

# Alcatraz: Holding the Rock to Reshape Indian Identity

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## Disclaimer

After much thought and deliberation I have decided to use the word Indian throughout the paper to describe the occupiers. Whatever terminology I used, whether it be Native American, Indigenous people, or any other politically correct variation, was a loaded expression that had preconceived connotations with it. I stuck with Indian because that was the language the occupiers used to describe themselves. They took pride in the term, had a sense of pride in it, and used it as a call to power. It is not used with any ill intent, malice, or meant to be taken offensively or viewed as ignorant.

I also use both takeover and occupation to describe the actions taken on the Island by the Indians. I begin using takeover because it is a temporary action taken by the Indians that lasts no more than a day. In the case of the Alcatraz the 1964 takeover, the Indians stayed long enough to read their statement, celebrate, than leave. Similar to what happened with the November 9<sup>th</sup> takeover. What makes the November 20<sup>th</sup> an occupation is the fact that it persisted more than a day and it involved the Indians occupying the space. While they were there it became something that it wasn't before. I just want to make it clear how I define these terms and that I chose to separate them.

“The “Stoic, Silent, Redman” of the past who turned the other cheek to white injustice is dead.”<sup>1</sup> This was the sentiment of Indians for much of the twentieth century but it had reached a boiling point by 1969. Many Indians felt it was time for America to view Indians not as timeless noble savages, but as contemporary people with the problems of other minorities but magnified tenfold. This identity of Indians had persisted from the age of the Wild West, and was used to give Indians an identity into the twentieth century. In order to smash this image and bring to light the struggles of Indians across the nation, Indians in the Bay Area took a stand. On November 22, 1969 the Indians of All Tribes occupied Alcatraz Island for nineteen months and nine days to change their standing in society. The takeover and occupation of Alcatraz Island has popularly been referred to as the start of the red power movement, but to the occupiers it was the start to taking back their identity. They made the island a symbol of modern Indian identity. The

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<sup>1</sup> Brightman, “The New Indians” 1

occupation was the kick start to reignite a movement that had been around for centuries. It began a new wave of Indian activism that for the first time was aggressive yet non-violent, national, and was taken seriously. A movement that's purpose was to bring Indian issues and contemporary Indian identity to the forefront of the national stage and demand changes for the betterment of Indians across the nation.

The federal policies of Termination and Relocation were the government's effort to get out of the Indian business in the 1950s and 1960s. Termination was enforced with House Concurrent Resolution 108 that "ended the special federal-tribal relationship almost completely and transferred tribes and people from the federal government to individual states."<sup>2</sup> It was a policy that gave the federal government more access to land, but left them to decide what to do with all of the Indians who had previously lived on reservations. It was decided to move the Indians into the emerging cities and suburbs, a decision that upset large portions of Indians on reservations.

It set the stage for animosity that had been long built up and now began to boil over. The Bureau of Indian Affairs sold the idea that relocating into the city was beneficial for all parties involved. Indians escape from the drunken poverty on the reservations while the BIA was more than happy to assimilate Indians into mainstream society and have one less problem to deal with. Many Indians took advantage of relocation to have a better life economically and away from all the social and economic strife on the reservations. "As a result of the government relocation program, the Indian population of the San Francisco Bay Area grew between 15,000 and 20,000 in 1964."<sup>3</sup> Some Indians had been in the Bay Area who "had served in the military during World

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<sup>2</sup> Johnson "The Occupation of Alcatraz Island" 7

<sup>3</sup> Johnson "The Occupation of Alcatraz Island" 9

War II.”, and chose to stay, “once exposed to the comforts of modern life, veterans would want to establish a similar lifestyle for themselves and their families.”<sup>4</sup> Some of these families willingly assimilated into mainstream American society, pushing aside their Indian past in order to better the life of their children. While others clung to and embraced their Indianness, they banded together to make sure that they were not melted into something they fundamentally believed they were not.

In the early 1960s, Bay Area Indians began to form cultural groups in order to maintain their heritage and sense of camaraderie that they had on reservations. Groups like the Intertribal Friendship House, the Four Winds Club, the San Jose Dance Club, the American Indian Baptist Church, and many others. Most of the clubs had large youth followings that became hangouts for college-aged kids. One of the main focal points was the San Francisco American Indian Center. It was one of the most popular meeting centers in the city, but was burned on October 28, 1969 from mysterious causes. The center, “which served approximately 30,000 Indian people in the Bay Area.”<sup>5</sup> This left Indians in the area feeling lost without a meeting place and needed to be reassured of their identity.

