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The Occupation of Alcatraz Island: Roots of American Indian Activism

by Troy Johnson

For too long, and in too many history books, American Indians died or were pressed into marginality in the 1890s. According to the most common Euro-centric presentations, after the 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee Indian people were rounded-up, moved onto reservations, or were assimilated into mainstream America, where it was anticipated that they would eventually fade from the mainstream of American history. In short, many believed that America's "Indian problem" had been solved.

This was not to be the case however. Indian people still lived on land held in trust for them by the federal government. As a result of continual pressures to gain access to reservation land the Congress in 1953, passed into law House Resolution 108, the ultimate result of which meant the termination of federal recognition of selected Indian tribes and the opening up of reservation lands for settlement and development.¹ An important part of the termination policy was a concurrent program of relocation of reservation Indians to urban area, a program that would give rise, in the 1960s to the occupation of some 70+ federal facilities throughout the United States, the rise of supratribal Indian activist organizations, and particularly, the nineteen-month occupation of Alcatraz Island.²

Among the many acts of activism conducted by American Indians, the occupation of Alcatraz Island is probably the most important, and has certainly been the most overlooked. Among those who remember Indian activism, the 1972 occupation of the Washington, D.C. Bureau of Indian Affairs Office and the 1973 occupation of Wounded Knee II stand out. The Wounded Knee II occupation lasted just over two months, however, and the occupation of the BIA headquarters, just only seven

days, while the occupation of Alcatraz Island lasted nineteen months.

The rise of Indian activism, and particularly the occupation of Alcatraz Island, has not been well researched, and little has been written regarding this important part of the 60s, civil, urban, unrest. As a matter of fact, the little that has been written generally gives credit for the occupation, incorrectly, to the American Indian Movement (AIM), for the occupation.

In actuality, there were three separate occupations of Alcatraz Island, one on March 9, 1964, one on November 9, 1969, and the occupation which lasted nineteen months which occurred on the 20th of November, 1969.

The 1964 occupation lasted for only four hours and was carried out by five Sioux, led by Richard McKenzie, and was planned by the wife of one of the occupiers, Belva Cottier. The federal penitentiary on the Island had been closed in 1963 and the federal government was in the process of transferring the Island to the city of San Francisco for development. Meanwhile, Belva Cottier and her Sioux cousin developed plans of their own. They recalled having heard of a provision in the 1868 Sioux treaty with the federal government that they believed stated that all federal lands, which became unused and abandoned, reverted to ownership by the Sioux people. Using their very loose interpretation of the treaty, they encouraged five Sioux men to occupy Alcatraz Island and claim it for the Sioux people.³ During the brief occupation they stated that they wanted to establish a cultural center and an Indian university on the island. While their interpretation of the treaty was incorrect, and the occupation was short lived, this short occupation is important because the federal government did not react in a hostile manner, i.e. they did not arrest anybody, and the treaty claim, and the use of the island for a cultural center and an Indian university would resurface almost word for word in the larger, much longer occupation of 1969.⁴

Before we move on to the 1969 occupations however, we must look at the underlying events and causes that would give rise to a generation of Indian youth who would rise up to face the federal government in the takeover of a federal facility.

The 1960s, particularly the late 1960s and early 1970s were heady times for urban unrest across the United States. The United States was deeply involved in an unpopular war in Vietnam.

The civil rights movement, Black Power, the rise of LaRaza, the Hispanic movement, the stirring of the new feminism, the rise of the New Left Generation, and the Third World Strikes, were sweeping the nation, particularly college campuses. The announcement of the massacre of innocent civilians in a hamlet in MyLai, Vietnam burned across front pages across the U.S. and the ubiquitous college demonstrations raised the level of consciousness of college students throughout the United States. People of all ages were becoming sensitized to the unrest among the emerging minority ethnic and gender groups, particularly among the vocal and active college student populations.⁵ Sit ins, sleep-ins, teach-ins, lock-outs, boycotts became everyday occurrences on college campuses. And it was from these college campuses, specifically the University of California Santa Cruz, San Francisco State, the University of California, Berkeley, and from the University of California Campus at Los Angeles where those who would make up the main occupation force would emerge.

