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A Journey to Freedom: The Life of Richard Oakes, 1942-1972

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A JOURNEY TO FREEDOM: THE LIFE OF RICHARD OAKES, 1942-1972

BY

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DISSERTATION

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DEDICATION

For my daughter, Kelie Nokisi Blansett.

May you forever follow your heart, no matter what obstacles are placed before you. Be strong, honorable, and kind. Always remember—I love you and I am extremely proud to be your dad.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

From a very young age and throughout my adulthood my Grandmother, Ethel Rank, captivated all of my attention with her wonderful gift for storytelling. Every day she strove to transport all of her grandchildren on fantastic intellectual journeys. Oral histories about her life were filled to the brim with adventure and life, from vaudeville shows to hobo, to surviving the Great Depression and World War II. She conveyed in her own narrative a rich mastery for the power and emotion of storytelling. Beyond her many stories my Grandmother was a remarkable woman, a matriarch who held her family together with minimal resources through some of the toughest of times. It is an understatement to refer to her as simply an amazing woman or role model. It was her strong will, guidance, and belief in my abilities that encouraged me to believe that I could accomplish anything in life. Of all of her greatest gifts the most significant was the ability to dream. My other grandmother, Zula ―Arlene" Bailey, was a gifted quilter who sewed her stories into brilliant star patterns, bear paws, fans, and complex geometrical designs. The hours of patience she placed with every thread and every cut, allowed me to gain a gradual appreciation for her as a sculptor of cloth—a true folk artist. I continue to cherish the laughter, smiles, and humble ways of my grandmothers.

I wish to first thank my family for their unwavering support of me during my years in graduate school. Like my grandmothers, laughter was a remedy for my grandfathers as well. My Grandfather, Wright Rank, was a compassionate yet stern man, who taught the art of patience, relaxation, and ingenuity while on those long fishing trips.

While I never met my dad‘s father, Millard Blansett, I was told that he was a rather quiet man who made his living both growing and picking cotton in the Mississippi Delta.

Despite coming of age during Jim Crow my father, Jewel Blansett, persevered in the midst of overwhelming obstacles he experienced as a young American Indian man. In ways which I will never fully know or understand, he developed a unique outlook on life during his years living in the southern Ozarks. He always made sure that his sons knew our heritage as Cherokee descendents. My mother, Connie Rank, grew up in Sedalia, a well-known Missouri town labeled as the birthplace for ragtime and Scott Joplin, located somewhere between cattle cars, juke joints, and state fairs. My mother dreamed of becoming a writer, and she, like her own mother, was inspired by the power of story. My parents understood the value of a college education, for in their own lifetimes it was one dream that was not obtainable. From a very young age they pushed their children to strive for success in all of our educational pursuits. I wish to thank both of them for the many valuable life lesions and survival skills they imparted on me, and for all that they continue to do for me.

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opportunity that allowed me to research and write about Richard Oakes. Professor Szasz's lectures were masterful and complete with episodes of high storytelling. I hope to impart his writing and gift for teaching to my own students one day. Dr. Szasz, you will always be missed. Although I took a brief break between my M.A. and Ph.D. programs, both Margaret and Ferenc maintained constant communication with me. They always encouraged me to return and finish what I had started. For all of their years of advice, editing, teaching, support, and guidance, I am eternally grateful—Thank you!

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Several gifted and extremely talented scholars impacted my course of study at UNM. I am thankful for professors Robert Kern, Sam Truett, Virginia Scharff, Jason Scott Smith, Durwood Ball, Andrew K. Sandoval-Strausz, Mel Yazawa, Charlie Steen, Elizabeth Hutchinson, Judy Bieber, Barbara Reyes, Richard Etulian, Manuel García y

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No one can survive graduate school without a wonderful support group of fellow graduate students to lean on. I have formed lifelong friendships with Alden Bigman, Adam Kane, Lincoln Bramwell, Elaine Nelson, B. Erin Cole, Sarah Grossman, Meg Frisbee, Shawn Wiemann, Jason Strykowski, Sonia Dickey, Colin Snider, Jim Ersfeld, Heather Hawkins, Susan Schuurman, Donna Peterson, Rebecca Vanucci-St George, Jerry Wallace, Brian Luna Lucero, Jacobo Baca, Jim Ersfeld, Edward Jolie, Robin Walden, Ben Reed, Brandon Morgan, Abe Santillanes, Richard Sanchez, Brian Stauffer, Chris Steinke, Gabe Schrager, Bryan Turo, Becky Ellis, Julian Dobson, Maurice Crandall,

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When my brothers, Keith Blansett and Kevin Blansett, graduated from high school and college, they instilled in me the firm belief that I could also earn my college degree. As my older brothers, they continue to look out for me, blazing new trails in their life pursuits. I have always looked up to them and appreciate all of their advice, guidance, and support. Thanks also to Holly Blansett, Neal Blansett, Ryan Blansett, Anastasia Blansett, Caleb Blansett, and Josiah Blansett, for always being supportive of my dreams. I also want to express my deepest thanks to my other family—the Nelsons—Gayle and Angie Nelson, Deanna Nelson, Matt and Kristen Kelley, Josiah, and Bryna. You have all been so welcoming to me and immediately treated me like a son, brother, and uncle. Thank you for all that you do to enrich my life.

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day, if you read this, you will understand just how much you mean to me. That the stories bound up in this dissertation may inspire you to do great and wonderful things with your life. Thank you, a million times over, for all of your love, patience, and understanding.

