

“To awaken a nation asleep”: Community Building Amid Radical
Activism, and the Indian Alcatraz Occupation

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines events leading to and during the Indian occupation of Alcatraz Island of 1969-1971. While scholars have used the occupation as an example of the changing trajectory of American Indian activism in the late 20th century, especially in regards to the American Indian Movement and Red Power Movement, the event is rarely examined on its own terms. This thesis seeks to fill that gap, focusing on concrete community building initiatives both on and around the island between 1964 and 1971. In doing so, it argues that Alcatraz was not *only* a symbolic space of Indian freedom, but also a physical place where Indians' lives were changed, and Indians' futures were informed. The thesis brings to bear significant archival research from the *National Parks Service Records and Collections*, public collections in San Francisco, CA, where many occupiers have preserved their occupation accounts and photographs.

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CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

- March 21, 1963.....Alcatraz Penitentiary closes
- March 8, 1964.....Sioux activists occupy Alcatraz Island for 4 hours
- March 20, 1964.....Elliot Leighton files the first of a series of petitions to General Services Administration, demanding Alcatraz Island be officially recognized as Indian Territory
- October 10, 1969.....San Francisco’s Intertribal Friendship Center burns to the ground
- November 9, 1969.....Indians of All Tribes’s first attempt to seize Alcatraz Island
- November 10, 1969.....Indians of All Tribes’s second attempt to seize Alcatraz Island
- November 20, 1969.....Indians of All Tribes seize Alcatraz Island
- November 20, 1969.....Coast Guard ships block incoming Indians and supplies to Alcatraz docks
- November 22, 1969.....Coast Guard blockade comes to an end
- November 27, 1969.....Un-Thanksgiving celebrations on Alcatraz Island
- November 1969.....Indian Depot Opens at Pier 40, run by Joseph “Indian Joe” Morris
- January 3, 1970.....Richard Oakes’s daughter, Yvonne, falls down a flight of stairs while playing, and is airlifted to hospital
- January 7, 1970.....Yvonne Oakes passes away from her injuries
- February 1970.....Richard Oakes and his wife, Annie Oakes, leave Alcatraz Island and the Indians of All Tribes. He says that following Yvonne’s death, his “heart isn’t in it”
- June 1970.....Fires on Alcatraz Island destroy the warden’s house, guard housing, and damage the lighthouse; fire’s cause is never discerned
- November 26, 1970.....Un-Thanksgiving celebrations on Alcatraz Island
- December 1970.....Joseph “Indian Joe” Morris leaves the Indians of All Tribes, putting the Alcatraz Finance Committee in charge of the Indian Depot
- February 15, 1971.....Indian Depot is forced to shut down due to unpaid rent
- June 11, 1971.....The Indians of All Tribes are removed from Alcatraz Island, after 19 months of occupation

INTRODUCTION

Community Building Amid Radical Activism

I thought to myself, 'It's great to be Indian!'
JOSEPH "INDIAN JOE" MORRIS

*If you are Indian, welcome to Indian land! Come
ashore and join your brothers and sisters!*
PETER BLUE CLOUD

On November 9, 1969, a group of Native American men, women, and children who called themselves the Indians of All Tribes gathered at Pier 39 in San Francisco, California, with the intent of travelling to and taking over Alcatraz Island. Most were outfitted in their best tribal wear, some were carrying drums, and all were impatiently waiting for the five boats that had promised to ferry them across San Francisco Bay. But when Adam Fortunate Eagle¹ – one of group's lead organizers – arrived to find restless Indians,² irritated media representatives, and no boats, he was met with questioning looks: were these boats on "Indian time" and simply running late, or would they not be coming at all? Realizing that a large group of onlookers was gathering and there was no transportation, Fortunate Eagle searched for a backup method to carry over 100 agitated protestors and journalists to Alcatraz Island. He quickly hired a three-masted schooner called the *Monte Cristo*, captained by Ronald Craig, and large enough to hold 50 individuals on board. However, because of the *Monte Cristo*'s hull depth, it would be unable to dock at Alcatraz and could only take the waiting protestors on a circuit around the bay. There would be no landing

¹ At the time, Adam Fortunate Eagle was known as Adam Nordwall, however he has since begun to refer to his surname as "Fortunate Eagle" for cultural reasons (Fortunate Eagle & Findley). I will thus refer to him throughout this thesis as Adam Fortunate Eagle, but will note any changes with square brackets or footnotes.

² Although some Indigenous studies scholars speak *against* using the term "Indian" to describe Indigenous/First Nations/Native peoples due to its colonial etymology, those involved in the occupation of Alcatraz refer to themselves as Indians within their own diaries, journals, and retrospective memoirs; I, too, therefore, will use "Indian" and "Native American" interchangeably throughout this essay, while simultaneously understanding that "Indian" is a term invented by colonizers, and that not all Native communities approve of its use.

on Alcatraz that day. Although the arrangement with the *Monte Cristo* was not ideal, Fortunate Eagle later recalled that he “was ready to accept a kayak” and was thus grateful for any boat that would help he and his group (*Alcatraz!* 55). Although this attempt proved unsuccessful, about a week later a smaller group of Indians would return to the wharf, board fishing boats, and land on Alcatraz; over the course of the nineteen-month occupation that followed, over 500 more would join them. Their stated goal: to claim the island as Indian Territory.

What brought hundreds of Indians from across North America to a rocky island in San Francisco Bay—the former site of an infamous penitentiary, now solemnly declared “Indian Land”? Why was Alcatraz Island so important to the Indians of All Tribes, when its conditions were such that the government decreed it unfit for some of the country’s most notorious and violent criminals? By using accounts and photographs gathered at the *National Parks Service Records and Collections (NPSRC)*, this thesis tells the story of events that transpired prior to and during the Indians’ time on Alcatraz. Among the myriad of testimony preserved in the collections, Joseph “Indian Joe” Morris scrawled an addendum into the cover of the Indians of All Tribes’s financial ledger: “This log book will serve to help the historian to put the two ends together, and piece together the real story of what happened in the first year of Alcatraz Indian Occupation.” Such a statement affirms my belief that archival materials provide a critical basis for recounting the Alcatraz occupation, and the influence of its events on Natives who participated. Alcatraz participants saved their diaries, photographs, and post-occupation commentary specifically *for* “the historian.” On this basis, I assert that the voices given prominence in the telling of this story should be *Indian*, and that any analysis of the event’s significance should begin from the views and memories of those who participated.

Archival testimony offers a discernible, recurring emphasis on the relationships that grew between Native American communities, as well as between Native and non-Native peoples, in the course of events. Photographs and videos taken during the occupation depict the island as not merely a piece of land that the Indians desired, but as a space where men, women, and children – people who had been separated by geographic landscape and the reservation system – could come together and (re)form bonds of community; personal diaries and written accounts of the occupiers' time on Alcatraz stress how the island provided a place for Native peoples to gather and recover their cultures, their traditions, and their histories. This thesis is provoked by these stories. It seeks to analyze the relationships forged on and around Alcatraz Island; in doing so, it argues that Alcatraz presented a time and a place for Native Americans to come together and take pride in their Indian identity. The unique community that formed on the island would deeply impact both the lives of its members and the wider trajectory of American Indian activism.

I examine occupation events in relation to three distinct themes, each of which demonstrates how the occupation's growing fame and emerging community structures impressed upon participants the importance of pride and Indian-directed action. In Chapter 1, I examine the events and preparations that led to the November 20, 1969 seizure of Alcatraz, and focus on how the newly created Indians of All Tribes sought to initiate a new form of Indian resistance through widespread participation. Then, in Chapter 2, I turn to the supporting role that non-Native peoples played in the successful takeover of Alcatraz: this aid – especially in the movement's initial months – was central to its widespread success, and unlike previous non-Native projects, it came on *Indian* terms. Finally, in Chapter 3 I look at the different ways that the community of Native Americans on Alcatraz Island worked to create a self-sufficient and inclusive space for all Indians, and emphasize how the rise in Indian pride is linked to these community initiatives.

Despite the multitude of occupation-related collections held in San Francisco, and despite numerous published accounts from prominent occupiers such as Fortunate Eagle and “Indian Joe” Morris, academic research on the occupation of Alcatraz Island has been sparse. Most current scholarship mentions the Indians of All Tribes only in passing, positioning the movement within larger projects of resistance such as the American Indian Movement and the Red Power Movement (Garment 215; Gray 1; and Reed 132). For example, notable Native environmental activist Grace Thorpe (Sac and Fox Indian) gives “credit to the American Indian occupation of Alcatraz Island in 1969 as the catalyst for Red Power activism” (in Josephy, Nagel, & Johnson 162), and University of California Davis Native Studies professor emeritus, Jack D. Forbes, called Alcatraz the “first successful strike of the Red Power Movement” for education grounded in Indian cultures (132-33). Journalist and Minority Affairs worker Woody Kipp adamantly states that Alcatraz was the “call to arms” the AIM needed to maintain visibility among Native and non-Native Americans (207), and American Studies scholar Daniel M. Cobb emphasizes how Alcatraz brought attention to the AIM’s fight for Native treaty rights (200). The occupation’s position in the trajectory of these movements is undeniable, and it did influence subsequent occupation protests for years to come. What these narratives fail to emphasize, however, is the specificity of Alcatraz and the community that emerged there, separate from the bodies that governed the AIM and Red Power. The occupation of Alcatraz was its own initiative, on its own terms crucial to the America-wide revival of Indian pride. I do not dispute that Alcatraz was broadly symbolic and historically significant within these larger movements. But Alcatraz was not only a symbol; it was, perhaps first and foremost, a group of real people who came together to effect change in their world.

From archival sources, it emerges that Alcatraz was not *only* a symbol of a better future for Native peoples—it was also a physical, concrete site where lives were changed, and new forms of activism were honed through the realization of an Indian community. The story of Alcatraz participant and well-regarded Indian scholar Vine Deloria Jr., who would help bring nationwide attention to Native American needs throughout the latter half of the 20th century, serves as a powerful example. Deloria was known in West Coast Indian circles for his advocacy work regarding Native fishing rights before the 1969 occupation; his widely influential text, *Custer Died for your Sins*, would be published in October 1969—the same time that Indians of All Tribes leadership was planning to take Alcatraz Island as Native land. Deloria was initially critical of the occupation, calling those on the island “inexperienced” and “unqualified to negotiate with the federal government” (qtd. in Smith & Warrior 82). When consulted, he informed the Indians of All Tribes that their movement was too symbolic, that for social rights demonstrations to succeed they needed a concrete and attainable goal. Yet when he saw waves of Indian activists flocking to the island in 1969, Deloria decided that “Alcatraz was a big enough symbol that for the first time this century Indians were taken seriously” (qtd. in Winton np), and that the occupation “helped to highlight the existing struggles” of Native Americans across the United States (Foreword ix). In what he calls “endless trips” to Alcatraz between 1969 and 1971, Deloria himself learned how “meaningful” the experience of community was for young Native Americans on the island (x).

Prior to the occupation, Deloria distinguished between symbolic and organizational forms of activism, and believed that each led to sharply different results; *Custer*, which bears directly on his involvement and spectatorship of many social movements between 1962 and 1969 (including the 1964 Sioux occupation of Alcatraz), repeatedly emphasizes how Black Civil

Rights movements succeeded where Indian movements failed *specifically* because they were structured around attaining specific demands, which were clearly outlined in a way that black and non-black Americans could understand. Symbolic activism drew attention to social inequalities, while organizational activism suggested concrete action that led to resolution; but as the 19-month Indian hold of Alcatraz progressed and inspired additional Indian rights demonstrations across the country, Deloria came to embrace the important if more diffuse goals of the project, understanding that progress would come not only from concrete political victories prized from mainstream authorities, but also internal efforts to transform native lives and societies. Indeed, this thesis resists the idea that symbolic and organizational are mutually exclusive. The occupation of Alcatraz demonstrated that inspiring pride and confidence, and building broad relationships and solidarity on their basis, could be as important as articulating concrete demands.

Troy Johnson, the one scholar who has taken a detailed look at the occupation of Alcatraz on its own terms instead of as a part of larger protest initiatives, focuses his work on the ideological symbol Alcatraz became, rather than on the concrete events that occurred during the Indians' time on the island. Some of his work is disputed in Indian occupier accounts: for example, Morris mentions Johnson in the Introduction to his published diaries, noting “some errors in the way that Johnson has told the Alcatraz story” (ii)—both in his depiction of members of the Indians of All Tribes and in his narration of events that influenced moments of Indian success and failure (iii-iv). Johnson’s narrations provide important information on Alcatraz participants, yet his occasional misrepresentation of the events that occurred also presents

difficulties.³ Although I utilize Johnson's texts throughout this thesis – particularly for his large collections of verbatim commentary from Native occupiers – I primarily rely on the testimony of those on Alcatraz, prioritizing Indian voices in discussions of how their experiences changed the trajectory of their lives and activism.

The 1960s had been a particularly difficult and frustrating decade for American Indians as the government continued to ignore the provisions of various historical agreements. Although a changing social temper had saturated the country, and crowds were regularly taking to the streets in radical protest of existing societal structures, Shoshone/Bannock activist LaNada Boyer emphasizes that race still dictated Indian suffering in America. As scholars of colonialism contend, race acts as a “potent political terrain,” and racial categorizations engineer “whites” as the dominant population who dictates the definition of social progress (Stoler 28; see also López 170; Davis 133). Decades of “insidious methods of depriving [Native Americans] of our lands” weighed on Native communities, and “non-Indians continued exerting intense political pressures to gain more of our land for white economic benefit” (“Reflections” 88-89); colonial projects left Native peoples feeling, as Deloria put it, as though “Indian rights are being ground into dirt” (*Custer* 30). While the Civil Rights Movement began to see success that inspired and benefited Native peoples, Deloria notes that, in the early 1960s, Indian causes were largely symbolic, “demonstrat[ing] the suffering and frustrations of the people” but failing to initiate concrete change (“Alcatraz” 46).⁴ At this time, San Francisco and the Bay Area were especially rife with

³ I want to emphasize that I do not believe Johnson was purposefully misinformed or intentionally presenting false information. His work on Alcatraz began early, and as the 1990s progressed more information from those personally involved with the occupation became available.

⁴ Deloria notes that movements for fishing rights were the one exception, and the only area where – early 1960s – Indians were seeing an outcome from protest and demonstration. He argues that this is because the right to fish in traditional lakes was a more straightforward issue

activist groups who were intent on making their voices heard, but Indian groups were “unable to articulate specific solutions” within the contemporary social and political climate (Deloria “Alcatraz” 46-47).

Perhaps the most troubling government project at this time was Relocation, federal plans that had been initiated in 1953 to move Indians off their rural reservations and into city centers, like San Francisco, but failed to provide adequate resources to help newcomers’ transition into urban life. Many who struggled on reservation, like Boyer, “jumped at the opportunity” to pursue work and education in the city; in reality, however, most were “dropped off” with no money, housing, or support network (“Reflections” 88; see also Boyer in Johnson *We Hold the Rock* 2-3). Urban life was challenging for many Indians, who were used to being surrounded by other Native people in their communities but were now alone and struggling to integrate into city life. Deloria described relocation as “a policy of the Eisenhower administration as a means of getting Indians off the reservation and into the city slums where they could fade away” (*Custer* 157), and the Pomo activist Joseph Myers says relocation made him and his people “invisible” (qtd. in Johnson *We Hold the Rock* 2).⁵

Alcatraz Island provided a vital physical space where the bonds of Indian community could be reformed after centuries of colonialism and dislocation, where the fragments of Indian culture could be gathered and celebrated, and where new forms of solidarity and collective action could emerge. Beyond its symbolism, the island filled a void in providing a physical space for *all* Indians, a focal point for new forms of organization and activism. Those who came to Alcatraz were no longer segregated by cultural or tribal affiliation, or by the geographical distance

with an easy resolution than, for example, the returning of a large plot of land that had been inhabited by non-Natives for almost a century (“Alcatraz” 50)

⁵ For more information on the effect relocation programs had on Native peoples in the Bay Area, see “The Relocation Program” (Johnson *Occupation* 6-15).

between reservations, but were bound by a collective pride in Native identity. Deloria would go on to establish the first official Native Studies master's university program in the United States, successfully advocate in multiple historic Native rights campaigns, and win many awards for his writing regarding colonialism and unfair treatment towards Native Americans. His written work predominantly emphasizes how Indians have been unfairly and inaccurately portrayed by anthropologists and historians, specifically referencing how Native Americans are stuck between two identities: the one society and the academy gives them, and the one they wish to embody. Deloria's rise to prominence in Native Studies, coming as it did on his own terms, demonstrates the lasting-effect that activist projects like Alcatraz had in the lives of those who participated. Known for criticizing "whites" within colonial relations, Deloria became a recognizable voice in scholarship concerning those claiming Indian blood without merit, and those offering support to Indian communities without understanding anything about the people.

Custer comments not only on the time and space in question, but also on the conditions that led to radical Indian resistance in the United States. Deloria's essays speak to the ways in which resistance groups – like the Indians of All Tribes – were coming together to affect meaningful change, and the tactics that were most useful in these endeavors. Writing in the late-1960s, he says, "Indian people are re-examining themselves in an effort to redefine a new social structure for their people. Tribes are reordering their priorities to account for the obvious discrepancies between their goals and the goals whites have defined for them" (*Custer* 2). This poignant critique of non-Native opinions bears directly on changing Native resistance in the late 20th century, and I use it to highlight the occupation as an important example of evolving Indian activism.