This new campus activism and unrest however, were not the roots of Indian activism, but were the manifestations of centuries of mistreatment of Indian people, the latest being the government relocation program.

The government relocation program of the 1950s promised relocation to a major urban area, vocational training, assistance in finding jobs, adequate housing, and financial assistance while the Indian people were undergoing training. More than 100,000 Indian people were located as a result during the relocation era. The training which generally was to last three months, often lasted only three weeks, the job assistance was usually one referral at best, the housing was 1950s and 60s skid row, and the financial assistance ran out long before the training was started or any hope of a job was realized. The history of the San Francisco Bay Area relocation effort is replete with examples of Indian people, men women, boys, and young girls, who sat for days and weeks at bus stations, waiting for the government representative who was to meet them and start them on the road to a new successful urban life.⁶

In the Bay Area, one of the largest of the relocation cites, these new urban Indians formed their own organizations to provide the support that the government promised, but failed to provide. Generally these groups were known by tribal names such as the Sioux Club, the Navajo Club, but

were also sports clubs, dance clubs, and the very early urban powwow clubs. Eventually some thirty of these social clubs formed to meet the needs of the new urban Indians, and their children, children who would, in the 1960s want the opportunity to go to college and better themselves. Many of these urban Indians were products of the boarding school experience, and could speak of shared boarding schools experiences and horrors. Additionally, many of the new urban Indians were servicemen returning from World War II who could find no work on reservations and sought out a better life in an urban setting.

The 1964 occupation of Alcatraz Island was a fore-warning of the unrest that was fermenting, quietly, but surely, in the urban Indian population. Prior to the 1964 occupation the Bay Area papers contain a large number of articles about the abandonment of the urban Indian by the federal government, and the state and local government's refusal to meet their needs. The social clubs which had been formed for support became meeting places for Indian people to discuss the discrimination that they were facing in schools, housing, employment, health care, and particularly by the police, who, like the police in other areas of the country would wait outside of "Indian bars" at closing time to harass, beat and arrest Indian people who were on the lowest rung of the urban social ladder, and were kept there by failed government policies.⁷

Thus, in March 1964, five Sioux Indians who represented the urban Indians of the Bay Area occupied Alcatraz Island for four hours. They issued prepared press releases claiming the Island in accordance with the 1868 Sioux treaty and demanded better treatment for urban Indians. Richard McKenzie who was the most outspoken of the group pressed the claim for title to the Island through the court system only to have the courts rule against him. Most importantly however, the Indians of the Bay Area were now becoming vocal, and united, in their efforts to improve their lives.⁸

In the Bay area colleges and universities and on other California college campuses, young educated Indian students joined with other minority groups during the 1969 third world strike and began demanding that colleges offer courses which were relevant to Indian students. Indian history, written and taught by non-Indian instructors was no longer acceptable to these young students who were now awakened to the possibility of social protests to bring attention to the national shame of the

treatment of Indian people.⁹

Among the young Indian students at San Francisco State was a young Mohawk Indian by the name of Richard Oakes. Oakes came from the St. Regis reservation, had worked on high steel in New York, and traveled across the United States visiting various Indian reservations and eventually wound up in California where he married a Kashia Pomo woman, Anne, who had five children by a previous marriage. Richard worked in an Indian bar in Oakland for a period of time and eventually was admitted into San Francisco State. In September 1969 Richard Oakes and several other Indian students began discussing the possibility of an occupation of Alcatraz Island as a symbolic protest and call for Indian self-determination for their own lives. Preliminary plans were made for a symbolic occupation to take place in the summer of 1970, however other events caused an earlier execution of the plan.