Traveling Indian colleges and the White Roots of Peace went across country to spread the message of Indian pride and keeping cultures alive. When the White Roots of Peace came to the Bay area in 1969 and the ideas it brought with affected the many of the future occupiers. One occupier, Ross Harden, said that it “set our mood before Alcatraz when they came to visit us in San Francisco. They came out very heavily on the cultural thing. We were inspired by them.”<sup>6</sup> The group emphasized Indian and specifically Iroquois pride, which had a monumental affect on

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<sup>4</sup> Johnson “The Occupation of Alcatraz Island” 9

<sup>5</sup> Johnson “The Occupation of Alcatraz Island” 53

<sup>6</sup> Johnson “The Occupation of Alcatraz Island” 41

Richard Oakes who was a Mohawk, and who would later become fundamental with the occupation. One occupier Ross Harden said that the group “set our mood before Alcatraz when they came to visit us in San Francisco. They came out very heavily on the cultural thing. We were inspired by them.”<sup>7</sup> The White Roots of Peace helped Indians in the Bay Area get fired up about taking pride in their heritage, something which was just beginning to take place at universities.

It was at Indian centers and in classrooms that students began talking about their situations. That there were no classes devoted to their history or the studies on Indians as a whole. Considering the few number of Indians at universities, it is no wonder they stuck together. They attended in small numbers and these new Indian students looked around and saw that not only were they a minority, but they were the lowest on the rung. This could be seen at the University of California at Berkeley where in the fall of 1968, “The Asian students comprise the largest ethnic group, approximately 2000. The Blacks make up about 1200 enrolled students. The Chicano enrollment has barely reached 200 and Native Americans, ONLY 15.”<sup>8</sup> This was due to the fact that education for Indians on reservations was and is beyond abysmal, with dropout rates higher than in any other minority group. So the opportunity to get a higher education was not feasible for many.

Indian students had to fight with the BIA and local universities to get the education they were entitled to. Students like Richard Oakes, Lanada Means Boyer, and Adam Fortunate Eagle, who attended local Bay universities, realized that in order to change the education they were to receive, they needed to change the way that they viewed themselves and how the masses viewed

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<sup>7</sup> Johnson “The Occupation of Alcatraz Island.” 41

<sup>8</sup> Brightman “Native Students Fight Racism at UC Berkeley” 11

them as well. They had seen the success of the many movements of the time and according to an authority on the history of the occupation, Troy Johnson, decided that, “Instead of waiting and relying on help from others, the oppressed rose up to fight their own battles.”<sup>9</sup> Influences of the many Indian clubs, the traveling Indian organizations, and the college atmosphere all worked together to push the young Indians one step closer to taking Alcatraz.

On, “March 21, 1963, the U.S. penitentiary on Alcatraz Island ceased operations and was declared surplus property.”<sup>10</sup>, and became fair game in the eyes of Indians. They began to look at the island as a potential symbol for Indian identity. On March 9, 1964 Indians looked at the surplus land and looked back at an 1868 Sioux treaty and decided to they had the right to claim the land based on the treaty. Indians went to the Island, read their own declaration referring to the Sioux treaty, did a victory dance, and then went home.

The attempt failed but it became a reminder of what could be if executed properly. While the Indians were looking at Alcatraz as a potential place for Indians, the public debates over what to do with the land were far from concrete. Public committees and forums were formed to see what should be done with the land. In 1965 thirty-three proposals were presented to the commission. One of the plans almost came into fruition, one by Texan Lamar Hunt. He “offered to develop part of the island a park commemorating the U.S. space program.”<sup>11</sup> Hunts plans were ultimately protested by the community and the Surplus Property Commission ultimately rejected all of the proposals, including one for an Indian center. Plans for the Island were put on hold until December 1, 1969, “to allow the Department of Interior...to explore the potential of a

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<sup>9</sup> Johnson “The Occupation of Alcatraz Island” 31

<sup>10</sup> Johnson “The Occupation of Alcatraz Island” 4

<sup>11</sup> Johnson “The Occupation of Alcatraz Island” 22

federal recreation use of Alcatraz.”<sup>12</sup> It would not be the first time Indians would be slighted from getting the land that they wanted.

The growing Indian population in the Bay Area wanted to have a space for them that could be solely theirs, and they did in the San Francisco Indian Center. But, “Since the San Francisco Indian Center burned down, there is no place for Indians to assemble and carry on tribal life here in the white man’s city.”<sup>13</sup> The students saw the loss of the Indian center, looked at the surplus land, and used their new found education to come up with the plan to takeover Alcatraz. It is unclear exactly who brought up the previous takeovers to the students, whether it be Belva Cottier, Professor Jack Forbes, or Adam Nordwall (also known as Fortunate Eagle), but whoever it was is unimportant. What is important is that the future occupiers were reminded of the attempted 1964 takeover, the very brief November 9<sup>th</sup> takeover before the main occupation on November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1969.

The November 20<sup>th</sup> occupation would be different from the November 9<sup>th</sup> takeover for many reasons. One of them was that, “The movement was to promote no one individual or one tribe, as the 1964 occupation had done, but rather Native Americans from all tribes across the United States; thus the name *Indians of All Tribes* was chosen to represent the occupation force.”<sup>14</sup> The name Indians of All Tribes held an identity all its own. It gave a sense of unity. They considered it to be, “This mutually unexpressed sentiment is meaningful in that is stepping quickly toward the unification of thought, word, and deed, of all Indians.”<sup>15</sup> It was chosen to show the world a new image, “To the world it represents an example of diverse groups at

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<sup>12</sup> Johnson “The Occupation of Alcatraz Island” 23

<sup>13</sup> Indians of All Tribes “Proclamation: To the Great White Father and All His People” 3

<sup>14</sup> Johnson “The Occupation of Alcatraz Island” 53

<sup>15</sup> Indians of All Tribes “Alcatraz: The Idea”

tempting unity in a meaningful way and well worth watching.”<sup>16</sup> Instead of being fetishized , they fetishized themselves. In a way they made themselves a commodity to sell their cause and stories to the media in order further their cause.