As discussions of decolonization began to impress the importance in taking pride in Indian languages, histories, and traditions, I place Alcatraz at the beginning of this wave of Indian protest—a wave that led to meaningful change through *Indian* action and led by *Indian* wants. Stories from Alcatraz occupiers attest to the profound impact their experiences had on their lives, careers, and families. The networks of support that the Indians of All Tribes forged, both Indian and non-Native, allowed Native Americans to take time to relearn their histories and traditions together. As Morris put it, in characteristically plain-spoken terms, Alcatraz was “a great opportunity for self-expression” (*diaries* 104). For Native Americans who had lived their lives on the invisible margins of American society, Alcatraz provided a powerful voice that, once awakened, proved impossible to silence.

CHAPTER 1

A Laughing Matter: Satire as a Community Unifier, 1964-November 10, 1969

Indians have found a humorous side of nearly every problem
VINE DELORIA JR.

It was a beautiful night, and it was so exciting. The Coast Guard arrived and came out with their spot lights, but they couldn't find us. They'd come so close and you'd be trying to keep back your laughter. We felt like such—we were such kids
LANADA BOYER

There is a small exhibit in the corner of the Alcatraz Island Ferry parking lot, dedicated to the Indians of All Tribes, which tells the story of a group of Indians who “on November 20, 1969, seized Alcatraz Island to highlight continuing grievances against the federal government” (13 May 2015). It is a synopsis similar to those given by many scholars: a November night on which about 100 Indian protestors sailed across San Francisco Bay and hijacked government property (Garment; Gray; Johanson; Wetzel; Winton; Schweigman). A group of Indian activists indeed traveled to Alcatraz November 20, and for 19 months they lived in crumbling prison buildings while publically advocating for Native American land and treaty rights. That dramatic night, however, was preceded by significant forethought and arrangements carried out across the city of San Francisco. These preparations would set in motion a series of later events ensuring aid to those residing on Alcatraz. This chapter examines these events prior to November 20, and analyses the tactics organizers used to attract widespread Native participation in the occupation. The community of Indians who came together were not limited by tribe or community, but were united in their hope for an Indian Alcatraz.

Preparations for the occupation sought to draw attention to ongoing struggles of Indian communities in the 1960s, and to garner the attention of Indians around the Bay Area. But the Indians of All Tribes would, perhaps, never have set foot on Alcatraz if not for the example set

by Sioux student-activists five years prior: I will thus begin this chapter by analyzing their four-hour Alcatraz occupation. When five Sioux men stepped on the island in 1964 and claimed it as their own, they generated a new and novel idea: Indians, too, could occupy and seize territory in the United States. Half a decade later, the work of the 1964 occupiers would continue to set a precedent for a new form of Indian activism, which moved beyond symbolic protest in order to draw attention to real Indian needs. In turning to the efforts that the Indians of All Tribes undertook as they prepared for another island seizure in 1969, I will then show how these activists worked together to gain widespread support and build an activist community committed to Native rights. Finally, I will narrate the first two landing attempts in 1969 – November 9 and November 10 – and emphasize how irony and satire were used to bring public attention to the activists' cause. Humorous retelling of conquest narratives, grounded in native tradition yet comprehensible to mainstream audiences, marked out the occupiers' claim to Alcatraz.

Through satirical performances of colonial tactics, the Indian activists who planned the occupation sought to draw people together, both Native and non-Native, in the realization of shared struggle. In doing so, they employed tactics of survival and resistance honed over centuries of colonialism—notably, humor. Unlike popular Indian stereotypes circulating in the 1960s – such as a “granite-faced grunting redskin” – Deloria emphasizes that Native Americans have historically used their own brand of humor to “experience life” (*Custer* 146-47). In what would become his most popular essay on Native life, Deloria noted that Indian humor is pointedly satirical, often purposefully making light of the discrepancy between how Native people live and white assumptions about Native life. Indian humor, he argued, maintains tribal relationships and the status quo of Indian leadership by addressing problems that arise without attacking personal dignity or ego (166); it “awaken[s]” and “cement[s]” together Indian

communities who have experienced a history of trauma, providing a means to move forward from the past (147). When preparing to seize Alcatraz in 1969, activists deployed this humor in new ways, using laughter as a means both to build solidarity among Native peoples, and to raise the profile of their struggle within white society. Fortunate Eagle called his strategy “humor with a sting”—a “tongue and cheek exaggeration” of the ways non-Natives continued to suppress Indian people (*Alcatraz!* 43, “Urban” 62). Laughter and satire underpinned new forms of activism that sought to subvert the boundaries and hierarchies of colonial society; making light of the violent colonial past would prove capable of simultaneously lifting native peoples up, and of transcending a history of settler-Indian antagonism in order to generate new social solidarities.

When Deloria states that humor should be used to bring a “militant edge” to Indian protest (*Custer* 147), he argues that 1960s Indian activism lacked the ability to convey viable solutions to Native struggles. Throughout the Alcatraz preparations and initial landing attempts, Deloria repeatedly advised Fortunate Eagle to cut back on broad, philosophical issues. Instead, he encouraged the activists to tie their work back to specific federal regulations—such as land restoration (“Alcatraz” 46, 49-50). Indeed, the events and preparations leading to Alcatraz drew together Bay Area Indians who believed in the cause: it created a community of participants and supporters, an organizational structure that would be crucial to later events on the island.

Through satiric performances of land seizure, the Indians of All Tribes would both bring national attention to their cause and actively reshape Indian attitudes and behaviors of shame and fear. Sheela McLean argues that through public gatherings and pointed performance, Native Americans can re-tell “stories which have been silenced, minimized, and denied” while

simultaneously “inspire hope and promote social and political change” (93⁶). This process, which McLean calls “re-storying,” allows Native groups to come together and actively reshaped shared histories in a respectful, shameless manner; indeed, “decolonization is a process that *requires* re-storying” McLean argues, as well as a “reimagining of our relationships with each other” (95). The persistent laughter that accompanied activism on Alcatraz was a powerful example of this process, seeking to recast memories of loss and pain through a biting satire that shifted focus to the absurdity and hubris of colonial projects.

Events prior to November 20, 1969 are less straightforward than that of the 19 months occupiers spent on Alcatraz Island. While a myriad of information and testimony exists leading up to November 20, the events I discuss in this chapter are often inaccurately narrated: falsely recounted by scholars and journalists who were unable to access the archives in San Francisco or put together pieces of a story that is scattered across different texts and locations. Generally, this misinformation presents as confusion regarding the timeline of pre-occupation events, and as an incorrect accounting of who attempted to travel to Alcatraz, when they travelled, and why. Bruce Elliot Johanson, for example, confuses events of 1969 and 1964 (18), and Johnson incorrectly dates the second attempt to seize the island as November 14 (*Occupation*). Sherry L. Smith completely neglects to mention the 1964 occupation in a narration that ignores what might have inspired the 1969 events (80). In order to reconstruct the events leading up to the occupation of Alcatraz as accurately as possible, I draw heavily on testimony from documents stored at the *NPSRC*, as well as *We Hold the Rock*, a work commissioned by the Golden Gate National Parks

⁶ McLean’s arguments relate to Canada’s Idle No More movement of 2012-2013, where Native peoples across the country took to the streets in public protest, education, and performance of traditional round dances. Her theory might postdate Alcatraz by over 40 years, but I contend is relevant because of Idle No More’s similar tactics of performance, occupation, and community-centered activism.

Conservancy in 1997 and edited by Troy Johnson.⁷ In charting a more complete, accurate narrative of the events leading to November 20, I demonstrate how pointed preparations were in seeking to establish a new type of Native protest based on widespread Indian participation.

i. Setting a Precedent: The 1964 Sioux Occupation

One day in January 1964, a young Sioux woman named Belva Cottier was reading the newspaper and spotted a story about Alcatraz, a small rocky island in the San Francisco Bay that – as she puts it – “the government didn’t know what to do with” (qtd. in Johnson *We Hold the Rock* 17). The island had formerly housed a penitentiary for some of the United States’ most violent and notorious criminals, but on March 21, 1963 the prison had been shut down for cost-related reasons. As Cottier remembers, the federal government and city of San Francisco were working together to decide on the best use of Alcatraz; although the island sat within traditional Sioux territory, Native communities were not included in these discussions.⁸ Along with her

⁷ Unlike most of Johnson’s work, which is more academic in style and relies heavily on the scholar’s own opinions and arguments, *We Hold the Rock* text largely consists of the written oral commentary of occupation participants. The testimony was taped by Jon Plutte of the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy in 1996 for a multimedia exhibit on Alcatraz that opened in 1997. *We Hold the Rock* is the transcription of the stories collected and was published to coincide with the opening of the exhibit.

⁸ Throughout all Indian archival and published accounts concerning the occupation of Alcatraz, the island is referred to solely as traditional Sioux Territory. Secondary critics, like Troy Johnson, also refer to Alcatraz as traditional Sioux space. Moreover, the Treaty of Fort Laramie explicitly outlines that all surplus federal land be returned its original owners, in the case of Alcatraz, the Sioux and Lakota people. While I choose to trust in the knowledge of these sources (both Native and non-Native) and their identification of the island as a Sioux space, the qualification brings to bear questions of *why* the island is Sioux. Geographically, Alcatraz arguably sits within what might be Coast Miwok or Muwekma Ohlone territory, and while I cannot answer at this time, it would be interesting to know when and why the island is seemingly agreed as belonging to Sioux peoples.

husband, Allen Cottier, and a small group of Sioux student-activists⁹ from the Berkeley area, Cottier sought the advice of well-regarded human rights lawyer Elliot Leighton of San Francisco. On Leighton's advice, six of the students headed to the Bancroft Library in Berkeley where they used their last two dollars to make copies of all treaties pertaining to their Sioux communities (10). Examining the documents "just like the lawyers," the studious group studiously uncovered the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie (18), a 100-year-old agreement between the Lakota (seven Sioux tribes), Arapho, Yanktanai Dakota, and the federal government. This treaty decreed that all abandoned and surplus federal land be returned to those people who traditionally held it as territory (np), a fiduciary responsibility that was clearly not being honored. Instead Alcatraz laid unused and empty in early 1964, a poignant reminder to the Sioux group that their needs were unimportant to American lawmakers. But after many days in the library Cottier had an idea: if the land had been claimed by Spaniards in the 18th century and then landed on by white colonizers in the 19th century, could Indians not reclaim it the same way?

Cottier and her friends knew they would not gain possession of Alcatraz by simply travelling to and landing on the island, but they hoped to bring attention to the fact that Indians still existed in the United States. Reflecting upon 1964, LaNada Boyer says that Indians in California were "invisible" to non-Indians (qtd. in Johnson *We Hold the Rock* 11), an apt terminology echoed in many archival accounts. For example, in a letter written by Allen Cottier to Richard McKenzie dated January 5 1964, he says the group are "invisible to whites," and one

⁹ While I cannot definitively name these activists, LaNada Boyer names Russel Means, Hank Means, Belva Cottier, and Richard McKenzie as the predominant organizers of the occupation, and stresses that there were others whom she does not know the names of involved ("Reflections" 90). Johnson names the five who occupied the island on March 8, 1964, as Garfield Spotted Elk, Walter Means, Richard McKenzie, Mark Martinez, and Allen Cottier (*Occupation* 16-17), and Morris (*diaries* 99) and Fortunate Eagle & Findley (7-9) refer to Allen "Chalk" Cottier, Walter Means, and Richard McKenzie as members of the March 8 group.

of Joseph “Indian Joe” Morris’s unpublished diaries from 1962-1965 contains frequent complaints of feeling “invisible” due to lack of government support (np). Correspondence between Leighton and Belva Cottier emphasizes that the students understood that they would not be able to physically reside on Alcatraz for long, but that they wanted to “test the 1868 treaty”—to determine how the city would respond if Sioux people began to actively address their legal rights to land in the United States (5 February 1964; see also A. Cottier qtd. in Johnson *We Hold the Rock* 18). Furthermore, by publically announcing their right to Alcatraz they hoped to garner support for other Native land claims, as the federal government was continuously changing reservation borders at this time, often to the detriment of Native inhabitants.

To execute their plan, the group chartered a small boat that would carry five of the Sioux students, along with Leighton, to Alcatraz, where they would stake a homestead on the island. Also invited were a contingent of known Indian activists from the Bay area, and a “select batch of media, to watch and lend support”; the Sioux students hoped that by having an audience to witness and journalists to report their actions, city officials would realize that Indians were struggling in California (Fortunate Eagle & Findley 9). Adam Fortunate Eagle was one such invitee, known in San Francisco for his work maintaining the Intertribal Friendship House. Fortunate Eagle remembers that while he was excited to be invited along, there was a “distinct separation between them and us” (*Alcatraz!* 22), emphasizing the difference between spectator and activist.

On March 8, 1964, the Sioux occupiers arrived on Alcatraz in tribal regalia, and approached island caretaker A.L. Aylworth. Leighton read from a prepared document summarizing the group’s legal right to Alcatraz Island, which explained that the Sioux men intended to “stake a claim” on Alcatraz as was legally outlined in the Treaty of Fort Laramie.

Apparently confused, Aylworth is said to have “scratched his head” and replied, “I guess if you want it you can have it,” before speeding away in his truck (Fortunate Eagle & Findley 7; Fortunate Eagle *Alcatraz!* 15; Morris “unpublished diaries” np). The group celebrated, pulling out drums and holding (what Johnson calls) “a victory dance” (*We Hold the Rock* 9). Walter Means then hammered an old mop handle into the hillside to “mark a homestead,” Richard McKenzie propped up an American flag on a pole next to it, and Allen Cottier pitched an old green camping tent “to symbolize a Teepee” (Cottier 10 March 1964). In what Fortunate Eagle & Findley call the “most theatrical” moment of that day, a Sioux man climbed the island’s highest hill with a tin tray and flashed three glints to the mainland “for victory” (10). But as Leighton and Belva Cottier had predicted, it was not long before Aylworth got over his confusion and contacted authorities. Within four hours of the group’s arrival, Alcatraz Chief Caretaker Richard Willard, accompanied by a small group of federal authorities,¹⁰ stomped off his boat and up the island docks. Willard accused the group of “trespassing,” enacting a “publicity stunt,” and “violating the law,” but aside from an unnamed participant who is said to have shouted “of course it was a stunt!” back at Willard, the group left peacefully (Cottier 10 March 1964; Blue Cloud qtd. in *not an Island* np; P.C. Smith 131).

The Sioux occupiers’ brief stint on Alcatraz offered a glimpse at what the history of western expansion had looked like, and the abuse that Indians suffered when outsiders staked claim to their lands. Their performance was simple: the group travelled to a piece of land that was seemingly unused, raised a flag, and set up a place to sleep. Then, in a moment of apt irony, it was *non-Native* authorities that were forced to come and defend their territory. But racial

¹⁰ In no accounts are these authorities identified more clearly in number or company, but it was most likely a group of city police from San Francisco, and/or members of the Coast Guard, who accompanied Willard to Alcatraz that day, based on whom the term “federal authorities” refers to in other passages.

power dichotomies, socially engrained through decades of Indian suppression, still placed Willard in a position of power when he arrived on the island. Yet though the Sioux Indians were not able to overcome he and his accomplices' social position as white and authoritative, Willard was forced to *join* their performance in order to remove them from Alcatraz. It was, as Margaret Mead puts it, “a magnificent piece of dramatization” (qtd. in Fortunate Eagle & Findley 6): it was a moment where colonial methods were experienced, exhibited, and examined, on a stage where past experiences were being satirically recreated.

Those who study Native performance often point to its pedagogical capacity, its ability to convey colonial histories from less-acknowledged points of view. Randall T.D. Hill, for example, argues that Indians “redefine and remake their cultures” within changing social and societal conditions (112); it provides an opportunity to Native performers to define themselves and battle assumptions about Native life, to establish terms that they see as important and resist goals set by non-Native peoples (112-13; see also Daum & Ishiwata). Kathleen Ritter suggests that performing historical events allows Native communities to inform non-Native audiences about Indian experiences, which in turn prompts the audience to reexamine “their relationships to history and to reflect on their practices of remembering” (7). Indeed, when Willard approached the Sioux occupiers, those witnessing the event – including the non-Native media representatives – could not ignore the events with which they were faced. Did they identify with the Indians for being forcibly removed from a “homestead,” or with Willard as a figure of authority? Did they empathize with Willard as he confronted those he deemed trespassers on his land, or the Sioux students who appeared to be acting within legal parameters? Furthermore, while the Sioux occupiers were on Alcatraz for only four hours, their stories were repeated by the *San Francisco Examiner*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *Oakland Tribune* – well read San Francisco-area

newspapers – for the following 48 hours; the coverage was – Fortunate Eagle & Findley sum up – “sympathetic” to the Sioux occupiers (11-12). Such publicity ensured that those who were not *on* Alcatraz that day were informed of the event, and readers – Native and non-Native – also then became spectators to the event.

