‘Our Women are Brave on Alcatraz’: Place and Memory in Indigenous Resistance, 1969-1971

by

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The Women of Alcatraz

A hai – A hai – A hai
Our women are brave on Alcatraz
They work like the hard North Wind
A hai – A hai – A hai
Our women are gentle on Alcatraz
They sway like the sweet South Wind
A hai – A hai – A hai
Our women are wise on Alcatraz
They sing like the fresh East Wind
A hai – A hai – A hai
Our women are loving on Alcatraz
They smile like the warm West Wind
O, women of Alcatraz!

-Dorothy Lonewolf Miller (Blackfoot)
November 25, 1969
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Acknowledgments

Before I begin I would like to acknowledge that this project was completed on stolen lands; the archives I relied on are on the traditional territory of the Nations that today are collectively referred to as Ohlone. Wesleyan University, where I did most of the work for this project is on the traditional land of the Wangunk People. Neither People is federally recognized but members of each Nation are very much present in these places.

Thank you to the participants in the occupation, whose stories I have spent time with for the last year and whom I have come to admire immensely.

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Introduction

At 2 a.m. on November 20, 1969, a group of Indigenous activists gathered at the No Name Bar in Sausalito around final call. A few local boat owners agreed to sail them to Alcatraz Island in the early hours of the morning. They planned to claim the island under the right of discovery, and demanding title with the intentions of building a school, cultural center, museum and more. A few weeks earlier, on October 10, the San Francisco Indian Center had burned down, destroying a central community space and hub for social services. While the idea of making Alcatraz into a center for the Bay Area Native community had already been in the works as early as 1964, the fire served as a final push and public justification for occupying. In the first few weeks after taking the island these initial 78 people quickly ballooned into hundreds of people from around the United States and beyond; an estimated 5,600 people participated in the occupation. They lived on the island for varying lengths of time, building all the institutions needed to have a functioning community, including a school and a clinic, all on an inhospitable rock in the bay. A confluence of factors had led to this moment. Before this landing, two other attempts had been made to occupy the island, one in 1964 and one on November 9, 1969,

1 Troy R Johnson, *We Hold The Rock: The Indian Occupation of Alcatraz, 1969 to 1971* (San
2 Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* (New York: New Press, 1997). 19. The 78 number is disputed in other, Smith and Warrior here rely on a cited interview, which is why I have chosen to reference this number. Many sources report it as 89. No estimates exceed 90.
but on November 20th the time was finally right as historical and political forces—internationally, nationally, and locally—fell into place.

Today if you walk down the main street of Sausalito, away from the No Name Bar, you can see why the occupiers chose this location to launch the occupation. From the bend in the road you can see the island clearly, as well as any other ships that might be waiting for you along the way. But that doesn't address the larger question: Why Alcatraz? The island is small; at 22 acres it’s less than half the size of Grand Central Station. In 1969 the island’s buildings were in various states of disrepair and the only way to get anything — including food and water — on or off was, as it remains today, by boat. The island is unquestionably most famous for its 29 years as a maximum-security federal penitentiary. Even before the prison closed it notoriety had made it the setting of several Hollywood films, helping to cement its place in the imagination of the American public. But, of course, its history starts long before then and does not end with the closure and removal of the final inmates in 1963.

The occupiers were making a serious claim to the title of the island and they planned not to leave until the federal government gave it to them. The action also carried symbolic weight. The act of occupying the island flipped that model of US colonialism of the 20th century: Indigenous people were claiming an island from the US military as Indian Land. The power of this statement is what made the occupation so lasting and such a significant catalyst for other activism. The significance of the space of the island, and how it was claimed as Indian Land and represented as such, is one of the focuses of this project. Despite the historical impact of the occupation and the public attention it

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received at the time, it has been the focus of comparatively little historical analysis as compared to contemporaneous social movements. In the accounts that have been written, the particular experience and roles of women as part of the occupation has been relatively neglected, as well as how the aftermath specifically impacted women. This project attempts to address this weakness and trace the occupation’s lasting impacts up to the present day.

The 1960’s and 70’s were a pivotal period in American Indian activism and the 1969 Alcatraz occupation reflected the shift towards intertribal organizing and action that included Native people living in urban areas as well as those living on reservations. The occupation stood for native rights and sovereignty throughout the country. The role of women in this occupation is not secondary to the story but integral to it. The conditions that created the need and context for the occupation were varied but are all part of the larger framework of settler colonialism, which in the Americas has always been intimately tied to patriarchy, each reinforcing the logic of the other. Because of this, colonization has affected, and continues to affect, Native women in different ways than it affects men. These factors make considering the unique experiences of Native women across historical periods and academic disciplines essential.

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5 There is also a rich history to consider of resistance by native people whose gender expression does not fit within the gender binary. However, this history of resistance is not part of the specific case of the Alcatraz occupation and I will not explore it more in this project.
Some of the women on Alcatraz were organizers and leaders elected to the official council, like LaNada War Jack\(^6\) and Stella Leach; others took on important public relations roles like Marilyn Miracle, who edited the Newsletter. Many lived on the island for days or months, maintaining the infrastructure required to keep a community going on a 22-acre rock. Because the island community strove to be truly governed by everyone involved in the occupation, all these women were also involved in decision-making and governance. Considering the position of the Alcatraz occupation as a jumping off point for Native American activism throughout the 1970’s and the significance the island still has today, particularly for Bay Area Native communities, remembering the role of women in the occupation also serves as part of a larger process of recording women’s roles in the Red Power movement more generally. While the occupation was under way— and in the years immediately following it Native women — including some who had been involved with or influenced by Alcatraz and similar occupations, founded Women of All Red Nations (WARN) and the Indigenous Women’s Network. These groups, among others, worked to highlight issues like forced sterilization and gendered violence that specifically impact Native women in the United States, as well as international indigenous issues.\(^7\)

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\(^6\) LaNada War Jack uses several different names over the period of time covered in this history. During the time of the occupation her last name was Means and hence in most primary source quotes she is referred to as such. Later she changed her last name to Boyer and uses this name in many of her reflections cited here. This is also the name used in many secondary sources. Today she uses the name LaNada War Jack. Because of this discrepancy there is some inconsistency in how I refer to her. In general I use her first name in addition to her last for clarity and use the last name that most fits the period. When citing her I use her name as it appears in that source in the citation.

While gendered oppression can be traced back to the first contact between Indigenous Americans and European settlers, so can Native women’s resistance. Women “have formed the very core of indigenous resistance to genocide and colonization since the first moments of conflict between Indians and invaders.”

Across history women have fought actively against colonization, served as mediators, and worked to preserve life and culture. Looking at more recent history Renya Ramirez (Winnebago/Ojibwe) details how Native women in urban space have been central in creating what she calls “Native hubs.” The “hub” “offers a mechanism to support Native notions of culture, community, identity, and belonging away from tribal land bases.” She also ties the hub specifically to women: “it [the hub] describes a Native woman’s notion of urban and reservation mobility, and it suggests a political vision for social change.”

As Indigenous communities have changed and fought for survival under the violent forces at work in the Americas for the past 500 years, women have consistently been central to this fight, even when [white] historical narratives have written them out.

Devon Abbott Mihesuah (Choctaw) begins her book Indigenous American Women: Decolonization Empowerment, and Activism with “A few cautions on the margining of feminist studies with Indigenous women’s studies,” reminding readers that

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10 Ramirez, Native Hubs, 1.
academic work about Native American’s has a history of being exploitive and harmful.\textsuperscript{11} Her solution is to always center Native women’s voices and connect history to the present, both of which I hope to do by prioritizing personal accounts and including other forms of expression such poetry. Her cautions are relevant to my work here, particularly recognizing my position as a white woman writing within the context of academic disciplines that have often been uninterested in or inattentive to the voices and experiences of native women.

The language of this project is complicated and fraught. In the 1960s and 70s the term “Indian” was widely used and the quotes and primary sources used here illustrate that. Even the official name of the occupiers “Indians of All Tribes Inc.” reflects this language. Throughout this project, however, I primarily use the term “Indigenous,” though I also use “Native” fairly interchangeably. I use “Indian” primarily where it makes the most sense in historical context. Most ideally I would identify people by the nation they are part of and, where possible I try to do this for individuals. However since this project is fundamentally about a “pan-Indian” movement it rarely makes sense for me to identify groups this way.\textsuperscript{12}

“Women” and “Indigenous women” are challenging terms too. They are broad categories that flatten and elide individuals’ experiences. The classification of woman is

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{11} Devon Abbott A. Mihesuah, \textit{Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism} (United States: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 2-8.

\textsuperscript{12} Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, \textit{Indigenous peoples’ history of the united states} (United States of America: Beacon, 2015). xiii. These language choices attempt to follow the terminology used in the secondary sources I used. The specific choices above are based loosely on Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz’s from her book \textit{An Indigenous People’ History of the United States}. She notes that “Individuals and peoples as a whole do not consider ‘Indian’ a slur.” She also avoids the word “tribe” where possible. I found this difficult because of its ubiquity in the era I focus on. In text I try to identify scholars and writers by tribal affiliation when they do but do not attempt this for each occupier.
\end{footnotesize}
not historically consistent and western ideas of what constitutes a woman and who is or is not part of that category is a framework imposed on Indigenous communities in the Americas through colonization. Professor of Anthropology Beatrice (Bea) Medicine (Lakota) whose work focused on Indigenous women described the problem with trying to talk about such a range of people under one term; “the term Indian woman conceals and distorts the rich variation that we have in our tribal societies. The roles of women are very different; for example, Navajo society is extremely different from Lakota society, and the roles of women are a reflection of the cultural milieu of that society.”

However, because this project is about the 20th century United States, I use woman as a term and concept because of how uniformly enforced it was in this time and place.

The archival component of this project was conducted in two Bay Area archives. The first, more extensive collection is part of the San Francisco History Center’s archives located in the main branch of the San Francisco Public Library. The bulk of these documents were donated to the San Francisco Public Library by Frederic S. Baker, a member of Indians of All Tribes Inc.’s legal team in 1972. They remained sealed for some time in the hopes that Indians of All Tribes would recover the documents. The other collection I used heavily was at UC Berkeley Ethnic Studies Library. This

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14 This collection includes newspaper coverage of the occupation along with meeting notes, incoming correspondences, petitions in support of the occupation, school materials, some financial records, and other miscellaneous documents. The archives there also have a photography collection from the occupation.
16 This collection consists primarily of newspaper pieces, especially pieces from smaller local leftist publications. It also includes a number of student papers on the occupation written at the university in the decades after the occupation, some of which include significant oral history.
collection is significantly smaller and does not include a record of how it was compiled. Additionally, I used the San Francisco Bay Area Television Archive’s digital collection of TV coverage of the occupation extensively.\(^{17}\) These collections, like all archives, are incomplete. It is clear from the San Francisco collection that members of the occupation were making efforts to preserve records and communications. But these documents themselves illustrate where there are holes in the record, for example minutes from one meeting nod to another meeting, which the archives do not include minutes from.

Histories of the American Indian Movement (AIM), the actions associated with it and similar organizations in the 1960s and 70’s have been dominated by stories of men who were figureheads of the movement and of the individual occupation, takeovers, and other actions. The Alcatraz occupation is no exception. Renya Ramirez recalls her mother’s experiences as part of the occupation as a counterpoint to the most prominent written records’ tendency to exclude women: “A weakness in this generally valuable study \(\textit{Like a Hurricane}\) is that it concentrates primarily on the perspectives of Indian men. My mother, Woeshia Cloud North, was involved in the Indian occupation of Alcatraz, as were many other Native American women. Unfortunately, their stories were left out of the Smith and Warrior book.”\(^{18}\) Susan Krouse and Heather Howard make a similar point in their book, \textit{Keeping the Campfires Going}:

Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior’s history, \textit{Like a Hurricane: the Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee}, and Troy Johnson, Joane Nagel, and Duane Champagne's edited collection, \textit{American Indian Activism: Alcatraz to the Longest Walk}, in particular have prompted discussion and re-examination of the events, participants, and causes of recent Indian activism. However, most of these studies have focused on the very visible, public figures of


\(^{18}\) Ramirez, \textit{Native Hubs}, 23.
the Red Power movement, virtually all of whom have been men. Women’s activism, while less visible, has been crucial to sustaining Indian communities, particularly in urban areas, and to maintain the momentum in the heady days of the 1960s and 1970s. We need to look more closely at the contributions of women to those activist movements.¹⁹

In using sources such as Like a Hurricane, or Troy Johnson’s (Seminole) histories I sought to understand how to incorporate their historical value with their inattention to women’s specific experiences and their focus on the men involved in the occupation and AIM. Both the media and later historians focus on singular “great men”- in this case especially Richard Oakes. Such a singular focus is a symptom of a more general problem in the way history is often written. While part of the problem with this way of writing history is that the rhetorical ‘great men’ are, in fact, usually men, which erases women’s participation, a focus on individuals also deprioritizes the movement’s own interest in collectivity.

Many of the books I used were collections of written or oral history reflections on the occupation. Given the vast number of people involved and the different experiences of each, sometimes important pieces of information and facts about the occupation vary between accounts. Tim Findley, a reporter who covered the occupation extensively, later wrote; “as a story, I prefer to hear about the Alcatraz occupation as it is still told in oral legend, almost like a folk tale… It is a story that does not really have a clear beginning or

¹⁹ Susan Applegate Krouse and Heather A. Howard, Keeping the Campfires Going: Native Women’s Activism in Urban Communities (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).146. Devon Abbott A. Mihesuah makes a similar criticism in Indigenous American Women: “Many hail Robert Warrior and Paul Chaat Smith’s one-sided, male oriented book, Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee, as the authoritative work on Native activism, despite the reality that the book mentions only a few women in passing… and offers no analysis about AIM of the men’s sexism.”
Throughout this project I attempt to balance these versions: where possible highlighting the voices of occupiers over other kinds of sources and noting where major discrepancies arise.

This project began for me as a local history project and in many ways the most memorable conversations about it were fundamentally because of its nature as a local history. While home in Berkeley, every time I mentioned the project someone would tell me about their connection to the island or the era. My neighbor helped with the curation of the exhibit on the island about the occupation and her thoughts and resources helped me immensly. I went to the No Name Bar to see if there were any traces of the occupation and a friend told me her uncle had co-owned the bar and had mentioned the occupation and its start there. At the bar I asked the bartender if he knew anything about the occupation and the bar’s role. He was too young to have been involved but recounted for me a fairly inaccurate, though entertaining, version of the story. I learned some of the people who founded — and are still part of — the summer camp I went to growing up knew some of the occupiers and were involved with later activism. Local history is valuable as a microcosm of larger issues, but, for me at least, it also helped make the events I was reading about more immediate and concrete.

Wilma Mankiller (Cherokee), the first female chief of the Cherokee Nation and one of the most well-known Native women of the 20th century writes in her book Every Day is A Good Day, “Alcatraz was certainly a watershed for me...during the Alcatraz

occupation and that period of activism, anything seemed possible.”

The impacts of the Alcatraz occupation are manifold and challenging to distill. It ignited passion in individuals like Mankiller, served as an inspiration and model for other occupations (some of which were far more successful in accomplishing their stated goals than Alcatraz), and was part of the push that changed federal Indian policy. Remembering the work of individual women and women collectively in this historical moment, and centering the voices of Native scholars in this project, is a small attempt to counter the colonialist and patriarchal forces that have erased Native women’s importance for centuries.

This project is, for the most part, chronological. To understand the experiences and impacts of the occupation it is useful to first look at the early history of the Island and its significance across time as a military and penal space and as a space of projected optimism. The first chapter starts there, working forward through the 1950s and 60s, centering on the Bay Area especially and examining the factors that led to the occupation. It briefly examines the historical context of Indian policy of the 20th century and at the growing and changing Native communities in the Bay Area during this era, particularly focusing on dual-pronged mid-20th century answer to the “Indian question”—termination and relocation. These two policies are undoubtedly the ones that had most affected the lives of those involved in the occupation, and many of the goals of the occupation were in reaction to such experiences. Yet the changing landscape of Indigenous life and community in the Bay Area was also shaped by other influences: local, national, and

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21 Wilma Pearl Mankiller, *Every day is a good day: reflections by contemporary indigenous women* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Pub., 2009), 82.
global. The organizations and informal networks that built and sustained these communities were often run and made up of women.