The November 9<sup>th</sup> takeover was the foundation for the occupation. It still unorganized and the Indians only landed on the Island long enough to read their proclamation (Figure 1), and was quickly squashed when they realized they were ill prepared. It did bring media attention to the cause. Richard Oakes said, “We were supposed to get dressed up in all of their “television costumes” and just make a pass around the island, to *symbolically claim* Alcatraz.”<sup>17</sup> By the end of November the time to physically claim Alcatraz was fast approaching, but the takeover needed to be carried out differently in order to make is more successful.

The key for making this takeover successful was to bring the media in on it. The key to doing this was bringing in the San Francisco Chronicle reporter Tim Findley. He had many Indian friends, and knew about the impending takeover. And it was “at a Halloween party he hosted and then shared the tip with other reporters.”<sup>18</sup> The stage was set. The Indians created a platform for when they would claim the island “by right of discovery” in front of national media.

While still in the planning stages, the future occupiers knew that they needed to speak to a large audience for support. They focused on the language of unity and brotherhood from World War II that helped inspire the Civil Rights movement. “some Indian groups adopted the vocabulary and techniques of African Americans in order to get Indian issues covered by the media and thus before the American public.”<sup>19</sup> The emphasis on working together as a

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<sup>16</sup> Indians of All Tribes “Alcatraz: The Idea”

<sup>17</sup> Johnson “The Occupation of Alcatraz Island” 58

<sup>18</sup> Smith “Hippies, Indians, and the Fight for Red Power” 86-87

<sup>19</sup> Johnson “The Occupation of Alcatraz Island” 31



community to lift themselves up from their current status was seen throughout their writings and would be seen throughout the occupation. One of the most influential calls for Indian brotherhood was the University of California at Berkeley and its publication of *Warpath: United Native Americans Liberation News Service*. *Warpath*, a self-proclaimed International Indian Newspaper that covered Indian news not only in the San Francisco area but across the continent. The pages screamed for a new Indian identity that could be reached through the language of brotherhood. Lehman Brightman, co-founder of UNA (United Native Americans), was a frequent contributor to *Warpath* and harkened to this language. He said that, "In order to change, we must gain some control over our own destiny and liberate ourselves from this pathetic state of poverty. For this reason we are advocating Indian independence from the Bureau of Indian Affairs and all other organizations that re run b y whites for Indians."<sup>20</sup> This language of pan-Indian unity was not anything new, but was reinterpreted by the young students reading this from a new perspective. The future occupiers took this idea to heart and had it in mind when they sailed onto Alcatraz on November 22, 1969.

The takeover itself can be viewed in two parts: from November 22, 1969- early 1970 time of optimism and mid 1970- June 11, 1971 a time of harsh reality. Both distinct times where the identity of the occupation and the Indians themselves changed based on internal and external forces.

Once they landed on the island, it was celebrated like a home-coming. The celebration was heard throughout the country, even by those who did not necessarily endorse the action. Because it brought Indian issues to the nation's attention, and one of the most important issues

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<sup>20</sup> Brightman "The New Indians" 9

was Indian identity and its struggle to modernize itself in the American consciousness. During this time Indians had their identity and life under the control of the BIA who controlled every aspect of their lives on and off reservations. For once, Indians began to express their identity by marking the island as theirs. They hung the Great Proclamation for all to see, wrote messages of “Indian Power” and “This is Indian Land.” (Figure 2). The Indians soon formed the *Indians of All Tribes: Alcatraz Newsletter*. The newsletter was written by Indians on the island, on the mainland, and a few nationwide contributors. It did not just focus on Alcatraz issue, but focus on the larger Indian struggle nationwide. It used the publicity of Alcatraz as a broader platform and to hopefully start movements in other communities. In its first issue the Indians professed their goals and their purpose for doing the occupation:

“We are here to stay, men, women and children. We feel that this request is but little to ask from a government which has systematically stolen our lands...and instituted a program to annihilate the many Indian Tribes of this land. We will preserve our traditions and ways of life by educating our own children. We are Indians! We have learned that violence breeds only more violence and we therefore have carried on our occupation of Alcatraz in a peaceful manner, hoping that the government of these United States will also act accordingly.”<sup>21</sup>

Through the newsletter, they were able to control their image, identity, and how they wanted to be represented. For as much as the Indians off All Tribes tried to create a new image and identity for the public, its newsletter was filled with continuous nods to a Pre-Colombian past. The imagery evoked sentiments of a peaceful people who loved harmoniously with nature and their fellow man. For a newsletter trying to reshape its identity, in this area it failed. It also failed when it spoke of an “Indian style” or an “Indian language” because such a universal thing never existed. Never has there been one homogenous Indian culture in the Bay Area or in America for that matter. It was a nice thought to use this as a unifying call for brotherhood, but it

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<sup>21</sup> Indians of All Tribes “We Hold the Rock!” 1

was misleading. The fact that they used this imagery and language was to appeal to a broader audience and to define their Indianness. Their Indianness was anchored in using the iconography of nineteenth century Indians because of lack of modern Indian role models, lack of education, and this type of language appealed to the media.