March 8 stimulated the interest of Native Americans across San Francisco, bringing people together by way of common experience. For example, Boyer wrote that the 1964 occupation “could not be ignored” (“Reflections” 93), and Shirley Guevara (Mono Indian) said that after that day, Indian peoples were no longer “people of the past” (qtd. in *We Hold the Rock* 14). Neither woman was *on* Alcatraz that day, but both saw their own histories in the occupiers’ actions, and were brought together by what Deloria might classify as an “Indian’s joke”—a humorous take on real lived experience that can be simultaneously laughed at and mourned (*Custer* 166). The Sioux occupiers brought public attention to an Indian cause, but it also demonstrated to Native peoples across the country that Indians could be active voices in their own history. The trauma of being separated from their traditional lands was recreated when Willard was forced to engage with the Sioux occupiers and remove them from Alcatraz, but it was also laughable because of the general absurdity of the event—the supposed ownership of land dictated by a green tent and a tin tray. Moreover, a long history of European ideology and imagery – presenting Native land as “unimproved” and therefore open to colonization (Lepore; Penekitt) – was gently subverted in the claim to an abandoned and crumbling site that nobody seemed to want.

Praise for the Sioux occupiers is common in 1960s Indian testimony: many contend that it was the 1964 occupation that fueled later Native activism pursuits in the Bay Area. Wilma Mankiller (Cherokee), for example, described the 1964 occupation as “the first time I’d seen

Native people willing to say this is our land and we're going to stand up for what we believe is right" (qtd. in Johnson *We Hold the Rock* 14), and Lehman Brightman (Sioux/Creek) praised it as "the most important event since 1889" (qtd. in Fortunate Eagle & Findley 6).¹¹ Although the 1964 event was intended to be a one-day affair, it garnered such popularity among Native student groups that, on March 20, 1964, Bay Area Indians – represented by Leighton – filed a formal petition to the General Services Administration requesting Alcatraz be "returned to its Indian owners." Although nothing would come of this petition, or subsequent claims filed by the San Francisco Council of Indian Chiefs in 1965, the idea of actively reacquiring traditional land would provide a novel example for Indian activists: Indians could seize land as their own.

ii. Establishing Community: Preparing for an Indian Alcatraz

Five years later the former prison continued to sit empty and unused, and once again city and federal governments began entertaining new proposals to develop the island. The steep cliffs and crumbling walls led the city to deem the island's conditions unsafe for public visitation, but despite the significant renovation or restoration required, Alcatraz's geographical placement made it desirable real estate to many wealthy developers. Hoping to avoid the financial burden a restoration would place on San Francisco, city authorities accepted these developers' bids to commercialize the island; as in 1964, however, Native Americans were neither consulted nor

¹¹ Lehman Brightman was a Sioux/Creek Indian born on the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation in South Dakota. Brightman worked as an American Studies instructor at University of California institutions from 1969 to 2000, and is widely regarded as one of the pioneers of the field of Native Studies (Hurd & DeBolt np). Interestingly, Brightman was never directly involved with the Alcatraz occupation, probably because (Fortunate Eagle admits in 2002) the two activists did not get along (Fortunate Eagle & Findley 6-7). Brightman was, however, involved in Native activism for the majority of his life; his prominent work included holding the role of Founder and National President of the United Native Indians Inc., an organization founded in 1968 to promote the general wellness of Native Americans in the United States, as well as progress in Native-non-Native relations (Hurd & DeBolt np).

involved in these discussions. On September 29, 1969, Texas oil baron Lamar Hunt was endorsed by San Francisco's city council to re-develop and update the existing infrastructure on Alcatraz—a plan that involved restaurants, condominiums, and a monument to the USA Space Program (Johnson *Occupation* 22-23). While Indians felt insulted that, yet again, their right to the island was being ignored, non-Native San Franciscans also disliked the commercialization of Hunt's plans and called it a “gaudy adult amusement park” (Fortunate Eagle & Findley 65). The example set by the first occupation, combined with the continued frustration of Indian proposals to the city, led Native activists to search for more dramatic ways to make their voices heard.

The Council of San Francisco Indian Chiefs, a committee made up of Native leaders from tribes across the Bay Area, had been watching Alcatraz since the Sioux occupation.¹² The Council had loosely discussed attempting another island seizure several times, but had proceeded with proposals to the city rather than radical action. They envisioned an Indian Alcatraz, the creation of a cultural center where rural and urban Natives alike could gather and learn Native cultural tradition. Colonial projects (such as relocation and Indian boarding schools) had left many Native Americans, especially the younger generations, growing up without understanding their community's spiritual beliefs and practices; Native peoples living in urban areas, like those who had been relocated by the government, had no place to seek spiritual guidance. The Council believed that Alcatraz offered an answer: the buildings could be renovated into a cultural center, an Indian history museum, and an Indian university—spaces where Indian understandings and experiences of historical events would be showcased (*Indians of All Tribes not an Island* np). Yet as the city began to move forward with Hunt's development, Fortunate Eagle remembers

¹² Also referred to as the Bay Area Council of Indian Chiefs in some records and accounts.

realizing that if they did not act quickly, they “could kiss [their] plans for an Indian cultural center goodbye” (*Alcatraz!* 40).

Fortunate Eagle had been elected to the Council earlier that year, praised for his work organizing Native events across San Francisco. Reflecting on the late 1960s, Fortunate Eagle admits that, since 1964, “the idea of an Indian Alcatraz was never far from my thoughts” (*Alcatraz!* 18), however his previous efforts to continue the Sioux occupiers’ work had been unsuccessful. From 1965-1967, Fortunate Eagle and two friends performed fake tribal dances during San Francisco’s Columbus Day events (Fortunate Eagle & Findley 52). In 1968 he rented a small motorboat that he would use to drive himself and a few Native students around the island; when the boat got close, Boyer remembers, the students jumped off in an attempt to swim to Alcatraz, however because of strong currents Fortunate Eagle needed to pull them back aboard (“Reflections” 90 and “Oral History” np; see also Deloria “Alcatraz” 47). When he joined the Council, Fortunate Eagle brought with him his passion for an Indian Alcatraz. The Council made decisions over the next two months as a group, but Fortunate Eagle would be the voice that continued to propel the initiative forwards.¹³

It was around the same time that Fortunate Eagle joined the Council that they began referring to themselves as the Indians of All Tribes, a title Peter Blue Cloud attests was meant to point out the breadth of Native Americans affected by colonial projects (qtd. in *not an Island* np).¹⁴ Over the next two months, “Indians of All Tribes” would come to represent more than past

¹³ In recalling the decision to take Alcatraz, Fortunate Eagle says he firmly believed it “would have to be unanimous among the United Council if we were going to do it properly” (*Alcatraz!* 40).

¹⁴ It is unclear exactly when, for different accounts of late-1968 to mid-1969 start using it at different times, and often interchange “Indians of All Tribes” with “San Francisco Indian Council” and “Bay Area Council of Indian Chiefs” until November 9, 1969, when “Indians of All Tribes” is the predominant title.

Indian struggles. Bay Area Natives had dreamed of Alcatraz as a site for gathering and renewal since at least 1964; now, through the progress of planning the occupation, they began to understand that the struggle for the island could itself serve as vehicle for the realization of the aspirations. As Fortunate Eagle and other Indian activists prepared to seize the island, Native Americans from across the West Coast – from hundreds of reservation backgrounds and tribal affiliations – would gather to form a new community rooted in *Indian* identity. This community truly was of *all tribes*, and its breadth and scope would reach and inspire Native peoples not only across the United States, but across the colonized world.

As San Francisco began moving forward in negotiations with Hunt, the Council leaders unanimously voted “to take the island” (Fortunate Eagle *Alcatraz!* 40). To Hunt, Alcatraz Island was a piece of land with monetary value, and he believed that its prominent location in San Francisco Bay coupled with the notorious convicts it had historically housed made it an ideal site with commercial potential. The Indians’ hopes of an Indian Alcatraz also required renovation and development, but it was a development rooted in cultural rather than financial value. In the teaching and rejuvenating of cultural knowledge, the Indians of All Tribes hoped to create a generation of informed Native activists who could articulate their needs within parameters understood by the non-Native government (Indians of All Tribes *not an Island* np). It was a space, they hoped, where Native voices would be privileged over those of non-Native Americans, and where simultaneously Indian experiences of colonial trauma could be acknowledged (Fortunate Eagle & Findley 38-40; Johnson *We Hold the Rock* 10-11). The differences here are notable, because they emphasize important notions of “progress” as

understood in Westernized “White” terms (those historically of the colonizers) and cultural progress as was sought by the Indians of All Tribes.¹⁵

The Council’s plans for Alcatraz were inspired by the Intertribal Friendship House in San Francisco, a gathering place for relocated and urban Indians in the Bay Area. The House was known in Native circles as “Little Res,” a remark satirically pointing to the 30,000 Indians ripped from their reservations during Relocation (which is discussed in the Introduction: Community Building Amid Radical Activism), and placed in San Francisco (Fortunate Eagle & Findley 55;

Morris *diaries* 89). These Indians had been separated from their communities and families and many struggled with urban life; the House provided safe refuge for those without adequate work or housing, organized cultural powwows and ceremonies (see figure 1.1 & 1.2), and offered classes in Native tradition for Indian

Figure 1.1: *Grand Entry*.

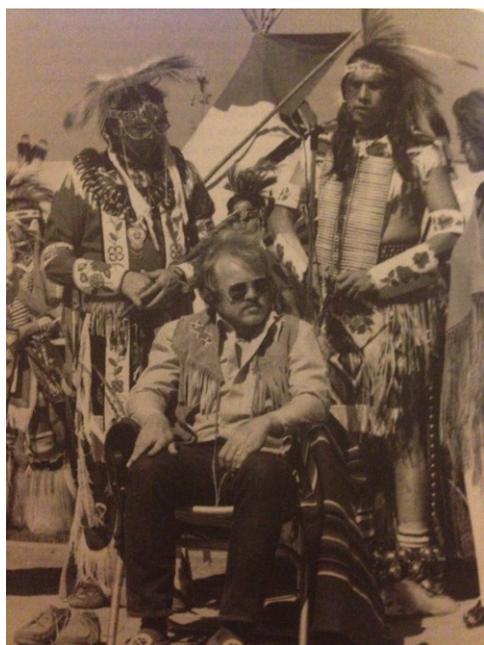


Figure 1.2: *Annual Powwow of United Bay Area Council of American Indians*

youth; Fortunate Eagle, who was lauded for his work at the institution, even described the House as “a beloved friend” (*Alcatraz!* 30), emphasizing how important the House was to the Native community. It was also used as headquarters by the Council, and as the Indians of All Tribes evolved to include Indian

understandings of progress, see Lepore’s *The Name of War*

activists of all ages from across the region, they used the House for Indian meetings to discuss occupation tactics (Fortunate Eagle *Alcatraz!* 38). But then, on October 10, a fire broke out in the middle of the night, and Intertribal Friendship House burned to the ground. The loss of the House immediately altered the way that Fortunate Eagle and the Indians of All Tribes envisioned the occupation of Alcatraz. The experience of this institution had impressed upon the activists the importance of a physical space from which to build solidarity, and to pursue activism in relation to broader society. Its loss created an urgent need for a physical space, a need that could be articulated in – what Deloria might have described as – concrete terms.

By October 15, Fortunate Eagle had reached out to prominent Mohawk activist Richard Oakes; known for his participation in multiple student-led demonstrations across California in the 1960s, Oakes had also worked at the Intertribal Friendship House. On October 11, 1969, Morris wrote Fortunate Eagle a letter emphasizing his belief that Oakes should be involved with the occupation plans: Natives, he wrote, “really, really love Richard. He looks just like a born Indian Leader [...] with all the qualities of leadership.” Although his background was “fuzzy,” Oakes was a well-known figure to media outlets, and Morris believed that he would help attract public attention to the movement.¹⁶ Morris’s recommendations were astute: as Deloria points out, the Civil Rights Movement’s popularity rose through the work of emerging individuals who were accepted as representative leaders, and the Indian fight for freedom was historically symbolized by “great war chiefs—Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, and Geronimo” (*Custer* 197-98). A

¹⁶ While it was known that Oakes originated from the New York City area, his exact pursuits prior to his arrival in California were – and still are – unclear. Oakes had told some people upon arriving on the West Coast that he had worked in the steel industry, and others he told he worked in construction. Still, to others he claimed a history of unemployment, engaging in Mohawk activism where he could to further the rights of his people in New York State. (Morris 11 October 1969). For More information on Oakes, see Fortunate Eagle “Urban Indians” 65-67, and Fortunate Eagle & Findley 58.

figure known in both Indian and non-Native circles would bolster the Indians of All Tribes's message; it would provide a representative figure for the occupation's message, and Oakes seemed the perfect choice.

As they began preparing for an Alcatraz invasion, the Indians of All Tribes felt it was important to grab the attention of both Native and non-Native Americans. Fortunate Eagle and Oakes's strategy was concise: take the island "with sufficient force, and in a way that they [non-Native authorities] can't stop us," and gather enough publicity to "show the government that Indians are visible people" (*Alcatraz!* 40). To arrange the latter, Oakes called upon his friend Tim Findley – reporter for the *San Francisco Chronicle* – who in turn reached out to a group of journalists and media representatives from across the Bay Area. This intimate relationship with media outlets ensured that reporters would be immediately ready to publish about the event, and thus increase the scope of those who would bear witness. From the reporters, Indians also gained a detailed grasp of other upcoming activist initiatives; Deloria recalls that 1969 was rife with anti-Vietnam war protests, and it had been suggested that unless the Indians chose a time when anti-Vietnam war movements were slow, these protests would "overshadow [the Alcatraz Indians] in the media and ruin what [they] were trying to accomplish" (*Spirit* 24). Anti-Vietnam war efforts were already established as important, and the massive number of American soldiers abroad ensured it was an issue most people in the United States could personally identify with. Indians were – as Deloria repeatedly argues, "invisible" in American society (*Custer* 26), and thus it was likely that Indian activism would be less of a priority to the American public.

To compete with other established 1960s activist movements, the Indians of All Tribes knew that they needed to impress upon non-Native San Franciscans the importance of their endeavor. They sought a time and place that would capture the biggest audience, and it was

Oakes who suggested Pier 39 – Fisherman’s Wharf – as a launch point, since hundreds of tourists visited every day. He also suggested seizing Alcatraz in early November, because Findley had informed him that anti-Vietnam war demonstrations had been planned throughout the month of December (Morris 102; “Questionnaires”). November 9, Oakes suggested, would give the group about three weeks to detail their attack and attract an audience—enough time to make arrangements but not enough time for city authorities to discover their plan. In fact, Fortunate Eagle remembers that “the news in October was so dull the papers were printing boring stuff,” and Findley advised them not to wait very long if they wanted to attract front-page coverage (*Alcatraz!* 42-43; San Francisco Indian Chiefs “notes” np).

Fortunate Eagle discussed the Indians of All Tribes’s plan with Deloria, whose *Custer* had just been published. Deloria had worked as executive director of the National Congress of American Indians from 1964-67, and Fortunate Eagle noted he had been successful in bringing the organization out of bankruptcy (Wilkins 107). He and Oakes hoped Deloria would bring organizational experience to the Alcatraz Occupation (Fortunate Eagle & Findley 66). Deloria advised Fortunate Eagle in regards to attracting non-Native public attention, and said that – in his experience – “the American public needed to see [Alcatraz] as important to their own concerns for social justice” (*Spirit* 244). Deloria still believed that Fortunate Eagle was too philosophical—he called Fortunate Eagle “naïve,” and told the Indians of All Tribes leader that their vision was a “People’s Movement”—too symbolic and without achievable goals (*Spirit* 245, Foreword ix). The Indians of All Tribes needed to come up with a method of clearly and simultaneously articulating their goals to all audiences, just as the Sioux occupiers of 1964 had conveyed their goals to Indians and non-Native reporters alike.

As a result, Fortunate Eagle and Oakes came up with a declaration that could be both circulated among the press and Indian communities, that would both outline their intended development of Alcatraz and what made the island a perfect site for their plans. Inspired by the declaration Leighton had prepared with the Sioux occupiers in 1964, the Indians of All Tribes crafted what would become known as the *Alcatraz Proclamation*: a page-long manifesto that was drafted by Fortunate Eagle and Oakes, edited and completed by the Indians of All Tribes, and printed en masse in brochures (for full *Proclamation*, see Appendix). The *Proclamation* was both serious and satiric: a clever blend of historical facts and humorous anecdotes that communicates in a format echoing that of many historical government treaties. It is a flawless example of Deloria's Indian Joke, for it both identifies the struggles faced on Native reservations, and amusingly notes that conditions in the former prison are similar – if not better – conditions than those under which Indians are expected to live. Deloria later said that the *Proclamation* kept the public interested in the cause, even though the Indians' first two attempts to land on Alcatraz failed. He credits “its irony” for its popularity—its depiction that “Indians wanted the rock because it had no more resources and services than the average reservation” and “highlight[ed] existing struggles that were occurring elsewhere” in Native American communities (Foreword ix-x).

The 1964 occupiers had placed great emphasis on their treaty right to Alcatraz Island; likewise, the *Proclamation* emphasized the history of legal, treaty agreements between colonial authorities and Indian communities, and alluded to their unfair nature. For instance, the Indians of All Tribes suggested they buy Alcatraz Island from the city, offering “\$24 in glass beads and red cloth, a precedent set by the white man's purchase of a similar island about 300 years ago” (np). Fortunate Eagle wryly commented that this offer was “clearly a bargain, since Manhattan is

several times larger than Alcatraz” (San Francisco Indian Chiefs “notes” np), and indeed, if examined solely within the parameters set by white colonizers in historical actions, the Indians’ offer appears fair. Yet no matter how run down the island might have been, the swap of an island for some cloth and beads does not seem a fair trade—and therein lies the humor. Such an offer is ironic, and underscores the absurdity of colonial seizures of land conducted under the guise of “fair and honorable” (*Proclamation* np) purchases.