The second chapter focuses on the Island and the 19 months of the occupation, including analysis of visual and media representations. The narrative of what happened in the 18 months that Indians of All Tribes held Alcatraz Island has always been contested. Even as it was still happening reports — ranging from who was on the island, to where money was going, to if the death of a child was accidental or murder — often varied wildly. This is not an attempt to reconcile these accounts but to use them, along with existing secondary sources to highlight the specific position of women on the island, as individuals and to some extent collectively, and how these women were understood by the wider public.

Finally, the last chapter follows lineages of the Alcatraz occupation and the women involved through the social movements that followed and up into the contemporary movements of the past few years. The occupation’s impact is lasting and echoes through the tactics, rhetoric, and images of the last half a century of Indigenous activism. It is recalled visually in support of contemporary movements and analyses of these movements often reference and build on the occupation.

Though the term had not yet been used in this context at the time, the occupation of Alcatraz was undoubtedly an act of survivance. Survivance, a loose blending, of “survival” and “resistance” coined by Gerald Vizenor; “is an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction of survivable name.”

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remembering that were central to the occupation and the memory of the occupation in the last half-century has, in turn, contributed to Native survivance.
Chapter 1: Getting to Alcatraz
A Brief History of *La Isla de los Alcatraces* and the Bay Area Native Community in the 20th century

By 1969, what was to become of Alcatraz Island had become a hot button issue in San Francisco. Yet the story of Alcatraz starts long before any attempted occupations, and before “the Rock’s” years as a Federal petitionary for some of the most notorious criminals of the early 20th century. Like all land in the Americas, the first people known to be on or around the island were the Indigenous groups that lived around the region now known as the San Francisco Bay.

This chapter explores the historical context that has shaped Alcatraz Island and the ways in which women would experience and create Alcatraz as Indian Land. By looking at the history that shaped the island into what it was, physically and symbolically, on the eve of the occupation in 1969, we see the ways the island’s history of colonial and military development both reflect a larger regional history and a specific place the American imagination. The national and local history of changing Native communities in the decades leading up to the occupation gives context for the specificity of the role of women in the occupation. The years of debate about what the island should be used for following the prison’s closing in 1963 reflected the different directions Americans felt the country was or should be moving.
An Island, a Fortress, a Prison

What role Alcatraz played in the lives of the pre-contact Indigenous communities of the area is not clear. Before Spanish imperialism, the California coast was highly populated by small groups, sometimes referred to as “tribelets” by anthropologists.²³ There were estimated to be around fifty of these communities, speaking a large number of distinct languages.²⁴ Spanish colonizers collapsed these groups into a generalized term “Costenos” which was eventually Anglicized to Costanoan, a term still sometimes used today. However, most people within Bay Area Indigenous communities and beyond use Ohlone, along with the more specific name of their community. Of these groups the Yelamu are indigenous to the closest inhabited area to Alcatraz, the far north end of the peninsula known today as the city of San Francisco.²⁵

Most of the oral history around the island and its possible role in the community was lost through the colonization of the region, however it is certain that the occupation “was not the first relationship between indigenous people and Alcatraz.” It is possible that the island, along with the other few islands in the bay, were places where the Ohlone “and other indigenous people of the coast rested and got their bearings.”²⁶

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²³ This language is problematic as were the methods used by the UC Berkeley anthropologists who conducted this research. Much of the foundational anthropologic work about the Ohlone, as with many Native communities fails to incorporate perspectives from the people themselves and is formed by racism and exotification.

²⁴ Michael Harney, The Ohlone Way: Indian Life in the San Francisco - Monterey Bay Area, ed. Malcolm Margolin (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 1998). Estimated to be somewhere between eight to twelve linguistically distinct communities, within the relatively small geographic region around the San Francisco Bay and Monterey, around 100 miles of coast.


²⁶ Mankiller, A Good Day, 81.
violations of laws and that it is associated with negative spiritual connotations. Both pre-colonial histories were deployed during the occupation as evidence for or against the action.

In 1776, the Mission San Francisco de Asís and a military presidio were established, as part of a network of missions along the coast. These missions were both strategic ways to claim and control land and a site of active conversion. Yelamu and other Indigenous communities were subject to forced conversions and physical punishment in the mission, as well as decimation by European diseases. These conditions led to a loss of significant amounts of Indigenous knowledge in the area, including many of the languages spoken. Introduction of cattle and other agricultural practices, along with banning of traditional agriculture made pre-colonial systems of food production untenable. After the missions began to lose their power wealthy ranchers and then settlers and miners from the Eastern United States took control of the area, each new group continuing to perpetuate the violence and erasure of those before.

This colonial process introduced and perpetuated hierarchical gender constructs, and used those classifications to further colonial projects, setting the stage for the continued marginalization of Indigenous women. Before white colonists came to the Americas, a period often referred to as “pre-contact,” Indigenous societies were not, as a rule, male-dominated. While it is important to keep in mind the specificity of each native community, Andrea Smith writes about this period in her book Conquest: “Women served as spiritual, political, and military leaders, and many societies were matrilineal.

28 Yamane and Kehl. This is an incredibly simplified version of a complex history of extermination and persecution. It is not within the scope of this project to fully explore the ways in which Spanish colonialism affected the San Francisco Bay Area Indigenous peoples.
Although there existed a division of labor between women and men, women’s labor and men’s labor were accorded similar status.”

While there is and was a wide range of social structures and beliefs across different societies and cultures, and it is crucial to not elide the specificity of each or erase the existence of hierarchies in pre-contact culture, patriarchal society as we see it today was brought from Europe and implemented in the Americas. Many writers have emphasized the importance of male dominance in the constructing of settler colonialist states. Subjugating women was a tool that reinscribed hierarchical social structure as natural across generations. Sexual violence was also used as weapon by colonizers from the earliest moments of contact, making women’s bodies into zones of conflict and tools of colonization.

Exploitation of bodies and land were, and continue to be, deeply connected: “The connection between Native people’s bodies—particularly Native women’s bodies—and Native lands is not simply metaphorical. Many feminist theorists have argued that there is a fundamental connection between patriarchy's disregard for the natural world, women, and indigenous peoples.”

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29 Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*, (United States: South End press, 2005), 18. Smith’s work has been foundational to many later scholars writing on patriarchy and settler colonialism and issues important to Indigenous women. However it has been tarnished in recent years by revelations that, while she claims Cherokee identity, she is not an enrolled member of the tribe and cannot otherwise demonstrate her lineage. The implication that she did ethnographic work under false pretenses of being a member of the people about whom she was conducting research has cast a shadow on her findings. I have chosen to still quote her work here because of its significance of its significance to other scholarship. However in the bulk of this project I do not use her work as a major source and try to focus on the voices of Indigenous women both as scholars and activists. You can read more about this case here: https://indiancountrymedianetwork.com/news/opinions/open-letter-from-indigenous-women-scholars-regarding-discussions-of-andrea-smith/

30 Smith’s book *Conquest* is centrally focused on this concept and illustrates it across historical periods

31 Smith, *Conquest*, 55.
In 1775, Juan Manuel de Ayala, while charting the San Francisco Bay recorded three islands, what are today likely Angel Island, Yerba Buena, and Alcatraz. Ownership of the island was unclear and contested for much of the early and mid 19th century, as was common with land in California while the area changed hands from Spain, to Mexico, to attempted independence, to the United States. In 1850, immediately after California became the 31st state, President Millard Fillmore designated the island as a military reservation and it quickly became part of a network of defenses guarding the expanding city of San Francisco and access to inland California. Through the 1850s a fort was built on the island and by 1859 a military company was permanently installed there. During the Civil War the island was seen a crucial point of defense and both the number of soldiers and the fortifications of the island increased even further.

The island also began doubling as a military prison starting in 1859, when a small number of soldiers were incarcerated there. Two years later the number of military prisoners on Alcatraz had continued to grow, and it was officially declared the Department of the Pacific Military Prison. In 1907, a new cell house was built and the island transitioned away from its role as a primary defense for the bay and became specifically a low security military prison. The military left the island in 1933 due to the

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32 Erwin Thompson, The Rock: A History of Alcatraz Island, 1847-1972 (National Park Service, United States Department of Interior), 4. Alcatraz was named after the large number of birds found there and described as “very steep and barren and would not afford shelter even for the launch.” It is not entirely clear if the island he identified as de los Alcatraces was the same island we call Alcatraz today: it may have been today’s Yerba Buena as his charts are unclear, however the description of bare rocks and no fresh water much more closely matches the physical attributes of Alcatraz.

expense of maintenance and the Bay Area public’s dislike of it. A year later the island was taken over by the Department of Prisons and became the Maximum Security-Minimum Privileges penitentiary made famous by some of the more notorious criminals imprisoned there, the media and Hollywood fascination with the prison, and the tourist destination it remains today.

Throughout the era that Alcatraz served as a prison it also held Indigenous prisoners, incarcerated as a consequence of resisting U.S. imperialism. Some, particularly earlier on in the 19th century, were men who had been scouts for the army but were later accused of mutiny. The island’s first Indigenous prisoner, known as Paiute Tom was taken to Alcatraz on June 5th 1873. Two days later he was shot and killed by a guard. On November 25th 1894 nineteen Hopi men were detained in Orayvi, on Hopi’s Third Mesa, were taken to Alcatraz. They were arrested and held on Alcatraz for seven months for refusing to send their children to government schools. Sentenced to be "held in confinement, at hard labor, until . . . they shall show . . . they fully realize the error of their evil ways . . . until they shall evince, in an unmistakable manner, a desire to cease interference with the plans of the government for the civilization and education of its indian wards." These twenty prisoners were invoked by the occupiers 75 years later as part of the Indigenous lineage of the island.

The penitentiary on Alcatraz was closed on March 21, 1963, after 29 years in operation, largely because it was far more expensive to run and maintain than most

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34 "The Post on Alcatraces,” National Parks Service.
37 ibid.
prisons. At the time, it was reported that the buildings were “dangerously deteriorating,” and that “$5,000,000 would be required to repair and rebuild them.” These reports would foreshadow some of the major problems the occupiers encountered on the island. The land was (and is) owned by the federal government; specifically, it was managed by the General Service Administration (GSA), but the city of San Francisco was also involved in managing what was essentially a local issue.39

By the time the occupation began in 1969 the prison had been closed for the better part of a decade. During this time possible uses for the island became a popular topic of discussion but little action was taken. A notable exception to this period of relative calm and disuse, particularly for the present study, was an earlier attempt by Native Americans to occupy the island in March, 1964. Shortly after the prison closed, five Sioux landed on the Island and claimed it, citing the 1868 Fort Laramie treaty, which allowed the Sioux to take possession of surplus federal land, making the Island a decommissioned penitentiary — fair game.

The idea to occupy Alcatraz and claim it as Indian Land first came to Belva Cottier (Sioux) in 1964. She had read an article about the government’s indecision about what to do with the land and went to the Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley and found a copy of the 1868 treaty. She enlisted the help of several lawyers and other experts to help her map the island and figure out how to navigate the tides. In addition to the legal justification of the Fort Laramie treaty she also pointed out that she “found out that many

Indians had been held as prisoners there, so in a way it already was Indian land.” The document they brought invoked the treaty and said “because we are civilized human beings, and we realize these acts give us land at no cost, we are willing to pay the highest price California land set by the government — 47 cents an acre.” The tactic of offering to pay small sums for the island to point out injustices in how the American government took land was repeated five years later in “Proclamation to the Great White Father,” the 1969 occupiers’ foundational document. The five occupiers stayed on the island for only a few hours, leaving after filing related paperwork and holding a victory dance. While this occupation was symbolic rather than a full attempt to take control of the land, it set legal and practical precedent for both the later Alcatraz occupation and other occupations around the country. The groundwork done by Belva Cottier and others for this occupation was essential to what came later. By invoking an Indigenous claim to the land Cottier drew upon local history and memory as well as a broader history of United States colonialism.

Urban Native Communities and United States Indian Policy First Half of the 20th century

To understand how the Bay Area Indigenous community came to exist as it was at the time of the occupation it is useful to look back to federal policy of the 1930s-50s, which had both immediate and lasting impacts. Over the course of the 19th century United States federal and state policy slowly shifted from outright murder and extermination toward violent assimilation, which jeopardized the continued survival of

40 Johnson, The Occupation of Alcatraz Island, 17. This quote is from a piece in the Catholic Voice “Indian in the City” excerpted by Johnson.
Indigenous people in the United States. These changes co-constituted shifting understandings of Indians in the American imagination from threatening menaces to white America to a “disappearing race” — part of an illusory nostalgia-laced past. One central policy that focused on assimilation was the implementation of the now-notorious Indian boarding schools.

The first and most famous of these off-reservation schools was the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, established in 1879, which served as a model for the many other schools that operated through the mid 20th century. The founder of Carlisle, Richard H. Pratt, famously said, “kill the Indian to save the man,” a phrase that has come to represent the mission of the boarding schools and later Indian assimilation policy. Thousands of children were forcibly removed from their families, and when parents resisted, some — like the “Hopi 19” on Alcatraz — were imprisoned. Many of these children died under terrible conditions, and those who survived had most often lost their native language and cultural practices.

In these schools boys were trained for manual labor and girls were taught the skills considered valuable in a wife, which generally involved preparing them to be domestic workers. Andrea Smith describes how “the primary role of this education for Indian girls was to inculcate patriarchal norms into Native communities so that women would lose their place of leadership in Native communities.”

43 The history of changing perceptions of Native Americans and how these perceptions were deployed strategically to maintain settler colonialism has been explored at length and is outside the scope of this project.
45 Smith, Conquest, 37.
naturalized gender hierarchies for Native children in addition to exposing them to physical and emotional abuse.

In the 1930s, United States Indian policy began to shift away from a strictly assimilationist agenda under the “New Deal for Indians” implemented by John Collier, commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). The “new deal” era policies were a reversal of decades of assimilation and a return of natural and financial resources to tribes. Under his leadership, bans on cultural practices and the speaking of native languages were lifted and more local day schools shifted education away from the boarding school system. The Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) encouraged tribes to organize tribal governments that mirrored the American legal system and gave more jurisdictional power to Native nations. Congress set aside $10 million for tribes who implemented the IRA and Collier made sure these funds were implemented in ways that were specifically useful to each region. Collier’s personal beliefs about the importance of Indigenous culture as he understood it was a primary motivating force, driving him to make fundamental changes in U.S. policy. He is not, however, an uncomplicated figure. There is “a near consensus among historians of the Indian New Deal that Collier temporarily rescued Indian communities from federal buses and helped Indian people survive the Depression but also damaged Indian communities by imposing his own social and political ideas on them.”

National policies had strong effects on local communities but the specific contexts of the Bay Area and surrounding regions in Northern California also shaped the experiences of Indigenous people living there. During this era Indigenous people from

outside the Bay Area were living throughout the region, though in smaller numbers. Some came from relatively nearby to follow economic opportunity in growing cities. For example many Pomo women would come from Rancherias north and east of the Bay Area and spend a few years or a season at a time in Oakland; “most of the girls… were placed as maids, whose jobs were to ‘dust, clean, cook, and take care of children.’”

Because of the nature of the work, jobs were open “only for girls. The boys can’t get jobs down here.” Some of these women expressed frustration at their inability to leave domestic work despite their effort but found themselves stuck because the government schools had only prepared them for this kind of labor. Later, during World War II, women were able to enter other fields, particularly manufacturing, but often went back to the Rancherias they had come from. For example Francis Jack “went back to Hopland Rancheria in 1949 after training as a nurse and building airplane engines in Sacramento (a job she loved, by the way).” She took on a central role in her community after returning, becoming “the first tribal chairperson of Hopland’s new government, organized after the group's landmark legal challenge to termination.” As tribal leadership reorganized and was forced to adapt to changing demands from the United States government, women in Bay Area communities took on leadership roles, which were shaped both by tribal tradition and by experiences in urban spaces. These structures and roles established in the earlier part of the 20th century continued to shape the community into the 1960’s when other forms of political organizing gained strength.

48 Most Pomo reservations are referred to as Rancherias.
Other Native communities came to the Bay Area in this period from farther away, driven by different forces. Ruth Saracino Hopper (Lauguna) writes about her memories of moving to the “Santa Fe Indian Village” on the outskirts of Richmond California:

My people came this far, two states away, beginning in 1922 before the Relocation Program happened in the 1950s. Our people came here because of an agreement with the railroad that because the tracks went through our land, we would get jobs working on the railroad… Our parent made sure we had the living style of home.  