The catalyst for the occupation came when the San Francisco Indian Center burnt to the ground in late October 1969. The Center had become the meeting place for the Bay Area Indian organizations and the newly formed United Bay Indian Council which had brought together the thirty private clubs into one large council headed by Adam Nordwall, later to be known as Adam Fortunate Eagle. The destruction of the Indian center brought together the Bay Area Council and the American Indian Student organizations in a way that they had never been before. The Council needed a new meeting place, the students needed a forum for their new activist voice. Alcatraz would be the springboard for a combined movement that would last nineteen months, bring together Indian people from across the United States, Alaska, Canada, Mexico, and South America. Alcatraz would force the federal government to take a new look at the situation faced by urban Indian people, the long forgotten victims of a failed relocation era.¹⁰

The initial occupation was planned for November 9, 1969. Richard Oakes, a group of students, and a group of Indians from the cultural center chartered a boat and headed for Alcatraz Island. The initial plan was to circle the Island and symbolically claim the Island for Indian people.¹¹ Since many different tribes were represented, the name Indians of All Tribes was adopted for the group. The boat held approximately fifty people and during the circling of the Island Richard and

four others jumped from the boat and swam to the Island. They claimed the Island in the name of Indians of All Tribes and left the Island after meeting with the Island caretaker who asked them to leave.¹² Later that same evening, Oakes and fourteen others returned to the Island with sleeping bags and food sufficient for two or three days on the island. Clearly no plans existed for a prolonged occupation and face off against the federal government at this early time. Oakes and his fellow occupiers left the island the following morning without incident. In meetings following the November 9th occupation Oakes and his fellow students realized that a prolonged occupation was possible. It was clear that the federal government had only a token force on the island and that no physical harm had come to anyone involved. A prolonged occupation plan now began to emerge.¹³

Following the brief November 9, occupation, Oakes traveled to the American Indian Studies Center at UCLA where he met with Ray Spang and Edward Castillo and asked for their assistance in recruiting Indian students for what would become the longest prolonged occupation of a federal facility by Indian people to this very day. Spang, Castillo, and Oakes met in Campbell Hall, met in private homes, and met in Indian bars in Los Angeles, and on November 20, 1969 eighty Indian students from UCLA were among the approximately 100 Indian people who occupied Alcatraz Island.¹⁴

It is important to remember here that while the urban Indian population supported the concept of an occupation, and once the occupation took place, provided the logistical support, the occupation force was made up initially of young urban Indian college students. And the most inspirational person, if not the recognized leader was Richard Oakes. Oakes is described as handsome, charismatic, a talented orator, and a natural leader. Oakes was strongly influenced by an Iroquois organization known as the White Roots of Peace, which had revitalized by a Mohawk, Ray Fadden. In the fall of 1969, Gerry Gambill, a counselor for the organization visited the campus at San Francisco State and inspired many of the students, none more than Oakes, whom he stayed with. The White Roots of Peace was an old Iroquois organization that taught cultural revival of Iroquois lifeways and attempted to influence young Mohawks to take up leadership roles in the Mohawk Longhouse. This was an attempt to preserve and revive Iroquois lifeways. Gambill found a willing

68

student and later a student leader in Richard Oakes.¹⁵

It should be pointed out here that there had been other isolated Indian protests in the 1960s, prior to Alcatraz. Fish-ins and demonstrations had taken place on several occasions in the northwest, which were demonstrations against violation of fishing rights guaranteed by treaties between the federal government and Indian tribes. Other protests had taken place in the Northeast where the Mohawks had protested against treaty violations allowing free passage between the U.S. and Canada guaranteed by the Jay treaty of 1794. The difference between what is seen in these actions however is that they were local, and they were primarily tribal in nature. The Alcatraz occupation was multi-tribal and attracted attention, media coverage, and support on an international scale.

Oakes position as leader on the Island, a title he himself never claimed, quickly created a problem. Not all of the students knew Oakes, and in the true concept of the occupation, many wanted an egalitarian society on the Island with no one being recognized as their leader. While this may have been a workable organization on the Island it was not with the non-Indian media. Newspapers, magazines, TV, and radio stations from across the nation sent reporters to the Island, to interview those in charge, the leaders of the occupation. Oakes was the most knowledgeable about the landing and the most often sought out and identified as the leader, the Chief, the mayor of Alcatraz.