Indians played into the media attention by putting certain images into their publications that would evoke sympathy for Indians by showing how peaceful their occupation was, like the lone teepee on the island facing the water or children playing in the crumbling buildings. (Figure 3) They played up to certain stereotypes to get media coverage that they at the same time tried to change. It was not just pictures that held power, but the images drawn in both *Warpath* and *Indians of All Tribes: Alcatraz* were filled with hand drawn images depicting various culture areas and icons like an eagle that evoked a certain image of Indians that did not represent contemporary Indians and their struggles. These conflicting interpretations of identity impeded the occupants from being looked at seriously.

The November 22, 1969 landing was not taken as seriously at first because of the previous attempts. Newspapers across the country either ignored the event or wrote stories along the same sentiment as the *New York Times* that, “In a pre-dawn “invasion,” 89 American Indians occupied Alcatraz again today to reclaim the former prison as their own.”<sup>22</sup> This was the sentiment of the media when news first broke about the takeover. Been there, done that. This was nothing new and was sure to be over in a day or so. It was also viewed as just another antic of college students in the Bay Area. “The Alcatraz occupation is still popularly regarded as the engaging fun and games of Indian college kids.”<sup>23</sup> These obstacles would be dealt with over

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<sup>22</sup> New York Times “**ADD HEADLINE**”

<sup>23</sup> **Ramparts GET CITATION**

time, the Indians of All Tribes proved tenacious enough to have the will power to stay more than a day. The Indians overcame the obstacles of being associated with Hippie movements and repeating the previous attempts. The defining feature was that the Indians of All Tribes came to the island with a purpose and a goal. They had certain steps they needed to do before they could achieve their goal.

The *New York Times* summarized, “The first phase, occupation of the island...the second phase involved development of facilities and curriculum for the center.” (NY times December) The Indians planned on transforming the island into a Indian sanctuary through the creation of certain institutions. They planned on making “a center for Native American studies, an American Indian Spiritual center, an Indian center of Ecology, a Great Indian Training school, an American Indian Museum.” (Vol1, Issue 1, page 3) This was not just another attempted takeover for publicity, but was a serious mission to make Alcatraz into a symbol of Indian hope.

After the Indians showed that they were not leaving until they held the title for the land; what was once a considered takeover became an occupation. The media viewed the Indians sympathetically and their cause to work together as a noble one. Believing in the idealized vision of Indians trying to live peacefully with the land but had been kept from doing so by the oppressive white man. A week after the occupation, occupiers viewed “their widely publicized exploit as changing the plight of “the invisible American” into an international problem. Members of many of the nation’s 300 tribes, as divided as African nations, were at last finding unity.” (Indians Rally Behind the Seizure of Alcatraz Nov. 30, 1969) This idea oversimplified the occupation as a pan-Indian effort, while many different Indian groups and tribes did support it, many groups didn’t. This was an effort made by local Bay Area Indians, led by college students, but was done as an effort to help Indians all over the country.

The support of Indians but non-Indians helped keep the message and the occupation going. Some of the most influential support came from celebrities and public figures, who garnered much more attention than any of the occupiers ever could on their own. Celebrities like Marlon Brando, Anthon Quinn, Jane Fonda, Creedence Clearwater Revival, and Ethel Kennedy came to the island or gave donations that were made extremely public. They kept Indians in the press and their message alive. Major publications like *the New York Times* and *Time* magazine covered the occupation and helped create the new Indian identity. *Time* covered the new Indian identity by claiming, “the new American Indian is fed up with the destitution and publicly sanctioned abuse of his long-divided people. He is raising his voice and he intends to be heard.” (The Angry American)

What was problematic was the use of “Indian language” or “Indian style” on the island without any recognition that pan-tribalism fails here. Many native languages are on the same linguistic branch, but there is still a wide variety. Their contemporary language and struggles are not all universal but are similar. In order to make the idea of a pan-Indian movement work was to reach out to all groups through a common language. Calling for a brotherhood of Indians to work together to raise themselves from the precarious situation that they had been kept in. The idea forming a new, united Indian identity was nothing new or transformative. But never on such a national level in the media has the message been put forth. The driving force behind the image of a pan-Indian effort was the 7 person council on the island.