Hopper’s memories illustrate not just different ways Native people were coming to cities but also the work that was done to maintain ways of life.

1950s and on

In her 1990 collection Diné poet Esther Belin often writes of the experience of being Indigenous in the Bay Area in a post-relocation time. Her Oakland is filled with Native-ness, seen from the perspective of the Coyote, a central figure in Navajo stories; he too has come from Navajoland.

And Coyote struts down East 14th
feeling good
looking good
feeling the brown
melting into the brown that loiters
rapping with the brown in front of the Native American Health Center
talking that talk
of relocation from tribal nation
of recent immigration to the place some call the United States
home to many dislocated funky brown

ironic immigration

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more accurate tribal nation to tribal nation

and Coyote sprinkles corn pollen in the four directions
to thank the tribal people
indigenous to what some call the state of California
the city of Oakland
for allowing use of their land.52

- Esther Belin, excerpt from “Blues-ing on the Brown Vibe”

The 1950s brought another major shift in how Indian policy was executed, though in spirit this era’s legislation spoke to the same goals of assimilation as the boarding schools and other related strategies from before the IRA and Collier’s other policy changes. John Collier’s tenure at the BIA lasted until 1945; in 1950 Dillon Myer whose term was defined, according to Ray Moise, by “the four gospels” of “termination, relocation, assimilation, and acculturation” 53 was appointed to the job. His appointment and policy decisions reflected the changing American political atmosphere. 54 Myer oversaw the design and execution of the termination and relocation policies, which ended federal recognition of the tribal government sovereignty and the dissolution of reservations and encouraged Indigenous people to move to urban areas, on a national scale. Given his previous work for the U.S. government he was a natural choice:

It was no accident that Myer was chosen as commissioner of Indian Affairs during this time. During World War II, Myer had been director of the War Relocation Authority, the agency responsible for uprooting from their homes tens


of thousands of Americans of Japanese descent and herding them off to concentration camps or “relocation centers” in the California desert.\(^{55}\)

In some ways the shift toward tribal termination had similar underpinnings to pre-Collier policy, particularly in the focus on extermination/assimilation and ending of collective land ownership. However, they differed substantially in that the drive behind termination was to make the government less involved in the lives of Native Americans, rather than heavily intervening to run all institutions.

In 1953, the House passed House Concurrent Resolution 108 and Public Law 280. These policies set in motion the dissolution of tribal sovereignty and government support of social services. These bills used the language of equality and citizenship, claiming “to end [American Indian’s] status as wards of the United States, and to grant them all of the rights and prerogatives pertaining to American citizenship.”\(^{56}\) These laws followed a set of more localized actions that had slowly been decreasing the number of tribes with full federal recognition - and importantly the amount of land and the resources on that land, over which Native people had control. In the years after 1953, many tribes were fully or partially terminated. In essence, this legislation suggested that differential treatment by federal and state governments toward tribes, including social services and different land use laws, were hindering Native people’s ability to integrate fully into white American Society. Public Law 280 gave several states “jurisdiction over offenses committed by or against Indians in the Indian country.”\(^{57}\) These policies took away much of individual


tribes’ power to enforce their own laws, exacerbating issues created by overlapping jurisdictions. Reflecting the language of earlier programs, such as the boarding schools, these policies were framed as being for the good of Native people—specifically as individuals.

Relocation policy, also enacted in the early 1950s, was another approach to similar ends. It entailed encouraging Native people to move to urban areas with the promise of support to find employment and housing. For many, this support was limited to a bus ticket to a major city and placement at a short-term, low paying job. Like termination, relocation was supposed to help assimilate American Indians into white America while simultaneously conveniently opening up land that had been part of Native Nations by undermining sovereignty. In the Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs of 1954, Commissioner Glenn L. Emmons announced, “during the 1954 fiscal year, 2,163 Indians were directly assisted to relocate under the Bureau’s relocation program” and “at their destination, Bureau Relocation Office assisted the group also to adjust to the new community.” This optimistic tone contrasts with the way many Native people remember these policies. Adam Fortunate Eagle maintains that BIA agents promised that there were jobs available in cities far away from their reservations, and “the Indians that signed up for the program were given bus tickets to whichever center they had chosen.” But when they arrived they often found themselves living “in a ghetto.” Relocated Indians were given assistance only until they got their first jobs, many

of which were temporary positions, and then the assistance was cut off.\textsuperscript{60} Relocation grant money was also tightly controlled and used to influence the choices of its recipients. Those who sought training for ‘blue-collar’ professions could receive money to cover education costs but those who wanted to pursue an advanced education could only receive money for living expenses.\textsuperscript{61} Similarly to only teaching domestic skills in the boarding schools, this system of funding gave the BIA power to limit the mobility of Native people, continuing to trap many in poverty after leaving reservations.

Several cities around the Bay Area became relocation centers during this era and because of that the Native community of the region was heavily shaped by these policies. According to Ray Moisa “California is home to more than 250,000 Native Americans [2000 Census, 333,346], the largest Indian population of any state. Yet fewer than 12 percent are Native Californians.”\textsuperscript{62} While these numbers also reflect that other cities in California were relocation centers, they give a sense of scale and lasting effects of relocation in the Bay Area.

\textbf{1960s planning for Alcatraz}

Suggestions and proposals for how to use the island ranged widely in scale and purpose. One of the most popular was a “west coast Statue of Liberty.”\textsuperscript{63} The idea of building a large statue on the Island was not entirely new. In 1934 a piece in the \textit{San Francisco Chronicle} suggested that rather than reopening the island as a prison again a

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid, 22.
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“statue of peace be erected.” Again in 1939 both the Chronicle and the New York Times suggested a statue similar to the Statue of Liberty after the Attorney General argued that the prison should be moved. After the prison was closed in 1963 one group went as far as introducing a bill in Congress for the building of such a statue.

By November 1969, one proposal had risen above the rest, gaining official backing from the city. The Hunt Plan, as it is referred to in articles and documents from the time, was the dream of a Texas oil tycoon Lamar Hunt. Its primary component was a colossal space museum, described as follows in a 1969 San Francisco Chronicle article:

Hunt proposes a space museum, retention of the prison as a tourist attraction, “an historically accurate reproduction of San Francisco, 1890,” which would be full of boutiques and restaurants, an underground space museum, and “a public plaza… of approximately four acres of landscaped, illuminated gardens, highlighted by statues of the key men who have planned and implemented America’s space program,” which Lamar Hunt calls “the most significant achievement in the history of man.”

The Board of Supervisors of San Francisco supported the plan, which involved the city purchasing the land from the GSA. However, the plan was fairly controversial with the general public. In order to get public support, the board “abandoned plans to build a controversial 364-foot tower on the island as a monument to the Apollo 11 moon mission.” The proposal was especially opposed by environmentalists, given voice by Alvin Duskin, who ran ads opposing the Hunt plan and encouraging people to write in

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64 Ibid, 351.
65 Ibid, 410.
66 Ibid 465.
67 Frankenstein, “Some Strange Confusion In the Alcatraz Plans”.
with their own suggestions, leading to some eccentric ideas, including three votes for a “monument to man’s failings.”

These competing ideas and proposals speak to different visions of the country’s direction at the end of a tumultuous decade. The Hunt proposal is a monument to American exceptionalism and scientific progress. The desire for a “west coast Statue of Liberty” speaks to other American ideals, both of national pride and of welcoming new comers, although the placement directly next to Angel Island, a west coast Ellis Island, is perhaps too apt. Both of these proposals are in sharp contrast to the vision of the Island in the demands of the 1964 and 1969 occupations. Each continue a legacy of colonialism; ever-continuing expansion into space or the naturalness of US control from “sea to shining sea.” Indigenous control of the island, in contrast, would be a radical shift from these histories in line with the decolonial movements that were happening globally at this time.

The Bay Area as a growing site of Native organizing

Many of the key organizers of the Alcatraz occupation came to the Bay Area during relocation. LaNada Means, who had spent her childhood being bounced around boarding schools and a BIA school on the Blackfoot reservation, was part of this program. Peter Collier described her experience of relocation in a profile in Ramparts:

“the BIA gave her a one-way ticket to San Francisco, one of the 8 major relocation centers in the country.” But, like many, she recounts getting almost none of the promised

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support upon her arrival. Wilma Mankiller also moved to San Francisco for the first time in 1957 with her family as part of relocation after The Indian Relocation Act of 1956 codified relocation as official BIA policy.

For many of these people, life in the Bay Area was not easy; despite a growing Indian community, they were still seen as outsiders. Stella Leach said that non-Native neighbors so regularly harassed her and her family that they had to move almost once a year. For her it “just got to be too much.” Her experiences exemplify the conditions that drove many to organize; both improve local Native people’s lives on a small scale and to push for larger, more sweeping social change.

Despite the huge impact termination and relocation had on Native urban communities, the story of every Native person who moved to a city at this time, or those who stayed on reservations, cannot be reduced to only federal policy. It is also imperative to recognize that the Native communities that grew up in cities at this time, at least in part because of these policies, were nonetheless vibrant and multifaceted Native spaces, with people expressing and experiencing their Native identities in a wide variety of ways. As Renya Ramirez argues in Native Hubs,

On many occasions when historians focused on urban Indians, they mistakenly assumed the BIA policies, such as termination and relocation, are the primary and predictable causes for Indian migration. Adopting a policy-driven approach, they have failed to recognize the various ways that individuals experience urban life.

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73 Ramirez, Native Hubs, 23.
Additionally, while relocation was in many ways very painful for people who ended up feeling trapped in cities without support from the government, many also associate this policy, and collective resistance to the goals of assimilation that inherent in it, with the growth of vibrant communities.\textsuperscript{74}

The Bay Area Native community was one of the many that grew dramatically during the years of relocation — Oakland and San Francisco were both among the cities that received Native people from across the country throughout the 1950s. The Intertribal Friendship House (IFH), “one of the first Indian focused, multipurpose, organizations in the United States,” established in 1955, marked the beginning of increased intertribal organization in the Bay Area.\textsuperscript{75} One of the groups that developed and grew at the IFH was a group that came to be called the “United Council,” an umbrella organization comprised of a wide range of Native groups, both affiliated with specific tribes and serving other affinity groups. Over the course of the 1960s, this group’s orientation shifted towards activism and it became a driving force in the occupation.\textsuperscript{76}

The Indian organizations in the Bay Area grew around a structure of women in leadership. Rather than institutions changing to incorporate women, as the growing feminist movement was advocating for in the 1960’s, women were integral in the foundations of Indian organizations. This did not come from a desire to promote an ideal of female leadership but rather out of necessity and as a reflection of the lives of the growing community. Rosalie McKay-Want reflected, “it is usually all the women that are on the boards and come to meetings. Men are busy with their jobs, or they’re on their

\textsuperscript{74} Intertribal Friendship House (Oakland, Calif.) and Lobo, \textit{Urban Voice}. Several of the interviewees speak to this. For example Peggy Berryhill, “Memories of Growing up in the Oakland Indian Community,” 31.

\textsuperscript{75} Intertribal Friendship House and Lobo, \textit{Urban Voice}, 49.

\textsuperscript{76} Fortunate Eagle, \textit{Alcatraz! Alcatraz!}, 26.
union boards or whatever.” Women running these organizations had to actively try to include men: “we have a hard time convincing them that the Indian community is just as important. Any man who ran for a board seat probably got it because we wanted the male perspective.”77 Women’s leadership in these community spaces was well established, if not always recognized by outsiders.

During this same time period, the Bay Area was a growing site of student activism, as student movements took over UC Berkeley’s campus. Students involved in organizing on their campuses were also connected to organizing in the Indian community both on and off campus. Notably, Richard Oakes, who became the figurehead of the first few months of the occupation, was a student activist at San Francisco State University (SFSU). In the year leading up to the occupation he had been involved in work to establish a Native American Studies department at SFSU, engaging also with similar efforts throughout the state.78 These demands were part of a larger movement to push the academy to open to other experiences and forms of knowledge that had been systemically excluded. At UC Berkeley, students and others occupied a bungalow and eventually were able to make it into a native cultural center. LaNada Means was a student there during this era, enrolling in January 1968. As the first Native student accepted through the Economic Opportunity program, she described that “at first it was lonely being a native on a campus of fifty thousand students,” but she soon met another Native woman and

recruited other Native students to the school. Like the community organizations that had been growing in the Oakland and the greater Bay Area, women established these groups, both formal and informal, changing the expectations of who was and wasn't allowed to be in leadership.

These students, and other Native activists involved in various actions like the Washington State fish-ins and the American Indian Charter Convention in Chicago learned from each other as well as from more established movements, such as the civil rights movement. In his reflections on the Alcatraz occupation Vine Deloria Jr. notes that Indian activists’ strategies were not only influenced by the civil rights movements but that they also “benefited substantially” from that movement in the 1960s, because of its “ensuing doctrines concerning the poor.” However, others, like Means, felt that the 1960s did not bring any tangible changes to their lives.

In the specific setting of UC Berkeley, students involved in organizing for Indigenous rights overlapped with students who were part of the Free Speech movement. While Indian organizing was separate and specific, building off centuries of Indigenous resistance, student organizers were also influenced by their peers. The women’s movement was also gaining strength across the country at this time. In considering the position of women in the occupation this cannot be fully ignored. However, in this period, the mid to late 1960s, the mainstream feminist movement was not focused on

82 LaNada Boyer “Reflections on Alcatraz,” 88.
issues specific to Indigenous women and many felt distanced from that movement.\textsuperscript{83} Later, in the 1970s and 80s Indigenous women formed organizations, such as Women of All Red Nations (WARN), but at this time the women most involved with the occupation do not mention specifically gender-focused activism.

Some Indigenous women activists and leaders in the decades following Alcatraz aligned themselves with the feminist movement or at least parts of its ideology. For example Wilma Mankiller (Cherokee), who was on Alcatraz during the occupation and became the principle chief of the Cherokee nation, identified as a feminist. Mankiller does not state in her reflections on the topic whether she would have identified this way at the time of the occupation, but in her 2004 book she writes that she is “one of the few elected tribal leaders to consistently describe [herself] as a feminist.”\textsuperscript{84} Others, however, felt this position was “assimilationist.”\textsuperscript{85} Both Indigenous women who distance themselves from feminism and those who embrace it point out that gender and misogyny as it exists today come from Western, not Native modes of thinking. This point also subverts the lasting stereotype of Native men as “savages” uniquely violent towards women.\textsuperscript{86}

Watching and participating in other fights for equality in the United States and liberation throughout the world encouraged Native Americans in the mid 1960s into a

\textsuperscript{83} Jaimes and Halsey, “American Indian Women: At the Center of Indigenous Resistance in Contemporary North America.” 311.
\textsuperscript{84} Mankiller, \textit{Every Day is a Good Day}, 94.
\textsuperscript{85} Jaimes, \textit{The State of Native America}, 331. As discussed in the introduction “integration of American Indigenous women’s studies and feminist studies” is still an issue to be approached thoughtfully and with caution (Mihesuah, \textit{Indigenous American Women}, 5). Because I did not encounter primary source references to the significance of the women’s movement to those involved in the occupation I will not speculate on what the connection may or may not have been.
\textsuperscript{86} Mankiller, \textit{Every Day is a Good Day}, 94. Mankiller discusses the idea, which Paula Gunn Allen also focuses on, that feminism and gender equality come from Indigenous women and cultures first.
new wave of resistance LaNada Means specifically cites the Third World Strikes at UC Berkeley and San Francisco State as one that Native students, including her, were involved in and inspired by. Similarly, on a national level, Vine Deloria Jr. identifies the 1968 Poor People’s Campaign as a moment in which he saw Native people joining other movements but also as an example of a march that was “unable to articulate specific solutions,” a problem he also found in the Alcatraz Occupation

The Vietnam War was another significant factor in much of the activism of the 1960s, and it also had substantial impact on Native organizing. At its base, the war can be seen as part of larger global, anticolonial movement that extended to the United States, “a nation built on colonialism and racial hierarchy.” Native people had long been fighting against the United States’ constant infringement on their sovereignty, but anti-colonial sentiment and action supported and was supported by the 1960s wave of anti-war activism and movement-building. In a more direct way returning Native American veterans influenced the direction of activism; these young men had to choose between going back to reservations with few job prospects or going to cities where they faced discrimination both as Native people and as veterans. Some chose to go to college on the GI bill, and there they met and joined with the many Indian students who made up the growing Red Power movement.

