illustrates the legacy left in the wake of the occupation of Alcatraz Island. The occupation broke legal barriers in Native American rights and has since broken barriers in activism, being one of the first and most significant instances of Indian activism in history. The occupation remains a powerful symbol of the search for equal rights and civil liberties today.

## Appendix A



This image depicts Alcatraz Island, taken in 1969 at the time of the occupation. The island operated between 1934 and 1963, serving as a federal penitentiary for prisoners who needed high security. Some of the inmates included Al Capone, Robert Stroud, and George Kelly, some of the most notorious criminals of all time.

Image credit: *1969 Occupation of Alcatraz and the Alcatraz Proclamation*,

[www.nativevillage.org/Inspiration-/Occupation of Alcatraz and the Alcatraz Proclamation  
alcatraz\\_proclamation.htm](http://www.nativevillage.org/Inspiration-/Occupation%20of%20Alcatraz%20and%20the%20Alcatraz%20Proclamation%20alcatraz_proclamation.htm).

## Appendix B



This image shows a group of the Native Americans who occupied Alcatraz Island. In front center is Richard Oakes, the leader of the occupation, and the rest of the Native American activists are gathered around him. This image demonstrates the determination and courage of the American Indian people, as there are many gathered here to demand civil rights even though doing so would mean encountering difficult conditions and perhaps retaliation from the government.

Image Credit: Blansett, Kent. "The Occupation of Alcatraz Was a Victory for Indigenous People." *USA | Al Jazeera*, Al Jazeera, 20 Nov. 2019, [www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/occupation-alcatraz-victory-indigenous-people-191120091424029.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/occupation-alcatraz-victory-indigenous-people-191120091424029.html).