Once on the Island, organization began immediately. An elected council was put into place. Everyone on the island had a job. Security, sanitation, day-care, housing, cooking, laundry, and all decisions were made by unanimous consent of the people. Meetings were sometimes held five, six, seven times per day, each time to discuss the rapidly developing occupation.¹⁶

The federal government for its part initially insisted that the Indian people leave the Island, placed an ineffective Coast Guard barricade around the Island, and eventually agreed to demands by the Indian council that formal negotiations be held. From the Indians side, the negotiations were fixed. They wanted the deed to the Island, they wanted to establish an Indian university, a cultural center, and a museum. And they wanted federal funding to establish all of these. The government negotiators insisted that the occupiers could have none of these and insisted that they leave the

island.¹⁷

By the end of 1969 the Indian organization began to fall into disarray. Two groups rose in opposition to Richard Oakes and as the Indian students began returning to school in January 1970 they were replaced by Indian people from the urban areas and from reservations who had not been involved in the initial occupation. Where Oakes and the other students claimed title to the Island by right of discovery the new arrivals harked back to the rhetoric of the 1964 occupation and the Sioux treaty, a claim which had been pressed through the court system by Richard McKenzie and found invalid.¹⁸ Additionally, many non-Indians now began taking up residency on the Island, many from the San Francisco hippie and drug culture. While drugs and liquor had been banned from the Island by the Indian occupiers they now became common place on the Island. The final blow to the student organization and occupation occurred on January 5, 1970, when Oakes's 12 year old stepdaughter fell three floors down a stairwell to her death. Yvonne Oakes and some other children had apparently been playing unsupervised near an open stairwell when she slipped and fell. Other versions exist which state that Yvonne was pushed to her death by the son of one of the leaders of the opposition group on the Island. Richard contacted the FBI and the coroners office but there was insufficient evidence to prosecute, despite the testimony of other children in the area who stated that she was pushed. Following Yvonne's death, the Oakes family left the Island and the two competing groups maneuvered back and forth for leadership on the island.¹⁹

The federal government responded to the occupation by adopting a position of non-interference. The Nixon White house domestic council handled the situation personally, taking authority away from the federal offices which would have normally handled the situation. The FBI was directed to remain clear of the Island. The Coast Guard was directed not to interfere, and the Government Services Administration (GSA) was instructed not to remove the Indians from the island. While it appeared to those on the Island that negotiations were actually taking place, in fact, the federal government was playing a waiting game, hoping that support for the occupation would subside and those on the Island would elect to end the occupation.²⁰

The waiting game by the government was the result of several different forces. First, the

Indians on the Island had a great deal of public support. The social climate in the late 60s and early 70s allowed for demonstrations on campuses and in cities. The Indian occupiers were but one of many groups attempting to bring to light the failure of the federal government to properly address their problems. Secondly, the Vietnam war had become very unpopular. The massacre at MyLai had been announced as well as the shooting of students at Kent State University by National Guard troops. Papers in the White House collection make reference to the fact that the American Public would not stand for Indian people being hauled off the Island in body bags - that the American people had seen enough spilling of blood on their TVs from Vietnam and would not stand for it on Alcatraz Island.²¹ Forcible removal was not seen as an alternative because it might result in another embarrassment such as the student killings at Kent State University. Thus the government was forced to wait. Additionally, President Richard Nixon was in the process of drafting his Indian policy at the very time the occupation took place. His official policy, which he and vice-President Agnew had stated in 1968 was that Nixon would bring about an end of the termination era and would bring Indian people into an era of self-determination. Nixon did not want a bloody confrontation on Alcatraz Island. Nixon's inner circle, Brad Patterson and Leonard Garment, understood Nixon's policy; Indian people were to be the subject of new initiatives to improve their lives. The Nixon administration introduced twenty-six pieces of legislature in 1969 to improve the lives of Indian people and there is correspondence and memoranda which indicates that he kept track of the various acts and applied pressures to insure that they did not get tied down in federal bureaucracy. In 1970 forty Public Laws were passed addressing Indian issues. On July 8, 1970, during the period the occupiers were on Alcatraz Island, President Nixon returned Blue Lake and 48,000 acres of land to the Taos Indians. In a memorandum written just prior to the return of Blue Lake, Leonard Garment stated 'It is essential that the Blue Lake restoration be portrayed for what it is: a much wider accomplishment than just the lands in New Mexico; a nation-wide symbol of this Administration's new approach toward Indian affairs, i.e., self-determination instead of termination.²² Other land returned to Indian people included 40 million acres to the Navajo Indians on June 30, 1970, 21,000 acres of Mount Adams in Washington State to the Yakima tribe in July 1972, eighty acres to the Washoe tribe