The Indians decided to form a seven person council, where decisions about the happenings of the island would be decided. Johnson summarized the goals of, “The Indian occupiers of Alcatraz Island attempted to maintain an egalitarian, democratic society without a single leader so that decisions would be made by consensus.” (56 Johnson) The council members

were elected every ninety days and decided rules that the occupiers on the island needed to follow. He also said that, "The rules require seven consecutive days of residence on the island for permanent residency status. And that is revoked if a resident leaves the island for more than 72-hour period without permission." (Teen-age boredom, times) Alcohol and drugs were prohibited from the island to maintain a clear consciousness and to give the occupation some credibility. Grace Thorpe, daughter of the great Indian athlete Jim Thorpe, an occupier and wrote frequently contributed to *Indians of All Tribes* newsletter said that, "In three months since the takeover, more than 12,000 Indians from across the country have visited Alcatraz. Only about 100 remain as permanent residents." (Teen-age boredom, times) Even though there was not a large number of permanent residents, the council dealt with the them and the temporary residents as well.

The council had to control the on goings on the island, but the media rarely covered them and only focused on individual people. It was easier for all parties to have one spokesperson even if they were unofficial. This may not have sent the message of an egalitarian society they wished, but it did send the message of strong, youth, Indian leadership through Richard Oakes. It also sent the image of a strong Indian leader that people could look up to like Geronimo, Sitting Bull, or Jim Thorpe. This would also become impossible to do with the media because it was more coherent to talk to one person in order to send off a singular message. The media and the government were also more familiar with dealing one leader as opposed to an egalitarian group.

The idea of Richard being a leader of the occupation emerged when he jumped out into the water to reach the island on the November 9<sup>th</sup> takeover where he also read the proclamation to the press. Once on the island he continued to be an unofficial spokesperson for the press. Not all viewed Richard being perceived as the Alcatraz leader as a good thing. It was alleged that he was misappropriating donation funds. (Johnson quote) Despite this, Richard had become the

unofficial leader and spokesperson, but he was not alone. All the young students and original occupiers were there to become leaders for Indian people. They said, “We on the Island by being here, have expressed our willingness to Lead.” (Vol 2 Is 2 p. 3) They said they wanted to lead people on a, “Indian direction, and we are calling on you to help yourself in making it possible for everyone else by having a welcome extended to you.” (Vol 2 Is 2 p. 3) It sent the message that any Indian could become a leader and become a part of this new Indian identity.

The Indians of All Tribes had strict codes for who was permitted on the island, clearly seen on the graffiti spread throughout the island. (Figure 2) It was an Indian sanctuary from the mainland, with waves of supporters that came sporadically. It became apparent that there were people on the Island that some of the original occupiers did not consider to be Indian or Indian enough. In order to attempt to answer these questions, the Indians of All Tribes held a conference about who would benefit from the Island and what qualifications needed to be met. Among them was, “whether or no of proof of Indian blood and to what degree;... the sincerity of the students as to training for leadership of their Indian people.” (Vol 1 Issue2, page 8) Things that are easier said than done.

They also thought about who they would admit into the university they planned to open up on the Island. They debated about, “Admissions considerations might include some of the following topics: blood quantum; reservation background...” (Vol 1 Issue2, page 8) These were contentious for many reasons, one of which is how much blood makes someone an Indian? Does living on a reservation make someone an Indian, and if so for how long do they need to live on the reservation? These raised more questions than answered about Indian identity, and showed once again that the Indians on Alcatraz did not know how they wanted to identify themselves. These philosophical debates continued throughout the entire occupation and afterwards.

When on the island, the Indians had to deal with everyday issues: food, water, education, and more. Food and water were not major worries in the early days of the occupation with food and monetary donations being flown in from all over the country in waves. Education was a main priority for the occupants and the children they brought with them. A majority of the occupants early on were college students on winter break and many brought with them their budding families. Teaching the young children about their heritage and also keeping up with their standard education. In order to do this, "On December 11, 1969, Alcatraz's new "Big Rock School" opened its doors for the first time, admitting 12 enrolled students, ranging in levels from kindergarten to level 6. Since this time, the school has reached a peak enrollment of 22 students on December 30." (8 Vol 1 issue 1) The opening of the school for children showed the importance of education at an early age. To show how change starts with teaching the younger generations about their history in order to understand how they got to their current situation and how to change it. The education was something that the BIA and mainstream America controlled, but on the island, the Indians could control how they were being presented.

They also had to deal with the way they were presented in the media. They were labeled everything from militant, occupants, trespassers, protesters, and many more. The Government labeled them in the beginning as trespassers on federal property and wanted nothing but for this to fade away. It was the epitome of bad publicity. The government could not be seen hauling away peaceful Indian protestors, playing into stereotypes. Since they were on federal property, they need to make sure that no accidents happened that they could be liable for. The Regional Administrator of General Service Administration on January 12, 1970 said that, "It is impossible to convey this message to you individually because of the continuing turnover of personnel. I must therefore advise you again that you are present here as trespassers. I must further advise



you that the Government assumes no responsibility for your safety while you remain on this island.” (6 Vol 1 Issue 1) They wanted nothing to do with anything on the island.