## Appendix C

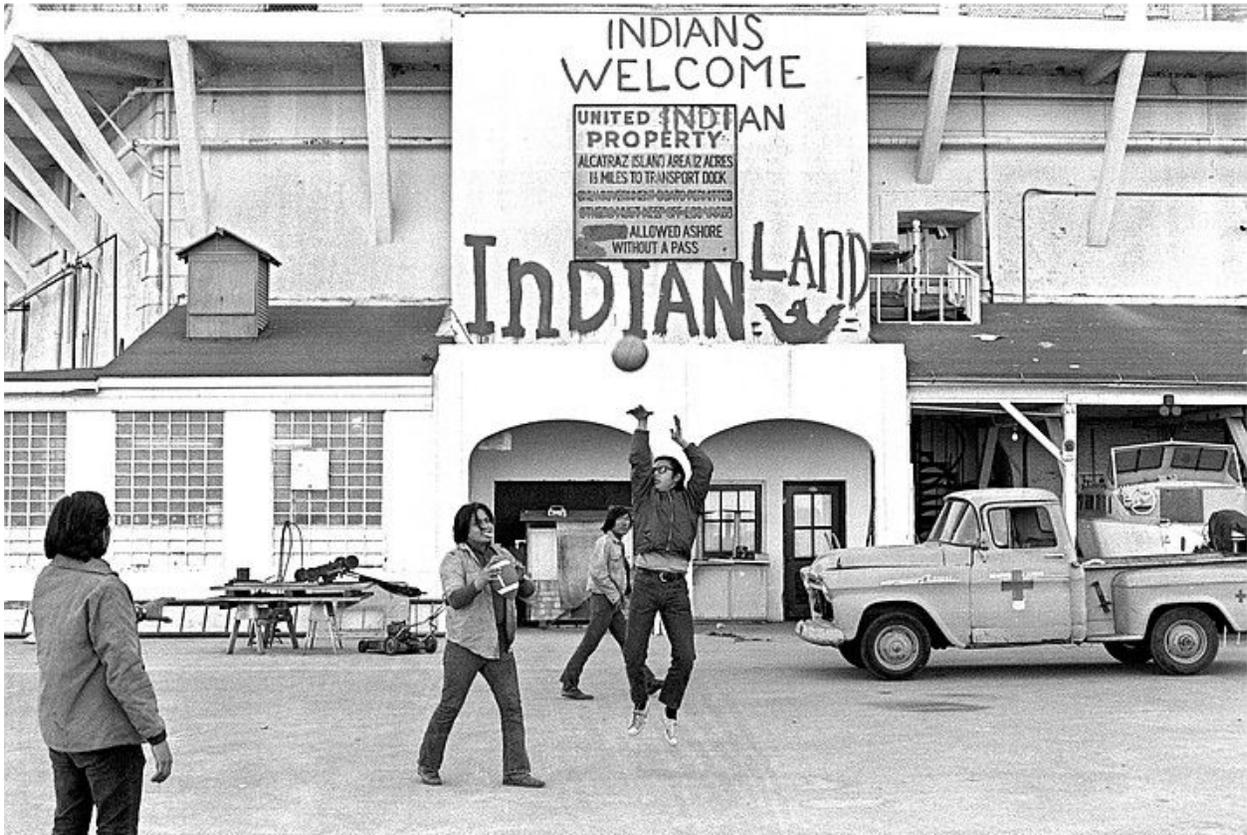
© Ilka Hartmann 2007



This photograph depicts one of the leaders of the occupation along with another Indian activist. They have their fists in the air, probably to symbolize the ongoing fight for Native American rights and their triumph after gaining control of the island.

Image credit: "We Hold the Rock." *National Parks Service*, U.S. Department of the Interior, [www.nps.gov/alca/learn/historyculture/we-hold-the-rock.htm](http://www.nps.gov/alca/learn/historyculture/we-hold-the-rock.htm).

## Appendix D



This photograph shows a part of Alcatraz Island while inhabited by Indians. The signs have been changed to read Indian Property as a symbol of their protest. This image shows that, despite the difficult conditions, the Native Americans were determined to persevere and managed to accommodate to their surroundings, as shown by the activists playing games in the center.

Image credit: Treuer, David. "How a Native American Resistance Held Alcatraz for 18 Months."

*The New York Times*, The New York Times, 20 Nov. 2019,

[www.nytimes.com/2019/11/20/us/native-american-occupation-alcatraz.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/20/us/native-american-occupation-alcatraz.html).

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<https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/sfbatv/bundles/238580>.

This news video relates the attempt and subsequent failure of the organization NEGRO from reaching a compromise between the occupying Indians and the federal government.

“Alcatraz Proclamation and Letter: Indians of All Tribes (December 1969).” Alcatraz

Proclamation and Letter | Indians of all Tribes (December 1969). Accessed April 2, 2020.

<http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/alcatrazproclamationandletter.html>.

This source includes the Alcatraz Proclamation and Letter. The Alcatraz Proclamation was a document declaring the occupation of the island and included a list of the characteristics of the island and the reasons for the occupation. The letter was written to other tribes encouraging other activists to join the protest on Alcatraz.

“American Indians Arrested & Taken Off Alcatraz Island.” American Indians Arrested & Taken Off Alcatraz Island - Bay Area Television Archive. Accessed April 2, 2020.

<https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/sfbatv/bundles/238480>.

This film footage provided information about the Indian removal from Alcatraz Island, and

interviewed several of the occupation leaders as well as government officials. This source was mainly interesting because it showed different perspectives about the removal.

Deloria, Vine. "This Country Was a Lot Better Off When the Indians Were Running It." The New York Times. The New York Times, March 8, 1970.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1970/03/08/archives/this-country-was-a-lot-better-off-when-the-indians-were-running-it.html?searchResultPosition=9>.

These newspaper articles from the New York Times contained a brief memoir of an Indian who grew up on the Pine Ridge Reservation, who experienced firsthand many of the conditions and events described in my paper.

Digital History. Accessed April 2, 2020.

[http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp\\_textbook.cfm?smtid=3&psid=726](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtid=3&psid=726).

This website contained a paragraph from House Concurrent Resolution 108, or the Indian termination policy. I used this excerpt from the resolution when describing the policy and how it affected American Indians.

“Excerpt from an Oral History Interview with Ramona Bennett, Activist and Former Chairwoman of the Puyallup Tribe.” Excerpt from an oral history interview with Ramona Bennett, activist and former chairwoman of the Puyallup Tribe. | DPLA. Accessed April 2, 2020.