The *Proclamation* also highlighted that government mistreatment of Native Americans was not an incident of the past, but an ongoing pattern of abusive behavior and the violation of Indian rights. When discussing the history of ongoing mistreatment towards Native communities, Deloria notes, “it would take Russia another century to make and break as many treaties as the United States has already violated” (*Custer* 28); when the Indians of All Tribes repeatedly state that they wish to be “fair and honorable” in their acquisition of Alcatraz, they repeat the language that the American government has used for centuries in their own dealings with Native peoples. Deloria explains that treaties might have been to “guarantee peace on the frontier” but how the treaty was interpreted was solely at the discretion of the “white courts” (*Custer* 31-32). Indeed, when the Indians of All Tribes discuss their purchase of Alcatraz Island, they note that their “offer of 1.24 per acre is greater than the 47 cents per acre the white men are now paying the California Indians for their land” (*Proclamation* np). They provide a concrete example of what the government sees as “fair,” and their ironic interpretation re-stories (as McLean would put it) historical experiences of land negotiation.

The Indians of All Tribes were certain the government would attempt to deny them access to Alcatraz, and hypothesized that the city would cite the same “health risks and dangerous conditions” that had closed the prison six years prior (San Francisco Indian Chiefs

“notes” np); in anticipation of these claims, the *Proclamation* outlines why the island is an ideal place for their new Indian Cultural Center, by underscoring parallel conditions to the parcels of land currently devoted to reservations. In fact, the *Proclamation* argues the conditions on Alcatraz were “more than suitable” judging by “white man’s standards” (np). The Indians stress that Alcatraz Island “has no fresh running water,” “is isolated from modern facilities,” “the soil is rocky and non-productive and the land does not support game,” “and that “sanitation facilities are inadequate”; furthermore, the Indians cite a lack of healthcare, employment opportunity, and educational facilities on the island, conditions that Indians were used to experiencing both on reservation and in urban centers. The Indians of All Tribes would, in fact, address these concerns vis-à-vis their creation of an Indian University and Museum on Alcatraz, which they hoped would create jobs and an economy based in *Native* cultures.

Through its satirical tone and ironic highlighting of the unfair nature of Indian Treatment in the United States, the *Proclamation* became a tool that would forge together a community of Native activists and occupation supporters. It was immediately popular among Native activist groups, many of whom had been involved in various resistance initiatives since at least 1964. Fortunate Eagle and Oakes used the *Proclamation* to draw attention to the Alcatraz initiative, and in the final two weeks of October the men travelled around California and Southern Oregon sharing copies with everyone they met. Fortunate Eagle wrote that he hoped to encourage Indians to join the cause and thus increase the number of activists who would launch their assault on November 9, but he also hoped that the occupation could help young Indians realize that their struggles were not solitary—they were “shared by other Native Americans across the country” (*Alcatraz!* 56; see also San Francisco Indian Chiefs “notes” np).

To reach as many Native Americans as possible, Fortunate Eagle and Oakes travelled to universities where they liaised with student groups, Indian conferences, and reservations across the West Coast.¹⁷ One such conference, the National Conference on the United Bay Area Council, was particularly important because its attendees included the Indian Chiefs and Tribal Councilmen/women of every reservation and Native community in the Bay Area. If Fortunate Eagle and Oakes could convince these Indians, well-regarded members of their communities, that an Indian Alcatraz was both attainable and important, they believed that Native “people would respond” (Fortunate Eagle *Alcatraz!* 71). Fortunate Eagle’s experience at the National Conference was memorable, and his description of the “incredible” response with which he and Oakes were met bears quoting at length:

Cheers broke out as I finished my request, and people crowded around me grabbing for the copies of the proclamation. I could hardly keep up with the demand. Months earlier I had confidently predicted that waves of protest would spread outward from the pebble that we threw into the San Francisco Bay. I had hoped the waves would ultimately reach the national Indian community, and my wishes came true. The conference transformed our remote little Indian activity into a national movement with national support. (72)

Indeed, many tribal elders and council members from this conference would be at Pier 39 on November 9, as well as Indians from their communities. Those at the conference also shared the *Proclamation* with other reservations across California, and then across the United States. 1964 had been a potent and memorable symbol of Indian activism, but the network that Fortunate Eagle and Oakes were building would ensure that these efforts would be something much more.

The *Proclamation* helped Fortunate Eagle and Oakes create an unparalleled coalition of activists across the West Coast, providing an example of organizational activism that both addressed legacies of the past and struggles of the present. Evelyn Strong, an Indian from

¹⁷ I could not locate the exact travel patterns used by Oakes and Fortunate Eagle, and the exact routes and their implications are beyond the scope of this thesis.

California, joined the occupation “to show all Indians can unite when called at a time of crisis” (“questionnaires”); Strong’s statement emphasizes how the idea of an Indian Alcatraz was already empowering Indians across the country before November 9, providing insight as to how effective such an initiative was. Her words are echoed by an anonymous occupation supporter known only as “California Indian”; although California Indian states that they were not directly a part of the occupation, they had seen the extensive coverage of the occupation on television and made sure to spend a day travelling to Alcatraz Island in order to “support those Indians on the rock” (“questionnaires”).¹⁸ The *Proclamation* was crucial in encouraging other Indians to join the movement and travel to Alcatraz Island, a call to arms that resonated through Indian communities.

iii. Attempted Landings: November 9 & 10, 1969

The Indians of All Tribes, under the leadership of Fortunate Eagle and Oakes, did all they could to assemble a community of unified, Native activists who would realize the importance of standing together. When November 9 arrived, almost 100 Indian men, women, and children had gathered on the docks of Fisherman’s Wharf, and a flock of media was ready and waiting to document the seizure of Alcatraz. Oakes had a copy of the *Proclamation* to read upon their landing, and Fortunate Eagle had a ceremonial wooden bowl filled with glass beads and red cloth to present as payment to the island’s current caretaker (Fortunate Eagle & Findley 75). The performance of colonial seizure would, though, be even more dramatic than the Indians had

¹⁸ In 1979 the San Francisco National Parks Service Rangers conducted a series of surveys regarding Alcatraz Island and its history during and after its time as a prison. These surveys are currently saved at the NPS Collections in San Francisco, CA, and although they are not specific to the Alcatraz occupation there are a significant number completed by Alcatraz occupiers and occupation supporters.

originally envisioned; when boats set to ferry activists and reporters across the Bay did not appear, the Indians had to spontaneously alter their plan of attack.

A performance of seizure that was both symbolic of historical events and organized to land Indian occupiers on Alcatraz Island had been planned in detail. When the boats failed to appear, the immediate worry was that the cohort of press that had assembled would report a very different story than the one Fortunate Eagle and Oakes had intended. The leaders worried that a failure to leave Pier 39 would result in negative exposure: it risked exposing future attacks on Alcatraz to city authorities, who would almost certainly attempt to block the island docks, as well as inaccurately tell the story that the Indians were trying to portray to the non-Native spectators who had curiously assembled. It could be “a public relations disaster,” as Fortunate Eagle said, and the media reporters that the Indians had cultivated relationships with “could disappear” (*Alcatraz!* 77). Furthermore, in their attempts to document the landing on Alcatraz as closely as possible, some reporters had rented a small skiff that was floating just off the island’s docks.

In desperation, Oakes began to present the *Proclamation* to those assembled, while Fortunate Eagle combed the docks for transportation that could carry he and his fellow activists

Figure 1.3: *Monte Cristo*



across San Francisco Bay. He came across a beautifully restored three-masted schooner called the *Monte Cristo*, captained by Ronald Craig – its 37-year-old owner – who frequently worked chartering tours around San Francisco Bay and recreating cannon attacks for the American Navy (see figure 1.3) (Fortunate Eagle & Findlay 78-

79).¹⁹ Craig agreed to take as many protestors and reporters that could fit aboard across the Bay, but warned Fortunate Eagle that the ship could not actually dock at Alcatraz due to hull depth. Still, the schooner provided a spectacle, a symbolic rendition of colonial ships that had travelled to America centuries before. Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warner, two of the American Indian activists waiting at Pier 39 that day, remember how the *Monte Cristo* was “gleaming with polished brass” and how Craig was “a attractive man dressed in white [that] matched the boat perfectly” (15). They said Craig truly appeared to feel bad he could not help complete the journey to Alcatraz, and offered to fire some cannons while circling the island to “draw attention” to their voyage—“to put on a show” (16). Fortunate Eagle and Oakes decided that – although they could not climb the docks and enter the prison building – they could at least provide an ironic performance of travel (Fortunate Eagle & Findley 80). Indeed, traditionally garbed Indians aboard an American warship attempting to seize unwanted federal land was far from uninteresting, and would hopefully provoke the audience’s curiosity and force spectators to question why such actions were necessary.²⁰

The leaders would need to reduce their group from over 100 activists and reporters to 50, an unpleasant task seeing that many tribal elders had been “waiting for this opportunity their entire lives” (Fortunate Eagle “notes” np). Furthermore, Findley quietly alerted the Indians that

¹⁹ There are no photos or videos accessible (at least, today) of the Indians of All Tribes actually *aboard* the *Monte Cristo* on November 9, 1969. However, these stills are screen capped from KPIX-TV newsreels, advertisements of the schooner’s rental tours on October 8, 1969 (one month before the attempted seizure of Alcatraz). Hopefully, these stills provide enough imagery for readers to imagine how the ship would have appeared laden with Indian occupiers on November 9. For full footage, see <https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/sfbatv/bundles/189934>

²⁰ When referring to Indian clothing in this thesis, I have chosen to repeat the language (unless otherwise noted) used in Indian accounts, rather than what today, contemporary Indigenous scholars and Indian circles refer to as “regalia.” Descriptions such as “fringed,” “garbed,” and “tribal wear” are directly taken from those who were a part of the movement, and used in an effort to avoid attributing my own contemporary and non-Native subjectivity upon the narrative.

there was rumor the Coast Guard was on their way to break up the demonstration before it could leave Pier 39 (np). Oakes, who had experienced similar, high-pressure demonstrations before, took charge of the group, separating first media representatives and then those Indians whom had agreed to sleep in the old prison that night, and allowing those separated to board the *Monte Cristo*. His choices, though unpopular, were likely intended to maximize visibility through the press, as well as placating the most probable of departing demonstrators—should the bulk of their Indian activists, who were largely young students that had been a part of radical initiatives before, leave the Indians of All Tribes, the movement might lose popularity among young Indians. The community that Oakes and Fortunate Eagle had worked so hard to establish over the past weeks would fall apart. And despite the disappointment of some waiting demonstrators, as Craig and his schooner of activists departed the docks, cheers and singing erupted—both by those onboard and on the mainland.

But then, as the ship drew closer to Alcatraz Island, Oakes's choice of young, strong, radical students made sense, and Oakes jumped into the water. Boyer remembers that the “air quivered with excitement and anticipation when suddenly a loud cheer came from behind” (“Oral History”): Oakes had climbed the rails of the *Monte Cristo* and leapt overboard, furiously swimming towards the rocky island despite the heavy Pacific currents. Fortunate Eagle remembers the moment he realized Oakes had jumped off the schooner:

Richard Oakes had climbed onto the railing, stripped off his shirt, and plunged into the water, still wearing his boots! A cheer went up from the Indians as they jammed against the rail. One of the students followed Richard into the frigid waters, and then another! Three Indians were swimming toward the island as hard and fast as they could before the captain had a chance to react. But react he did, and in no uncertain terms.

‘What the hell are those guys doing, Adam?’ [Craig] shouted to me.

‘They’re swimming to Alcatraz,’ I replied as calming as possible.

‘What the hell for?’

‘To take the island for the Indian people.’ (*Alcatraz!* 57)

It was a risky move, for the currents were strong and the waters were cold in November. Joe Bill, an Eskimo man who had spent much of his life around ocean waters and (as Fortunate Eagle remembers) “a good deal more sea-wise than the other young men from inland,” apparently muttered that the young men were fools who would never make it to Alcatraz; the Indians in the water were fighting a strong current that pushed them away from their destination instead of towards it, and should have waited for the schooner to round the other side of the island (Fortunate Eagle & Findley 80). Sure enough, Coast Guard boats quickly began scooping Indian swimmers from the water, and chartering them back to shore. Bill, picking his opportunity, dove off the *Monte Cristo* when Craig’s back was turned, and easily swam with the waves to one of Alcatraz’s rocky outcroppings.

Five Indians in total jumped off the *Monte Cristo*, and one – Bill – made it to Alcatraz.²¹ Even though Bill was immediately apprehended and brought back to the mainland by authorities, the symbolic landing was one that would resonate with Indians and non-Natives alike. The press reported the event as a “major assault” for Indian rights, stated that the protestors had claimed the island by “right of discovery,” and emphasized that the Indians “planned to return” (Findley 21 November 1969). Furthermore, even though Oakes was scooped from the water and never made it to the island, some commend his dive from the *Monte Cristo* as the moment the occupation “truly began” (Don Patterson qtd. in Johnson *We Hold the Rock* 16; Johnson *Occupation*, Morris *diaries*, and Fortunate Eagle *Alcatraz!*).

Like in 1964, the performance of land seizure (or, attempted land seizure) forced non-Native Americans to become a part of the performance: the Coast Guard had to go and

²¹ According to Johnson’s *We Hold the Rock*, those jumpers were Jim Vaughn (Cherokee), Joe Bill (Eskimo), Ross Harden (Winnebago), Jerry Hatch, and Oakes himself (15).

physically remove the swimming Indians from the water. When discussing the intersection of politics, activism, and performance, Nato Thompson argues “you have to share what you know”—those who have the research or experience “might use the skill sets of symbolic manipulation and performativity in order to get their message out” (24). In the case of November 9, the Indians of All Tribes used their knowledge of colonial projects – knowledge of the untold, *Native* experience – to create a satiric image of land seizure. The Indians shared that experience with all who watched, including the Coast Guard that became a part of the performance when they pulled the Indians out of the water.

When all of the Indians of All Tribes had been returned to the mainland, they reconvened at one of their temporary headquarters in San Francisco, intent on planning another trip to San Francisco Bay. The symbolic performance that had occurred had inspired many Indian students to pursue further, direct action: Mankiller, for example, adamantly stated, “we’re going to take control of our own lives” (qtd. in Johnson *We hold the Rock* 14). Promises from colonial settlers and American governments had been constantly unfulfilled, and this time the Indians had forcefully taken what was ‘not theirs,’—Alcatraz Island. In doing so, they demonstrated how coming together attracted the attention of the non-Native community.

That day’s attempt to claim the island might have been a symbolic performance of seizure that concluded with a reenacting of Indian removal from their traditional land, but Oakes was not content with how the events had run their course. For the first time since he joined the Indians of All Tribes, Oakes disagreed with the trajectory Fortunate Eagle wanted to enact. Oakes was keen on a second, organized seizure attempt, and “was having nothing of the ‘symbolic’ claiming of the island” (Smith & Warrior 16). Oakes was about “action” (Smith & Warrior 17), while Fortunate Eagle was “pleased with the publicity” (*Alcatraz!* 63). For

Fortunate Eagle, success came from the fact that the American public knew – and would know – what had happened that morning in San Francisco Bay, that video and photographic coverage would reach the eyes of Native and non-Native Americans across the country; conversely, Oakes wanted to set out immediately and regain Alcatraz Island (Fortunate Eagle & Findley 85). The disagreement was unimportant, but emphasized that despite the greater community that had gathered on Pier 39 that morning, different activist backgrounds led to different understandings of successful radical action. The Indians needed a physical space where they could come together and unify; they needed Alcatraz Island.

That night, a much smaller group of 20 Indian students, led by Oakes, set out to claim Alcatraz Island. Accounts of this attempted landing vary, with many disagreeing about what time and place the Indians met to leave the mainland, and what exactly happened on Alcatraz that night. Most agree that the group boarded a fishing boat,²² and paid \$3 per person to be chartered across the bay. Carrying blankets, bread, and sleeping bags, the group began to unload supplies and disembark once they reached the docks, however when the owner realized exactly what the Indians intended to do that night – sleep in the old prison buildings – he threw the boat into reverse (Fortunate Eagle “notes” np). About 14 of the 20 Indians made it off the boat before it left the docks, as well as some of the hastily thrown supplies. The group set out to find cover in the prison buildings, while Fortunate Eagle – waiting at the docks for the fishing boat to reappear empty – soon after informed the press that Indians had successfully taken the island.