After a month on the island, the occupiers formed and began to broadcast a weekly radio broadcast called Radio Free Alcatraz. John Turdell hosted the show and was the mastermind behind it. The program “reaches an Indian listening audience of approximately 100,000.” (10 Vol 1 Issue 1) And Turdell viewed it as a platform, he said, “We are making use of this opportunity by broadcasting Indian affairs and problems confronting our Indian People all across our lands as well as here on Alcatraz. Participation is needed and will be welcome, as we believe it is one step closer to Indian unification.” (10 Vol 1 Issue 1) This idea of unification was a belief that all Indians shared, let alone on the island. The island was meant to change the way Indians looked at themselves and were looked at, but not necessarily as a call for a pan-Indian movement.

Some groups, like the Ohlone firmly opposed this idea of having the Indians of All Tribes speak for all Indians. “the occupiers were presenting a false image of one group speaking for all Indians when this was not true. "They are misinforming the public about Native American culture, history, and beliefs. They are destroying what we Indian people have been fighting and dying for these hundred years..." (162 Johnson but look at the ohlone statement) They believed, like many, that the actions of the occupiers of calling for Indian unification was not only idealistic but very untrue. Each Indian culture had and has distinct characteristics that had never been unified or worked peacefully together. The Ohlone had good reason to be upset at the occupation because the Indians of All Tribes were trying to claim Alcatraz for themselves when it was once Ohlone land. There were no Ohlone on the island and they sent a statement, "We Ohlone are opposed to the occupation of Alcatraz. If any Native Americans have a right to claim

these lands, we Ohlone are the only ones." (162 Johnson). What the Ohlone failed to realize is, that even if the Indians of All Tribes were able to get the deed to the land, it was not important which Indian group held the land, as long as an Indian group held it. That it was the idea of Alcatraz being a place for all Indians to reclaim what was taken from them. Their land that was lost and their identity that was taken from them. "We came to Alcatraz because we were sick and tired of being pushed around, exploited, and degraded everywhere we turned in our country. we came to Alcatraz because it is a place of our own." (97 Johnson).

The Indians of All Tribes failed to make a resolution with the Ohlone about who should hold the title to Alcatraz if the Indians were to get it. By trying to reclaim the land in the name of Indians, they failed to see which Indian group had the right to hold the land. They were too focused on the symbolism of the island than to rights. The Indian of All Tribes said, "We announce today on behalf of all Indian people or tribes that from this day forward we shall exercise dominion over Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay." (Indian Meet Press NY times, 1970) This broad statement would upset some people

By early 1970, the adrenaline of the early days of the invasion had disappeared. The euphoria and optimism soon became replaced with the harsh reality of life on the island. Food and water shortages began. Many of the original occupiers had to leave to go back to college. Yvonne died. The Oakes had left. Fires had burned 3 buildings. Water and electricity would soon be cut off as well.

On January 2, 1970 Yvonne Oakes had a fatal fall on the Island and died 5 days later in the hospital. This changed the atmosphere of the occupation, leaving Richard in a distraught place and to him, "It was like a symbol of all the doubts we had hidden from ourselves during the

whole Alcatraz experience”. (101 Johnson) Shortly after this experience he and his wife Annie Oakes left. Mysterious fires with contested causes burned, “at least three buildings had been destroyed.”, but more importantly “It destroyed the lighthouse.” (NY times) The lighthouse which was government property and many maritime visitors claimed to be vital to the Bay Area. With Richard and many of the original occupiers gone, it left a void for someone to take the place of the symbolic leadership to guide the movement.

This void was filled by Stella Leach and John Turdell, but they could not fill the legacy that Richard left on the Island. The idea of being a leader became more important than leading their people. The message of, “We on the Island, by being here, have expressed our willingness to Lead...and we must carry forth this expression in deed...If in our role as leaders of our people we cannot abstain from foolishness and moments of weakness, then we will remove ourselves from this honored position.” (3 V.1 I.2), became lost.

The media perception towards the end of the occupation had turned. Public attention began to be replaced with more pressing matters in Vietnam, the economy, and the images of hippies identifying with Indian culture did not help either. When the Coast Guard set up the blockade to slowly cut off the Indians on the Island from their mainland support, they found support in places they most likely did not want. “The opportunity to buttress the Indian occupation of Alcatraz and simultaneously engage in civil disobedience by running the Coast Guard blockade was highly appealing to hippies and political radicals on the Berkeley side of the Bay.” (88 Hippies) This was not the company they wanted to keep to be taken seriously as a movement.

With attention from the public gone, sympathy began to wane with reports of weapons, violence, and drug use on the island. Too many, the flux of new Indians showed instability in leadership and the movement, but to some this new blood reinvigorated the occupation. *Ramparts* magazine believed that, “The composition of the ad hoc Indian community changes constantly, but the purpose remains the same; to make Alcatraz a powerful symbol of liberation springing out of the long American imprisonment.” (27 *Ramparts*) The number of occupiers had waned over time for numerous issues: some had to get back to school, some had to go back to work, some had to go back to their lives and bills. As *Time* put it, “The act was meant to focus attention on the central tragedy of Indian history, the usurpation of their lands, and for a time it did just that. Then public attention began to dwindle—and so did the number of Indian squatters.” (Anomie at Alcatraz) Attention dwindled with reports of unrest on the island as well.