<https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/the-american-indian-movement-1968-1978/sources/133>

4.

This is an interview with an Indian activist who was the chairman of the Puyallup tribe. She describes the speech made by President Nixon after the occupation, and how white settlers had been invading the tribal land and stealing their resources.

“Indians Begin a Second Austere Year on Alcatraz Determined to Make the Federal Island Their Own.” The New York Times. The New York Times, November 22, 1970.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1970/11/22/archives/indians-begin-a-second-austere-year-on-alcatraz-determined-to-make.html?searchResultPosition=2>.

This article from the New York Times describes the requests of the Indian occupants, such as a cultural center and museum. The article also describes the difficulties the activists faced when inhabiting the island and the ways in which they dealt with these hardships.

James, and Alex Cherian - Film Archivist. ““Keep off Indian Property.”” "Keep off Indian property" - Bay Area Television Archive. Accessed April 2, 2020.

<https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/sfbatv/bundles/187778>.

This footage video shows Alcatraz Island from different views. It shows the buildings on the island and the Indian Territory signs that were put up during the occupation. This video helped me to understand the conditions on the island and made me realize how persevering they were to

spend 19 months there.

“Letters to the Editor of The Times.” The New York Times. The New York Times, January 3, 1970.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1970/01/03/archives/letters-to-the-editor-of-the-times.html?searchResultPosition=7>.

This series of letters to the editor of the New York Times includes one brief letter about the Indian attitude toward land rights and their propriety to occupy the island. The letter describes how Native Americans believe that land is for the use of all, if it is unused and uncultivated. This insight on their beliefs helped support the Indians’ motives for occupying Alcatraz.

National Council. “NCIO News. V.1 No.1-6 1970-1971.” HathiTrust. Accessed April 2, 2020.

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015074181911&view=1up&seq=1>.

This news excerpt includes 40 pages solely describing then current Indian affairs. For example, it contains information about activist movements, legislative proposals, self-determination, and the lives of urban Indians.

“News Footage from the Trial of Dennis Banks and Russell Means, Indicted on Charges Related to the Wounded Knee Occupation, January 8, 1974.” News footage from the trial of Dennis Banks and Russell Means, indicted on charges related to the Wounded Knee occupation, January 8, 1974. | DPLA. Accessed April 2, 2020.

<https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/the-american-indian-movement-1968-1978/sources/133>

3.

This news footage is from the trial of Russell Means and Dennis Banks, two Indian activists who were indicted and brought to court, but who were cleared due to later discoveries. Although I did not use information about the trial in my paper, this interview footage included quotes such as “It is a lengthy story to get across what the Indian is all about in America,” and included Indian perspectives.

Resinada, Leitura Mesa. “'NEGRO' Group Tries To Broker A Deal For American Indians

Occupying Alcatraz.” 'NEGRO' Group Tries To Broker A Deal For American Indians

Occupying Alcatraz - Bay Area Television Archive. Accessed April 2, 2020.

<https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/sfbatv/bundles/238559>.

This footage video is about the group NEGRO, which attempted to reach a compromise between the Native Americans and the federal government.

Special, Earl Caldwell. “ALCATRAZ INDIANS SHORT OF WATER.” The New York Times.

The New York Times, August 16, 1970.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1970/08/16/archives/alcatraz-indians-short-of-water-declare-the-island-off-limits-to.html?searchResultPosition=3>.

This news article described the water shortage on Alcatraz Island and how the government

behaved toward the occupants.

States., United. “Revolutionary Activities within the United States the American Indian Movement : Report of the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the ...”

HathiTrust. Accessed April 2, 2020.

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015077944851&view=1up&seq=10>.

This article from a report to the Senate was useful as it related different opinions about the American Indian Movement. Specifically, it described AIM as possibly having Communist connections and accused them of violent actions, which was useful as it showed other people’s perspectives.

“U.S. Weighs a Peace Offer by Alcatraz Indians.” The New York Times. The New York Times, March 1, 1970.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1970/03/01/archives/us-weighs-a-peace-offer-by-alcatraz-indians.html?searchResultPosition=1>.

This newspaper article from the New York Times included information about the Native Americans’ requests from the federal government. This article also included a quote about life on reservations which I used in my paper.