While Indian communities connected with some contemporaneous social movements, there were also tensions. Those involved with the Alcatraz occupation, and

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87 LaNada Boyer, “Reflections on Alcatraz,” 89.
88 Deloria, “Alcatraz, Activism, and Accommodation,” 46.
90 ibid, 42.
91 Johnson, The occupation of Alcatraz Island, 32.
Red Power more broadly, often expressed frustration with hippies, an issue especially exacerbated in the Bay Area. Ross Harden described his feelings toward hippies calling them “nothing but a bunch of spoiled white kids who are lazy and claim they want to go back to the ways of the Indians. They’re all over San Francisco, wearing their headbands, vests with fringe hanging all over them; they’re buying beadwork, or trying to do beadwork. If they ever had the chance to change the color of their skin they never would.” The hostility reflected in his Harden’s remark lasted throughout the occupation, and influenced also relations with and perceptions of the occupiers on the part of government officials and the public. A GSA director, Richard Laws, said about the occupiers “Indians are not hippie types and are not allowing hippie types on [the] island”

However, any animosity between the occupiers and the hippies may have only gone one direction. The Good Times, a short-lived San Francisco alternative newspaper with connections to prominent hippies, covered the story of the occupation regularly and expressed the support of hippies as a broad group; “The hippies, who were turned on to Indian culture, and who had turned Amerika on to it, were glad to support the movement. Middle America, sporting fringed jackets bought at J.C. Penney and Woolworth moccasins, took the takeover to heart.” This article illustrates how the non-Native people supported the movement while still perpetuating myths about Indians rooted in racism and nostalgia. The piece is titled “Home of the Brave,” playing with conceptions of patriotism but also embracing the conception of Indigenous people, specifically men, as “braves.” The imagery of the fringed jacket and moccasins associated with the hippies

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92 Ibid, 113
93 ibid, 177
94 “Home of the Brave,” Good Times (San Francisco, CA), November 20, 1970.
celebrate the idea of “Indians” as associated with a non-specific aesthetic rather than engaging with fraught histories and specificity.

The Proclamation

After the San Francisco Indian Center was destroyed by a fire in October 1969 the idea of claiming the island began to gain more traction, this time with a longer occupation as part of the plan. Adam Fortunate Eagle\(^95\) proposed the idea to Richard Oakes at a Halloween party later that month hosted by Tim Findley, a young local reporter who was a close friend of Fortunate Eagle’s. They immediately agreed to go forward with the idea and started planning.\(^96\) Findley, the host of the party, later wrote about the party; “Not saying that Willie Brown or Dianne Feinstein were in on some kind of conspiracy. Maybe they didn’t even hear it, but I do know that before the party was over that night, there was a tacit agreement from political forces in San Francisco that the invasion would have no serious local opposition.” The many members of the press at the party also colluded, agreeing not to say anything until the occupation began.\(^97\) Fortunate Eagle recalls he even “gave a bit of the history of the Alcatraz action” and a brief description of the plans and proclamation to some members of the press. Not only did no one leak the

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\(^95\) At the time Adam Fortunate Eagle’s name was Adam Nordwall and he appears as such in many of the primary and secondary sources.

\(^96\) Fortunate Eagle, \textit{Alcatraz! Alcatraz!}, 49.

\(^97\) Tim Findley, "Alcatraz Recollection," 78. Willie Brown and Dianne Feinstein were the California State Assembly Member and a Member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors respectively. Both were early in the start of long political careers.
story or tip off any law enforcement, but Fortunate Eagle believes this talk with the press led to better and more thorough coverage when the time came for the occupation. 98

It was in the immediate aftermath of a fire on October 10th the destroyed the San Francisco Indian Center and the board approval of the Hunt plan that around 80 people gathered at Pier 39 in San Francisco on November 9, 1969 to read the “Proclamation to the Great White Father” — the action’s foundational document — and move to occupy Alcatraz. 99 They were at first unable to charter a boat and stayed on the pier for several hours dancing, chanting, and giving interviews. Richard Oakes read the proclamation publicly and it was likely this act that solidified his position as the face of the occupation and a leader and spokesman in the eyes of the public and the media.

Despite the temporary setback with the boats, news footage from the day shows a buoyant crowd. Eventually, a large group chartered and boarded a wooden sailing ship called the Monte Cristo to sail around the island. 100 When they drew close, four people including Oakes jumped overboard and swam to the Island. Later that evening, another group sailed to the island and, after managing to dock in bad weather, ten more people landed before the boat captain got nervous about the legal ramifications and left with the rest of the passengers. 101 Fourteen occupiers then stayed on the island that night including three women. According to Fortunate Eagle, the women’s presence in the landing party came as a shock to one reporter, who asked incredulously, “you mean to tell me that there are three women in that invading party and they stayed overnight on

98 Fortunate Eagle, Alcatraz! Alcatraz! 50.
99 Johnson, We Hold the Rock, 12-14.
100 Mike Mills, “Native American Alcatraz Proclamation”, (November 10th 1969; KRON-TV, Young Broadcasting of San Francisco, Inc.), Archival newsfilm, 16mm color, magnetic sound film. Digitized by San Francisco Film Archive. https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/sfbatv/bundles/209390
101 Johnson, We Hold the Rock 16.
that miserable island?“ Planning for the November 9th occupation apparently did not include a determination as to how long they would stay. According to Oakes “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.” But the frustrations and convictions that had driven the activists this far also made a simply symbolic act seem insufficient.

Figure 1: Native Americans swim onto Alcatraz island, (November 9 1969; KRON-TV, Young Broadcasting of San Francisco, Inc.), Archival newsfilm, 16mm color, magnetic sound film. Digitized by San Francisco Film Archive. [link]

102 Fortune Eagle, Alcatraz! Alcatraz!, 67.
103 Johnson, The Occupation of Alcatraz Island, 32. Emphasis original.
Figure 2: Native Americans swim onto Alcatraz island, (November 9 1969; KRON-TV, Young Broadcasting of San Francisco, Inc.), Archival newsfilm, 16mm color, magnetic sound film. Digitized by San Francisco Film Archive. 
https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/sfbatv/bundles/209389 Still from newsreels from November 9th. People gathered on the dock playing drums and talking.

This small occupying force stayed only one night. They had brought just two loaves of bread in their hasty landing and had spent the night cold and hungry, though it seems this did not lower their morale. When asked by one news crew what they did during their night on the island, one occupier replies, “[we] laughed, joked around,” and Oakes, standing next to him, adds, “[we are] going to build a nation on it, an Indian Nation.”¹⁰⁴ The morning of November 10 a group of federal officials, led by the regional GSA director T. E. Hannon, and news crews landed on the island. Oakes read the proclamation again to Hannon, after which the Indian occupiers returned to the mainland.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ “Indian proclamation claiming rights to Alcatraz”, (November 10 1969; CBS5-KIPX, San Francisco Film Archive.), Archival news film, 16mm color, magnetic sound film. Digitized by San Francisco Film Archive. https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/sfbatv/bundles/187789
¹⁰⁵ Johnson, We Hold the Rock, 16.
The foundational document of the occupation is the “Proclamation to the Great White Father.” Read several times in public on November 9 and 10, it lays out the driving forces behind the occupation, both the symbolic meaning and the demands for the use of the land. It starts “We, the Native Americans, re-claim the land known as Alcatraz Island in the name of all American Indians by right of discovery.” Then Indians of All Tribes, the name chosen by the activists and used through the rest of the occupation, outlined their offer for the island, saying, “we wish to be fair and honorable in our dealings with the Caucasian inhabitants of this land and hereby offer the following treaty.” The treaty includes an offer to “purchase said Alcatraz Island for twenty-four dollars (24) in glass beads and red cloth, a precedent set by the white man’s purchase of a similar island about 300 years ago” and plans for a “bureau of Caucasian Affairs” to provide for the white inhabitants of the island and “to thus raise them and all their white brothers up from their savage and unhappy state.” The island prison is itself a monument to this “unhappy state;” in an interview from that day one young man describes the prison itself as “a monument of a sick society.”

106 The “Right of Discovery” invoked here is in reference to the Doctrine of Discovery, which stemmed from the 1493 statement by the Vatican allowing Christians to claim any land not inhabited by Christians. It allowed for the colonizing of the Americas from Columbus’s initial voyages through Manifest Destiny and beyond.


Next the authors lay out the ways in which the island “is more than suitable for an Indian reservation, as determined by the white man’s own standards,” pointing to the lack of running water, “modern facilities,” job opportunities, productive soil, and more.

Finally, they list the Indian institutions to be established on the island including: a Center for Native American Studies, an American Indian Spiritual Center, an Indian Center of Ecology, a Great Indian Training School, and an American Indian Museum.\(^{109}\)

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\(^{109}\) Indians of All Tribes Inc, “Proclamation to the Great White Father.”
The tenor of the piece fits into a long history of Native American humor as a form of survival and resistance. The humor is neither incidental nor for publicity its use embodies Marilyn LaPlante St. Germaine’s point that “humor is as essential in American Indian life as breathing is for life. Survival without humor must be very agonizing.” The demands of the occupiers were about survival and the humor of the proclamation underscores rather than minimizes that. Dean Rader, in his book Engaged Resistance, argues that the Proclamation, along with other documents like accompanying demand, manifestos, and poetry do significant work to construct the occupation. The documents both create the physical space for it — Alcatraz reimagined as Indian Land — and place a context of Native resistance through references to past historical events and the language use. In doing so they announce intention and instruct observers on how to understand what is happening. The wording, structure, and requests also subvert typical colonial documents, such as treaties, mirroring and twisting them. Much of the humor in these documents comes from this playing with form, but it also works to illustrate the occupiers’ knowledge of the historical contexts and “slipperiness” within which their negotiations with the government take place. The Proclamation, both in its tone and its demands, continued to steer the course of the occupation beyond this brief November 9th attempt and into the long occupation, which started a few days later. It was with this backdrop that the occupiers gathered at the No Name bar and sailed to the Alcatraz Island

112 Ibid, 14.
on November 20. Its satirical tone and lofty goals are reflective of the community that produced it and the political atmosphere of the times.

The November 9th and 10th occupation ended without any arrests or charges filed but also without any significant response to the demands laid out. The organizers were determined that their demands should not be merely symbolic. They would have a school and cultural center. Immediately they began to prepare to take the island again. The would-be occupiers were preparing to take action that was rooted in decades of history: the colonization of the Americas, the building of Native communities in the Bay Area, and the increasing strength of Indian resistance movements.
Chapter 2: Alcatraz- Indian Land
Experiences and Aspirations of 19 months on Alcatraz

The occupying force of slightly fewer than 100 landed in the early hours of November 20. The overarching goals of the occupation were for the most part consistent with the Proclamation and the messages of the shorter occupation just over a week before. However this time the occupiers made it clear that they were not planning to leave; “let it be known that our stand for self-determination is on Alcatraz. We invite the United States to acknowledge the justice of our claims.” Their language and actions, including the number of occupiers and the supplies they brought, indicated to the government and to the public that they were not planning on leaving the next day.

The story of the occupation is in itself compelling, though many elements of it are contested both among those who were there and those who have written about it in the intervening years. And while the chronological events of the occupation are part of this story, certain elements, including the relationship of media and depiction of the occupation, the importance of education and children as representative of the future, and the government’s response to the takeover highlight both what the occupation was about and the different ways in which women were crucial to its unfolding.

The Early Days

The Coast Guard reacted quickly to the occupation. Before the end of the day on the 20th they had established a blockade to prevent additional occupiers or supplies from reaching the group already on the island. On the 23rd, there was an attempt to use a hot-air balloon to deliver supplies, which was, unsurprisingly, unsuccessful. That night the occupiers distracted the Coast Guard with firebombs on the inland side of the island by the dock while a small boat came around the other side, and used ladders on the sheer cliffs to drop off donated supplies from mainland San Francisco.\textsuperscript{114} News footage from

\textsuperscript{114} Johnson, \textit{We Hold the Rock}, 23.
the first few days of the occupation shows a small, overcrowded boat full of would-be occupiers ram into a Coast Guard boat before throwing supplies to the landing dock, meanwhile ramming the Coast guard again. The collisions do not look particularly intentional; rather they seem to be a side effect of inexperienced and exuberant sailors.  

According to Fortunate Eagle, many of the Coast Guardsmen didn’t take the blockade particularly seriously themselves, only chasing boats when the media was paying attention. The unsuccessful blockade was lifted after three days.  

Meanwhile on the island the occupiers were settling in. On the first day the painted messages, some of which are still visible — the most obvious remnants of the occupation to today’s tourists — began to appear. Many declared “Indians Welcome” and over a sign that had previously read “United States Property,” anyone landing would now see “United Indian Property.” The messages mark the space as Indian Land, often subverting existing signage that denoted Untied States federal control. In the photograph below, and many similar ones taken at the time, occupiers, in this case what seems to be a family including young children stand in front of the signage, commemorating their presence as part of this movement. This dynamic is most clear in the cases where occupiers painted over existing signs, like the one by the landing dock (Fig. 5) and the “This Land is My Land” sign with a photo of Geronimo affixed that hung from a statue of an eagle over the main entrance (Fig.6). Such markings throughout the island made clear

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115 “Interviews & confrontation with Coastguard at Alcatraz,” (November 26, 1969. NCPB/KQED, Archival news film, 16mm color, magnetic sound film. Digitized by San Francisco Film Archive. [https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/sfbatv/bundles/187781](https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/sfbatv/bundles/187781)

116 Fortunate Eagle, *Alcatraz! Alcatraz!*, 75-76.

117 Ibid, 19.

118 Photographs- Alcatraz Indian Occupation Records (SFH 11), San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library. Also visible in video footage from the San Francisco Bay Area Television Archive reels.
both to the Native occupiers and to anyone who might visit that authority lay not with the United States but with United Indians.  

The map “Alcatraz Indianland” (Fig. 4) does related work marking the space and subverting the historically colonial practices of cartography. The center of this map is dominated by a birds eye view of the island surrounded by illustrations and text. Though the overall layout is of the island seen from above important buildings are sketched head on. The map was made at the end of the occupation and in addition to serving as a geographic guide it also provides a history of the island and the occupation around the perimeter including information on the island pre-contact, before “the pirates and the thieves from Europe” arrived, and a timeline of the past uses of the island. Various points are marked not only which what was physically there but also what happened there, for example the water barge is marked with the date the government removed it, May 27, 1970, and the wardens house and light house are illustrated engulfed in flames, memorializing their destruction on June 1, 1970. The artist who made the map, Joe Morris, uses the visual language of cartography, to create a complex record and memorial to the occupation.

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120 Ibid, 46
Figure 5. Sam Silver, Untitled, San Francisco Historical Photo Collection, Alcatraz Indian Occupation Records 1964-1971. Reproduced August 25, 2016. Photograph of four people posing in front of the offices near the dock.

Figure 6. Vince Maggoria, Untitled, in Engaged Resistance, by Dean Rader, Figure 1.30, page 42.
The same day they landed the occupiers held a victory powwow and ceremonial dance. In his poetic “Alcatraz Diary,” Peter Blue Cloud (Mohawk), described the dancing after they first took the island “The deep throbbing of the drum demands that everyone dance and the whole scene is of reds and gold. We join the dance and feel the magic which is passing from hand to hand. All tribes and [sic] unity are the words of the drum and all the tribes in unity are the dancers.”¹²¹ For some, like Rosalie McKay-Want, just being on the island in a space where everyone was Indigenous was an important and immediate outcome: “I heard some Indians talking in the background, and the sound of Indians is so different than when white people talk. And it felt so good; it felt like I was home.”¹²² Looking back at the occupation, Richard Oakes expressed that “after Alcatraz was taken, Indians started coming in from all over… They came from Canada, from Mexico, from South America, from all over. For some, it was the first time that they had met with people of other tribes, the first time they felt a unity with all Indians.”¹²³ While frictions between tribes, and between people how experienced very different ways of being Indian came to dominate much of the occupation, these memories illustrate the significance of the occupation, both to leaders like Oakes and to many Native people throughout the Americas.