The alleged drug use and alcohol use were just some of the problems that were speculated by the media. *The New York Times* wrote that, “After the publicity of the takeover subsided they experienced some troubles among themselves. “Tribal differences were part of the problem,”” (Teen-age Indian boredom, times 1970) Months before the occupation came to an end, *Time* magazine had a harsher critique of the occupiers than just tribal differences. *Time* wrote that, “The occupants’ militant stance is defiantly summed up by Hastings: “The white snakes have eaten everything from the earth. We will never give Alcatraz back to them. And if they try to force us, we will fight to the death to keep our land.”” (Anomie at Alcatraz) That these were no longer peaceful activists and occupiers, but now their refusal to leave Alcatraz had become militant. “Tribal differences were part of the problem,” one young student in the original landing group said. “But there were others, too. We had some drunks and some rights. You know, all the problems that people have.” (Teen-age Indian Boredom, Feb. 22, 1970) The

government saw the shift in not only the public's mood but on the Island as well and knew that now was the time to strike.

The government knew that after Kent State and My Lai that they could not be seen forcibly removing the Indians, that it was a waiting game. They realized that, "Since force could not be used, isolation, the passage of time, and the federal bureaucracy would be the weapons." (75 Johnson) The beginning of this isolation was when the government cut off water, electricity, and enforced a blockade to the Island. Thomas Hannon was the man behind these actions as the Regional Administrator of the General Services Administrations. He represented the same suppressive authority of the BIA and when he spoke about the water situation he said, "that the Government had no authority to return water to the island for the Indians." (NY times August 1970) The Indians wanted to fight back but they too did not want a physical altercation. One occupier said, "We don't want another Mylai or Kent State here, but we will not back down when we're right." (NY times August 1970) The Indians of All Tribes continued to work together in order to achieve their goal.

When things on the island were being to crumble around them, the Indians of All Tribes clung to these ideas. John Turdell's radio program, Radio Free Alcatraz, began the vast majority of his shows by saying morale was high. His continuous reassurance of this leads one to think who is he trying to convince, himself or the public? Whether or not morale was high is unsure, but even if it was not, it is not surprise why he would present that image. At this time public support for the occupation rapidly was dwindling with news of drugs and troubled leadership permeating the news. Time reported that there, "is the pervading sense of anomie, a social disintegration that has created a breach with mainland supporters, including other Indian groups. The invasion euphoria was inevitably dissipated by the exigencies of day-to-day survival."

(Anomie at Alcatraz) This survival depended on the leadership on the Island and the negotiations that took place.

Turdell and others became fixated on the belief in Alcatraz being The Rock. The last stand for a new generation and refused any offers from the government that did not hand the title of the land over to the Indians. The government quite possibly never took that or any of their offers seriously, but negotiated for awhile with the Indians of All Tribes to save face. To show the public that they tried to work with the Indians, but they were the stubborn unreasonable ones, not them.

That they did not budge when other potential offers came in. The idea of negotiating with the government was something that the council members could not fathom at this time. It was the equivalent of negotiating who they were as people and what they stood for and this was unimaginable. Negotiations were seen as a slap in the face. It would mean that the government would once again dictate the image of Indians. The language used to counter attack these attacks became more aggressive than the pan-Indian unity and brotherhood that was used in the beginning stages.

Towards the end of the occupation the language on the Rock turned more forceful and progressive. The occupiers became swept up in the enthusiasm of the occupation and became overwhelmed by it, losing members and their mission. Personalities became more important than the message. The occupiers became so steadfast in the idea of getting the title to Alcatraz or nothing at all, that it harmed their message. They left the government little room for negotiating, because if they gave over Alcatraz more and more land cases would appear and the government would have to figure out solutions for all of these. The occupiers became too fixated in controlling the land than controlling the idea and message behind the land.

Though the original message of self-determination was not lost on all, one occupier said, “We are not defying the Government, we are just declaring our rights.” (Caldwell, Indians meet press) After months of livings without a constant supply of water, food, or donations life on Alcatraz became worse than reservation life. And the final chapter came to a close on June 11, 1971 when, “A Government force of 35 marshals recaptured Alcatraz Island without resistance today, removing 15 Indian holdouts remaining from an occupation that begun 19 months ago.” (NY times) It meant the end of the occupation on the Island, but many of the occupiers vowed to continue working to fight for Indian identity and rights.

The legacy of Alcatraz lived on and the Indians of All Tribes claimed that, “To the world it represents an example of diverse groups at tempting unity in a meaningful way and well worth watching.” Issue 2) Alcatraz was a way for the Indians to finally divorce themselves from oppressive hand of the United States, “Uncle sam, you are not my uncle! We are not even related...! Damn your interference with my rights of life, liberty, and happiness!” (2 of Vol.1 Is. 2 "Indians of All Tribes Alcatraz." *Indians of All Tribes Alcatraz*. 1.2 (1970): 2. Print.) The Indians wanted to disassociate all ties with The United States Government because they considered themselves to not be Americans and did not need life was dictated by the BIA and other government agencies. And no amount of affirmative action could resolve their socio-economic situation until this unhealthy relationship came to an end.