## **Secondary Sources**

“1953 To 1969: Policy of Termination and Relocation.” Geriatrics, March 5, 2014.

[https://geriatrics.stanford.edu/ethnomed/american\\_indian/learning\\_activities/learning\\_1/termination\\_relocation.html](https://geriatrics.stanford.edu/ethnomed/american_indian/learning_activities/learning_1/termination_relocation.html).

This website contained information about the Indian termination and relocation policy, and included specific facts about how it affected different tribes. It also included a timeline about events concerning American Indians in history.

1969 Occupation of Alcatraz and the Alcatraz Proclamation. Accessed April 5, 2020.

[https://www.nativevillage.org/Inspiration-/Occupation of Alcatraz and the Alcatraz Proclamation alcatraz\\_proclamation.htm](https://www.nativevillage.org/Inspiration-/Occupation of Alcatraz and the Alcatraz Proclamation alcatraz_proclamation.htm).

This website summed up the three occupations of Alcatraz. I used it to describe the brief occupations in 1964 and in 1969 in my buildup and heart of the story.

“A Civil Rights History: Native Americans.” A Civil Rights History: Native Americans |.

Accessed April 5, 2020.

<https://knightpoliticalreporting.syr.edu/?civilhistoryessays=a-civil-rights-history-native-americans>.

This website contained information about Native American history, dating back to the 1400s. It included details about treaties, the Trail of Tears, and Indian movements throughout the 1960s.

Admin. “WWII and American Indians: After the War.” Native American Netroots, August 7,

2010. <http://nativeamericannetroots.net/diary/623>.

This website was about the involvement of Native Americans in World War 2. It described their loyalty and servitude under the United States army and how this affected their reputation and the discrimination they faced.

“American Indian Movement.” Extremist Groups: Information for Students. Encyclopedia.com, April 2, 2020.

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/united-states-and-canada/north-american-indigeno-us-peoples/american-indian-movement>.

This is a detailed description of the American Indian Movement, including the history of its formation and of its key events. It also included controversial perspectives about AIM, such as a court case accusing AIM members of a murder. It remains unclear whether the members were in fact guilty or whether they had been framed by the government.

Andrews, Evan. “Native American Activists Occupy Alcatraz Island, 45 Years Ago.”

History.com. A&E Television Networks, November 20, 2014.

<http://www.history.com/news/native-american-activists-occupy-alcatraz-island-45-years-ago>.

This was one of the first sources I used when conducting my research, and it contains a detailed description of the occupation of Alcatraz Island. It describes the build-up to the occupation, the

occupation itself, and mentions the resulting impacts in Indian rights.

Chavers, Dean. "9 Laws and Programs Passed for Indians After the Occupation of Alcatraz."

Maven. Indian Country Today, June 9, 2017.

[https://indiancountrytoday.com/archive/9-laws-and-programs-passed-for-indians-after-the-occupation-of-alcatraz-bf04irLCzkqrwO\\_rBtoFAA](https://indiancountrytoday.com/archive/9-laws-and-programs-passed-for-indians-after-the-occupation-of-alcatraz-bf04irLCzkqrwO_rBtoFAA).

This website contained a long list of events that occurred due to the occupation of Alcatraz, and it was very useful to me in writing the short term impact of my paper.

"Congress Seeks to Abolish Tribes, Relocate American Indians - Timeline - Native Voices."

U.S. National Library of Medicine. National Institutes of Health. Accessed April 5, 2020.

<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/nativevoices/timeline/488.html>.

This passage contains a summary of the Indian tribal termination policy and a quote about the effects this policy had on Indians.

History.com Editors. "Trail of Tears." History.com. A&E Television Networks, November 9, 2009. <https://www.history.com/topics/native-american-history/trail-of-tears>.

This history.com article describes the Trail of Tears, in which thousands of Indians were forced from their homes by the federal government. It also includes information about what had led up to the removal; in other words, the "Indian Problem," so-called by white settlers hungry for

Indian land.

History.com Editors. "Indian Reservations." History.com. A&E Television Networks, December 8, 2017. <https://www.history.com/topics/native-american-history/indian-reservations>.