News footage from these first days is buoyant and plentiful. It includes scenes of occupiers chopping wood, children running around playing baseball, and food cooking over large open fires, as well as impassioned interviews given at the pier in San

¹²² Intertribal Friendship House and Lobo, Urban Voices, 77.
¹²³ Johnson, The Occupation of Alcatraz Island, 100
Francisco.\textsuperscript{124} This didn't happen by accident. While the November 9 occupation had gotten some media coverage, the November 20 occupation was a media event.\textsuperscript{125} Many members of the local media had been alerted in advance of the occupation, and those who had been at Time Findley’s the Halloween party had known for some time and prepared to cover it.

Helicopters circled the island for days. It is easy to understand why. In an era of dramatic political actions and events, this one had amazing visuals and made for exciting TV, and local stations KQED and KPIX covered the occupation and its issues extensively. The backdrop of the island is beautiful and striking. This was before the island had been open to the public so these glimpses might have been exciting to TV viewers from the Bay Area who had only ever seen the island from afar and heard stories about the notorious gangsters and escaped criminals. The events and clashes with Coast Guard boats like the one described above are exciting to watch. Some of the occupiers (at least of those captured on camera) wore traditional dress, both on the 9\textsuperscript{th} and later, strategically and performatively making their presence known to non-Natives, many of whom believed in narratives of the “vanishing Natives.” Peter Blue Cloud satirizes this response, describing people saying “Indians invade Alcatraz, can you imagine? We didn’t even know there were any Indians left.”\textsuperscript{126} At least in the beginning, the occupation had widespread public and media support, likely enabled by the preemptive communication with the sympathetic media.

\textsuperscript{124}“Alcatraz scenes, relief fund, Richard Oakes interview,”(November 24' 1969. NCPB/KQED), Archival news film, 16mm color, magnetic sound film. Digitized by San Francisco Film Archive.\url{https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/sfbatv/bundles/187780}
\textsuperscript{125}Johnson, \textit{We Hold the Rock} 19.
\textsuperscript{126}Blue Cloud, \textit{Alcatraz is not an Island}, 28.
In a press conference outside the Mission Area Community Action Center a few weeks into the occupation, one unidentified spokesman said, “I would say that it would be impossible at this moment in history to move the Indians off of Alcatraz,” a conclusion the federal government had come to quickly after the failed blockade. He went on that “the American people, with the other problems, problems that it cannot at all begin to solve, like Vietnam, and the problems of the Ghetto and urban areas, likes a problem that can be solved as easily as giving the Indians a piece of land that we haven't known any particularly good use for anyway.”

The Nixon administration recognized that attempting to take any action that could potentially become violent or remove the occupiers could be a public relations disaster. This dynamic influenced the way all governmental agencies handled the occupation from the first decision not to take actions to remove them on the 20th through the forced end of the occupation 16 months later.

The occupation received wide attention in the press- and while most coverage, at least initially, was positive, the members of Indians of All Tribes also produced their own communications on the occupation. In part this control over information pushes against some of the languages, used even in positive media coverage that served to demean the occupiers and their motives, and to further racist stereotypes. For example, “articles in the Chronicle used terms such as ‘redmen,’ ‘invading brave,’ ‘Indian maiden,’ and


128 Johnson, We Hold the Rock, 24.
classified the occupants as ‘men’ and ‘girls.’”\textsuperscript{129} This language infantilizes all the occupiers but especially discredits women involved in the occupation.

Additionally, much of the coverage portrays Indians of All Tribes as exclusively a young or student based movement when really a wide spectrum of people were involved. Many of those involved were students but many, including Stella Leach and Grace Thorpe were older, bringing different experiences with them into the occupation and its leadership. While young people should be credited for their contributions, in some cases, especially in an era of controversial student movements, the emphasis on youth could serve as a way to discredit the occupation and its seriousness.

The occupiers worked strategically both to spread the message of the occupation and to maintain some control over the media narrative as it quickly emerged. The two main ways they developed to accomplish these goals, outside of having spokespeople and media contacts, were Radio Free Alcatraz, and a semi-regular newsletter. Radio Free Alcatraz was produced by John Trudell and broadcast live from the main cellblock, using “begged and borrowed radio equipment,” by KPFA, a Pacifica Network station based out of Berkeley. It first aired December 22\textsuperscript{nd} 1969 and continued each weekday night at 7:15pm through September, 1970.\textsuperscript{130} At an estimated 100,000 listeners its audience was wider than any other media source produced on the island and the updates and interviews carried on the show were often personal and could humanize the occupiers to a listening public on the mainland.


\textsuperscript{130} “KPFA folio February 1970” Alcatraz Indian Occupation Records (SFH 11), San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library. Box 4
The newsletter was less widely circulated, with around 3,000 people on the mailing list according to Marilyn Miracle, one of the editors.\textsuperscript{131} It did, however, provide a platform for the many voices of those involved in the occupation. Each issue included short pieces updating readers on the goings-on of the island as well as more creative pieces such as illustrations and poetry by the island’s occupants.\textsuperscript{132} While the newsletter may not have been seen by as many people, each issue gives readers a glimpse into what the island was like, including visual representations.

In addition to spokespeople who helped significantly from the main land, support came from many individuals, eager to help out how they could. Some of this support came in the form of modest checks ranging from around $2.50- $5.\textsuperscript{133} Today a small sample of these letters fills up file folders in the San Francisco Public Library archives, collectively painting a picture of the occupations wide base of support. While most are local the letters and donations come from all over the country, along with a few international letters and requests for information about the occupation. The writers express that they wish they could send more but they are sharing what they can. Because of the timing of the occupation, late November, some mention the significance to them of giving around Christmas. Many people, especially locals, donated other things to the occupiers, like food and warm clothes. Often letters accompanying or offering these items came from women expressing concern about the wellbeing of the occupiers as it got colder. One woman from Oakland offered sewing machines and fabric, asking if “some of the women on the island [would] be able to use it to sew warm clothing for you

\textsuperscript{131} Johnson, \textit{The Occupation of Alcatraz Island}, 125

\textsuperscript{132} Newsletters, Alcatraz Indian Occupation Records (SFH 11), San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

\textsuperscript{133} “Correspondence, Inward Donations (Not Money).” Alcatraz Indian Occupation Records (SFH 11), San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library. Box 1.
This letter is indicative of who was donating, and speaks to how the public understood the presence of women on the island — both a surprising anomaly and a force toward domesticity.

While the many small donations give a sense of the number of people who supported the occupation significant funding also came from high profile donations and fundraising efforts. Grace Thorpe organized visits from celebrities like Jane Fonda, Marlon Brando, Anthony Quinn, and Candice Bergen. The rock group Creedence Clearwater Revival bought a boat for Indians of All Tribes, freeing the occupiers from their reliance on other boat owners willing to risk run-ins with the coast guard. Musicians Buffy Sainte Marie (Cree) and Melvina Reynolds held a benefit concert on December 12, 1969 at Stanford University's Memorial Chapel. Reynolds also released a song on the topic of the occupation:

Chorus:
Alcatraz,  
We don't need that plastic jazz.  
Give us the island the way it was  
When the Indians had their day.  
Who needs an Astrodome
Final verse:
In San Francisco Bay!  
Now the Indians claim the Rock  
Just a grain of sand  
To the wilds we robbed them of

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134 “Correspondence, Inward Donations (Not Money).” Alcatraz Indian Occupation Records (SFH 11), San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library. Box 1.
135 Donna Hightower-Langston, "American Indian Women's Activism in the 1960s and 1970s," Hypatia 18, no. 2 (2003), 120.
Their ancestral land.
Red Brother, take your stand!\textsuperscript{137}

These high-profile supporters both contributed money and expanded the reach of the occupation’s message. Exemplified by Reynold’s song, they also shaped public knowledge about the occupation, for example she references the Hunt plan specifically, if imprecisely. It is impossible to estimate exactly how many incoming letters and donations were sent to the island and to individual occupiers, especially Oakes. The management of this money eventually became a serious issue, as accusations were made that the money was being mishandled or that leaders were keeping it for themselves.\textsuperscript{138}

The first to fall under this kind of suspicion was Oakes, as the most visible member of the occupation he received a significant amount of mail addressed to him specifically. Later others were accused of similar misappropriation of donations, or of otherwise capitalizing on the occupation. Such tensions over finances and leadership both marked the beginning of problems for Indians of All Tribes and continued to weaken the occupation through the end.

Though the members of the occupation recognized that leaders and spokespeople were somewhat inevitable, as illustrated by the early support of Richard Oakes in this role, there was an rejection of codified leadership. The tensions developed with the media and internally about unofficial leaders and spokespeople in some ways mirrors similar sentiments and issues in the feminist movement. The media attached to certain leaders and these people often became the object of suspicion within their movements. They

\textsuperscript{137} Melvina Reynolds, “Alcatraz (Pelican Island),” Benefit for Indian of All Tribes, December 12, 1969. You can listen to Reynolds perform the song live here \url{https://vimeo.com/52025578}

\textsuperscript{138} Johnson, \textit{The Occupation of Alcatraz Island}, 161.
were seen as capitalizing on the movement for fame or financial gain. In the feminist movement these women were somewhat derisively labeled “stars.”

The realities of having a large community living on an island meant that mainland support was essential to maintaining the occupation. Much of the coordinating of basic necessities, food, water, clothing and more had to happen in San Francisco. Additionally communication with the press and, to some extent, the negotiations with government officials had to be organized from the mainland. The occupiers set up another facility on the mainland from which they managed donations and a two-way radio system. While the onshore office was essential from the beginning of the occupation, as the weeks wore on it became even more critical because of increased tension with the federal government.

Dr. Dorothy Lonewolf Miller (Blackfoot) also helped the occupation from the mainland. As the Director of Scientific Analysis Corporation, a Bay-Area based social science research institute, she allowed Indians of all tribes to use her office and got grant funding for the island school and clinic. Lonewolf Miller also wrote poetry about the occupation featured in the newsletters, including the poem which begins this project.

The significance of this mainland organizing structure is part of how women were left out of the main narrative of the occupation. While many of the spokespeople for the occupation were those on the mainland, these individuals tended to be seen as more of a support than a central part of the organization. They were also often less integrated into the leadership of the island because they were often gone for longer stretches. This also led to suspicion from other occupiers, particularly toward Means later in the occupation.

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140 Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island*, 80.
As the occupiers settled in to their inhospitable new home, they quickly established governance structures and other necessary forms of infrastructure including a school for the children and a clinic. Food was prepared communally, for example early in the occupation food such as “sandwiches, potato salad, and soft drinks” was spread across large tables.\(^{142}\) Linda Aranaydo (Creek), a UC Berkeley student, and Luwana Quitiquit were in charge of feeding the occupying population. Aranaydo described the challenges of cooking on the island in the early days with little access to resources; “On a concrete plaza that led to the visiting and administration areas, less than one hundred yards from a kitchen full of stoves, ovens, and other appliances, the two women cooked over an open fire. It wasn't for cultural reasons. Rather, all the utilities were off and the kitchen was behind heavy iron bars.”\(^{143}\)

In these first few weeks when there were consistently hundreds of people on the island, with especially high numbers on weekends, every part of the island became sleeping quarters, Peter Blue Cloud recalled that “each person felt free to decide where to live… Large rooms were claimed by groups and the rooms were named in bold letters of paint: POMO ROOM! DO NOT DISTURB.”\(^{144}\) Blue Cloud’s memory of this time gives a glimpse into day-to-day living conditions and organization. It also illustrates some of the complexity of having a movement based in general Indigenous identity and shared experiences of Indigenous people in North America but also recognizing the specificity of each tribe and the importance of those individual experiences.

\(^{142}\) Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island*, 69.


\(^{144}\) Blue Cloud, *Alcatraz is not an Island*, 25.
The system of governance set up on the island to manage the quickly growing community included a council of seven to deal with everyday issues that came up on the island and manage other groups. On important issues the whole island had a vote, which reflected the ideals of self-determination behind the occupation. Meetings were called regularly, sometimes up to three times a day, demonstrating the centrality of group openness and group discussion in the early days of the occupation. The first council, elected by the occupiers to serve for 90 days, included Richard Oaks, Al Miller, Ross Harden, Ed Castillo, Bob Nelford, Dennis Turner, and James Vaughn. Noticeably, all the council members were men. Oakes’s position as the most visible leader on the island continued from the earlier occupation. LaNada Means wrote that “the media identified Richard Oakes as the leader of the island, and he wanted that responsibility, so that was agreeable with us. Richard was smart and aggressive—a handsome Mohawk who always knew what to say. We were proud of Richard.”

A local article from the beginning of December comments on the importance of Oakes but also of his family:

Richard Oakes is a Mohawk: his wife Annie, is a Pomo, and their five children, he says are Pomahawks. Now the family lives on Alcatraz. They symbolize the Indian unity that, according to Oakes, is probably the most significant development since he swam ashore three weeks ago. Mrs. Oakes was sorting donated clothes. Her husband was explaining why the Alcatraz experience means so much to him and other Indians.

Oakes and his family were symbolic; to “Indian unity,” the integrity of the occupiers, and in many other ways. The fact that Annie was Pomo was important. The Pomo are indigenous to the region just north of San Francisco and throughout the occupation there

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145 Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island*, 72
146 Johnson, *We Hold the Rock*, 27.
147 LaNada Boyer, “Reflections of Alcatraz,” 88.
148 “Oakes Has One Goal For Alcatraz: Unity,” *SF Examiner* (San Francisco, CA), December 7, 1969. Mrs. Oakes is called both Anne and Annie inconsistently across primary sources.
were underlying tensions between some of the Native people who came to the Bay Area during the period of relocation and through larger urbanizing forces, and the California Natives who were indigenous to these areas. Further, the family was a model of respectability that mainstream, non-indigenous Americans could recognize and identify with. In the interview Oakes is charming and jokes with the reporter, Annie Oakes is contributing in a quiet way easily read as domestic (folding clothes). This version of the occupation, one which is also captured in photographs and television footage, is part of what helped it gain so much support; the presence and positioning of women–especially women who were not easily read as radicals–and children on the island in this way separated it from other social justice movements that felt more threatening. Also clear in the photographs is that the occupiers were, for the most part, not armed.\textsuperscript{149} Such open nonviolence also contributed to making the occupation more palatable to the public even when the demands at the heart of the action were radical calls for sovereignty. One article explained to reader why the occupiers couldn't just be pushed aside in the way typical of many protests, “after all, those weren’t just a bunch of bomb-toting blacks and Mao-quoting long-hairs, there were gray-haired old men, little children, soft-spoken matrons.”\textsuperscript{150} While this article, from a San Francisco leftist publication, is tongue-in-cheek, it does distill the sentiment toward the occupiers expressed in more mainstream coverage and letters of support.

\textsuperscript{149} The occupiers of Indians of All Tribes were aware of and active in shaping how they were viewed by the public, as indicated by decision about spokespeople and other media outreach policies. Often the effect of these photographs was to soften the public’s view of the occupiers. Leigh Raiford’s research on the Black Panthers speaks to a similar tactic. Leigh Raiford, \textit{Imprisoned in a luminous glare: photography and the African American freedom struggle} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

Despite Anne Oakes being seen by some, at least among the occupiers and press, as a representative of California Native people, many people Indigenous to the area did not support the occupation. Some Indigenous Californians asserted that the occupiers were “little more than colonizers themselves” because of their failure to prioritize those Indigenous to the land they were on or ask their permission to be there.\(^{151}\) One observer, Darryl Wilson, a Pit River Indian,\(^ {152}\) expressed this frustration; “this is the land of the Ohlones. Today I am like a stranger… There is no one speaking the original language that is familiar with this area... a movement separate from the Ohlones and the other California natives.” Later in the occupation Rupert Costo (Cahuilla) and Philip Calvan, (Ohlone) “requested that the president deed the land by executive order.” They argued;

> We Ohlone are opposed to the occupation of Alcatraz. It is wrong… The Ohlone people discovered, owned, and occupied the land from Pleasanton in the East Bay to the Coast, and southerly to Monterey, including the islands along the coast, Alcatraz and Yerba Buena among the others. If any Native Americans have a right to claim these lands, we Ohlone are the only ones.\(^{153}\)

These remarks, while specifically about the Alcatraz occupation, illustrate tension in the larger pan-Indigenous movement of this era and specifically in the Bay Area.