in California in October 1970, and some 60,000 acres to the Warm Springs tribes of Oregon.

While it can be said that the government played a waiting game, that is not to say that they did nothing. At one point, secret negotiations were held where the occupiers were offered a portion of Fort Miley, in San Francisco, as an alternative site to Alcatraz Island. By this time, mid-1970, however, those on the Island had become so entrenched that nothing less than full title to the island, the establishing of a university and cultural center, would suffice. The recalcitrance of the occupiers led to even greater discomforts on the Island. Initially, and for a considerable time, support poured in from across the nation, in the way of cash, food, supplies, and moral support. As time passed the support began to subside. Radio Free Alcatraz broadcasting from Los Angeles, Berkeley, and New York kept the public informed of the Indian demands and government failure to respond. A newsletter *Rock Talk*, published on the Island further brought the concerns of Indian people before the public. Still, as time passed, the support lessened. The government proposed a \$50,000 urban planning grant as an enticement for leaving the Island. The stipulation was however, that an organization had to be formed which would represent the Bay Area urban community as well as those on the Island.²³ The Island occupiers refused such an organization since they viewed this as a sell out and saw only the urban Indians, who had not suffered the discomforts of the Island, as the beneficiaries. Representatives of Indians of All Tribes demanded that all negotiations take place on the Island and that they have a veto power over any decisions.

Ultimately the \$50,000 was given to the newly formed Bay Area Native American Council (BANAC) for development of programs to improve the life of Bay Area urban Indians. On the Island, in the meantime, the government shut off all electrical power, and removed the water barge which had provided fresh water to the occupiers. Three days following the removal of the water barge a fire broke out on the Island. Three historical buildings were destroyed including the wardens home, the lighthouse, and the doctor's home. The government blamed the Indians, the Indians blamed undercover government infiltrates trying to turn non-Indian support against them.

The new population on the Island became a problem as time passed. The new occupiers consisted of American Indians as well as other ethnic groups, many from the hippie street scene of

San Francisco. The daily reports from the government caretaker on the Island as well as testimony from the remaining original occupiers complain of the open use of drugs, fighting over authority, and general disarray of the leadership. An egalitarian form of government was supposed to prevail, yet no leadership was visible with which the government could negotiate. As a result, in the summer of 1970 the government stopped negotiation entirely and began to look at ways to end the occupation.

When the electricity was cut off from the Island, and the lighthouse subsequently destroyed by fire, San Francisco Bay lost the light and fog signals to shipping in the Bay waters.²⁴ The Pilots Association and Coast Guard wrote repeated letters to the president to remove the Indians from the island and restore the aids. The Coast Guard complained because they saw themselves being held hostage by some 75 Indian people on the Island. In August 1970 a secret plan called Operation Parks was developed for an armed assault on the Island, to be conducted at night, hopefully for a peaceful removal. Operation Parks was scrapped when the San Francisco Chronicle published a detailed account of the plan. The federal government tried to deny that they had planned an armed assault on the Island despite the fact that the Chronicle twice published the operation plan.²⁵

The occupation continued on at a slow pace, both sides now in a retrenched position, the Indians living a harsh life, no heat, no electrical power other than portable electrical generators, no fresh water other than that brought out daily in bottles, and no way to preserve meats and vegetables. Still they said it was better than giving in to the federal government. Alcatraz Island reminded them of a reservation.