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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B.A. HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI, 1997
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ABSTRACT

―A Journey to Freedom: The Life of Richard Oakes 1942-1972," is the story of Indigenous leader and activist Richard Oakes, and focuses on the climax of the national movement toward Native self-determination and freedom. ―A Journey to Freedom" investigates the intersections of place, space, identity, and socio/political coalitions within the Red Power movement. Oakes' leadership was influential in the Alcatraz (1969) and Fort Lawton (1970) takeovers, as well as Pit River's resistance to PG&E Corporation's illegal land use. Each successive takeover pushed for land rights, treaty rights, and the development of ecological centers that forged links between reservation and urban spaces. Oakes' political activism also influenced other organizations such as the Black Panthers, Brown Berets, Atzlan, and the national environmental movement. The assassination of Richard Oakes led to the Trail of Broken Treaties march on Washington D.C. and ultimately resulted in the passage of federal self-determination legislation.

I use two theoretical models to construct an ―alternative" twentieth-century history: what I define as ―Intertribalism" and the advent of an ―Indian City." While the term ―Pan-Indian" implies the Ethnic-American destruction of Tribal identity, Intertribalism emphasizes the study of coalitions between Tribes. Native history, within this context, is transnational history. Intertribalism, I argue, emerged as a central force of American Indian Nationalism. Intertribalism is also connected to Indian Cities. Unlike traditional ethnic neighborhoods, these cities were comprised of institutions (Indian Centers, Indian bars, health centers, businesses, churches, and a host of others) that politicized a highly migrant and dispersed urban population. ―A Journey to Freedom" is the first urban comparative study to examine the construct of Indian Cities within New York, San Francisco, and Seattle.

Oakes' unique life provides an alternative narrative to previous scholarship that placed the American Indian Movement as the lone icon of Red Power. My dissertation counters this representation by emphasizing the multiple roles of community, ideology, identity, and nationalism. ―A Journey to Freedom," moves beyond an examination of contemporary Native leadership, and exposes the deep and diverse foundations of the larger Red Power movement that informs contemporary definitions of Native politics and sovereignty.

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INTRODUCTION

Let me be a free man—free to travel, free to stop, free to work, free to trade where I choose, free to choose my own teachers, free to follow the religion of my fathers, free to think and talk and act for myself…

(Chief Joseph, Nez Perce 1879)

―A Journey to Freedom" is the first critical biography to assess the life of Richard Oakes, American Indigenous leader and activist. The story of Oakes (―Ranoies" meaning ―A Big Man" in Mohawk) symbolizes the climax of the nationwide movement toward Native American self-determination and freedom. The dissertation opens with the famed words of Nez Perce leader Chief Joseph who led a concerted campaign to reclaim Nez Perce traditional lands in the Wallowa Valley in the American Columbia River Plateau. This simple and powerful quote, stated almost a century before Richard Oakes appeared, epitomized an early Indigenous definition of freedom. Taken literally, Chief Joseph's statement exposes the rich layers of Indigenous sovereignty that are connected through land, Nation, community, family, and individual.

Throughout my extensive research on Red Power, I have noticed how infrequently scholars discuss or acknowledge American Indian freedom. How do we define freedom as a construct for understanding modern Native politics and peoples? What does it mean to be truly free as Indigenous peoples? Is it simply throwing off the colonial yoke, destroying the colonizer/colonized theoretic, decolonizing institutions and peoples, or is a greater meaning embedded within this simple term freedom? How do Native peoples, as distinct representatives from over 500 Nations, define freedom? This dissertation attempts to move beyond traditional binary debates to unlock the multifaceted historical roots that inform contemporary definitions of Tribal sovereignty.

Through the medium of biography, ―A Journey to Freedom" identifies the deep ideological foundations of twentieth-century Red Power, Native Nationalism, self-determination, and freedom.

Definition and historiography are necessary for any historical study that attempts to identify the origins of Red Power and Native self-determination. The genesis of Red Power is not exclusive to any one individual or organization, rather, as a movement, it was a shared experience that emerged in the early 1960s. As a political ideal, Red Power is often used as a synonym for self-determination and nationalism of the early twentieth century. Self-determination was born out of the Great War idealism of Woodrow Wilson, who advocated for a League of Nations, as spelled out in his ―Fourteen Points" doctrine. In title five of the ―Fourteen Points," Wilson urged world powers to promote self-determination and divest themselves of their colonial states. Self-determination under Wilson's doctrine called for the gradual right of self governance and sovereignty for all nations currently under colonial powers. A controversial message, self-determination sparked a rise in nationalism throughout the world, nationalism defined as the overthrow of a colonial or foreign power.[1]

Native Nationalism, as Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred argues in his *Heeding the Voices of Our Ancestors*, lies outside the traditional meaning ascribed to the term

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[1] Beyond the original ―Fourteen Points" document are several articles that attempt to define self-determination and nationalism. In 1957, Marshall E. Dimock examined ―The New Freedom" that Wilson referred to in his humanitarian goal to promote anti-colonialism, concluding that this goal dismantled the acceptance of the League of Nations by Congress. Marshall E. Dimock, ―Woodrow Wilson as Legislative Leader," *The Journal of Politics*, 19:1 (Feb. 1957), 9. See also, Craig Calhoun, ―Nationalism and Ethnicity," *Annual Review of Sociology* 19 (1993); 213 and Ernst E. Haas, ―The Attempt to Terminate Colonialism: Acceptance of the United Nations Trusteeship System," *International Organization*, 7:1 (Feb. 1953), 2.