Coast Guard searchlights swept across San Francisco Bay around 1AM, hoping to detect exactly where on Alcatraz the Indian occupiers were hiding. Boyer, one of the 14 who made it

²² Johnson says that, in his research, the most commonly cited boat at this point was a fishing boat named the *New Vera II*, however he was unable to concretely verify that this was the boat in question (*We hold the Rock* 15).

ashore that night,²³ remembers how “the Coast Guard arrived and came out with their lights, but they couldn’t find us. They’d come so close and you’d be trying to keep back your laughter. We felt like such—we *were* such kids” (qtd. in Johnson *We hold the Rock* 16, emphasis original). This underscores the importance of humor – the sting of the Indian Joke – even at the most critical moments of the seizure of the island. Boyer’s testimony emphasizes how fitting the young activists found the situation. Indians had been ignored as persons for years in the United States; as Dennis Turner, a 22-year-old Indian student, stated, “we are the invisible Americans” (qtd. in Fortunate Eagle *Alcatraz!* 74). It was ironic that the authorities, who had historically spent so much effort in keeping Indians out of sight in society, were now unable to find them now. Indians had been invisible for a long time, and now that the authorities wanted to see them, they were melting into the shadows.

When the officers decided their efforts were better served in daylight, they left the island and the Indian occupiers set up their sleeping bags in the old warden’s quarters. A grainy picture, taken by an unknown photographer, shows the Indians sitting in



Figure 1.4: November 10, 1969

the main office of an old, empty guardhouse, some still dressed in fringed Native clothing (see figure 1.4). The image displays both community and satire in the second occupation: the image of stereotypical dressed Indians sitting in a prison – a prison that had held Indians prisoners for

²³ According to the Alcatraz information brochure in the Marc S. Boatwright collections, the November 14th occupiers were: Linda Aranaydo (Creek), Joe Bill (Eskimo), Burnell Blindman (Sioux), Rick Evening (Shoshone and Bannock), Ross Hardin (Winnebago), Kay Many Horse (Sioux), David Leach (Colville and Sioux), John Martell (Cherokee), La Nada Means (Bannock), Richard Oakes (Mohawk), Fred Shelton (Eskimo), James Vaughn (Cherokee), John Vigil (Apache), and John White Fix (Shoshone)

years – offers a humorous portrayal of racial power structures. Rather than white officers presiding over Indian inmates, the Indians sit in the officer’s chair. The image is a mockery of the public understandings of relations between authority and lawbreaker—in this case, trespasser and prison warden. The juxtaposition between performance and the social hierarchies that they mocked would be a tactic that the Indians used in their preparation for a third (and final) Alcatraz seizure attempt.

It is clear from existing evidence that – even in 1964 – Bay Area Indians considered Alcatraz Island as a place – both symbolic and concrete – where a new community of Native Americans could assemble to establish Indian rights on their own terms. From the minute that Joe Bill stepped onto Alcatraz Island, occupation was an act that no longer threatened Native Americans, but empowered them instead. The imagery of fifty Indians aboard a ship like the *Monte Cristo*, sailing to lay claim to unused land, recalled the arrival of British settlers arriving in North America, and the notion that uninhabited land was up for the taking—despite the fact that others might “own” it or be there first. It was a direct reference to how Native Americans have been treated throughout colonial history. Occupying Alcatraz Island, even for only a few short minutes, would hopefully raise questions and concerns in non-Native Americans’ minds about how and why Indians lived the way they did; simultaneously, the action would allow Native Americans to see themselves as active members in their own life stories. In his analysis of performance activism, Thompson adamantly states, “if politics have become performative, so too, has knowledge—in other words, you have to share what you know” (24). Likewise, Marcia Crosby comments that performative protest forces audiences to understand the place of marginalized and minority groups in American society, and the process of performing or re-

representing past historical events allows Native peoples to make “meaning of historical and cultural trauma by sharing their *own* knowledge of history” (81).

The publicity garnered by the Indians of All Tribes would lead to a flurry of non-Native support in San Francisco, which in turn would lead to a successful seizure of Alcatraz Island later that month. Five Indians swimming to Alcatraz on November 9 were on the minds of everyone who had witnessed the event, leading to an atmosphere of “excitement—sitting and watching your people put their heads up” (qtd. in Josephy, Nagel, & Johnson 39). Once an unnoticed population, Native Americans were suddenly the most watched group on America’s West Coast; the Indians of All Tribes were visible.

CHAPTER 2

Rallying for a “Rightful Claim”: Reimagining Colonial Society in an Era of Radicalism, November 20, 1969-December 1970

*Much of the credit for the success of the
occupation lies with the people who supported it
on the mainland.*

ADAM FORTUNATE EAGLE

On November 20, 1969, the *San Francisco Chronicle* published an article announcing the Indians of All Tribes’s return to Alcatraz Island. Quoting Richard Oakes’s determined announcement, “this time we are here to stay!”, the front page story marked the beginning of a slew of non-Native support for the Alcatraz occupation. Such support came at the request of and under terms set by the Indians of All Tribes, and would prove invaluable to occupation efforts—especially in the movement’s initial months. The support also represented an important new vision of how minority and majority populations could relate and interact with one another, and how stories of community building could encompass the efforts of different populations. In this chapter, I look at how the occupation’s overall success was enabled – in part – by the crucial aid that non-Native peoples provided.

When a group of about 89 Indians piled into three fishing boats in the dead of night on November 20, it was – for some – their third attempt to seize the rocky island. Having regrouped and discussed the previous week, the Indians of All Tribes came up with a new strategy: rather than make another spectacle of the trip *to* Alcatraz, they would quietly travel across the bay. Then, once settled, they would contact the press and announce their successful takeover of the island. As Richard Oakes point out, the Indians of All Tribes had assembled a network of support on November 9 and 10, and the media had already run the story about why they *wanted* the island to become Indian Territory; should they repeat the same message, the public might tire of

the initiative and stop following the story (Schweigman). So, when the Indians left the docks at about 1:00AM that night it was not with a contingent of spectators and media representatives, but under the cover of darkness. Only Tim Findley – trusted because of his help and advice throughout the October preparations – knew of the planned trip across San Francisco Bay (Morris *diaries* 84; Fortunate Eagle & Findley 78). It was he who published the *Chronicle's* article later that morning, having received word that the Indians were successfully established on the island.

When Coast Guard officers, San Francisco police, and (according to Joseph “Indian Joe” Morris) members of the United States Armed Forces (*diaries* 99) arrived on Alcatraz on November 20, they were unable to extricate the Indian occupiers; according to Adam Fortunate Eagle, only Findley and a few, carefully-selected Indians knew where the activists hid in the old cellblocks and guard housing that day. Authorities were unable to find the Indians, and upon reading Findley’s article many San Franciscans publically disagreed with removing the Indians by physical force (Fortunate Eagle “notes” np). Of Oakes’s group of 89, none were removed that day; indeed, despite official disapproval, Alcatraz would see over 1000 visitors and 400 inhabitants over the course of the following 19 months (Indians of All Tribes *not an Island* np). Yet while Indians would be at the center of the movement, it was *non-Native* communities who offered key support in the securing of Alcatraz Island.

I emphasize this point not to divert attention away from Indian resistance efforts and Native protest, but to underscore the importance of the Alcatraz occupation as a moment in the history of Native/non-Native relations. Historically, colonial efforts to ‘support’ Indian communities often unfolded as processes of Indian cultural suppression, attempts to eradicate Indian peoples and assimilate them into dominant, colonial society (Penekitt; Lepore). Such

projects continually separated and broke apart Native communities: Indian boarding schools, for example, tore Native children from their families, and Relocation initiatives segregated Native people in urban centers where they could neither assimilate into the dominant society, nor maintain their own cultural identities. In contrast, the Alcatraz occupation saw Indian needs and desires prioritized by non-Native Americans, with aid coming when and as the occupiers requested it. Certainly, efforts of *Native* activists should be celebrated and highlighted when discussing the Alcatraz movement, but as Morris himself points out, Indians “often forget how important *white* support was in holding the island” (“unpublished”, emphasis added). To neglect addressing the important role that non-Natives played in the Alcatraz occupation, I argue, is to suggest that Indians and white Americans cannot be considered equally within colonial and post-colonial narratives. Glossing over non-Native support risks suggesting that white voices, when present, will *always* and *necessarily* be prioritized—even when key occupation leaders, such as Fortunate Eagle and Morris, emphasize that it is crucial to remember their actions. In emphasizing the important yet subsidiary role of white support in the occupation, I critique the tendency, rooted in colonial discourse, to assume the absolute and naturalized precedence of white subjectivity.

There are a myriad of examples concerning the different groups that came together in support of the Indians of All Tribes dream of an Indian Alcatraz. Johnson, Champagne, and Nagel emphasize that the 1960s was a time of radical action, and argue that it was this cultural tone that led to the extensive non-Native support systems that emerged around the Indians of All Tribes (*American* 20). In *Hippies, Indians, and the Fight for Red Power*, Sherry L. Smith pays special attention to the relationships forged between the 1960s hippie community in San Francisco and the Indians of All Tribes. She argues that many Indian occupation tactics echoed

the hippies' radical activism, and by utilizing "non-Native tactics" the Indians drew attention and sympathies of white San Franciscans (84-85). Moreover, S. Smith comments on the hippie communities that emerged in the Bay Area in the 1960s, emphasizing the continuous donations of food and clothing that hippies provided the occupiers during the first year on Alcatraz (100). I focus on two facets of aid provided to the Indians of All Tribes between 1969-1971, both of which illustrate how occupation support, coming on Indian terms, fostered unity within the island's Indian community. Without these key undertakings, the Native activists almost certainly would not have succeeded in holding the former prison for 19 months; yet had the aid not come within parameters set by the occupiers, it would likely never have been accepted.

I begin with the Coast Guard blockade of Alcatraz Island, a two-day event during which authorities – unable to physically remove the Indian occupiers on November 20 – placed boats in front of the prison's docks in an attempt to halt the arrival of supplies. Those on Alcatraz had not brought much food with them on November 20, for the Indians intended the arrival of additional demonstrators on November 21 who would bring the bulk of the start-up supplies. The Indians of All Tribes called on San Franciscans to bring their boats to ferry them across San Francisco Bay, and the number of non-Native Americans who responded ensured that there were few problems getting occupiers and food to the island. Then, I turn to the Indian Depot, a donation center run by Morris throughout the occupation's first 14 months. Morris rented a warehouse on Pier 40, and kept detailed records of what donations were brought to the occupation by whom; these records, now preserved in the *NPSRC*, provide detailed insight as to what requests the Indians of All Tribes made of non-Native peoples, and which communities responded with support. Both examples encouraged community building on Alcatraz through external support systems; via

terms set by the Indians of All Tribes, supplies and aid were provided in such a way that the Native community controlled resources and their use.

Discussions surrounding early moments of the occupation illustrate the importance of Alcatraz as a space and time when white communities were not merely tolerant of Indian activism, but actively working *with* the Indians to achieve a specific, Indian-centered outcome. Bill Schweigman (Rosebud Sioux) excitedly called Alcatraz “the first place in America where Indians are equal to white men” (np), emphasizing the important role Alcatraz played as a physical space in the re-emergence of Indian cultural pride. His anecdote also highlights that the occupation marked a moment of changing societal hierarchies, for “white men” were not dominant but were “equal” to Native Americans. I draw on Schweigman’s comment, and emphasize how Native voices were the center of the movement. Colonial and white ‘aid’ might have historically been unwanted and destroyed communities, but Alcatraz established a reimagining of this relationship, harnessing white support in a project of Indian self-renewal and community building.

i. “Pirate Spirit”: Evading the Coast Guard Blockade, November 20-22, 1969

In retrospect, Fortunate Eagle admits that “at the time, no one really understood that the Indians had truly gained possession of ‘the Rock.’ Even we didn’t understand” (*Alcatraz!* 75); there were about 89 Indians on Alcatraz, but with Coast Guard ships hovering in San Francisco Bay in front of the island’s only docks, it appeared doubtful that more could join them. If Oakes and those he had led to Alcatraz were to hold their position in the former prison, then they would soon need more food, water, and blankets, having brought less than 48 hours worth of supplies. On the mainland, Fortunate Eagle had supplies ready to send to Alcatraz, along with additional

Indian activists, but he needed transport across San Francisco Bay if these were ever to arrive on the island. With the help of Findley and the network of non-Native press members he had assembled to cover the occupation, Fortunate Eagle began to call on Native and non-Native San Franciscans alike, asking for “everything from boats to canoes” to come out in support of the Indians of All Tribes (Findley 21 November 1969).

There was an inherent irony to the Coast Guard’s blockade of Alcatraz: historically, white colonizers had invaded resource-rich territory occupied by Indians and forced the communities onto barren sections of land. Now, the non-Native authorities were blocking Indians from a piece of land that had been empty and unused for over half a decade—land that had been vacated because of its barrenness and intemperate weather conditions. Moreover, Alcatraz had not only once been a prison, but had been a facility for some of the country’s most dangerous and notorious criminals. Yet Fortunate Eagle & Findley point out that many Native prisoners were held in the penitentiary during its years of operation, often for no greater a crime than refusing to send their children to boarding schools. These Indians were not the ruthless criminals that were known to be housed at Alcatraz Federal Penitentiary, such as Al Capone or Robert “Birdman” Franklin Stroud; yet imprisoned among them, many Indians would be “broken in *spirit*,” psychologically shattered from the “dark, chilly dampness” of a prison, renowned for its extreme conditions (13, emphasis added). This time, Indians were travelling to Alcatraz to *mend* their broken spirits, to sew together their scattered knowledge through the sharing of Native experiences within a Native community. Instead of imprisoning Indians inside of Alcatraz’s walls, non-Native authorities were trying to keep them out, and non-Native civilians were being asked to help force their way into – not out of – the prison boundaries.

Tactics to skirt the Coast Guard and reach Alcatraz during the blockade only further emphasize how relations were changing between Indians and non-Native Americans. At cursory glance, the efforts to reach Alcatraz deliver an ironic juxtaposition to famous, prison-break stories; however when probed deeper, these moments provide insight into the relationships and hierarchies between Native and non-Native peoples that were forming on and around the island. The Coast Guard knew neither how many occupiers were on Alcatraz nor how many non-Native San Franciscans would answer Fortunate Eagle's request for transportation support. Yet the multitude of supporters who came out to help achieve an Indian Alcatraz ensured that the blockade did not succeed in halting the occupation. As Fortunate Eagle put it, "the Coast Guard hadn't reckoned on the 'pirate' spirit of the boaters of the San Francisco Bay [...] and the boaters took [the blockade] as a challenge to get supplies across the bay" (*Alcatraz!* 75); indeed, in the following days, non-Native supporters would employ everything from fishing boats to kayaks, to ferry food, water, and Indian activists to Alcatraz. The manner in which occupiers and their non-Native supporters united against the official blockade stood in stark juxtaposition to colonial histories, in which state coercion and expansion of settler societies went hand in hand.

Because Coast Guard ships blocked the docks, Native and non-Natives worked together to get activists and supplies up the island's rocky cliffs. While Alcatraz was clearly an Indian project, non-Native supporters came together with just as much determination to realize it as the Indians of All Tribes. The teamwork and community spirit that developed between Indian activists and non-Native boaters is, perhaps, best illustrated in these instances of blockade-running; photographs depict how closely supporters and occupiers worked together, despite the fact that only some of the group would directly experience the result. Pulling up to the stony edges of the island, ladders were raised – often precariously – and supplies were passed from

person to person, from non-Native to Indian, up the cliff walls (see figure 2.1). Kathy Williams,



Figure 2.1: *Supply Line to Hoist Food to Upper Alcatraz*

a non-Native reporter for the underground newspaper the *Berkeley Tribe*, reported that sometimes they could get all the way to the shore (see figure 2.2), and sometimes the Indians would “jump off” the boats “and swim to the rock face, grabbing ropes that had been lowered by occupiers above”

(27 November 1969). Without the intricate teamwork of Indian and non-Native activists alike, supplies might never have made it up the ladders, and many occupiers might never have stepped foot on the island.

Raising supplies and Indian activists up the cliffs might be the most obvious expression of collaborative community building, but narratives of travel across San Francisco Bay also illustrate how occupiers and supporters worked together to actively build an *Indian* community on the island. Below, I provide two excerpts from these narratives, one from Native occupier Peter Blue Cloud and one from white supporter Kathy Williams, in order to demonstrate how the Indians’ purpose in seizing Alcatraz was understood and supported by non-Native communities. Blue Cloud’s



Figure 2.2: *Landing*

narrative emphasizes how quickly a community was forming on Alcatraz, and the Indians of All Tribes's active insistence that such a community remained exclusively *Indian*. Williams's echoes this emphasis, but from her non-Native perspective she offers insight into non-Native supporters' respect and understanding for the project. Individuals such as Williams operated from the periphery during the movement, entering the narrative only when asked and not to challenge occupation motives, but to support the community's Indian center.