This website contained information about events such as the Indian Removal Act, the Trail of Tears, the Treaty of Hopewell, the Indian Appropriations Act, and the Dawes Act. However, I mainly used this source to relate conditions on Indian reservations, such as the close quarters and lack of proper food or resources.

History.com Editors. "Native American History Timeline." History.com. A&E Television Networks, November 27, 2018.

<http://www.history.com/topics/native-american-history/native-american-timeline>.

This website has a timeline of several of the most pivotal events in American Indian history, from the landing of Columbus to the Indian Civil Rights Act. I used it when mentioning the murder of Sitting Bull and the Wounded Knee Massacre in the background of my paper.

Hudson, Myles. "Wounded Knee Massacre." Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., January 17, 2020.

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Wounded-Knee-Massacre>.

This website is about the Wounded Knee Massacre, in which hundreds of mainly defenseless

Miniconjou Indians were killed by the 7th Cavalry in 1890. I used this website as an example of discrimination and extreme cruelty displayed toward Native Americans throughout the 1800s.

Johnson, Troy R. *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island: Indian Self-Determination and the Rise of Indian Activism*. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1996.

This is a book which describes, in precise detail, practically every part of the occupation. It also describes events and conditions which preceded the occupation and the impacts which the occupation had on Native American rights.

“National Indian Youth Council.” Dictionary of American History. Encyclopedia.com, April 3, 2020.

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/national-indian-youth-council>.

This website summarizes the National Indian Youth Council. It describes, in particular, how it was founded as one of the civil rights movements of the 1900s, and the beliefs which it spreads concerning Indian rights and tribal sovereignty.

“Northern Plains: Termination Policy: PWNA Resources - Partnership With Native Americans.”

Northern Plains: Termination Policy | PWNA Resources - Partnership With Native Americans. Accessed April 5, 2020.

[http://www.nativepartnership.org/site/PageServer?pagename=PWNA\\_Native\\_History\\_terminationpolicyNP](http://www.nativepartnership.org/site/PageServer?pagename=PWNA_Native_History_terminationpolicyNP).

This page relates the horrific conditions in Native American reservations due to mismanagement by the government and BIA. It also describes the termination policy and information about how this affected the tribes.

“Sitting Bull.” Biography.com. A&E Networks Television, October 24, 2019.

<https://www.biography.com/political-figure/sitting-bull>.

This website is a short biography of Sitting Bull, the famous Native American chief. It relates his leadership as chief of the Lakota Indians and how he defended them against the white settlers in 1868. I mainly used this website when writing about Sitting Bull’s death, when he was shot by police officers who feared his power.

“Termination Era Ends; Self-Determination Proposed - Timeline - Native Voices.” U.S. National Library of Medicine. National Institutes of Health. Accessed April 5, 2020.

<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/nativevoices/timeline/522.html>.

This is a brief paragraph summarizing the end of the Indian termination policy, which was brought about by Nixon’s speech to Congress in July of 1970. It included a quote by president Nixon and how his speech affected the federal government’s relationship with Native Americans.

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "American Indian Movement." Encyclopædia

Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., April 26, 2018.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/American-Indian-Movement>.

This Encyclopaedia Britannica article contained a summary of the American Indian Movement. I used it mainly when describing how the movement was founded and what its original purposes were.

"We Hold the Rock." National Parks Service. U.S. Department of the Interior. Accessed April 5,

2020. <https://www.nps.gov/alca/learn/historyculture/we-hold-the-rock.htm>.

This is a very detailed article, describing, in depth, the occupation of Alcatraz from the start to the finish, when the government forced the protesters off. For example, this site described the Native Americans' requests and their relationship with the federal government.

Zephier, Frances, Rubi, Bettye Anderson, and Ingrid Martine. "Native American Activism:

1960s to Present." Zinn Education Project. Accessed April 5, 2020.

<https://www.zinnedproject.org/materials/native-american-activism-1960s-to-present/>.

This website included information about numerous different American Indian protests, from the occupation of Alcatraz to modern-day protests, such as the Sioux Pipeline protest in 2016. I used this source for both short-term and long-term impact to explain the protests which the Alcatraz

occupation inspired.