–nationalism." Native Nationalism, Alfred asserts, did not advocate for an overthrow of the American government for Tribal governments to gain independence. Instead, Native Nationalism promoted the historic right of Tribal governments to maintain their distinct sovereign status outside and apart from the United States. Native Nationalism, Alfred posits, has always been at the core of Native politics and is further complicated by Tribally specific or Kahnawake Nationalism. Both Native and Tribally specific forms of nationalism create independent and dependent constructs throughout Indian Country. For example, the 1940s fight against Kinzua Dam led by the Seneca Nation in New York employed a Tribally specific form of Nationalism as defined by the Seneca Nation. Yet, the Seneca nationalist efforts also created a historical, political, and legal precedent that has altered Native Nationalism for Indian Country. Finally, *Heeding the Voices of Our Ancestors* draws a distinction between Native Nationalism and ethno-nationalism. The former term is typically used to describe such movements as Marcus Garvey's form of Black Nationalism (lacking sovereignty). Thus, ethno-nationalism misrepresents Native history and is problematic for two reasons: the terminology assumes an ethnic status and racial identity for American Indians and it ignores the preexistence of Native sovereignty. Put more simply, most Native Nations are not seeking to acquire sovereignty, as implied with ethno-nationalism; rather a majority of Tribes already exist as treaty Nations actively maintaining their political sovereignty. Of course, the issues with –ethno-nationalism" become far more diverse when applied to federally recognized, state recognized, and non-recognized Tribes. Clearly the unique status of Native Nations also deserves an equally unique nationalist terminology. Native Nationalism is a late 19th and 20th century movement that sponsored the rise of Red Power during the 1960s.

Red Power holds a rich historical definition all its own. A movement born out of Native Nationalism, Red Power sponsored Intertribal direct action for greater self-determination and promoted Indian control and autonomy over Indian institutions, policies, lands, and jurisdictions. Red Power was also about land reclamation and restoration of traditional lands and treaty rights; it was an Intertribal movement born out of but not entirely separate from Native Nationalism. Red Power as a historical subfield of American Indian history has received sparse attention but holds wonderful potential to inspire new historical scholarship and debates. Literary journalist Stan Steiner's *The New Indians* was the first contemporary study to try to unravel the significance of Red Power politics. In 1968, Steiner's singular narrative pulled popular press attention to the Fish-ins of the Pacific Northwest and the young activists within the National Indian Youth Council; it also documented the struggles of several urban Indian communities. Following Steiner's game changing commentary, one year later, Standing Rock Lakota, Vine Deloria, Jr., published *Custer Died for your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, and simultaneously First Nations Cree author Harold Cardinal published *The Unjust Society.* Both Deloria and Cardinal highlighted the transnational scope of Red Power.[2]

Beyond geopolitical borders between Canada and the United States, Indigenous authors Deloria and Cardinal issued a call for a reawakening of Indian culture and politics and reforms at the Tribal and federal level. Vine Deloria, Jr., continued to record and critique the progress of Red Power through an immense collection of works: *We Talk, You Listen* (1970), *Of Utmost Good Faith* (1971), *God is Red* (1973), *Behind the Trail of*

[2] In 1976, Stan Steiner dedicated book , *The Vanishing White Man* to Richard Oakes and other Native activists. Clearly, Oakes life had served to influence Steiner's evaluation of Red Power by the mid 1970s.

Broken Treaties (1974), *The Indian Affair* (1974), and *Indians of the Pacific Northwest* (1977), just to name a few. Complementing Deloria's epic and voluminous work on Red Power, in 1971, historian Alvin M. Josephy published *Red Power*, mainly a reprinting of primary documents that held the philosophical and ideological core of Red Power. Later, Josephy's *Now That the Buffalo"s Gone*(1982) offered yet another rich historical study that documented the struggle ranging from Pyramid Lake in the Great Basin to the Fish-ins in the Pacific Northwest. Salish author, historian, and anthropologist D'Arcy McNickle, in his 1973 book *Native American Tribalism*, argued that, "Indian nationalism, pan-Indianism, Red Power…indicate a growing sense of shared problems, shared goals, and a shared heritage….the new voices avow…will have to contend with an integrating tribal people, not with isolated individuals lost in anonymity."[3] McNickle's words shadowed the true nature of Red Power as an Intertribal movement. Together, Steiner, Deloria, Cardinal, Josephy, and McNickle carved out the foundational and definitional constructs of Red Power as: direct action, land reclamation, treaty rights, federal and Tribal reform, cultural renewal, Indian education, sovereignty, self-determination, and an Intertribalism that linked reservation, urban, and rural populations.