The occupation dragged on into 1971 with various new problems emerging for the Indian occupiers. In an attempt to raise money to buy food, they allegedly began stripping copper wiring and copper tubing from the buildings and selling it as scrap metal ashore. Three of the occupiers were arrested and subsequently tried and found guilty of selling some 600lbs of copper. In early 1971 the press, which had been largely sympathetic to this point turned against them and began publishing stories of alleged beatings and assaults that occurred on the Island even though only one case of assault was ever prosecuted. The press began to talk about lack of leadership, the open use of drugs and alcohol, a security force that was brutalizing the other Indians on the Island. Soon, little support

could be found. Those who had been sympathetic originally, including movie stars, Jane Fonda, Richard Burton, etc..... now moved on to other causes.

In January 1971, two Standard Oil tankers collided in the entrance to the San Francisco Bay. Even though it was acknowledged that the lack of an Alcatraz light or fog horn played no part in the collision it was enough to push the federal government into action. Nixon gave the go ahead to Ehrlichman to develop a removal plan - to take place when the smallest number of people were on the Island and to use as little force as possible.²⁶

On June 10, 1971, federal marshals, FBI agents, and special forces police, armed to the teeth, prepared for a major engagement, swarmed the Island and removed 5 women, 4 children, and six unarmed Indian men. The occupation was over.²⁷

If one looks at the original demand - title to the island, the building of a university and cultural center, none of which was achieved, it would appear that the 19 month occupation of Alcatraz Island was not a success. However, to use the words of Peter Blue Cloud and Richard Oakes, *Alcatraz Is Not An Island*, that is to say, the concept of an Indian people rising up as a group against the federal government and demanding to be heard, was not to be limited to Alcatraz Island. And certainly it was not.

Prior to the occupation there had been sporadic, localized, tribal, activist activity. These however were small in number and by and large addressed a specific concern in a specific local by a specific tribe. The difference following November 20, is dramatic and impressive. During the period of the occupation, no less than twenty other occupations of federal facilities occurred. These ranged from California to Oregon, to Washington State, across the nation to the BIA in Denver, and an assault on Ellis Island in New York. Most of these occupations were organized by, led by, or participated in by members of Indians of All Tribes from Alcatraz Island. The comings and goings of Indians on the island were recorded daily by a government caretaker. The occupiers often told him that they were in route to a certain place, and occupations occurred wherever they went. When the police arrested the occupiers at the abandoned Nike sites, the former CIA listening posts, Lassen forest, Pit River lands held by the Pacific Gas and Electric Company, the organizers proudly announced that they had come

from Alcatraz Island to lead the occupations. Following the removal of the Indians from the island in June 1971, some 50 other occupations took place across the country. Some received a considerable amount of press, some only a little, but the important thing is Indian activism had attained a new level.

The occupation of Alcatraz Island provided fertile ground for the rise of a new premiere Indian activist organization, the American Indian Movement, or AIM. Researchers and journalist generally reported that the participants in the occupations of 69, 70, and 71 were associated with AIM, or less often with the National Indian Youth Council. AIM however was formed in Minneapolis in 1968 and in 1969 had only three chapters, one in Minneapolis, Cleveland, and Washington, D.C. In 1969 AIM was primarily an urban organization with an emphasis on stopping police brutality of Indian people in urban areas, somewhat similar to what had been occurring in the Bay Area in the late 1960s. Five AIM members visited Alcatraz Island in the summer of 1970, and it was following this visit that they attracted their first national publicity. On Thanksgiving Day, 1970 they took over a replica of the Mayflower in Philadelphia. It was Alcatraz, however, and the realization that the federal government's hands were tied, that allowed, and motivated AIM to move into its more militant activities.