While men may have filled the early official positions on Alcatraz, women were, of course, very present and active. Surviving council meeting minutes from December show that Stella Leach submitted the notes and indicate at least some level of non-hierarchical leadership.\(^ {154}\) Leach was also responsible for running the clinic on the island and organizing the group of volunteer doctors. In addition, many tasks associated with

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\(^{151}\) Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 87.

\(^{152}\) The eleven bands that form the Pit River tribe are indigenous to the most North Eastern part of California, near the border with Oregon.

\(^{153}\) Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island*, 162

media and communications were handled by some of the most prominent women on the island including Grace Thorpe, Marilyn Miracle, and LaNada Means.

Marilyn Miracle was one of the primary writers and editors of the newsletter, the first volume of which was published in February, 1970. She was also commissioned to write other pieces about the occupation from the perspective of the occupiers for *San Francisco Magazine* and much of the incoming mail from people hearing about the occupation was addressed specifically to her. Grace Thorpe, who was older than many of the other occupiers at the time, described how the occupation led her to put her everything else on hold, putting her “furniture into storage and spending [her] life savings.” She had prior experience that was useful to the communications work she did for Indians of All Tribes since “most of [her] years have been spent in advertising and public relations.” She described knowing that she had to change course when “one day I woke up in the home I had lived in for twelve years and said ‘what am I doing here? I should be working for my people.’ So I sold my house and quit my job… everyone thought I was crazy but I knew it was the right thing to do.” She often spoke publicly as well as being among those responsible for replying to income letters and appearing on “Radio Free Alcatraz.” She also had heightened name recognition because of her father Jim’s prominence as a famous athlete.

LaNada Means spoke at press conferences, especially as the occupation wore on into 1970. After being appearing on the cover of *Ramparts* magazine in an article about the occupation that featured her heavily she traveled to Los Angeles and New York, meeting with prominent people and appearing on the “Dick Cavett Show,” an experience which she said made her “extremely uncomfortable.” For many people these women were the faces and voices of the occupation even though they were rarely if ever identified as leaders by the media or public.

**Children and Education: visions of the future**

Throughout the occupation children were always part of the Alcatraz Island community. The Big Rock School was therefore an essential part of the functioning of the world of the island. The school was opened early in the occupation, on December 11, 1969, in the main cell block in what was once an old movie theater space. The teachers quickly accredited it as a private school in the San Francisco School District so the students could attend and not be considered truants. The number of students enrolled varied. In the summer of 1970 there were 10 students in fairly regular attendance based on the roll. The image below (Fig. 7) is one of a series of color photographs by Swedish photographer Bengt af Geijerstam taken in July 1970 of daily life on the island. None of the individuals depicted is identified and it is not clear if the scene is of an

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159 LaNada Boyer, “Reflections of Alcatraz,” 97.


161 Alcatraz Indian Occupation Records (SFH 11), San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library. Box 2 folder 1.
official school space. However, the image shows illustrates children cared for in a space that prioritizes Native history, as demonstrated by the image of Geronimo on the wall, the same one that hung over the entry taped to the “THIS LAND IS MY LAND” sign (Fig. 6).

Figure 7: Bengt af Geijerstam, “Young children and an (sic) woman in an Alcatraz apartment,” National Parks Service, July 1970, https://www.nps.gov/media/photo/gallery.htm?id=FEBABE96-0479-1C88-9DCDDCEB6553BF9E.

The school, as well as the arts and crafts center which also served adults, were both prototypes for what could be achieved on the island beyond basic services. Judy Scraper emphasized the significance of the school: “These teachers, not only do they teach regular academic subjects, but they also teach different Indian religions, different cultures, all types of Indian history.”¹⁶² This kind of education was in direct contrast to the education that many of the occupiers had experienced which, even in the best cases,

¹⁶² Johnson, The Occupation of Alcatraz Island, 114.
erased Indigenous history. This school could help children build positive, strong, Indian identity for children. Linda Aranaydo, who, among her many roles on the island, tutored some of the children, wrote “my thought was that Indian Children in the city need to have supportive people around them. I felt very lonely when I experienced childhood without a supportive community.”

The school was also a place where the many student activists who were part of the occupation could implement a version of the Native studies departments they were creating or hoping to create in their universities. Peter Blue Cloud distilled another significance of the children on the island and their education, writing “These children were what the occupation was all about. It was for their futures that we had dared defy the government. To look at these children was to envision an Indian tomorrow of great home.” He makes it clear that the significance of children to the future of Native people is specifically about education; “Their education must continue, we know, for they are our future leaders.”

The birth of John and Lu Trudell’s son in July 1970 was meaningful for similar reasons as those that Blue Cloud cited in talking about the school. They named him Wovoka, after the renowned Paiute leader who had led the Ghost Dance movement in the late 1880s. Evoking “one of the first performative pan-Indian acts of resistance” seems an appropriate naming choice for a child whose very existence was understood to be significant for Native resistance. Trudell joyously announced his birth on Radio Free Alcatraz saying “my wife had the baby, Monday evening…. There are some really good

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164 Blue Cloud, Alcatraz is not an Island, 30.
165 Rader, Engaged Resistance, 8.
feelings here…. His name is Wovoka, no middle name, no last name, and he is about what I would call the first free Indian born in the past 500 years, because the government is not going to get him.”

Wovoka’s birth, especially to such prominent members of the island community, highlighted the goals of the occupation in way that was particularly necessary in that summer which was marred by so many setbacks and disasters. In a later episode of the show, Trudell, expanding the message about children as the future beyond his family, said that one of the most significant things to him was “The fact that our children are free.” Living on Alcatraz they were “getting a different kind of education without ‘propagandizing’ and so they will always know what the government had done.”

The demand in the Proclamation for “A great Indian Training School… developed to teach our people how to make a living in the world, improve our standard of living, and to end hunger and unemployment among our people,” which would also include an art and culinary arts center, can be contextualized within the history of the boarding school system. The primary goal of this education forced on Native people, was the erasure of indigenous culture, language, and knowledge. It had a lasting effect on communities throughout the country. This envisioned school would be the antidote to the lasting intergenerational wound inflicted by the boarding schools by specifically celebrating all parts of Indian life. Both LaNada Means and Stella Leach spent time at boarding schools, as did many of the other occupiers. The demands for the school, and

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166 Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island*, 137
167 ibid, 146
169 Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 71.
the way in which the small island school was set up, come directly from the occupiers’ experiences of the boarding schools.

Children and concern for their future is often a key part of social movements though this positioning of children as symbolic of an idealized future can be fraught one. However, in the case of indigenous people in the Americas, who by the 1960’s had faced hundreds of years of violence and genocide the message is poignant. In 1969 a court ruling in California made it clear that it was legal for doctors to use sterilization as a form of birth control. Through the 1970s high numbers of women were sterilized without consent, often by physicians who intentionally obfuscated the effects of procedures.¹⁷⁰ The health clinic on the island and the birth of Wovoka illustrate the importance of reproductive freedom to self-determination. The school is similarly tied to cultural reproduction, representing a future for children free from cultural erasure and violence. Like the demands for the use of the island laid out in the Proclamation, institutions like the island school and clinic run by Stella Leach and staffed by volunteer doctors, make Alcatraz is a site of optimism.

“As Long as It Takes”¹⁷¹

The optimistic and exuberant first few weeks of the occupation were not long lived. Early in the occupation fissures started to become clear between different interests on the island. The government response, while not as overtly aggressive as the Coast Guard blockade, consistently sought to undermine the occupation through tactics

including heavy surveillance, offering limited concessions that undermined the central demands, and cutting off resources. A series of disasters, all of which have disputed causes, also contributed to the decline of the occupation. And yet during this period many occupiers continued fighting for the ideals and goals enumerated in the Proclamation, determined to stay on the island for “as long as it takes” to gain the title.

On January 3, Yvonne Oakes, Richard and Anna’s twelve-year-old daughter, fell down a stairwell and sustained severe head injuries. She died in a hospital in San Francisco hospital a few days later. The Los Angeles Times commented in a short piece on her death that it “deepened the uncertain outlook of the Indian who have occupied the former prison since Nov. 20.”172 The whole island community mourned the tragedy but rather than unifying those still on the island, it deepened some divides and forced a major change in leadership. The Oakes family left the island shortly thereafter, in mourning and doubt; “about a week before the accident, my wife Anne told me of dreams and feelings of premonitions she was having… Yvonne’s death cast an air of gloom over the whole island. It was like a symbol of all the doubts we had hidden from ourselves during the whole Alcatraz experience.”173 Yvonne’s death, coupled with the San Francisco Chronicle’s publication the same week of a very critical article of the occupation, began to turn local public opinion against the occupation, even while attention was still increasing on the national stage.174

After Yvonne’s death, some on Alcatraz firmly asserted that she had not slipped but had been pushed intentionally, perhaps because of her father’s position on the island and suspicion that he was abusing power. The Oakes family requested an investigation

172 “Indian Girl Hurt in Alcatraz Fall Dies,” Los Angeles Times (Los Angeles, CA), Jan 09, 1970.
174 Smith and Warrior, Like a Hurricane, 65.
from several government agencies but no arrests were ever made nor was her death officially found to be murder. Both those on the island at the time and those who have written about it since are divided on the issue.\textsuperscript{175}

On February 6\textsuperscript{th}, 1970, Stella Leach called to order a council meeting, where residents held an election to replace Oakes on the council. It was at this time that Stella Leach and LaNada Means officially became two of the most central leaders on the island, serving on the council at points as well as unofficially taking on more leadership. They managed most of the daily functions, as well as the negotiations along with John Trudell and Grace Thorpe.

Leach and Means both proved effective and divisive in different ways across the remaining months of the occupation. Robert Warrior suggests that, while they were each dynamic individuals in their own right, Leach and Means also came to represent two archetypes of Native womanhood. Means was the idealistic student from a rough reservation background, while Leach was seen as a domineering mother figure who some saw as using her sons to accomplish personal goals.\textsuperscript{176} While these simplified narratives could not have accurately represented either individual, they certainly influenced how they were seen and how they have been recorded in histories. At 50, Leach was older than most of the occupiers, which automatically set her apart. John Waugh described her as “the salty Sioux nurse who holed up in the infirmary and watched over Indian health

\textsuperscript{175} Johnson, \textit{The Occupation of Alcatraz Island}, 153. Johnson, the scholar who did the most work on the Alcatraz occupation in his life came to the conclusion through interviews and primary source research that Yvonne was murdered. Other scholars, including Smith and Warrior do not come to any conclusion in their writings.

\textsuperscript{176} Robert Warrior, Interview by Author, October 18, 2016, Wesleyan University.
on the island.”¹⁷⁷ She was seen by some as an effective check on the mostly young
occupiers who could sometimes get out of hand, but by others as “power mad” and
controlling.¹⁷⁸

Means was part of a group, mostly women, from UC Berkeley who had started
organizing together before the occupation.¹⁷⁹ The Ramparts article on the occupation she
is identifies her as one of the original 14 occupiers, “a pretty 22-year-old” with “long and
reddish-black” hair, “her nose arches slightly and prominent cheekbones square out her
face.”¹⁸⁰ A photograph of her staring straight into the camera in front of graffiti reading
“BETTER RED THAN DEAD” was the issue’s cover (Fig. 8). She was charismatic and
incredibly committed to her vision for the future of Alcatraz, and she believed in the
occupation for far longer than most. After the tragedy and tumult of January and
February 1970, the enthusiasm of the first weeks never returned but the atmosphere of the
island stabilized. At this point the occupation remained an important symbol, but Means
continued to fight for elements of the original proposal, specifically a cultural center for
which she drafted a detailed budget.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ John Waugh, "THIS LAND IS OUR LAND," Los Angeles Times (Los Angeles, CA), Mar 15,
1970.
¹⁷⁸ Smith and Warrior, Like a Hurricane, 71.
¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 72.
¹⁸¹ Smith and Warrior, Like a Hurricane, 73.
As the year wore on there were several fires on the island, the sources of which became a major source of tension among the occupiers and between the occupiers and the government. On “Radio Free Alcatraz,” the community radio program, Trudell announced the news of the largest and most destructive fire which started around 10:30 pm on the night of June 1st, 1970 and burnt the warden’s house, the old clinic and the lighthouse, lasting until morning in part because of the occupiers’ lack of access to water.\(^\text{182}\) The government said that the occupiers had started the fires, possibly to be intentionally destructive. Many occupiers and those who sympathized with them believed the government had started them to make it even more challenging to stay on the island.

and to turn public sentiment further against the occupation.\textsuperscript{183} It appears that the fires did do significant damage to the public’s sympathy for the occupation; government officials claimed that after the destruction of the historic lighthouse they received calls from “outraged citizens” petitioning for an end to the occupation.\textsuperscript{184}

LaNada Means was seriously injured after she woke in the middle of night to find her curtains on fire. She describes, “I was still half asleep, I did not think; I followed my first instinct which was to protect my son. I threw myself at the fire and put it out with my hands.” In doing so she sustained serious burns which she was told would take six months to a year to heal enough for her to use her hands. Still, Means “went back to the island, and, miraculously, [her] hands were healed within six weeks.” Means describes this as her “very first spiritual experience.”\textsuperscript{185} Mean’s injuries illustrate the seriousness of the fires and the tumult and fear they caused. It also shows what she presents as a caring and positive relationship between her and Stella Leach, as Leach cared for her and prayed for her through the night. And lastly it is clear that to Means, Alcatraz was a deeply spiritual place, an experience which was true for many occupiers, though in different and specific ways.

Despite being badly injured in one of these fires, Means continued to split her time between the island and the mainland. She traveled frequently to Washington DC, where she kept pushing for the occupiers’ demands even when the Alcatraz project had begun to faded from people’s minds. Not all the residents of the island viewed her actions and connections in Washington positively, although she was fairly effective in fundraising and public relations. Some felt that she was advancing herself rather than the

\textsuperscript{183} Johnson, \textit{The Occupation of Alcatraz Island}, 151.  
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid, 168.  
\textsuperscript{185} LaNada Boyer, “Reflections of Alcatraz,” 95.
group, and she lost the trust, a criticism similar to what Oakes had faced while on the island.\textsuperscript{186} Means said it was this kind of suspicion and confrontation that had led Stella Leach to leave the island after becoming “fed up with the politics and the constant attacks on her and her family.”\textsuperscript{187}

Amid reports of tensions on the island and the news of the fires, the public and the media began to view the occupation as in decline. While the number of occupiers had shrunk significantly after the first few weeks many still felt strongly committed to it. In response to one article reporting on the decline of the movement, Lou Trudell responded with a letter about how positive and hopeful the occupation remained. She focused her response on the collective character of the leadership and on the birth of her son.\textsuperscript{188}

The federal government’s tactical approach to the occupation changed throughout its course, but it is clear from the government’s proffers and their strategic choices that for the most part the GSA and officials working directly for President Nixon never intended to grant title to the occupiers or any other Indigenous group – such as the Ohlone, who also requested title. In the “Planning Grant Proposal to Develop An All Indian University And Cultural Complex On Indian Land, Alcatraz” published in 1970, Indians of All Tribes Incorporated state, “We feel that the Island is the only bargaining power that we have with the Federal government. It is the only way we have to get them to notice us or even want to deal with us.”\textsuperscript{189} Robert Robertson, executive director of the National Council on Indian Opportunity was responsible for most of the communication

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\textsuperscript{186} Smith and Warrior, \textit{Like a Hurricane}, 106. \\
\textsuperscript{187} LaNada Boyer, “Reflections on Alcatraz,” 97. \\
\textsuperscript{188} Smith and Warrior, \textit{Like a Hurricane}, 96. \\
\textsuperscript{189} Indians of All Tribes Inc., “Planning Grant Proposal to Develop An All Indian University And Cultural Complex On Indian Land, Alcatraz,” February 1970. UC Berkeley Ethnic Studies Library.
\end{flushright}
from the executive branch. As early as January 1970 Robertson “proposed that all women and children leave Alcatraz immediately and that only a small, symbolic force of five to fifteen men remain.”\(^{190}\) Even before that the National Parks Service had submitted a proposal to add Alcatraz to Golden Gate Parks, which, the federal government continued to promote this plan even after it was completely rejected by the occupiers.