In March of 1970, the limitless possibilities attached to Red Power excited scholars and Tribal leaders alike who created the First Convocation of American Indian Scholars at Princeton University. Through a series of meetings, roundtables, and conference papers, these scholars crafted a theoretical lens for Red Power. Proceedings from this convocation were subsequently published by the Indian Historian Press, based

[3] Darcy McNickle, *Native American Tribalism: Indian Survivals and Renewals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 170.

out of San Francisco, and edited by famed academic couple Rupert (Cahuilla) and Jeannette Costo (Eastern Cherokee). Lakota anthropologist Bea Medicine's convocation speech entitled, "Red Power: Real or Potential," underscored the importance of Intertribalism:

> Pan-Indian forces which had been prevailing for some time had formed into feelings of 'inter-tribalness' in one organization on a national scale...transcending tribalness in existing organizations…in my estimation, [is] a cornerstone for this movement….We have only to look into the diverse tribal histories of our people to point out instances of wisdom and astuteness…the largest dimension of the power problem is the hard fact that we cannot achieve the goal of equal opportunity for all unless we can accept a significant redistribution of power in all aspects of our social, political, economic, and intellectual, as well as our legal existence.[4]

Medicine's speech echoed the core principals of Red Power—Intertribalism, reform, and sacrifice. Most importantly, Medicine suggests a redistribution of power; federal reform meant little without Tribal reform and the strength to accept total change. Red Power's toughest challenge was discovering how to sponsor an Intertribal base born out of Native logic and unity.

Militancy emerged as the most popular stereotype for Red Power, yet violent resistance never served as a founding principal for Red Power organizations, leadership, or strategy. The militancy label was consistently touted by conservative forces in America that intended to discredit the varied foundations of Red Power. Despite a non-violent origin the Red Power politics that emerged in the 1960s—the BIA takeover in 1972 and the standoff at Wounded Knee between the Independent Oglala Nation and the US military in 1973—encouraged the media to cast a violent shadow over all Red Power

[4] Rupert and Jannette Henry Costo, *Indian Voices: The First Convocation of American Indian Scholars* (San Francisco: The Indian Historian Press, 1970), 299-307.

movements. Likewise, images of Black Panthers marching in military formations with unloaded guns in front of California‘s Capitol, the terror bombing of the Weatherman Underground, and gun battles with Brown Berets fueled further misperceptions of Red Power. Irrevocably linked with other power movements of the time, Red Power developed outside these movements and forged its own unique nationalism that successfully changed Federal Indian Policy and promoted modern Tribal sovereignty.

By 2005, professor of law Charles Wilkinson had written *Blood Struggle: The Rise of Modern Indian Nations*, an overview of the entire Native Nationalism and Red Power movement. Richard Oakes‘ brief four-page cameo appearance follows a standard interpretation and narrative. Whereas new studies like historian Akim D. Reinhardt‘s *Ruling Pine Ridge: Oglala Lakota Politics From the IRA to Wounded Knee* (2007) deconstructs Federal Indian Policy and the true role the Oglala Civil Rights Association played in crafting the Wounded Knee takeover of 1973. Reinhardt‘s work is not based upon devaluation of the American Indian Movement but rather seeks to complicate the historical narrative regarding Red Power.

The edited anthology by Daniel M. Cobb and Loretta Fowler *Beyond Red Power* (2007) identifies the wider field of Red Power scholarship that moves beyond the American Indian Movement. This collection of essays challenges the stereotypical timeline of Red Power ideology, suggesting its roots lie in the early twentieth century struggle. By shifting the timeline for the introduction of Red Power, the anthology falls short on definition. Cobb and Fowler‘s work documents the rise of Native Nationalism, skips over a fervent look at Red Power and jumps to a contemporary portrait of Native sovereignty. In his *Native American Activism in the Cold War Era* (2008), Cobb builds

upon the premise from *Beyond Red Power*. This latest book is a bold and engaging historical study of several social movements, including the National Congress of American Indians, National Indian Youth Council, and the Poor Peoples Campaign, just to name a few. In this study Cobb moves away from Red Power by adopting the term Native American Activism. Both of these collections support my earlier conclusions that articulate a difference between Native Nationalism and Red Power.

Previous scholarship has often limited Oakes' activism in the movement to a minor role in the 1969 Indian occupation of Alcatraz Island. Most of the popular literature on this event erroneously portrays it as a "militant" operation led by the American Indian Movement (AIM). Gary Donaldson's *The Making of Modern America* (2009), a popular undergraduate textbook used in introductory history courses, claims that, "In 1969, eighty members of AIM, chanting "Red Power," snatched control of Alcatraz Island."[5] Donaldson was neither the first, nor the last scholar to credit AIM with

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[5] Gary A. Donaldson. *The Making of Modern America: The Nation From 1945 to the Present* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009), 178. "In November 1969, a small group of activists from the American Indian Movement (AIM) occupied Alcatraz Island…" William H. Chafe, Harvard Sitkoff, and Beth Bailey, *A History of Our Time: Readings on Postwar America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008),159; "Important AIM actions have included the 1969 takeover of Alcatraz Island…" Barry M. Pritzker, *A Native American Encyclopedia: History Culture, and Peoples*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 412; "In 1969 AIM organizers joined local Indian activists in occupying San Francisco Bay's Alcatraz Island." Robert V. Hine and John Mack Faragher, *The American West: A New Interpretive History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000),539; "…more militant members of AIM dramatized their dissatisfaction by seizing the abandoned federal prison on Alcatraz Island…" James West Davidson, Brian DeLay, Christine Leigh Heyrman, Mark H. Lytle, and Michael B. Stoff, *Nation of Nations: A Narrative History of the American Republic Volume II: Since 1865* (Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2008), 904; "The occupation of Alcatraz by American Indian Movement activists and others in 1969…" Coll Thrush, *Native Seattle: Histories From the Crossing-Over Place* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 170; "The mission of AIM was to force the dominant U.S. culture to listen and to act on

the takeover of Alcatraz. Popular travel guides such as the 2000 edition of Dorling Kindersley *Travel Guide to San Francisco* misinforms potential tourists when it proclaims that the American Indian Movement was solely responsible for the Alcatraz takeover. Although it has been credited by a myriad of public and historical sources, AIM was not the spearhead for Alcatraz, nor was it the only national Indian organization that advocated Red Power. The Alcatraz takeover masterminds were largely Native college students like Richard Oakes, who helped found the community based Intertribal organization ―Indians of All Tribes." His pivotal role in the movement for self-determination exhibited a particular brand of Native leadership that exceeded far beyond the walls and tiny island of Alcatraz.