Blue Cloud, a Mohawk poet who lived in the prison building from November 21 until the Indians were removed on June 11, 1971, was one of the first Indians to arrive on Alcatraz after the blockade was established. His diaries, excerpts of which are published in the Indians of All Tribes's text *Alcatraz is not an Island*, emphasize how a Native community centered in and proud of Indian heritage was already developing on Alcatraz. One diary entry in particular bears quoting at length:

When we near Alcatraz, the boat circles the island and we begin to approach the water barge which is tied to the dock. A huge bonfire is burning and we can see many figures moving about. An amplified voice booms at us, 'Indians only. If you aren't Indian, please keep going and don't try to land. If you are Indian, welcome to Indian land! Come ashore and join your brothers and sisters!' Many hands reach out to help us ashore. Everyone is smiling and laughing. 'Hey, Welcome! What tribe you from? Hey, come on and dance. It is like coming home after a long journey. (in *not an Island* 19)²⁴

Blue Cloud's accounts emphasize how – even 24 hours into the occupation and despite attempts to stop it from the outset – the Indians of All Tribes were already creating a space on Alcatraz Island *for* Native Americans—a “home” that had not been experienced before. It did not matter to Blue Cloud *who* was helping him off the boat, nor did they appear to know whom they were

²⁴ The diary entry itself is undated, however in lists of original occupiers' arrivals on Alcatraz Island, located in the Joseph Morris collections at NPS archives, Blue Cloud is listed as arriving on the island on November 21, 1969, so I know what date the writing itself refers to, even I cannot speak to the date that it was actually penned.

helping; the ability to have a space specifically for Indians allowed new relationships to be fostered, allowed strangers to feel connected like “brothers and sisters.” It bears repeating that non-Native supporters were vital to the establishment of this unique space. Although they recognized that the project underway on Alcatraz was never intended for them, they proved eager and capable partners of the Indian occupiers.

In comparison, non-Native stories of travelling, visiting, and delivering supplies to Alcatraz also emphasize the shared goal of building an *Indian*-centered community on the island. Williams, for example, emphasizes in her writing that there was a distinct divide between Indians and non-Indians on Alcatraz, while simultaneously making it clear that the divide was one respected – not resented – by everyone involved. Williams travelled to Alcatraz at least five times on November 21 and 22, and then reported her experiences delivering supplies in articles published between November 27 and December 5, 1969. “[T]his was an Indian thing,” she reported, emphasizing her belief that the occupation “belonged to Indians” (27 November 1969). She wrote that reporters “were guests [on Alcatraz] but it was cool, it was the way it should have been all along and we brought support and supplies and then left” (5 December 1969). Williams’s attitude is echoed in many non-Native accounts; it is notable that such support manifested not *only* in the form of physical supplies, but also in the form of acceptance and understanding towards the Indians’ point of view.

In her examination of the occupation, S. Smith notes that Williams travelled on a thirty-foot sailboat called the *WOO*, owned by skipper Peter Jones and “used by hippies and underground reporters to deliver food and water to Indians” (90). Morris also references Jones and his crew in unpublished diaries, stating that the group travelled over 15 times between the island and mainland during the blockade, and was part of a network of non-Native boaters

working together to evade authority ships that were trying to stop boats in the bay. Sometimes Jones loaded his ship with milk, cheese, baked ham, and other supplies, and sometimes his boat was empty—a decoy vessel to distract the Coast Guard while canoes and kayaks snuck across the water in complete darkness (Morris “unpublished”). Williams’s description of using *WOO* to create a diversion highlights the seriousness with which non-Native groups took the Indians’ mission to create an Indian community on Alcatraz. In her second trip across San Francisco Bay, for example, the reporter described in detail being a part of the occupation:

The Coast Guard rammed our boat, so Jones decided to get our asses OUT of here. With the military in pursuit of the junk, the Indians on Alcatraz waved farewell as we gave them the clenched fist salute as someone lit up another joint. The WOO limped back to its slip in the San Francisco marina, where we received a citation for reckless and negligent handling of a motorized vessel [...] But we won. We landed two Indians on their land, and because the military was busy chasing us a lot of food got to shore. (27 November 1969).

Such documentation emphasizes the excitement and feelings of victory that non-Native San Franciscans and mainland supporters felt by aiding those on the island, and illustrate how integral the mainland efforts were to success *on* Alcatraz. A community was forming not only among Indians, but among non-Native supporters as well.

Because of efforts by those like Jones, Williams, and countless other unnamed San



Figure 2.3: *Indian Land*

Francisco boaters, the Coast Guard gave up its blockade on November 22, 1969, leaving the main docks open and clear for the Indians of All Tribes (see figure 2.3). Fortunate Eagle, who was coordinating

much of the mainland support at this point, states that it was this moment when the Indians of All Tribes realized that they “really had the island,” and that the excitement of its prospects “lit a fire in the Indian community” (*Alcatraz!* 77). Now that they could easily acquire food and water at the main docks, Morris gleefully stated, “We have everything we need! There was plenty of water, lights, and a telephone [...] even running toilets” (*diaries* 104). The penitentiary may have been shut down in 1963 because the conditions on the island were considered uninhabitable, but as discussed in Chapter 1, its conditions were no less adequate than those on Indian reservations across the country. The departure of the Coast Guard meant that the occupation the Indians of All Tribes had envisioned would be possible. The initial solidarity between Native and non-Native Americans was crucial to the Indians’ ability to quickly establish themselves as a rooted community on Alcatraz; without the help of those boats and the food and water they brought, the Indians of All Tribes would likely have struggled to remain in the prison walls for long.

ii. The Indian Depot: Monetary Aid and In Kind Donations, November 1969-December 1970

It was around the same time that the Coast Guard gave up their blockade that Morris, Indians of All Tribes member and a key organizer of the mainland support efforts, opened the Indian Depot (also known in some accounts as “Alcatraz Depot”). Morris, who visited Alcatraz frequently throughout the occupation but never resided there, had already accomplished a significant amount of fundraising on the mainland in the lead-up to November 20 (Morris “unpublished”). Once the Indians of All Tribes were established within the former prison buildings, he began to expand his requests for aid, publicizing lists of items necessary for life on Alcatraz. In addition to the numerous clothing and canned food donations that Morris gathered on behalf of the Indians of All Tribes in the first month of the occupation, he was also able to

collect an incredible \$150,000 in monetary donations.²⁵ These donations are meticulously recorded in the *Alcatraz Spare-Changer*, and came primarily from local churches, charity groups, and wealthier non-Native Californians, although Native American groups across the United States also contributed a significant monetary amount over the 19 months (Morris *Spare-Changer*). It was a stunning amount of support given the short period of time, and by actively working to inform the public of the Indian Depot, Morris hoped to increase donations throughout the winter months (*diaries* 140).

What makes the *Spare-Changer* such an interesting source of information regarding the occupation of Alcatraz is that it speaks to how various, seemingly unrelated communities came together in the shared mission of an Indian Alcatraz. Fortunate Eagle emphasizes how important non-Native support was to establishing regular life on Alcatraz Island, candidly stating, “it did cost a great deal of money to secure initial provisions for Alcatraz Island” (*Alcatraz!* 78). Different scholars examine different cohorts of support that evolved around the Indians of All Tribes, but when examined in aggregate the extensive donations – both in kind and monetary – illustrate communities transcending societal expectations of Native/non-Native relations. In fact, it is inside the *Spare-Changer* that Morris scrawled, “This log book will serve to help the historian to put the two ends together, and piece the real story of what happened in the first year of Alcatraz Indian Occupation”; he points to the importance of including *this specific resource* in historical analyses of the occupation. While intricately examining every log in the *Spare-Changer* is beyond the scope of this thesis, inferences can still be made from the notable trends and donors, and how different parties supported the Indians of All Tribes. It illustrates how community building that occurred on Alcatraz was aided by new forms of community emerging

²⁵ According to XE live exchange rates, this is equivalent to approximately \$999,450 USD today (<http://www.xe.com>).

between Native and non-Natives on the mainland.

Some of the most prominent and significant sources of funding, according to Morris's records, were churches of the Bay Area, whose monetary collections and donations totaled over \$50,000 between December 1969 and January 1970. Missionaries and religious communities had historically been among the most destructive agents of European colonialism, undermining both the social fabric and spiritual solidarity of Indian communities; here, those groups came together in support of building a community on Alcatraz Island. As S. Smith comments, "[t]he relationship between Indian activists and mainstream churches could be rocky," but groups such as Berkeley's First Congregational Church supported "the Indians' rightful claim" (101).

While the larger of the monetary donations came from non-Native parties, the Indians of All Tribes also received substantial funding – and aid in securing funding – from Native groups and celebrities throughout the occupation's first 14 months. High-profile Indian figures, such as Buffy Sainte-Marie, along with known-musicians such as Malvina Reynolds, held their own fundraisers and benefits to support the Indians of All Tribes. These benefits were multi-functional: while the *Spare-Changer* attests that the Native celebrities were able to collectively gather over \$10,000 from December 1969-December 1970, the events were also instrumental in drawing nationwide attention and awareness to the occupiers' ongoing fight for an Indian Alcatraz. In turn, monetary donations appeared to spike following these events, illustrating how the celebrities promoted the occupation's goals in a manner that resonated with non-Native Americans across the West Coast.

Thus when examining the *Spare-Changer* in relation to large, public events, it is clear that there is a direct correlation between Indian efforts to publicize their initiative and the volume of support coming in from non-Native parties. Fortunate Eagle discusses the different parties

who rallied around those on Alcatraz, and how – despite officials’ irritation – those supporting the Indians of All Tribes’s movement continued to grow. As he puts it,

public support grew as fast as the occupation, much to our relief. Individuals and groups from all over gave their support. Minority groups and churches collected donations; celebrities like Dick Gregory donated money. The folksinger Malvina Reynolds donated money and the royalties of one year from her song, ‘Alcatraz,’ about the occupation. Local rock groups immediately began benefit concerts to raise money. The word spread like wildfire, much to the government’s chagrin (*Alcatraz!* 71).

Solidarity emerged around Alcatraz, which starkly contrasted the history of mutual dependency and unity between colonial state and settler society. As when they had been forced to abandon the blockade of the island after only two days, it was often authorities who appear powerless and marginalized in Indian occupation descriptions. Just as San Francisco boaters exhibited a “pirate spirit” during the blockade, non-Native communities across the West Coast stood in solidarity against authorities who opposed the occupation. Indian occupiers tapped a deepening well of support that cut across boundaries of colonial society, satirically turning the tables on a traumatic, colonial past.

As a community centered in Indian culture was forged on Alcatraz, communities also began to spring up on the mainland, emphasizing the education of both Native and non-Native San Franciscans. For example, in December 1969 (and through January-April 1970), various Native ensembles would play music at the Play Bar Inn, a small niche pub known to Indians in the Bay Area as a place to meet up with other Native Americans (Morris *diaries* 95). While the performances were neither professional nor greatly publicized, the Inn became a spot for Native Americans and non-Native supporters to come together and share updates about the occupation outside Alcatraz, as well as celebrate and learn about Native culture through music—both traditional and modern tunes given an “Indian twist” (97). Everyone was welcome at the Inn – no

matter their heritage – and the shows were free of charge to all who came. In his *diaries*, Morris states that although they never mandated an audience fee, after performances “cans would be passed around” to collect cash, and when the cans were full Morris would go to the Inn and empty them; he says the money went “right into the Bank of America deep-freeze to support the brothers on Alcatraz” (100), and indeed Play Bar Inn funding is logged in the *Spare-Changer*, totaling over \$1000.

What the *Spare-Changer* does not record is non-monetary donations, the food, clothing, and necessary items gifted to the Indians of All Tribes to support life on Alcatraz. Such aid was equally important to the Indians of All Tribes, for the occupiers relied heavily on the food, water, and clothing that came to them via the Indian Depot—especially in the colder winter months, when wind ripped across the unprotected rocky island and through the cracked and crumbling prison walls. S. Smith notes that the *Berkeley Barb*, an underground newspaper published weekly in Berkeley California, collected tampons and other toiletries for the Indians on Alcatraz (93), and Morris’s archives hold multiple requests for support that were circulated in the Bay Area requesting warm clothing, bottled water, generators, and car batteries (Morris “flyer”). Morris publicized his requests in the *San Francisco Chronicle* on at least two occasions, and in January 1970, he printed hundreds of flyers that were distributed in mailboxes around San Francisco. In February 1970, Morris put out a special request for plumbers to donate their time, as many pipes had stopped working in the old prison building, as well as winter clothing for children. In another example, Morris placed an ad in the *San Francisco Chronicle* on December 20th, stating that children on Alcatraz were “looking forward to Christmas and could use presents to open Christmas morning.” Morris suggested candy or clothing, but says that a large department store

instead answered his call with winter coats and brand new toys—“there were about fifty large presents for the kids Christmas morning” (*diaries* 106).

Morris’s archives at the *NPSRC* demonstrate how seriously he took his role running the Indian Depot, the responsibility he felt for those living on Alcatraz in supplying them with clothing, food, and money sourced from such a diverse and broad scope of sources. Despite little education outside of the Catholic boarding school he attended as a child, Morris demonstrated apt intuition when it came to securing and retaining occupation supporters; for example, a thank you card preserved in his collections, undated but signed by Morris himself on “behalf of the Indians of All Tribes,” emphasizes that he understood how important the external support was to success on Alcatraz; his communication with donors underscored the Indians of All Tribes’s appreciation, and kept them informed about on-island events. Oakes, Fortunate Eagle, Findley, and many others have since praised Morris for his role providing support to the occupation, calling him “instrumental” in facilitating new relations between Native and non-Native San Franciscans (Fortunate Eagle *Alcatraz!*; Smith & Warrior).

What made the Indian Depot so successful – both in terms of garnering non-Native support and in ensuring the support came on Indian terms – was Morris. When he left the movement at the end of 1970 to spend more time with his daughter, the Indian Depot shut down fairly quickly because (as Morris put it) “nobody knew what to do with the money”; despite gathering significant funding over the first 14 months, Morris wrote that in 1971, “the Alcatraz finance committee was so busy spending the money that they forgot to pay the rent on our little office, \$10 a month” (*diaries* 119). At the same time, new coordinators stopped paying specific attention to non-Native donors and supporters, letting systems of recognition Morris had set up fall away—as Fortunate Eagle put it, “much of the credit for the success of the occupation lies

with the people who supported it on the mainland. The Indians forgot this, and it came to haunt them” (*Alcatraz!* 78). As 1971 progressed with fewer sources of non-Native aid and external support aiding those who remained on Alcatraz, the occupation began to wind down.

When considering the occupation of Alcatraz Island, stories of non-Native support and coming together in the establishment of an Indian community illustrate how new relations were forged between different parties in the Bay Area. While the movement was pointedly centered in *Indian* needs and desires, those who aided the initiative from the periphery were crucial to its success. Christine K. Gray argues, “for the first time in American history, the public at large was confronted by social action by Native Americans that transcended the grievances of an individual tribe or group of tribes in one local area” (1); in making their movement about larger, nationwide social concerns, Gray contends that it was relatable to Natives and non-Natives alike, who could identify with the need for changing societal structures in America (4). Non-Native – white – Americans are an important part of this narrative, and can be discussed in occupation narratives without displacing Indians as the dominant and central subjects. In fact, non-Native supporters *should* be acknowledged rather than ignored, for as Fortunate Eagle and Morris both noted, as external aid died down in 1971, so did the occupiers’ time on Alcatraz.

For Indian activists and their non-Native supporters, reaching beyond the trauma of colonialism meant building a space where Native voices could finally be heard clearly by society at large; yet the project was never predicated upon the notion that non-Natives should remain silent, a position that risked leaving unexamined – or even reproducing – the settler’s central position in colonial discourses. A truly postcolonial America meant acknowledging and critiquing the past from *both* sides of the colonial encounter. In this sense, non-Native supporters

were not just spectators, but were active members working together with the occupiers to reframe anti-colonial resistance in the United States.

Of the first few months on Alcatraz, Fortunate Eagle said, “nobody really expected us to be that persistent, and certainly no one expected us to stay very long” (“notes” np); yet, the longer that the Indians of All Tribes were on the island, the more those on the mainland answered their requests for support. While Alcatraz Island was a space *for Indians*, its effects rippled across diverse segments of American society, generating unexpected solidarities and new positions – both center and margin – from which to criticize the society created colonialism and imagine how it might be remade. Thus, it would be remiss not to underscore how important – especially in those initial weeks and months – the support of *non-Natives* was to its long-term success, and to emphasize how the visibility of Indian needs across the United States was brought about by both those occupiers on Alcatraz Island, and those who supported it from the mainland in San Francisco and the Bay Area.

CHAPTER 3

“From Alaska to South America”: Realizing an Indian Community
on Alcatraz, November 29 1969-June 11, 1971

my people call / I go to join them
ANONYMOUS

*All tribes and unity are the words of the drum and
all tribes in unity are the dancers. The vast
distances separating our many tribes is forgotten,
as are the man-made boundaries.*
INDIANS OF ALL TRIBES

Years after the occupation of Alcatraz Island had come to an end, Adam Fortunate Eagle wrote, “the trip to Alcatraz became almost a pilgrimage. After all, it was the only piece of land in the country ‘owned’ by Indians” (*Alcatraz!* 91). ‘The Rock’ had become a symbol of Indian freedom in North America, as well as a physical space where the Indian community could come together outside of dominant societal structures. Efforts leading up to and on Alcatraz established the island as a space grounded in Indian culture and tradition: a physical place where Native Americans could interact with each other and with the land on Indian terms, instead of those set by a non-Native government. Non-Native San Franciscans may have been instrumental in supporting the occupation from the mainland, but they remained outside of the community building that occurred *on* Alcatraz, unless invited by Indians for a special event. As has been gone over in Chapters 1 and 2, the occupiers built on existing histories of Indian Activism, and on tactics of survival and resistance. They also developed new ways of relating to non-Native groups that proved vital to the success of their venture. Over the 19 months that the Indians of All Tribes spent on the island, these compelling ideas and powerfully effective strategies would be deployed in service of efforts to build a cohesive and supportive community of Indians on Alcatraz, one focused in rejuvenating cultural pride and re-learning Indian traditions.