As the occupation continued the level of surveillance of the island and its inhabitants increased, and the occupiers’ access to resources like electricity and water were increasingly limited. Starting in August 1970 two private citizens on the mainland were paid to follow all the activity on the island with high-powered telescopes and report it to GSA.\(^{191}\) Government officials also removed the water barges and cut off electricity to the island on May 29\(^{th}\) 1970, shortly before the fires. This move also cut power to the lighthouse, which the occupiers relit with a generator just over a week later.\(^{192}\) The lack of power to the lighthouse was also a tool used by Robertson and Hannon to argue that the occupation was a safety risk.

\(^{190}\) Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island*, 186.

\(^{191}\) Ibid, 202.

The above cartoon points out the absurdity of the government responding with military force to the occupation, representing Alcatraz as far larger in relation to its surroundings than it is in reality and showing a throng of concerned officials. It plays with rhetoric that was would have likely been familiar to readers in 1970, used to lampoon Cold War scares and proxy wars. The cartoon is not suggesting that Indians of All Tribes is serious threat to United States control of San Francisco, Oakland, and Berkeley. However, if the implications of returning land to Indigenous people was truly followed through to its logical conclusion that would mean the return of all those communities to Ohlone groups, a threat to Untied States control.

On June 11, 1970 federal marshals removed the remaining fifteen occupiers. By this time the occupation no longer held the public’s attention and there was not strong
pushback against the removal despite reports like that of Vicki Lee, who described her children’s experience of being forced off the island: “My little girl said they held a gun to her chest and she asked ‘are they going to kill me?’ And my son hid under the bed but came out when they put a gun to his head.”  193 Footage from that day shows the last occupiers getting off a bus in San Francisco, chanting “power to the Indian people.” 194 Ilka Hartmann, a German photographer who moved to the Bay Area and began documenting social movements in the 1960s and 70s photographed these last few moments of the occupation- creating some of the most often reproduced images of the occupation. 195 The image below (Fig. 10), which shows the occupiers, looking “defiant” according to Hartmann, just after their removal from the island on June 11, 1971, has become particularly iconic. It appears in many publications about the occupation despite depicting what could be seen as a moment of defeat.

194 Belva Davis, “Indians removed from Alcatraz, Part II,” (June 11, 1971, CBS5-KPIX), Archival news film, 16mm color, magnetic sound film. Digitized by San Francisco Bay Area Film Archive. https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/sfbatv/bundles/187817
Management of Alcatraz Island was transferred from the GSA to the National Parks Service just over a year after the end of the occupation in October 1972 and opened as part of Golden Gate National Recreation Area not long after. The Hunt plan had long been discarded before the end of the occupation but as the name “Operation Parks” — the code name for the efforts to remove the occupiers and create a park — implied, the federal government, at a level going all the way up to the president, had decided that the island was to become a park. Government negotiators had offered an iteration of this plan to the occupiers — proposing a park and education center focused on Indian issues with “maximal Indian quality.” This plan was summarily rejected — “our answer at this time, and at any other time, is an emphatic NO” as it met essentially none of the initial demands issued in by the occupiers. However, the island’s destiny was understood from the moment the occupiers were removed. A San Francisco Chronicle article covering the removal of the last fifteen occupiers is speculatively called “U.S. May Soon Declare Alcatraz in Parks Area.” The author mentions “reports, unconfirmed by government spokesman” that all the buildings were to be demolished and the island converted into a “wilderness area.” Reports of the GSA’s plan to dramatically alter the

196 Johnson, We Hold the Rock, 48.
197 Robert Robertson on behalf of the Federal government, “A Proposal” to Indians of All Tribes from, March 31, 1970, Alcatraz Indian Occupation Records (SFH 11), San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.
198 Response by Indians of All Tribes to the above proposal, Alcatraz Indian Occupation Records (SFH 11), San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.
landscape of the island may have been exaggerated, but they were certainly not wholly incorrect, and rumors about park plans were quickly substantiated. On October 27, 1972, President Nixon signed Public Law 92-589 establishing the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and including Alcatraz island. 200

Despite this end to the occupation the occupiers never characterized it as a failure. John Trudell said in an interview immediately after the removal, “whether we won the physical part or not we never sold ourselves out. We never compromised…when they start kickin you around you just gotta learn to bandage up the bruises and stand up again. They didn't beat us.”201 This position was still clear in a 1999 piece in which one occupier reflects, “we won the war – we just didn't know it at the time.”202 Vine Deloria Jr. reflected:

Alcatraz was more than a protest against the oppressive conditions under which Indians lived. In large part, it was a message that we wanted to determine our own destiny and make our own decisions…. Like the activists at Alcatraz, we often mill around, keenly aware that we have the ears of the public by uncertain what to do next. Until we can sketch out realist scenarios of human and resource goals, we continue to resemble those occupants of the rock a quarter of a century ago: We want change, but we do not know what change. 203

The overall outcomes and effects of the occupation can be read in many ways, but it is clear that, despite the decline and eventual removal, the occupation and the island itself remain enduring symbols both in the Red Power movement and in the lives of the individuals involved.

201 Belva Davis, “Indians removed from Alcatraz, Part II.”
203 Deloria, “Alcatraz, Activism, and Accommodation,” 51.
Chapter 3: Remembering ‘the Rock’
Lasting impacts in place, memory, and resistance

Rather than an afterthought or a coda, the way the occupation is remembered is a central part of its story. Since the moment the occupation ended, people, both those who were on the island and others writing about it, have tried to gauge its success. Well before the last 15 occupiers were removed from Alcatraz by Federal marshals in June 1971, the effects of the occupation were already becoming visible. In a 1999 article celebrating the 40th anniversary of the occupation, a list of the accomplishments of the occupation includes “unleashed Indian activism and raised public consciousness about a nearly forgotten segment of the nation’s ethnic mix” and persuading Nixon to end the Termination policy. It also highlighted that many of those involved primarily see the occupation as a victory. Adam Fortunate Eagle is quoted as saying “we won the war – we just didn't know it at the time” and LaNada War Jack describes the Alcatraz occupation as “symbolic in the rebirth of Indian people to be recognized as people, as human beings…Before, we were not.”

The federal government certainly did not meet the demands announced in November of 1969 — most obviously Indians of All Tribes did not have title to Alcatraz. But the true impact of the occupation, in the years immediately following and still today, is evident. The most clearest and most widely discussed successes of the occupation — although the link is not necessarily definitively causal — are the major changes in United

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204 Brazil, “Indians mark ’69 culture clash on ‘The Rock.’”
States “Indian policy” in the early 1970s. In 1970 Nixon rescinded the prevailing policy of termination and over the next few years several large swaths of land were returned to tribes. Beyond those changes, a high-level aid, Brad Patterson, who had been somewhat involved in the Alcatraz negotiations, “cited at least ten major policy and law shifts. They include passage of the Indian Self Determination and Education Act, revision of the Johnson O'Malley Act to better educate Indians, passage of the Indian Financing Act, passage of the Indian Health Act and the creation of an Assistant Interior Secretary post for Indian Affairs.” These changes were significant and should not be underestimated. However many harmful policies remained in place or were enacted after this time- for example the forced and coerced sterilization of Native women reached astronomical levels in the 1970s. This chapter looks beyond the policy changes related to the occupation and traces the trajectory of the island, the lives of those involved in the occupation, and the echoes of Alcatraz in Native activism — both immediately after the occupation and in the decades since.

The park on the island was opened almost immediately after the occupation. The way the occupation has been remembered in the space has changed over the years, including initial destruction of evidence of the occupation and later exhibits remembering it. There have also regularly been events on the island commemorating the significance of the occupation and the Bay Area Native community. After the occupation, the individuals involved scattered around the country, many getting involved in other occupations and actions. Richard Oakes’ murder in 1972 permanently shaped the way the occupiers and the public remembered the occupation and his and his family’s part in it. The murder

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205 Winton, "The Occupation of Alcatraz.”
206 Smith and Warrior, Like a Hurricane, 141.
contributed to sparking many like it around the country and set the tone for the next
decade of Native activism. Though the American Indian Movement (AIM) started before
the occupation, the tactics of Indians of All Tribes would be adopted and modified by
AIM and influenced later direct actions. The high profile nature of the occupation also
contributed to the effectiveness of other occupations. One significant difference in the
next decade of AIM activism was a turn from non-violence. Government reactions were
also significantly more violent in later instances — especially when they were more
isolated and there was less public scrutiny, such as most notoriously in the occupation of

Today Indigenous activism and coverage of it often recalls the occupation as one
of the most recognizable moments of Indian organizing in the 20th century. Contemporary
movements reference the occupation visually and through the use of similar tactics.
Remembering the occupation is one way of understanding why today’s movements look
the way they do.

Movement” in American Indian Activism, ed. Johnson, Nagel, and Champagne, (Urbana and
Alcatraz Cruise

When the government took back control of Alcatraz a substantial number of the residential buildings on the island were destroyed in a clear effort to make it even more unlivable for any possible future occupiers. The federal government wasted no time demolishing the apartment buildings around the parade ground. They brought demolition equipment and armed guards to the southern point of the island within a month. While this was “ostensibly because they were crumbling and unsafe” even the Historic Resource Study published by the Nation Park Service (NPS) says that the federal government had the apartment buildings and other residences “reduced to rubble” in 1969-71, claiming it as Indian land. 

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order to “make the island inhospitable for any future army of occupation.”\textsuperscript{209} The
demolition of these buildings, including the only building to be officially issued an
address by the city of San Francisco- Ira Hayes House, also erased significant signs of the
occupation: “Pima House, Ira Hayes House No. 1, and the other buildings in the area had
been used as residences and contained a lot of graffiti. Their destruction was an
unambiguous reassertion of federal authority and an unmaking of place.”\textsuperscript{210} While a park
was intended to give the public access to the island as a significant historic landmark the
destruction made it clear that the government would moderate the narrative of the island.
The Department of the Interior did “announce that it was concerned about preserving
evidence of the Indians’ 1 ½ years on Alcatraz” and continues to preserve some of the
“more important graffiti.”\textsuperscript{211} However this limited preservation fails to give visitors an
understanding of how significantly the occupation shaped the landscape of the island-
making it a footnote on the primary historical narrative of the penitentiary. The visitors
map (Figure 11) does not provide any information on the destroyed buildings and there is
not much more evidence of what was once there. The only evidence most visitors to the
island encounter is a three dimensional model of what the island looked like when it was
a prison in what was once an administrative room.

Today there is an exhibit on the island — the current iteration of which opened
permanently in 2011— that tells visitors to the island about the occupation. When visitors
get to the island and disembark from the Alcatraz Cruises boat they are greeted by a park
ranger who, in their speech, suggests that you watch a video on the history of the island
which in 17 minutes gives a history of the island “starting when there’s no water in the

\textsuperscript{209} Thompson, \textit{The Rock}, 474.
\textsuperscript{210} Rundstrom, “American Indian Placemaking on Alcatraz 1969-71,”191.
\textsuperscript{211} Thompson, \textit{The Rock}, 474.
bay.” In pitching this video to an impatient crowd on the day I visited the ranger said
“See this red paint up here? Why is this red paint up there? How many people here know
that Native Americans invaded Alcatraz…If you don’t know that you should go see the
movie!” 212 As promised the video includes a segment about the occupation including a
clip of Richard Oakes and Ed Casillio speaking about the lasting impact of the
occupation. This approximately three minute segment ends with the voiceover drawing a
causal connection between the occupation and changing federal policy, “while the island
never became Indian land the government ultimately changed its policy and started
returning tribal lands to American Indians.” It then transitions smoothly into the current
incarnation of the island; “The event refocused attention on the island and in 1972 it was
designated a national parks site.” 213 Behind the room where this movie plays there is a
collection of three small exhibits, one on the American prison system, one on the birds of
Alcatraz, and one on the occupation titled “We Are Still Here,” on the occupation. The
room is dominated by a few benches were visitors can sit and watch a documentary
featuring interviews with many of the occupiers. Around the walls are information panels
and photos, both from the occupation and from more recent gatherings on the island.
While this exhibit is certainly informative and moving to anyone who sees it, it is also
easily missed by streams of visitors eager to see the main cellblock.

There are two annual Indigenous events on Alcatraz. Both are Sunrise
Ceremonies — one for Indigenous Peoples’ Day in late September or October, and the
other, “Indigenous People's Annual Thanksgiving Sunrise Gathering” for
“Unthanksgiving Day.” The later event has happened in some form every year since

212 Personal recording of park ranger, January 16, 2017, Alcatraz Island.
213 Personal recording of the introduction video, January 16, 2017, Alcatraz Island.
1975. The events are hosted by International Indian Treaty Council “as a way to celebrate and preserve the survival of the Native American peoples.” In addition to these regular events there have also been anniversary events, especially shortly after the occupation, organized for the participants. In 2013 LaNada War Jack participated for the first time in one of these events, and in an interview said that the need to resist “continues to this very day.” A radio piece for local KALW gives a sense of the purpose and feeling of the event. Rather than the usual greeting instructing visitors to watch a video, the group is welcomed with “good morning everybody, welcome to Ohlone land! You’re out here near the village of Yelamu.” The piece concludes by reflecting on what most days on the island are like today; “at 9am everyone has to leave the island. Tomorrow Alcatraz will fill up with thousands of tourists. But the first thing they’ll see as they come off the ferry is the giant red graffiti left over from the occupation.”

Lives (and deaths) of the Alcatraz Occupiers

By the time the occupation ended almost all the initial occupiers and most prominent figures had moved on, with the notable exception of LaNada War Jack. Many

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of them were involved in the following decades of activism while others returned to their lives as they had been. Some of those who participated as children or young people later felt that the occupation had shaped them deeply. Many of the women involved went on to be involved in tribal politics and activism, including Grace Thrope, LaNada War Jack, and Wilma Mankiller. Thorpe was older than many of the other leaders of the occupation. By the time she arrived on Alcatraz she was a World War II veteran and held several degrees. After the occupation she went on to serve as a tribal judge, a congressional liaison to the U.S. House of Representatives American Indian Policy Review Commission, and a prominent environmental activist—particularly against nuclear technologies.²¹⁸

This section looks at how individuals’ lives were affected focusing on some of the occupations most prominent women as well as women who, while less central to the occupation were deeply influenced by Alcatraz. It also reflects on the impact of Richard Oakes’s death, how the occupation is remembered and the position of his widow and family.

A large portion of the student occupiers had been continuing their studies while participating in the occupation. LaNada War Jack finished her degree at UC Berkeley, graduating the same year the occupation ended. She later perused a Masters in Public Administration and a PhD in Political Science at Idaho State University. She lives on the Fort Hall reservation in Idaho and had served as a councilwoman there. She has spoken and written about her experiences. In the past year she was involved in the Water protector movement at Standing Rock and wrote about the parallels between that

movement and the occupation.\textsuperscript{219} She has also written a book titled \textit{Colonization Battlefield: A Native American Historical and Personal Account of Oppression, Survival, and Resistance}.\textsuperscript{220}

Others, who had also been young students at the time of the occupation, like Vicki Santana, similarly went on to work for tribal organizations. She became a tribal attorney and judge and served in an advisory role to multiple governmental agencies and advocacy groups.\textsuperscript{221} Linda Aranaydo, also a student during the occupation, finished her degree by commuting twice a week from the island.\textsuperscript{222} She then settled in a neighborhood in Oakland where many of the families involved in the occupation had moved and taught school, later teaching and serving as center supervisor at Hintil KuuCa Children’s Center for Native American Children. She later received an M.D. from University of California San Francisco School of Medicine.\textsuperscript{223} She cites the occupation as a major influence both on her work and who she became as a person:

\begin{quote}
During the occupation of Alcatraz Island I learned a lot about being a woman in a community. From my grandparents and mother, I always knew who I was, but there was no community surrounding me to help me make decisions as I wondered, “How am I going to be? What kind of woman am I going to grow into
\end{quote}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{219} For example: Socco, "Original Organizer from Occupation of Alcatraz Talks With AF3IRM Before First Return to Alcatraz Unthanksgiving in 44 Years." LaNada War Jack, "Taking Our Stand on," \textit{Native News Online}, September 12, 2016, \url{http://nativenewsonline.net/currents/taking-stand-rock-standing-rock/}.
\textsuperscript{220} A very limited release of this book was published in 2014 and I as not able to find a copy of it for sale or in a library, though it would have been a useful resource for this project. In personal correspondence Dr. War Jack said the book would hopefully be published in the near future.
\textsuperscript{222} Linda Aranaydo, in \textit{Every Day is a Good Day: Reflections by Contemporary Indigenous Women}, 115.
\textsuperscript{223} Ibid, 115. And “Biographies-Linda Aranaydo”, in \textit{Every Day is a Good Day: Reflections by Contemporary Indigenous Women}, 175
\end{flushleft}
if I haven’t been around a lot of women?” The friendships I made at Alcatraz have lasted for more than thirty-five years, and I expect them to last a lifetime.  