Despite the stellar efforts of Indians of All Tribes, popular culture has focused squarely on one organization, the American Indian Movement. AIM has received so much attention that even Hollywood has attempted to cash in on the glamorization of ―Red Power" politics. One of the most famous movie portrayals of Red Power was in the 1971 cult Native exploitation film *Billy Jack*. Written by actor Tom Laughlin, who also played Billy Jack in the film, audiences bore witness to Laughlin's stereotype of Red Power leadership and activism. Written shortly after and closely linked with the takeover

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Indian rights, and the organization felt that only militant action, which would attract media coverage, could effectively communicate their message. Among their first actions was the seizure and occupation of Alcatraz in San Francisco Bay…" Mark O. Sutton, Third Edition, *An Introduction to Native North America*. (Boston: Pearson Education, Inc., 2008), 370. All of these are recent examples from prominent US and scholars of American Indian history. I have selected to list only a few sources for the historiographic timeline and literature for this single error is worthy of its own manuscript. Finally the Dorling Kindersley Travel Guides, *San Francisco & Northern California* (New York: Dorling Kindersley, Inc., 2000), 82 states, ―Unoccupied until 1969, the island was seized by members of the American Indian Movement…"

of Alcatraz, Billy Jack (Cherokee) relies upon his Green Beret training to single handedly challenge anti-Indian discrimination against a countercultural Freedom School in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Laughlin made two more films based Billy Jack: *The Trial of Billy Jack* (1974) and *Billy Jack Goes to Washington* (1977). A little over ten years passed before *War Party* (1988), starring Billy Wirth, Kevin Dillon, and Dennis Banks as a Tribal Chairman was released. In this cult film, both Wirth and Dillon are hunted down and killed for the murder of two white reenactors, but not before violence tears apart their reservation. One year later, *Powwow Highway* attempted to deal with the legacy of Red Power with an all star Intertribal cast that included Gary Farmer (Oneida), John Trudell (Santee), Wes Studi (Cherokee), and A. Martinez (Blackfeet). Philbert, played by Gary Farmer, who teams up with former AIM member and Wounded Knee veteran Buddy Red Bow (A. Martinez) in his Indian car, called ―war pony," to bust Buddy's sister out of a Santa Fe, New Mexico jail. The journey that both Buddy and Philbert endure on their individual and joint quests results in a struggle between traditional/modern values and the violent aftermath of Red Power politics.

In the mid-nineties, Ted Turner sponsored the making of *Lakota Woman*, a movie based on the autobiography of Mary Crow Dog. The finale was the standoff and occupation of Wounded Knee. In the movie *Thunderheart*, a young Val Kilmer plays an FBI agent turned activist as he rediscovers his heritage. In 1995, between several movie roles, Russell Means (Oglala Lakota), a former AIM leader, coauthored his autobiography *Where White Men Fear to Tread*. As the trend continued, more autobiographies written by Richard Erdoes soon followed, including accounts of Dennis Banks, and Leonard Crow Dog. Despite all the popular attention that AIM has garnered,

Alcatraz has its own unique and rich history. Often overlooked, Alcatraz and other West Coast Native movements are significant because they reflect the initial constructs and ideology of Red Power. These less popularized movements have only recently caught the notice of a handful of scholars, yet the history behind the leaders responsible for these alternative movements remains a distant second place to the events themselves. While many Americans have heard of the Alcatraz takeover or the American Indian Movement, few know of Richard Oakes.

—A Journey to Freedom," which attempts to fill in the gaps and build upon the works left by other scholars and Oakes himself, employs extensive use of conventional and non-conventional archival materials, academic journals, documentaries, and interviews, plus Tribal, National, underground, and local newspapers. The San Francisco State University Archival department proved particularly helpful in collecting information on the advent of Native American Studies and the Student Coalition of American Natives (SCAN). The San Francisco Public library maintains the largest known collection of primary source material on the occupation of Alcatraz. Most of the records, totaling six boxes, are housed at the main library. At the University of New Mexico, the Center for Southwest Research has a treasure of invaluable documents in their Underground Newspaper Collection and the Doris Duke Oral History collection. The Underground Newspaper Collection contains almost every issue of *Akwesasne Notes*—the leading National American Indian Newspaper that emerged during the late 1960s, and the Doris Duke Collection has several key interviews with occupiers, collected during the takeover.

Along with the San Francisco archives, I have been fortunate to collect materials from the Special Collections at the University of Oklahoma, University of South Dakota, and University of Washington in Seattle. I tackled mayoral papers from Joseph Alioto in San Francisco and Wes Ulhman in Seattle. During a fellowship at the Newberry Library, I located a treasure trove of rare underground Tribal newspapers and combed through their extensive BIA Relocation Records. The Bancroft Library proved invaluable with its rare original broadcasts from Radio Free Alcatraz and interviews with Pit River Nationalist leaders. The local newspaper collection at Berkeley also yielded rich interviews and daily coverage of the trial of Richard Oakes‘ assassin Michael Oliver Morgan.