As the Coast Guard blockade came to an end on November 22, 1969, Indians residing on the island set about the task of establishing this transformative community. In this chapter, I point to what I consider the most distinctive elements of community building on Alcatraz, in order to illustrate how events were shaped with specific, organizational intentions. I begin with what is, perhaps, the most recognized moment of the movement: the 1969 Thanksgiving feast. A celebration meant to both rejoice in the capture of Alcatraz and welcome newcomers to Indian Land, Thanksgiving would become an iconic, well-recognized symbol of the occupation. I then turn to life on Alcatraz, and how Indians of All Tribes leadership set up day-to-day life on the island with the intention of evoking feelings of normalcy within those who resided there. Community building on Alcatraz was, first and foremost, aimed at answering the need for a space focused on Indian needs. Places where Native Americans could go engage in traditional ceremony, live amongst other Indians, and publically celebrate Native culture were sparse, and an Indian Alcatraz was meant to fill that void. The broader symbolic implications of the project were secondary and inferred; certainly choosing an infamous prison would illuminate unjust projects of colonial conquest, and signal a new moment of direct, action-oriented Native protest. But when Fortunate Eagle called travelling to Alcatraz Island a “pilgrimage,” he emphasized its importance to Native Americans as a physical location.

While the Indians of All Tribes invited non-Native supporters and journalists to join them on Alcatraz for island tours and special events, the occupiers intended it as a space specifically for men, women, and children who possessed *Native* heritage. This policy lay at the heart of what the activists hoped the project would achieve; white exclusion was not for a dislike or disinterest in Native/non-Native relations, but rather in the interest of maintaining Indian needs at the center of the island’s community structure. Contemporary theorist and internationally

recognized Kanien'kehaka professor, Taiaiake Alfred, argues that there are inherent “institutional and attitudinal [...] prejudicial biases” present in non-Native, North American societal structures (103); to overcome these colonial traumas and unjust historical policies, Native Americans must create “meaningful change” through a “resurgence of Onkwehonwe *spirit* and *consciousness* directed into *contention* with the very foundations of colonialism” (107).²⁶ Alfred places Indian culture at the center of resurging cultural pride, noting that the only way to combat “ingrained and oppressive fears” of the past is to confront oppression “*our way*” – the Indian way – on land considered *Indian* (108, 118). Alfred may write three decades after the occupation came to an end, but his theory bears directly on the Indians of All Tribes’s practices. Native occupiers saw the establishment of an Indian-centric space on Alcatraz as vital, not only as a symbolic act of defiant protest, but also as a physical site for the renewal of cultural life and spirit—both in ritual and in everyday terms. The island would, above all, be a functioning space, one that met the physical needs of those residing there; yet simultaneously, it would serve as a place where being *Indian* was a point of pride, rather than shame.

The Indians of All Tribes’s efforts aimed at and resulted in the emergence of potent new forms of Native community on Alcatraz. The experiences that Indians had on the island would have long-lasting influence, inspiring Native peoples for decades to come. Just as his time on Alcatraz changed Vine Deloria Jr.’s ideas regarding how symbolic performance could lead to organizational outcomes, the occupation as a whole demonstrated the vital importance of using community to transcend the trauma and internal divisions of colonial pasts. The initiatives of

²⁶ Onkwehonwe, in this context, refers to the Mohawk and Haudenosaunee people (members of the Iroquois Confederacy). In the language of these people, Onkwehonwe is translated as “Real People,” and is how Mohawk people refer to themselves (Jacobs).

community building that occurred on Alcatraz, I argue, were instrumental in rejuvenating Indian cultural pride and relearning Indian rituals and ways of life.

As previously discussed, the importance of the Alcatraz occupation transcends its symbolic and overarching influence on later projects of Indian resistance. Scholars call Alcatraz the “beginning” of new Indian protest, focusing on how the movement affected larger, nationwide structures of Indian resistance (Garment 215; Reed 131-34). For example, Troy Johnson, Duane Champagne, & Joane Nagel argue that within the Red Power movement, Alcatraz “transform[ed] national consciousness [...] and engendered a more open and confident sense of identity among people of Indian descent” (9); they are not wrong to illuminate Alcatraz as a moment when Indian identity was recognized as a powerful mobilizer of resisting peoples, but their macro-sociological focus obscures the stories that speak directly of Alcatraz’s impact to those *on* the island through those 19 months. Testimony concerning life on Alcatraz uses elaborately illustrates how seemingly mundane details were important to Indian occupiers on the island; thus in focusing on community building activities during the occupation, I focus the experience of living in a community organized by Indians on their own terms, and intended to serve their needs, could prove to be a life-altering experience.

i. Un-Thanksgiving: Celebrating an Indian Alcatraz, November 27, 1969

The widespread attention that the Indians of All Tribes garnered in Native communities, both in the lead up to and initial days on Alcatraz, made the island an attractive location for Indians to congregate. A week into the occupation, many had already travelled to the former penitentiary in hopes of calling the newly acquired Indian Land their home, and many more intended to do so. To celebrate this growing community, and to welcome those making the move

to Alcatraz, Fortunate Eagle and Oakes began to plan a large celebration for Thanksgiving Day. In what would become the first of many daily trips to the island in an effort to strengthen the relationships and communications between Indians on Alcatraz and those on the mainland, Fortunate Eagle said that a large Thanksgiving event would offer the “perfect opportunity” to “celebrate our new Indian home” (Fortunate Eagle & Findley 78).

When considering the occupation and its projects of community building, I argue that discussions of community and land cannot be mutually exclusive; rather, the need for an Indian community and the need for land should be understood as overlapping problems that the Indians of All Tribes sought to address in seizing Alcatraz. The Thanksgiving celebrations provided an opportunity for Indians to reconnect with each other, as well as with the land—with what Anishnaabe/Métis writer Ryan McMahon calls “our own version of God, which is found in the land” (74).²⁷ Colonial projects have historically been rooted in the forceful acquisition of the traditional territories of Native Americas, and in doing so ripping communities apart. To (re)build an Indian community on Alcatraz, the occupiers sought to re-establish these traditional relationships on new terms, in the creation of a supportive and inclusive space designated for the coming together of *all* Indians.

Thanksgiving was traditionally an American celebration of harvest, of the exchange of goods, and of new relationships formed between newly-arrived colonizers and Native Americans; an *Indian* Thanksgiving would offer the opportunity for those same celebrations with

²⁷ McMahon centers his theory through the analysis of the Canadian 21st century Idle No More movement, a movement in which Indigenous communities in Canada occupied urban spaces with high publicity across the country to draw attention to unfair treaties and teach non-Native Canadians about the position colonial history has left Native peoples. These discussions, of reconnecting to land and creating solidarity with non-Indian peoples, are just as pertinent in this analysis of the Alcatraz occupation, and thus I will occasionally draw upon the Indigenous Protest Theory written in response to Idle No More in this thesis, while understanding that it came approximately 40 years after the Indians of All Tribes’s work.

a twist—this time, Indians were the “newly arrived,” dominant population. As plans developed, Thanksgiving quickly became another example of Deloria’s Indian Joke, one aimed at drawing together an Indian community through performance and encouraging Indian pride among Indian peoples. Specifically, Thanksgiving was the first, concrete, organizational effort of community building *on* Alcatraz, and would highlight specific needs for Indian-centered spaces in the United States. As Fortunate Eagle envisioned it, an Indian Thanksgiving would be “shar[ing] not only food but also all the tears, frustrations, and joys of the past weeks. Our harvest was the island, which we shared with all our people” (*Alcatraz!* 82). Just as the pilgrims’ harvest had been (what was now) America, the Indians acquisition of Alcatraz was to mark not only a demand for the right to be heard within society at large, but – most importantly – for the right to a space in which to live as they saw fit and to determine their own destinies.

Thanksgiving is arguably the *most* examined and known moment of the Alcatraz occupation; scholars generally turn to it – at least by anecdote – when mentioning the movement. Troy Johnson, for example, calls the celebration “unique” and emphasizes its importance as a reflection of the “high spirits” of Native Americans coming to the island (*Occupation* 90). Johnson quotes multiple Indians who travelled to Alcatraz for the event, emphasizing how they call Thanksgiving both “inspiring” and “liberating” (129).²⁸ The influence of this moment has indeed reverberated far beyond the occupation’s 19 months. Even today, when Alcatraz is a US National park, Thanksgiving is still an *Indian* event at Alcatraz: every year the former prison is closed to the non-Native public so that Indians can travel and come together in celebration of Indian culture. In 1969, the event offered a timely welcome to new incoming members of the Indians of All Tribes community.

²⁸ In this chapter of *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island*, Johnson quotes a myriad of personal letters he wrote to known Indian occupiers, and the Indians’ subsequent responses.

400-700 Native Americans were expected to flock to Alcatraz on November 27, 1969, and as word of the celebration spread a restaurant owned by non-Natives in San Francisco offered to cater the celebration free of charge. Fortunate Eagle and Oakes eagerly accepted their offer; they were aware of the difficulty of acquiring and shipping enough food to feed the nearly 1000 Indians that were expected to be present on the island (Fortunate Eagle “notes” np).²⁹ The offer provided a concrete solution to an organizational issue, but as Fortunate Eagle points out, it also presented an ironic re-presentation of the original Thanksgiving dinner. Americans feeding Indians, the leader excitedly stated, would be “*a delicious turnabout of history!*”—a satirical reenactment of the original holiday, and of what non-Natives were “thankful” for every year (*Alcatraz!* 82, emphasis original). His description bears quoting at length:

For the first Thanksgiving the Indians had not only taught the newly arrived pilgrims how to grow the food, but they had also brought most of the native foods to the feast—turkey, yams, cranberries, beans, squash, pumpkins, and deer. Now the Indians had landed on ‘white man’s land’ and the white man was going to provide the feast (82-83).

Thanksgiving was a holiday steeped in colonial imagery, a history of pilgrims being fed and taught to survive by Indians; this time, an Indian Thanksgiving would symbolize Indians being taught to survive by *each other*, all the while being supported – not oppressed – by non-Native companies.

Indian Humor might not have been the *most* important of unifying tactics in the case of Thanksgiving Day, 1969, but it played an intrinsic part in bringing together a community of Indians and non-Native supporters—both on and off Alcatraz Island. The restaurant became a part of the reenactment by offering the food, both providing for a physical need as well as for a symbolic subversion of the categories and narratives present in the event. This dual role of

²⁹ The restaurant is unnamed in all documents and accounts, only referred to as “a white restaurant” by Morris, and “San Francisco restaurant” by Fortunate Eagle.

symbolism and material aid was common to the non-Natives who were present on the Island for the celebration, which was intended as an avowedly Indian-centric event. Racial hierarchies and colonial implications remained strong in the minds of many, and Indians began referring to the event as “Turkey Day” (Big Bear “questionnaires”; Fortunate Eagle “invite”) and, more often, as “Un-Thanksgiving” (Morris *diaries* 120; Blue Cloud np; Strong “questionnaires”). In doing so, Native Americans satirically resisted being understood within non-Native terms of thankfulness. The history of colonial relations between Native and non-Native Americans had begun with this day, and Indians emphasized that they would not perform that they were “thankful.”

As discussed in Chapter 2, reimagined relations between colonizer and colonized were realized through support and aid pointedly aimed at maintaining the island community one of Indians. This shared understanding between Indian and non-Native was important, as S. Smith points out, because there was a “historical tradition” of non-Natives subsuming and overwriting

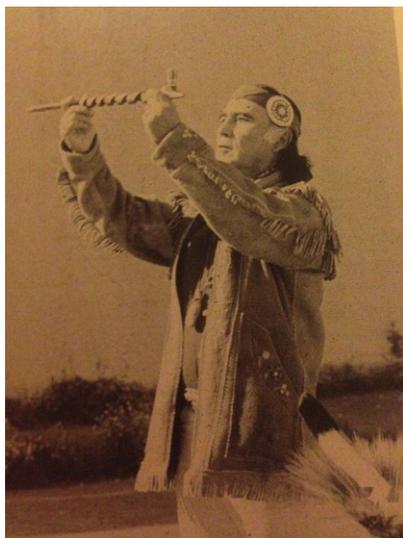


Figure 3.1: *Passing the Pipe*

Indian projects (9). Alcatraz, therefore, had to remain *Indian*, because Indian Land could only exist outside of the problematic colonial structures that the Indians of All Tribes were resisting. Losing Indian Land had been historically traumatizing and damaging to Native communities, and as Cree musician Buffy Sainte-Marie pointed out, no matter how supportive white Americans were to the Alcatraz movement, they “could never be real Indians” and thus could “never understand” colonial trauma (qtd. in S. Smith 81).

That the non-Native supporters of the occupation were

willing to respect this imperative was, in itself, represented an important moment in the reimagining of the relationship of Native peoples to society at large.

Thanksgiving Day offered – no matter what it was called – a significant moment for Native assembly and community building; coming together to celebrate and teach cultural traditions, such as pipe smoking and drumming, Fortunate Eagle says, was so exciting that people came “From Alaska to South America, the north and south, the east and west coasts” (*Alcatraz!* 84). Blue Cloud wrote that Thanksgiving marked the occupiers’ “urge to share a cultural identity,” and that through gathering together in song and dance the Indians of All Tribes were able to partake in “subtle political statements of cultural unity and affirmation” (in *not an Island* 23-24). Different nations and different people were beginning to come together on Alcatraz Island, and in a way that had never been realized before, an Indian community was coming together to share in Indian ritual tradition. Such pride, publically celebrated in such a way, would have been impossible without physically controlling Alcatraz in a way that Indians did not control land anywhere else in America.

On November 27, Thanksgiving Day, Native Americans garbed in traditional tribal outfits arrived on Alcatraz with baskets of food, drums, and gifts for those who had worked so hard to secure the island. Fortunate Eagle and Oakes had worked since dawn setting up tables, chairs, and benches in the prison’s main recreation yard, and the food promised by the



Figure 3.2: *UnThanksgiving*

San Francisco restaurant arrived on boats with the first set of Native visitors. As more and more Indians – along with selected journalists and photographers, who had demonstrated their support of the occupation through their work – began to arrive, Indians began to play drums and dance in large circles in the yard (see figures 3.1, 3.2 & 3.3). Fortunate Eagle emotionally describes this moment:

The beat of the drum is to the Indian the beat of the heart. The playing of the drum, the dancing of moccasined feet, and the singing of our songs in our native tongues reaffirmed to us that we will survive. Considering everything that has happened to Indians over the last centuries, this affirmation is a good one. This is a day of survival, of Indian survival. (*Alcatraz!* 85)

After most had eaten, a pipe was passed around to “release all negative thoughts such as anger or



Figure 3.3: *Indian Feast*

hate” and to “mark Alcatraz as a truly united effort” (86)—to assert that despite the different tribes and communities that the men, women, and children came from, they were “all Indians under the sun, and all together in the fight for an Indian Alcatraz” (Morris *diaries* 122). As Thanksgiving came to an end and as the visitors began to depart, Morris noted that it was impossible not to become overwhelmed by the spirit of community that had blossomed among those present that day (123).

ii. Normalcy as Postcolonial Politics: (Re)building everyday Indian life on Alcatraz

Morris called Alcatraz Island a place where “it was great to be Indian!” (*diaries* 104), emphasizing the feelings of community and connectedness that continued to grow and flourish

over the weeks and months that followed the Thanksgiving Day celebrations. Alcatraz was a space captured *by* Indians *for* Indians, and the feelings of unity fostered there, demonstrated to Natives across the United States that a re-attainment of cultural pride and community was possible. Such ideas – the very existence of Alcatraz as an idea and a burgeoning movement – contradicted the colonial projects that the American government had been implementing in California (and indeed, across the country) such as reservation systems and Relocation. As previously discussed, these projects generally pointed toward an end goal of assimilating all Indians into the majority American population by slowly cutting off the resources such as clean water or food on reservations, and by making quality healthcare and education increasingly difficult to obtain.

The goals of the occupiers on Alcatraz reached beyond symbolic reversals of colonial discourse and recovery of ritual traditions; they sought to use the island, now claimed as Indian Land outside the jurisdiction of the colonial state, as a site to establish uniquely Indian ways of everyday life. As contemporary historian Kim Anderson acknowledges, colonialism disrupted normal structures of Indian life by both alienating peoples from their land and removing them from their families (113); Rosalind Ing furthers Anderson's assertion by pointing out the intergenerational effects of such familial and community disruptions, using residential schools (the Canadian equivalent of the US Indian Boarding School) as an example. Ing finds that many residential school survivors feel disconnected from their mothers – and thus their Native heritage – because they were removed from their traditional lands at a young age. Therefore, cycles of “shame and emotional deprivation” trickled into the lives of new generations, who would never know the “proud of thriving cultures they came from before European settlement” (122). The emphasis placed upon seemingly-mundane details of community organization and everyday life

in the testimonies of many occupiers is not a simple curiosity, but reveals critical insights into the way the Indians sought a restoration of Indian culture and pride – from the bottom up – and why the experience proved so transformational for those involved.