The goals that the occupiers had in the beginning, to get the title to Alcatraz failed to materialize, but it did succeed in bringing national attention to the current struggles of Indians. That they were not just people who lived on reservations as one with nature, that life on the reservation was harder in 1969 than living in many urban areas of the time. The occupiers soon became heroes and immortalized like the founding fathers. They were viewed as the new leaders

of the movement for Indian cultural preservation. Indians took over Alcatraz to change the way the media, mainstream culture, and they themselves were viewed.

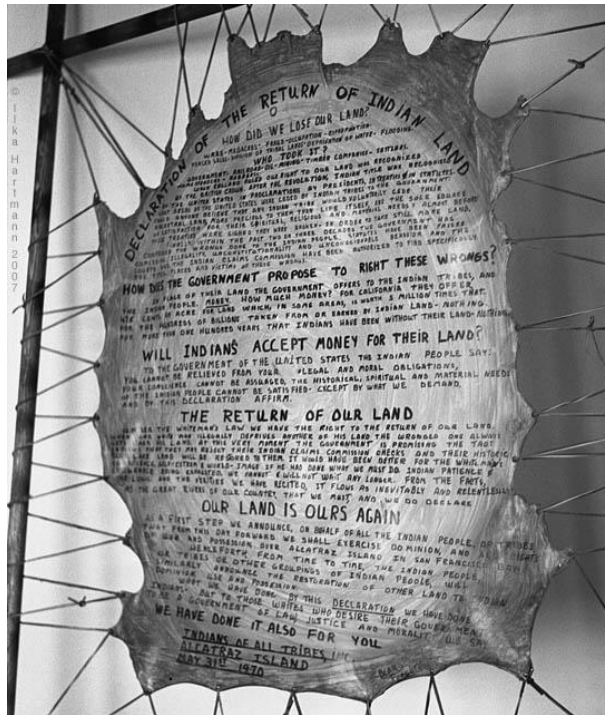
Though the Indians were not always sure of how they wanted to be viewed based on the language they used. The language in their publications showed that though they wanted to form a new identity, they were not exactly sure what that was. (Warpath and using jumping around from Great Indian to Great American to Great American Indians is interesting. These identity crises of Indian v. Native American v. American Indian v. any other politically correct term arose as a result of the occupations confrontation with Indian identity. Lehman Brightman said “Even the name Indian is not ours. It was given to us by some dumb honky who got lost and thought he landed in India.” (2 The Angry American) The images placed in *Warpath* of “Great Americans” in every issue are a prime example of how the movement of a new Indian identity was unclear. They went from calling them “Great Americans” to “Great Indians” to “Great Indian Americans” If they were unclear on what to call themselves, there was no hope for the public to know. First Indian activists refused to be called Americans, but sometimes it was OK. The occupiers and Indian activists failed because they tried to speak for all Indians and give them a unifying label when they were too diverse to have one.

The memory of the occupation lives on in the hearts of the occupiers, in the minds of Indian students, and is celebrated every year with the annual celebration of Un-Thanksgiving where the anniversary of the occupation is commemorated. And after Richard left the island, he continued to fight for Indian causes, and died on September 20, 1972 while confronting a man named Morgan about the mistreatment of Indian kids. Richards’ death sparked the continuation of more takeover and occupations. Cementing he and his daughter’s place as martyrs in the red power movement. (Figure 4 & 5)



The occupation did not start the red power movement; it began a new wave of Indian protest that had been around since 1492. It was generally a peaceful occupation that transformed a dilapidated prison into a promise of a bright Indian future. Johnson viewed it, "For the Indians, Alcatraz Island would serve as a symbol of everything they had been promised but never received from the government, lost land, and government waste. This symbolism proved strong because Native Americans remembered the importance of this island to their people." (1 Johnson) The occupation of Alcatraz became an impetus for other Indian protest like Wounded Knee, the occupation of the BIA office in Washington, and "Native Americans in New York attempted to "liberate" the Statue of Liberty, while others in South Dakota briefly occupied Mount Rushmore and Badlands National Monument." (151 Hippies) By trying to differentiate themselves from Americans, they ended up using very American methods and language to do so. By protesting against oppressive powers, Indians used the methods and language of the founding fathers through traditional Americanism.

The identity of the Indians changed after the occupation, but it was not necessarily what the occupiers originally envisioned. Early on the Indians of All Tribes said, "Alcatraz has already served a number of purposes. It has served as an awakening to the general public and the world of the many injustices, both past and present, done to the Native Americans." (Indians of All Tribes, page 5, Vol 1, Is 2) In the end the occupation educated Indians and non-Indians on Indian identity and issues. It forced the country to enter a new era of Indian policies, one where Indians could take hold of their image and how they were treated. The island itself became more transformative than any language the occupiers used because it was a physical representation of the struggle and oppression put on them.



(Figure 1)

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Figure 1-Proclamation

Figure 2- graffiti with Indian land

Figure 3- Images of teepee facing the water or kids playing

Figure 4- Hippies picture

Figure 5- Yvonne memorial fund