The success or failure of the Indian occupation of Alcatraz Island should not be judged by whether the demands for title to the island and the establishment of educational and cultural institutions on the island were realized. If one were to make such a judgment, the only possible answer would be that the occupation was a failure. Such is not the case, however. The underlying goals of the Indians on Alcatraz Island were to awaken the American public to the reality of the plight of the first Americans and to assert the need for Indian self-determination. In this they were indeed successful. As a result of the Alcatraz occupation, either directly or indirectly, the official government policy of termination of Indian tribes was ended and a policy of Indian self-determination without termination became the official U. S. government policy.

In January 1969, upon taking office, Nixon and his administration took the reins of a country

that was and would continue to be troubled with tumult and tragedy; an era in which many Americans had grown uncertain about the nation's present and fearful of its future. Chief among those with serious doubts were the American Indian people who were distrustful of federal officials and continued to harbor a deep fear of further termination efforts by the federal government. In Nixon's address to the Congress on July 8, 1970, he stated that 'It is long past time that the Indian policies of the Federal government began to recognize and build upon the capacities and insights of the Indian people. . . . 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. In keeping with this pledge the Nixon administration introduced twenty-two legislative proposals to the 91st Congress on behalf of American Indian people. These proposals were designed to support tribal self-rule, foster cultural survival as a distinct people, and to encourage and support economic development on Indian reservations. Six of the twenty-two proposals were passed into law by the 91st Congress. The following year the 92nd Congress passed into public law forty-six pieces of Indian legislation. Public Law 92-22 established within the Department of the Interior the position of an additional Assistant Secretary of the Interior, Public Law 92-265 extended the life of the Indian Claims Commission, Public Law 92-189 established the Navajo Community College, and Public Law 92-209 established the Native Alaska Claims Act. A large number of these new public laws were the result of various departmental submissions and awarded judgment funds to Indian tribes as a result of the Indian Claims Commission or returned land to various Indian tribes.

In addition to bills introduced, President Nixon increased the budget of the BIA by 224 percent, doubled the funds for Indian health, established the first special Office of Indian Water Rights, and made special provisions for presenting to any federal court the trustee's position defending Indian natural resources rights. New 'Indian desks' were created in each of the government's human resource departments to help coordinate and accelerate Indian programs. Indian education efforts were expanded including an increase of \$848,000 in scholarships for Indian college students and the Navajo Community College, the first college in America planned, developed and operated by and for Indians was established. OEO doubled its funds for Indian economic development and

tripled its expenditures for alcoholism and recovery programs. In areas such as housing, home improvement, health care, emergency food, legal services and education, OEO programs were also significantly expanded. Altogether, obligational authority for Indian programs increased from \$598 million in Fiscal Year 1970 to \$626 million in Fiscal Year 1971. In summing up the Nixon white house Indian policy, Patterson wrote on September 20, 1971 that the Nixon administration had a good policy record on Indian affairs and the Blue Lake and Indian (Alaska) accomplishments were down payments on the seriousness of those policies.

More importantly for young Indian people, the occupation of Alcatraz Island became the springboard for the rise of Indian activism beginning in 1969 and continuing into the late 1970s, as witnessed by the large number of occupations which began shortly after the November 20, 1969 landing. These occupations continued through the BIA headquarters takeover in 1972 and the occupation of Wounded Knee II in 1973. Most scholars, and the general public who follow Indian issues, frequently and incorrectly credit this new Indian activism to the American Indian Movement (AIM). Alcatraz was, in fact, the real catalyst for the new activism as it became more organized and more 'pan-Indian' in 1969 and beyond. Many of the approximately seventy-four occupations that followed Alcatraz were either planned by or included people who had been involved in the Alcatraz occupation or certainly gained their strength from the new 'Indianness' that grew out of that movement.