Despite these large collections, no one yet has penned a full biography of Richard Oakes, whose life story has been relegated solely to the occupation of Alcatraz. Oakes‘ involvement with this event is crucial, but the story of Alcatraz and Red Power remains incomplete without a fuller narrative. Richard Oakes‘ life was rich with complexity and controversy, which may have led some scholars to brush over the intricacies of his story. Both celebrated and vilified for his political convictions, Oakes can become a real person only through a detailed biographical and Intertribal study.

The term ―Intertribalism” advances a truly transnational history by looking at the intersection of hundreds of distinct Native individuals, communities, and cultures. I argue that previous terminologies, ranging from pan-Indian to supratribal, are misleading and fail to capture adequately the history of Red Power. The Pan-Indian theoretic began in the early twentieth century as a byproduct of the assimilation and acculturation movements sponsored by the Friends of the Indian and other Gilded Age reform organizations. This

movement sought to racialize or integrate American Indians into the larger mainstream ethnic-Americanization process. Under this cannon reformers used racialization to suppress Native Nationalism; they declared that distinct Tribal peoples belonged to a single race rather than to individual Nations. Anthropologists and other scholars coined ―pan-Indian" as a means to explain how individuals are no longer Tribal, but should be perceived as racialized as ―American Indians."

In distinct contrast to this early twentieth century terminology, Intertribalism centers on the power of place and Native nationalist definitions of shared culture that enable Native peoples to hold onto their Tribal identity and to create a political, legal, and Intertribal identity/culture as American Indians. Intertribalism emerges from a Native Nationalist construct and from the built environment (urban, reservation, and rural) that maintained Nationalism in an Intertribal space. Most importantly, Intertribalism evolves within a shared space that fosters an exchange of culture and, simultaneously, strengthens Tribalism. Native peoples do not willing give up their Tribal (political, national, and cultural connection) affiliations to become American Indian. Rather, they protect these Tribal affiliations and reinforce them within Intertribal spaces/coalitions that encourage the wholesale acceptance of an American Indian identity for the promotion of Tribal political gains. This shared connection and identity counters a pan-Indian and assimilation theoretic. Intertribal history examines the Tribal exchange of culture and politics, a space distinctly separate but not exclusive from Tribal history.

Since World War II, modern American Indian history has undergone significant historiographical and theoretical changes. While scholars of American Indian history have experimented with a host of different methods and theory, the field has focused

lately on Tribal histories. Scholars have written multiple volumes, each of which details the history of a single Native Nation: Comanche, Cherokee, Lakota, or Navajo. Intertribalism employs transnational history, moving beyond borders to push for new scholarship that explores the intersections and cross cultural exchanges between Tribes and Native peoples. Intertribalism remains the mortar of American Indian history, and it deserves further exploration. ―A Journey to Freedom" explores Intertribalism through people, organizations, institutions, nations, place, and space. A significant part of my scholarship employs Intertribalism as a component of what I define as Indian Cities.

When Richard Oakes entered San Francisco in the late 1960s, he entered an Indian City. His urban experience was defined by the institutions, structures, community, and organizations that comprised the Indian City. Created by increasing numbers of Native peoples who relocated to urban environments during the twentieth-century, each city emerged as Indian Cities, a distinctively new urban space. By the 1970s, roughly half of the total population of American Indians resided in major U.S. cities. Kiowa author N. Scott Momaday's Pulitzer Prize winning first book *House Made of Dawn* (1969) exposes a deep seated division between reservation and urban communities. Momaday's main character Abel is victimized in the city and finally leaves Los Angeles to return to the reservation, traditions, and reservation life. While Momaday's work has been heralded by literary cannons for deserved reasons, the story line created a set of popular binaries for the urban Indian experience. Somehow Indians became victims of the city, modernity and technology, while the urban landscape remains void of Tribal identity, a concrete prairie in opposition to Native traditionalism. ―A Journey to Freedom" counters this perception by revealing Native peoples actively Tribalized or Indigenized urban space and fostered

the growth of unique Indian Cities. Native residents of Indian Cities strove through Intertribalism to protect Tribal identity while politicizing an entire community of Native peoples. Within Indian Cities Intertribalism thrived and became a major stepping stone to Red Power, a shared experience between urban, reservation, and rural spaces.

The Literature

To date only two critical studies have focused exclusively on Alcatraz and Oakes' role in the takeover. Both Troy Johnson's *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island* and Robert Allen Warrior (Osage) and Paul Chaat Smith's *Like A Hurricane* appeared in 1996. Collectively, these two works have offered the most critical examinations on Alcatraz and Richard Oakes. Each study has painted a different portrait of Richard Oakes' life. Troy Johnson's *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island* provides a formulaic treatment to document the events of Alcatraz. The study combines the richness of oral history and policy with key source material derived from multiple archival collections in California. His treatment of Richard Oakes is ample, to say the least, but he often wraps Richard Oakes' leadership role in the curtain of popular politics. Although Johnson points to Oakes as a catalyst for the occupation, he is overly cautious in referring to him as a leader. In this context, Troy Johnson slips into "the generic inherent difference" argument, which assumes that Euro-American leaders are inherently different from Native leaders. Johnson argues that because Native people 'traditionally' governed by consensus, Indian Country was basically leaderless. This is a controversial statement and relies upon generalization. Although some communities did keep their leaders in check, each Nation devised its own brand of checks and balances to prevent the rise of abusive

governments. Johnson‘s amorphous premise renders Indian Country and modern Native history as ―leaderless.” He also uses the argument to demonstrate why some Indians on the island refused to call anyone a ―leader.” To accept Johnson‘s explanation is to assume that all IAT members were leaders by consensus. Johnson‘s fear of labeling Oakes a leader in the Alcatraz occupation has allowed the details of his life to remain static and often misinterpreted. Given these difficulties, biography suggests a more comprehensive approach for understanding the complex nature of Native leadership.