When the occupation began, Wilma Mankiller was twenty-three and the mother of two young daughters, living as a housewife after marrying a man with “definite and fairly narrow ideas about the role of women” just before turning 18. She wrote that the “Alcatraz experience was certainly a watershed for me. The leaders articulated principles and ideas I had thought about but could not name or articulate. During the Alcatraz occupation and that period of activism, anything seemed possible.” After spending some time as part of the occupation she became involved in the Pit River Tribes Land sovereignty struggle, which a significant number of occupiers joined. Along with other organizing work in California, Mankiller wrote that these experiences “helped me to understand more fully the historical context in which tribal people live our contemporary lives” and were “great preparation for [her] future role as a principal chief of the Cherokee Nation.” Of course these women represent a tiny fraction of the thousands who were involved in the occupation. Their experiences speak to the impact Alcatraz had on the lives of individuals and how that rippled out into communities. These impacts, while not official government concession or control over land, are certainly ‘successes’ of the movement.

Richard Oakes, his wife Anne, and their children were some of the most visible faces in the early days of the occupation. While they departed early in the occupation after the death of their daughter Yvonne in January 1970, Richard Oakes’s name remains

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224 Aranaydo, in Every Day is a Good Day: Reflections by Contemporary Indigenous Women, 115. 115.
225 Mankiller, Every Day is a Good Day, 48.
226 Ibid, 81-85.
possibly the most associated with the occupation of any of the leaders. Oakes was killed on September 20th 1972 by Michael Morgan a 34 year old YMCA camp manager near the town of Annapolis a few hours north of San Francisco.\textsuperscript{227} Morgan alleged that Oakes had threatened him with a knife though police found no evidence to support these claims.\textsuperscript{228} During the trial a young man who had been visiting the camp testified saying that Morgan had said Oakes was “half crazy and better off dead” and that during a discussion of hunting he had said “there is open season all year long on coons, foxes and Indians.”\textsuperscript{229} Despite this evidence, the next April Oakes’ killer was found not guilty of voluntary manslaughter.\textsuperscript{230} In the wake of Richard’s death and Morgan’s trial Anne’s mourning once again became hyper-visible. One article covering the case concluded, “after the court proceedings, the sobbing Mrs. Oakes said outside the courtroom, ‘Indians are free to kill.’”\textsuperscript{231} Though by the time of his death Oakes had “become an outcast” somewhat removed from the larger activist groups his death re-galvanized many and reaffirmed Oakes’ statues as a hero of the movement. Hank Adams wrote in a statement “Richard Oakes’ presence beyond Alcatraz and his influence upon many Indian people shall continue to live within the body and soul of Indian experience.”\textsuperscript{232} Oakes’ murder restored his place as a central figure of the occupation, he died young and tragically, and this brought together people in the movement who had begun to drift away from him and each other. It also meant that he was not involved with the politics and problems of any of the later AIM actions.

\textsuperscript{227} “Oakes’ Slaying Testimony,” \textit{San Francisco Chronicle} (San Francisco, CA), October 14, 1970. Other sources report the date as being September 21\textsuperscript{st} rather than the 20\textsuperscript{th}.
\textsuperscript{228} Smith and Warrior, \textit{Like a Hurricane}, 140.
\textsuperscript{230} Smith and Warrior, \textit{Like a Hurricane}, 245.
\textsuperscript{231} “Jury Clears Caretaker in Indian's Death,” \textit{Los Angeles Times} (Los Angeles, CA), 1973.
\textsuperscript{232} Smith and Warrior, \textit{Like Hurricane}, 141.
American Indian Activism after Alcatraz: The Rock to Standing Rock

One of the most obvious influences of the occupation on activism that followed was the wave of similar occupations of other significant places that Alcatraz catalyzed. The locations chosen for these actions were “government installations or historical sites of deep double-edged meaning. In some cases this meant BIA regional offices (and eventually the national headquarters). Other significant protests sites included an occupation of Mount Rushmore by Lakota and Chippewa activists and a thanksgiving take over at Plymouth Rock.\textsuperscript{233} In Seattle in March 1970 a group took over the recently decommissioned Fort Lawton Army instillation. Several of the leaders of the Fort Lawton occupation were from the Seattle area and had gone down to California to participate in the Alcatraz occupation. Inspired to take similar action they planed the takeover using similar strategies, also choosing a surplus military site which allowed similar legal arguments and using their refusal to leave as leverage to gain title. The occupation also received support from Alcatraz participants including Richard Oakes and actress Jane Fonda, whose celebrity statues helped this occupation gain traction at a national level.\textsuperscript{234}

Two of the largest actions of this era were the takeover of the BIA headquarters November 3-9, 1972 and the occupation of Wounded Knee, South Dakota from February 27- May 5 1973. These two actions were both more explicitly tied to AIM than Alcatraz had been and the motivations and goals of each differ in significant ways. However, they

\textsuperscript{233} Smith and Warrior, \textit{Like a Hurricane}, 91.
\textsuperscript{234} Lossom Allen, "Fort Lawton Takeover," \textit{Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project, University of Washignton}, 2006, \url{http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/FtLawton_takeover.htm}.
are undoubtedly part of the same wave of action and activism, which was also linked to social movements throughout the world.235

Women’s participation in the occupation of Wounded Knee, and AIM more generally is a deeply fraught and contested topic. Women who were part of the occupying force have discussed specific targeting by the FBI agents. Gladys Bissonette (Oglala Sioux) recalled being inside a church during a firefight; “Every time us women gathered to protest or demonstrate, they always aim machine guns at us. Women and children. I would like to know why they would shoot us Indians down just to save a building.”236

During Wounded Knee there were “criticisms of male domination and opportunism.”237 Devon Abbot Mihesuah has written about the misplaced “Hero Worship” surrounding male leaders of AIM and how, in addition to obscuring the important contributions of women, it also pushes aside abuses committed by these men against women in the movement. She describes that “because of these men’s popular images as activists, many Natives believe that the weight the AIM men lend to Indian issues through their notoriety in the media is more important than the way they treat women and follow traditions of their cultures.”238 This was perpetuated by the way the media “remained fascinated with the stereotype of the male warrior.”239 Because of this fascination women “watched as the image of the warrior took center stage in front of the

235 It is outside the scope of this project to look in greater depth at either of these incredibly significant movements. They have both been written about extensively in the past but, like most of the red power movement the gendered experiences of each could be interrogated further by future researchers.
237 Langston, "American Indian Women's Activism in the 1960s and 1970s.”
238 Mihesuah, Indigenous American Women, 10. For further reading on Wounded Knee and specifically the murder of Anna Mae Pictou-Aquash see Mihesuah’s essay “1970’s Activist Anna Mea Pictou-Aquash,” 115-127.
239 Langston, "American Indian Women's Activism in the 1960s and 1970s."
cameras” as their own experiences and oppressions were marginalized even in the movement that was supposed to be fighting for them. John Trudell, who had also been a central leader on Alcatraz and who Mihesuah implicates as part of the harmful male leadership of Wound Knee said of the time “we got lost in our manhood…we became men who became leaders and then we started protecting our political leader image, our political leader identity, which became more important than the overall needs of the community”.

Shortly after the occupation at Wounded Knee, a group of women, many of whom had been involved in the action, founded Women of All Red Nations (WARN) to address the issues they felt most directly affected them and had been sidelined by the men of AIM. These women—over three hundred from over 30 nations—“formed an organization of their own in order to deal with a verity of social issues that appear to be most important to Native females: education health care sterilization, treaty rights, and political incarceration of Native people.” The Indigenous Women’s Network, established about a decade later, also worked toward similar goals, both groups focusing on issues including environmental racism and forced sterilization as well as organizing for global indigenous rights. Other movements since then, including quite recently, have also better integrated the goals of the Alcatraz occupation and the specific experiences of Native women.

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241 Ibid, 224. This Chapter on Sayers book also includes and short analysis of the role of women in the legal cases that followed Wounded Knee.
243 Ramirez, Native Hubs, 51.
Idle No More (INM) movement, started by four women from Saskatchewan: Nina Wilson, Sheelah Mclean, Sylvia McAdam, and Jessica Gordon, is one example of a contemporary movement that has been connected to the historical legacy of the occupation of the Alcatraz but which has very different implications for women’s involvement and leadership. In an article about the intersections of Indigenous activism and feminism in Idle No More, Sonja John places the movement in the historical legacy of women’s involvement in Indigenous Activism. While women were involved in the movements of the 1960s and 70s, they were, for the most part, in the background and expected not to voice gendered concerns. Idle No More—while not a “women’s movement”—certainly engaged (and continues to engage) with the issues of immediate importance to First Nation women. While there is a distinct and significant historical tie between Alcatraz, the Red Power movement, and INM, one of the most significant differences is the distinct place of women—both in who served as the “public face” of each movement and in the weight placed on issues important to Indigenous women.

INM also referenced Alcatraz visually, through social media, the movement used Facebook particularly to build connections between existing Indigenous networks. The image below (Fig. 13) was shared and captioned “Taking back this great big island one little island at a time. Idle no more.” and posted with the description “Idle No More,

244 Sonja John,. "Idle no More - Indigenous Activism and Feminism." Theory in Action 8: (4), 2015, 38-54.
The post-image and caption connect the movements and assert the significance of Alcatraz as a symbol and a physical space in later activism.


The movement against the building of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), has become the largest and most high-profile Indigenous Rights movement in the United States since Alcatraz, the BIA takeover, and Wounded Knee. Articles in both mainstream news sources, like *Time* and *The New Yorker*, as well as specifically Native media sites have explicitly situated the movement in the context of the occupation and people who were involved in both have written about the significance of seeing a movement of this scale nearly 50 years after the occupation of Alcatraz. Each of these movements makes a strong statement about sovereignty and control of land by indigenous people, each is a coming together of people from many different Indigenous

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248 This sentiment is visible primarily in media coverage of NoDAPL. For example in the September 6, 2016 episode of *Democracy Now!* Amy Goodman NoDAPL “the largest gathering of Native American tribes in decades,” apparently referencing the movements of the 1970s.
Nations and has widespread support from around the world, each is, in many ways, a youth led movement.²⁴⁹

Jane Fonda— one of the most famous voices of support of each movement and present for both wrote, “It has been 45 years since the Occupation of Alcatraz. At Standing Rock we are witnessing the flowering of the seeds that were planted there and, again, it is the youth who seem to be leading the way.”²⁵⁰ LaNada War Jack went to Standing Rock and reflected “this stand at Standing Rock allows me to reinforce the importance of peace, prayers and non-violence because it kept us alive during our 18 month occupation of Alcatraz.”²⁵¹ During the annual Indigenous Peoples Sunrise Ceremony on Thanksgiving 2016 people held signs in solidarity with Standing Rock and a prayer was made for the Water Protectors.²⁵² Women have also been central in the NoDAPL movement, but — in ways that looks more like INM than AIM — the voices of indigenous women have been amplified during this movement.

The Richard Oakes quote “Alcatraz is not an Island” has proven one of the most enduring lines about the occupation.²⁵³ The phrase evokes the significance of Alcatraz in a long historical context, the occupations connections to other world events at the time, and extends its reach forward out into the future towards the occupations lasting impacts.

²⁵¹ War Jack, "Taking Our Stand on ‘The Rock’ to Standing Rock."
²⁵³ Blue Cloud, Alcatraz Is Not an Island. The phrase has been used for several records of the occupation, starting with Blue Cloud’s. It is also the title of a documentary about the occupation.
The occupation of Alcatraz has shaped island, the lives of the occupiers, and Indigenous activism for the last half century. The intervening events and lives have also shaped the way the occupation is remembered. Alcatraz is significant for the 19 months in which occupiers turned the “right of discovery” on its head and reclaimed the island, but no less meaningful is the intervening half-century of history shaped by this time.
Conclusion

Today about 3,800 people per day make the voyage to the island, one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world. Most of these visitors will not know how deeply their experience of the island is shaped by the 19-month occupation. The significance of painting they see when they first land, announcing the island as Indian Land, will fade into more lurid stories of gangsters and prison breaks.

Yet the site holds an important place in the history of Indigenous resistance in the United States and is frequently referenced as such by individuals and in later movements. The occupiers subverted colonialist scripts, reshaping land that had been used as a tool of colonization into symbolically weighty Indian Land and reframing legal arguments once used by the federal government to disposes them and their forbearers. Many of these activist had been directly affected by the mid 20th century policies that sought to destroy what limited sovereignty Native communities had. The aims of the occupation were in direct response to colonial violence both within the occupiers’ lifetimes and in a longer historical timeframe.

The occupation itself was sometimes fraught with conflict from within and there is still not, and will never be, one definitive version of the events that took place there.

from November 1969-June 1971. Nonetheless it was an impactful act of resistance, which resonated with people around the country and the world both Indigenous and not, as is illustrated by the public and media responses and other resistance movements that came after. The work of the women who participated in the occupation was in many ways remarkable, but was also consistent with the labor that they and other women had been undertaking to build networks and communities as the Indigenous population in the urban Bay Area had expanded in through the 1900s. On the island the occupiers built models of the more ideal institutions; a school and clinic that rejected the violence that had been enacted in the versions of these organizations the federal government had created. They were focused on their own survival and the survival of the children in the community.

The Alcatraz occupation set in motion a string of similar occupations, shaping North American Indigenous rights movements for the rest of the century and onward. The lasting impacts of the occupation are also imprinted in the physical land of the island and in its current positioning as a national park. Occupiers’ experiences of Alcatraz stuck with them, marking for many a turning point in their lives.

This project has sought to address gaps in historical analysis of the occupation of Alcatraz when it comes to women’s experiences and leadership. The reasons for these gaps are manifold, and include the movement’s own focus on not having specific leaders to better include the voices of all the participants. While many of the women, mentioned, quoted, or featured prominently could be the subjects of full biographies — they were (or are) brilliant thinkers, activists, and artists and their lives are rich stories to be explored further, I focused on a wide range of experiences of the occupation to better reflect what the occupation stood for. Alcatraz is one of many moments of Indigenous resistance that
can and should be looked back on with an eye to women’s experiences. While there is
has been some outstanding scholarship on this topic there is still much to be done, both in
bring more historical attention to these movements in general and thinking specifically
about women’s experience which have been largely ignored. Failing to consider these
women and the specificity of their involvement is not only a historiographic failure but
also limits the possible depth of understanding about these movements.

Visual reference to occupation is another way people continue to engage with its
the memory and through which it continues to be impactful. The Facebook post from the
page RISE: Radical Indigenous Survivance & Empowerment. The image (Fig. 14) shows
a version of one of the most famous photographs of the occupation (to the left) altered to
read “REFUGEES WELCOME” rather than “INDIANS WELCOME.” The image was
posted February 2\textsuperscript{nd} 2017 accompanied by the caption “#NoBansOnIndigenousLand
#SolidarityWithTurtleIsland.” This visual assumes viewer know about the occupation of
Alcatraz and calls on the symbolic power of the movement to call viewers to another
cause- in this case protesting immigration restrictions.
The occupation stated goal was gaining title to Alcatraz but it was also about asserting the existence of Native people the Urban space of the Bay Area. Scholarship on Native resistance in the 20th and 21st centuries is, in a different way, a strategy for affirming the continued survival and vibrance of indigenous communities in the United States. Claiming the island was a way of claiming this existence and legacy of collective rights to all the land of the Americas. The Proclamation ends by making clear that the occupiers are surviving and resisting; “in the name of all Indians, therefore, we-reclaim this island for our Indian nations… We feel this claim is just and proper, and that this land should rightfully be granted to us for as long as the rivers shall run and the sun shall
shine." Though Indians of All Tribes does not hold the title to Alcatraz the island continue to function as Indian Land through the lasting memory of the occupation.

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