Today Alcatraz Island remains a strong symbol of Indian activism, self-determination, and a rallying point for unified Indian political activities. On February 11, 1978 Indian participants began the 'Longest Walk' to Washington, D.C. in protest of the government's ill treatment of Indian people. That walk began on Alcatraz Island. On February 11, 1994, AIM leaders Dennis Banks, Clyde Bellecourt, and Mary Wilson met with Indian people on Alcatraz Island and began the nation-wide 'Walk for Justice.' The walk was organized to protest the continuing imprisonment of Leonard Peltier as a result of the June 26, 1975 shoot-out between AIM members and FBI agents on the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota. That walk began on Alcatraz Island. On Thanksgiving day of each year since 1969 Indian people have gathered on Alcatraz Island to honor those who participated in the occupation and those who participate in the continuing struggle for Indian self-determination. While

not achieving the stated goals of those early occupation leaders, it can be accurately stated that the 1969 occupation of Alcatraz Island stands out as the most symbolic, the most significant, and the most successful Indian protest action of the modern era. In the final analysis, the occupation of Alcatraz Island was a major victory for the cause of Indian activism and remains one of the most noteworthy expressions of patriotism and self-determination by Indian people of this century.

Troy Johnson is a research scholar at the American Indian Studies Center at the University of California, Los Angeles. He holds a Master's Degree in American Indian History and Law and a Ph.D. in U.S. History from UCLA. The complete history of the occupation of Alcatraz Island and government response is contained in his book The American Indian Occupation of Alcatraz Island, Indian Self-determination and the Rise of Indian Activism, forthcoming from University of Illinois Press.

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- 13 Joe Bill, Eskimo, oral interview, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, Doris Duke Oral History Project, 10-11. Interviewer, Dennis J. Stanford,(February 5, 1970).

- 14 Oakes, Richard. 'Alcatraz is Not an Island,' Ramparts (December 1972).
Records at the UCLA American Indian Studies Center indicate that Oakes did in fact recruit a large number of American Indian students from that university to participate in the occupation. The exact number is not recorded.
- 15 Laurence M. Hauptman, The Iroquois Struggle for Survival (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1986).
- 16 Ross Harden. Interview by C. G. Crampton, July 14, 1970, Doris Duke Oral History Project, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.
- 17 San Francisco Chronicle, November 28, 1969.
- 18 Rupert Costo 'Alcatraz' The Indian Historian 3 (Winter 1970):9.
- 19 Oakes, "Alcatraz is Not an Island," 38-40, and U. S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation case file 70-51261.
- 20 National Archives, Washington, D.C. National Council on Indian Opportunity," memorandum by Leonard Garment, December 23, 1969," box #4, folder #1.
- 21 Leonard Garment, interview by author. Los Angeles, CA, July 16, 1992.
- 22 Nixon Presidential Materials Project, Alexandria, VA. Memorandum, Garment to Patterson, the White House,, Washington, D.C. July 8, 1970. Emphasis mine.
- 23 Bradley H. Patterson, Jr. to Ms. Colleen Waggoner, October 1, 1993.
- 24 Nixon Presidential Materials Project, Alexandria, VA, "memorandum for Brad Patterson from Commandant, United States Coast Guard," November 6, 1970. Alcatraz File Group - E. Krogh, (1970-71) box #10.
- 25 Nixon Presidential Materials Project, Alexandria, VA, "memorandum for Brad Patterson from Commandant, United States Coast Guard," November 6, 1970. Alcatraz File Group - E. Krogh, (1970-71) box #10.
- 26 San Francisco Chronicle, "Oil Not the Only Mess in the Bay," January 22, 1971.
- 27 Interview of John Garvey by author, July 3, 1992, Los Angeles, CA. Garvey interviewed Dick Billus, U.S. marshal, who was working in the Sacramento marshal's office and arrived on the island three hours after the removal occurred. Billus and other officers spent three days on Alcatraz following the removal to guard against a possible reinvasion. LaNada Boyer informed the author in an oral interview conducted on the Fort Hall Indian Reservation, Pocatello, Idaho, on December 5, 1992, that in fact another invasion was planned by Indian college students from the Bay Area. Boat transportation for the reinvasion has been secured by Al Miller, and the college students were gathering to go to the island. Unbeknownst to Boyer and the students, however, the reinvasion date of June 11, was the same date that the government forces landed on the island to affect the removal of the few remaining occupants holding the island, thus preventing the reinvasion.