Similarly, Robert Warrior and Paul Chaat Smith‘s *Like A Hurricane* has certain limitations for its coverage of Alcatraz. Warrior and Smith chose to compare Alcatraz to other Native movements and thereby produced an interpretation based on contrast. Their work spans much of the Red Power years, from the creation of the National Indian Youth Council in 1961, to the emergence of Alcatraz and the subsequent rise of the American Indian Movement. Like Johnson, Warrior and Smith utilized the Alcatraz collection at the San Francisco Public Library, along with dozens of key interviews. Warrior and Smith also avoid labeling anyone as the official leader in the Alcatraz movement. Instead, *Like A Hurricane* dismantles the constructs of consensus theory. They point to the breakdown in group politics within IAT. They argue that Richard Oakes‘ title as a spokesperson became the wedge that eventually dismantled the organization. Warrior and Smith‘s treatment of Richard Oakes‘ life is noteworthy but sparse in detail outside Alcatraz itself. Their work has become increasingly important in dissolving misperceptions that shroud popular views of this time period. Like Johnson, however, their focus on the Alcatraz occupation missed opportunities to present a detailed review of Richard Oakes‘ life.

Beyond these two monumental works analyzing Alcatraz lie the few memoirs and

diaries that have appeared. In 1972, one of the first diaries published was Peter Blue Cloud‘s (Mohawk) *Alcatraz Is Not an Island*, a collection of essays and art from the *Indians of All Tribes Newsletters*. In 1992, Red Lake Anishinabe Adam Nordwall or Fortunate Eagle published his memoirs in *Alcatraz, Alcatraz!* and a subsequent edition with coauthor journalist Tim Findley called *Heart of the Rock*. In 2010, a new documentary on Nordwall‘s life, entitled *Contrary Warrior*, erroneously suggests that Nordwall organized the Alcartraz takeover. For commercial purposes, Fortunate Eagle relies on the false assumption that he was the principal organizer for the Alcatraz takeover. Refuting Nordwall, in 1998, Joe Morris (Blackfeet) published his memoir *Alcatraz Indian Occupation Diary*, describing his role in the occupation. Ironically Joe Morris‘s memoir, which was edited by Troy Johnson, specifically names Richard Oakes as the lead organizer on the Island, with no mention of Nordwall. Following the publication of his first book on Alcatraz, Johnson teamed with Duane Champagne and Joane Nagel to edit a collection of personal stories from occupiers, scholars, and journalists entitled *American Indian Activism: Alcatraz to the Longest Walk*. In 1996, Nagel published *American Indian Ethnic Renewal: Red Power and the Resurgence of Identity and Culture*, which used a non-place/space based concept termed Supratribal to explain Indian unity and Red Power. In their own unique ways each of these works provides valuable insights into the life of Richard Oakes. One of the major works I rely upon for constructing this biography is an article published in *Ramparts* shortly after Oakes‘ death in 1972. The article, written by Oakes himself, offers a brief account of his life from childhood to Alcatraz. This article is invaluable to the dissertation; it is the only known autobiography of Oakes‘ life.

Several studies in urban literature influenced the urban historiography of this biography. These include George Sanchez‘s *Becoming Mexican American*, Mary Ryan‘s *Civic Wars*, Joel Garreau‘s *Edge City*, John M. Findlay‘s *Magic Lands*, and Elijah Anderson‘s *Streetwise*. While these studies remain groundbreaking foundational works in urban history, they lack a Native voice. Instead of focusing on what was missing from the historiography, I elected to combine the theoretical principles present in urban and Native history. This melding opened up an entirely new historical dialogue that led to the advent of an Indian City.

Beyond the trope of definition, methodology and theory, ―A Journey To Freedom” attempts to produce a solid urban and Native historical account. A majority of the secondary literature written on Indian cities has been crafted by sociologists and anthropologists. In 1971, Jack O. Waddell and O. Michael Watson published *The American Indian in Urban Society,* an anthology that documents through several disciplines the Indian experience in select cities. Along the same accord, economist Alan L. Sorkin‘s *The Urban American Indian* (1978) proved extremely useful for identifying several of the key institutions that comprise the Indian City. Overviews of urban American Indian history have been written by noted historians such as Donald Fixico in *The Urban Indian Experience* and Susan Lobo and Kurt Peter‘s *American Indians and the Urban Experience*. Fixico‘s book provides a wonderful historical analysis of the urban Indian historiography from the 1960s and 1970s. It remains an invaluable study as an overview that historicizes the urban Indian experience. Lobo and Peter‘s edited anthology is a collection of essays written by historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and poets, each seeking to uncover the identity dynamics of what it means to be an Urban

Indian. While these studies offer theoretical and historiographical content, they fail to provide a concentrated historical investigation of one specific urban environment.