As the occupiers began to build routine and normalcy into their lives on Alcatraz, the opportunity to create a *home* – a place for displaced Indians to live and learn about themselves – became an important goal in and of itself. Robert Allen Warrior (Osage Indian) said that by New Year’s 1970, the community was an attractive location for people from all over the country who had been “hidden from their Native identity, denied it” (qtd. in *We hold the Rock-DVD*). Indeed, many archival sources indicate the importance of creating a sense of normality in day-to-day life on Alcatraz, a location that despite being a site of political activism, was also a place for Indians to feel safe and secure (“questionnaires”). The bulk of living space on the island had been designed for the housing of prisoners, and not for the enjoyment of civilians and families from all walks of life. But because there were so many Indians, available prison guard housing would clearly be insufficient for permanent needs. Morris attests that this problem was ultimately solved by “tak[ing] over the main cellblock,” turning what were once the dark and dingy homes of criminals into apartments (*diaries* 100). Blue Cloud also speaks to the need for more housing than the guardhouses could provide; as he described, “sleeping quarters are everywhere, each person free to decide for themselves where they will live. Solitary confinement cells, the chapel, the warden’s house and guard’s quarters are all made use of in various ways” (qtd. in *not an Island* 25). In the questionnaire she filled out for Park Rangers, Linda Rae Brown (a non-Native visitor to Alcatraz in December 1969) notes that brightly colored blankets were hung in the hallways and cells where the majority of Indians were living in an effort to cover up what were “dingy, dark, grey—white(?) [*sic.*], cold, creaky, and dank rooms.” Although a seemingly small

and insignificant detail, the addition of blankets is an example of the how Indians sought to transform the harsh conditions of the old prison into something more than a temporary camp—a true home, belonging to the island’s Indian residents.

Unlike reservations, which were designated as territory for individual Indian tribes or communities, Alcatraz Island was a place for all Indians. As Fortunate Eagle put it, “Any Indian was welcome on Alcatraz. If they chose to stay, after a week they were considered a resident” (“Urban” 57). While this inclusivity emphasized the breadth of Indian communities in need across the United States, the variety of cultures represented on Alcatraz also meant a variety of cultural needs, traditions, and beliefs needing to be catered to and respected. Blue Cloud described how this need was met by taking over larger rooms for spiritual practices, “named in bold letters of paint on the doors: POMO ROOM! DO NOT DISTURB MONOS, PRIVATE-PAIUTE, LONGHOUSE, and SIOUX ROOM” (*diaries* 107). Furthermore, despite the many



Figure 3.4: *Alcatraz Kitchens*

cultures represented on Alcatraz Island, Boatwright notes that everyone thought it important to emphasize normal, domestic routines and responsibilities—especially for the many children who had come to reside on the island with their parents (“notes” np).

Being able to express what it meant to be Indian while simultaneously expressing what

it meant to be Pomo, Sioux, or Paiute showed the children of Alcatraz that cultural differences didn’t need to be feared or sacrificed to survive.

Life on Alcatraz was communal, with responsibilities and chores being collectively and equally shared among Indian men, women, and children. Although Richard Oakes acted as leader of those on Alcatraz up until his departure from the occupation in February 1970, the majority of decisions were immediately made in a group, with open votes being held for all who had been on Alcatraz “at least one week” (Fortunate Eagle *Alcatraz!* 91).³⁰ Schools were set up in the old guards’ quarters for the children, and teaching was a shared duty between tribal elders and young Indian university students (see figures 3.4 & 3.5). The main building’s existing kitchen was set up for communal meals, and the Indians used “the steam cookers that they had used for cooking for the prisoners”

because of their size and ease (*diaries* 100). A first aid station was set up in the old solitary confinement cells and manned by volunteers, with non-Native nurses and doctors coming to the island for shifts when necessary (Blue Cloud in *not an Island* 23). Unlike reservations or urban centers in the United States,



Figure 3.5: *Big Rock School*

Alcatraz presented the opportunity for an autonomous Indian community independent from non-Native governance; unlike other Indian spaces in the United States (such as reservations),

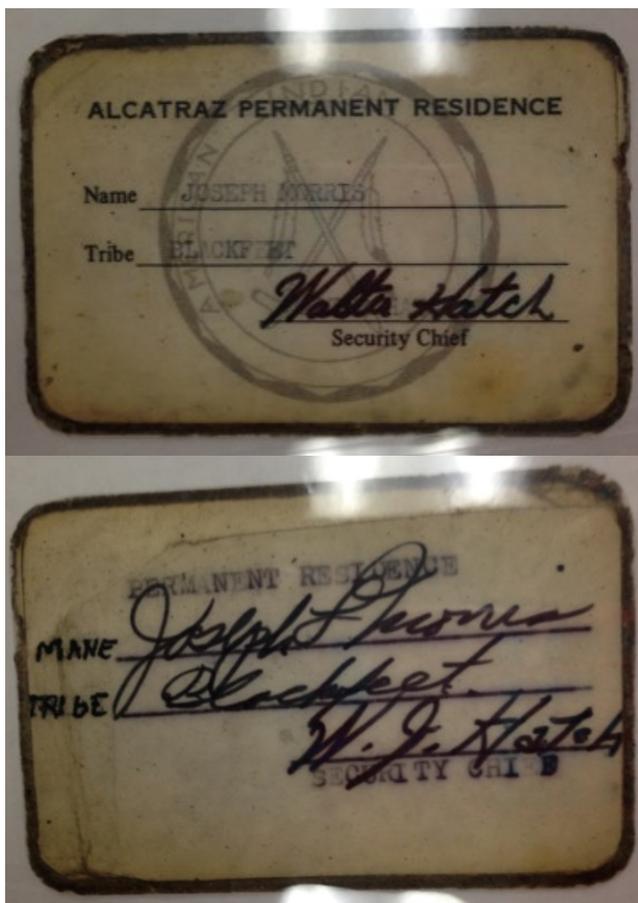
³⁰ On January 3, 1969 Oakes’s daughter, Yvonne Oakes, was playing with other children in the former prison when she slipped and fell down a flight of stairs. Ed Williams, an 11-year-old child living in the prison at the time, witnessed Yvonne slip and fall while playing tag with other Indian children (qtd. in *We Hold the Rock-DVD*). Yvonne was immediately airlifted to a hospital in San Francisco, but she never regained consciousness and died four days later. Her death hung over her father, who once the rallying leader of on-island Indians, said his heart was no longer on Alcatraz. In February, Oakes and his wife Annie Oakes left Alcatraz and the Indians of All Tribes.

Alcatraz emphasized family, community, and shared responsibility instead of segregation and separation.

Extensive descriptions of life on Alcatraz emphasize how central Indian women were in first establishing routine and then in maintaining it, despite the radical nature of the movement. In his published *diaries*, Morris adamantly states, “if it wasn’t for our Indian women doing all the work they did, keeping the Alcatraz movement alive while also making it a *home*, we would

have fallen apart” (109). Morris is not alone in his praise, and in a letter LaNada Boyer wrote to an unknown subject in March 1970, she praises Indian female security guards on Alcatraz, writing “they keep order and there was no bullshit, no drunks, no booze.”

Multiple scholars have written about the profound and lasting affects that colonial projects of community and family separation had on Indian women (Ing; Montour; Stevenson; Sunseri), and in taking ownership and leadership of reconnecting to land and community, Indians of All Tribes women in particular began to recapture the important



Figures 3.6 & 3.7: Alcatraz Residence Pass

roles that had played in many native societies before the advent of European colonialism.

Although non-Native visitors were ferrying occupiers and supplies across San Francisco Bay (as discussed in Chapter 2), they were not always welcome *on* Alcatraz Island without

special permission. Fortunate Eagle remembers the stream of visitors in the early days of the occupation, stating that “for many Indians, the trip to Alcatraz became almost a pilgrimage” (*Alcatraz!* 91). In an effort to maintain Alcatraz as a space for Native peoples, Morris began to issue special visitor passes that granted entry to Alcatraz; those who wished to reside on Alcatraz Island were also issued passes to carry (see figures 3.6 & 3.7). Such passes might have mainly functioned to keep Alcatraz a piece of Indian territory and help keep non-occupation supporters away from the island, but it also is reminiscent of many colonial projects in which Indian peoples were issued identification cards proclaiming their Indian status. This time, though, such cards were empowering, and were held with pride instead of shame. Indeed, when remembering the occupation in March 1979, Evelyn Strong says that she had to show her Island Pass to “prove I was an Indian following the movement,” and notes that to her, the pass was a “celebration of Indian identity” (“questionnaires”). This mundane administrative procedure, again, demonstrates the significance that even relatively minor inversions of colonial tactics could have for Indians living on Alcatraz. When employed in order to maintain the island as an Indian space, the tools of the colonial state could be “re-storied” to emphasize strength and pride instead of weakness and shame.

Despite efforts to maintain the island as an Indian space, relationships that had been forged with press members and journalists like Findley needed to be maintained; keeping the events of the occupation on the front page of newspapers was vital, both to encourage continued mainland support, and to press home ongoing demands of the government to formally declare Alcatraz Island as Indian Territory. As Morris points out, having an audience interested in the Indians of All Tribes’s purposes in claiming Alcatraz Island provided a key opportunity for the Native Americans to reshape the way that non-Native peoples understood and evaluated the

history of Indigenous relations in the United States (“unpublished” np). Thus media passes were issued to journalists and members of the press whom Oakes, Fortunate Eagle, or Morris approved as supporters of the movement. These press passes were, as described by Findley in his personal notes, similar to those that Indians on Alcatraz carried; the obvious difference being, of course, that press passes only allowed visitation during daylight hours and with Indian escorts, while Native Americans were free to come and go as they pleased. As much as the occupation of Alcatraz Island generated changes in relations between Indians and non-Indians, it was important to the Indians of All Tribes for the island itself needed to remain a space for *Native* peoples.

Over the years, a remarkable number of people have taken time to recollect and preserve their experiences of everyday life on Alcatraz Island, underscoring how important it was to rebuild Indian community through rebuilding Indian ways of life. Mundane details, such as where pots were stored in the kitchen or which children went to school where, have been carefully recalled, highlighting how when given a physical location, forms of community and identity arose out of everyday life. Land was, therefore, just as central to community building as renewing cultural pride and relearning spiritual traditions, for without a space free from the colonial societal structures, these methods and manners could not have been realized. Alcatraz was such a space, functioning to meet the physical needs of those residing there while simultaneously allowing Indian occupiers to rediscover what Indian life truly meant.

Alcatraz Island was not just important for Indian movements as a symbol and source of visibility, but because life – both ritual celebrations and everyday routines – allowed residents to reconnect with their own Indianness. The occupiers re-learned that it was possible, and profoundly meaningful, to live their lives openly and proudly as *Indians*. It was this lesson, born

of the physical location and the people that lived there, that rippled outward into communities around the world when former occupiers returned home. Community building, both in terms of establishing a physical group of Native peoples in a specific space, and in terms of engaging in acts that were centered in building relationships among Native peoples, energized Indians in being proud – not ashamed – of Indian heritage.

Back in October, 1969, Fortunate Eagle had predicted that “waves of protest would spread outward from the pebble that we threw into the San Francisco Bay”; these were those “waves,” and as he had hoped they were “reach[ing] national Indian communit[ies]” long before the occupation had come to the end (*Alcatraz!* 72). Occupiers began to slowly leave the island throughout 1970 and 1971, some because of external commitments such as school or work, but more to join up with radical Indian demonstrations on other sites of traditional Indian Territory. Such activist projects were directly inspired and activated by occupiers’ experiences on Alcatraz, experiences that ignited in them a desire to construct more of these Indian-centered spaces across the country.

CONCLUSION

“Alcatraz, the idea, lives.”

Alcatraz meant finding a whole. It was finding a community. It was finding yourself.
DENISE QUITQUIT

Every important chapter in Indian history has ended with the removal of our people from the land, but life will and must go on. Our children need us.
ADAM FORTUNATE EAGLE

On July 11, 1971, a contingent of Coast Guard officials and federal officers arrived on Alcatraz Island, and removed the last 15 Indians of All Tribes members residing there. As key leadership figures left the occupation for their families, and student activists took up new causes across the West Coast, numbers on the island had dwindled to only those activists with nowhere else to go. When faced with removal, Adam Fortunate Eagle and Joseph “Indian Joe” Morris both write that the occupiers left peacefully, and photographs show them signaling victory despite the clear loss of the Indian Land (*Alcatraz!* 156; *diaries* 198). All that had been achieved leading up to and during the 19 months on Alcatraz had been a victory, and even though they failed to maintain hold over the land, the Indians had reason to celebrate.

The lasting effects of colonialism on Native American communities were, of course, too large to be solved on only one island. In hindsight, Fortunate Eagle admits that it was an “idealistic and romantic notion that all Indian problems could be fixed on Alcatraz” (*Alcatraz!* 91), but that summer the Indians of All Tribes also stated, “[t]he occupation of this island has seen the beginning of a unity between Indian tribes” (*not an Island* np). Alcatraz Island provided a space where new collective and personal understandings of what it meant to be Indian could be established, and for Native peoples to come together with the purpose of creating a better, sustainable future for themselves and their communities. The practices of community building

and the experiences of Native pride that had occurred drastically altered the way that Native Americans perceived themselves and a postcolonial world.

Concrete experiences on Alcatraz influenced the trajectory of many activists' lives. Vine Deloria Jr. would become one of the most recognizable names in American Native studies, and LaNada Boyer would gain her doctorate – and then popularity – in the field of political science in 1999. Many more occupiers would influence the course of Native/non-Native relations through scholarship, academia, politics, and journalism, bringing to bear experiences of the Alcatraz community while advocating for societal change. The occupiers of Alcatraz may not have ultimately won a deed to the land, but subsequent occupations and rallies across the United States were inspired by their work and have achieved more for Native Americans than was thought possible prior to 1969. In this way, Alcatraz became symbolic, for the occupation's place in Native history is a place of reclaimed pride and agency. More than a symbol, however, the real community that emerged taught its members how to embrace Indian identities and lifestyles in the contemporary world, knowledge they took home when they left the island.

In this regard, perhaps it was best that the occupation of Alcatraz was a temporary – not a permanent – endeavor. By the time officials removed the last Indians from Alcatraz, social conditions mimicking those on reservations were beginning to emerge, such as alcoholism and substance abuse. Fighting between younger and older activists had caused many families to move out of the prison and into other Indian communities created by the inspiring image of an Indian Alcatraz. As Indians left the island they understood how important realizing Indian life on Indian terms had been, and sought to affect change in other spaces and in other communities. Upon hearing that the final occupiers on Alcatraz had been removed, Fortunate Eagle wryly commented that it was fitting, for “[e]very important chapter in Indian history has ended with the

removal of our people from the land, but life will and must go on. Our children need us.”

(*Alcatraz!* 136). If the community on Alcatraz proved ultimately transient, its ideas and practices spread and ultimately transcended what could be achieved on one inhospitable island.

Furthermore, the relationships cultivated between non-Native groups and the Indians of All Tribes would impact and aid later Red Power and American Indian Movement projects of resistance. Alcatraz had, first and foremost, been important because of the physical space it provided for an Indian community to flourish; however it also held iconic moments of re-storied colonial scenarios, of reimagined relationships between white and Native, between Indian and American. Today, Native Americans continue to fight for their rights to land, to natural resources, and to compensation for the centuries of mistreatment suffered. Although much work remains in the way of Native/non-Native relations in North America, and between Indian communities and government parties in the United States, the occupation of Alcatraz Island shows that support can and will be garnered for Indian projects. Now, as before, broad Native participation and community building remain at the center of resistance efforts in Indian movements. As the Indians of All Tribes state at the beginning of *Alcatraz is Not an Island*, “We liberated Alcatraz for everyone [...] We have taken the first step, will you now join us?” (11).

APPENDIX: *Alcatraz Proclamation, full text*

TO THE GREAT WHITE FATHER AND HIS PEOPLE, 1969

We, the native Americans, re-claim the land known as Alcatraz Island in the name of all American Indians by right of discovery. We wish to be fair and honorable in our dealings with the Caucasian inhabitants of this land, and hereby offer the following treaty: We will purchase said Alcatraz Island for 24 dollars in glass beads and red cloth, a precedent set by the white man's purchase of a similar island about 300 years ago. We know that \$24 in trade goods for these sixteen acres is more than was paid when Manhattan Island was sold, but we know that land values have risen over the years. Our offer of \$1.24 per acre is greater than the 47 cents per acre the white men are now paying the California Indians for their land. We will give to the inhabitants of this land a portion of that land for their own, to be held in trust by the American Indian Government for as long as the sun shall rise and the rivers go down to the sea -- to be administered by the Bureau of Caucasian Affairs (BCA). We will further guide the inhabitants in the proper way of living. We will offer them our religion, our education, our life-ways, in order to help them achieve our level of civilization and thus raise them and all their white brothers up from their savage and unhappy state. We offer this treaty in good faith and wish to be fair and honorable in our dealings with all white men. We feel that this so-called Alcatraz Island is more than suitable as an Indian Reservation, as determined by the white man's own standards.

By this we mean that this place resembles most Indian reservations, in that:

1. It is isolated from modern facilities, and without adequate means of transportation.
2. It has no fresh running water.
3. The sanitation facilities are inadequate.
4. There are no oil or mineral rights.
5. There is no industry and so unemployment is very great.
6. There are no health care facilities.
7. The soil is rocky and non-productive and the land does not support game.
8. There are no educational facilities.
9. The population has always been held as prisoners and kept dependent upon others.

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

INDIANS OF ALL TRIBES

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