In his study *Native Seattle*, historian Coll Thrush provides a historical account of Indians in Seattle during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is a work of seminal value in the urban Indian historiography. Thrush explores how the city of Seattle forged and controlled its own Indian identity for economic gain, a conquest of place. His study opened up new research possibilities for my work on Seattle. Other focus studies include anthropologist Joan Weibel-Orlando's *Indian Country, L.A.* and historian James B. LaGrand's *Indian Metropolis: Native Americans in Chicago, 1945-1975*. Both Weibel-Orlando and LaGrand broke new ground by delving into the dynamics of community and consensus building within a specific city. However, specific histories of New York and San Francisco as Indian Cities are missing from the larger urban Indian historiography. Only two major works covering the politics of Red Power and the Alcatraz takeover have minimally glanced at the urban history of San Francisco—Warrior and Smith's *Like A Hurricane* and Johnson's *The Occupation of Alcatraz*. Each of these works remains crucial to our understanding of the emerging movement of Red Power in the late sixties. Yet each fails to address the San Francisco urban Indian community and its larger role in Native nationalism, Red Power, and Alcatraz. ―A Journey to Freedom" builds upon these previous works in new and exciting ways.

Chapter one is a history of two largely Mohawk Nations: Akwesasne and Kahnawake. These Tribal histories examine the northern borderlands that shaped the Indigenous background and perspectives of Richard Oakes' Iroquois community. As a nation and community, Akwesasne in particular played a vital role in cultivating

Richard‘s political ideals, values, identity, and leadership potential. Long before Richard‘s birth, Akwesasne and other Iroquois Nations were actively involved in protecting their sovereign status. Akwesasne and Iroquois leaders denounced the 1924 Citizenship Act (granted U.S. citizenship to all Native peoples) and rejected the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act (sponsored federally approved Tribal constitutions). Chapter one argues that Akwesasne Mohawks in the twentieth century remained a major epicenter for Iroquois protest and leadership.

Chapter two traces the emergence of an ‗Indian City‘ in New York and the advent of a migratory labor force from Akwesasne and Kahnawake that would, through political economy, change the city. Aspects of this political economy resonated throughout Richard‘s home life. Like his father Arthur Oakes, Richard had joined the ironworker industry by the 1950s. This had long served as a primary industry for Akwesasne and Kahnawake Mohawks, who constructed the vertical shock wave of Manhattan‘s bustling skyline. This chapter also analyzes the rise of a satellite urban Iroquois community in North Gowanus, Brooklyn that emerged from the ironworking industry. From Richard‘s early education to his surprise experience of testifying before the Indian Claims Commission hearings in the 1940s, both New York City and Akwesasne molded the early life of Richard Oakes.

Chapter three follows Richard Oakes‘ evolution from employment as an Ironworker in New York City to serving as the first coordinator of the Native American studies department at San Francisco State College during the late sixties. Crucial to this discourse is an exploration of the advent of an ―Indian City” in San Francisco. During the 1950s, several external factors influenced one of the greatest mass migrations of Native

peoples into the city; World War II, the controversial Bureau of Indian Affairs Relocation Program, and the destructive federal policy of Termination. Countering the destructive federal policy, a more populated Intertribal community reinvented the urban Americanization experiment, as thousands of individuals from different Tribal backgrounds created political coalitions that directly challenged destructive government policies.

Migrants like Richard Oakes, who typically found themselves at the bottom of the Red Ghetto in the North Mission District, strove to protect and reinforce their Tribal identities by accepting an Intertribal identity as _American Indians.' I define this process of Intertribal community building as creating an Indian City. Through the lens of biography and the life of Richard Oakes, we can gain a better understanding of this historical process.

Dramatically, Richard Oakes remains at the center of this process, as he builds networks and coalitions throughout greater San Francisco's Indian community. This chapter further explores the institutions that supported the rise of the Indian City. Richard Oakes worked as a bartender at the Indian owned Warren's Slaughter House Bar, and he was an intricate part of a community action program sponsored by the San Francisco police department (SFPD). The SFPD hired Oakes to curb violence between rival Samoan and Native American gangs in the Mission District. His rise to prominence as a highly visible community leader was reinforced by his appointment as coordinator for one of the first Native American Studies programs in the country.

Chapter four, entitled, –I'm Not Your Indian Anymore" examines Richard Oakes' meteoric rise from community leader and educator into the position of national leader.

The takeover of Alcatraz Island in November 1969, inspired over 10,000 Native peoples to visit the island over the course of the nineteen-month occupation. This chapter attempts to understand the roots of the takeover and how Richard Oakes reinvented Intertribal leadership. The narrative also highlights the rise of modern Native leadership in contrast to the leadership style of the famed Minneapolis-based American Indian Movement (founded in 1968). Oakes created a different example of Red Power leadership, a model consistently duplicated by other Native leaders.

The Intertribal organizational structure of Indians of All Tribes (IAT) represented the culmination of years of Native American community and student activism that found an expressive model in the actions of Richard Oakes. The occupation of Alcatraz forged a new Intertribal identity that redefined self-determination and Native nationalism. While Richard Oakes‘ time on the island lasted only three months, the death of his daughter Yvonne Sherd Oakes, left an immeasurable impact on the family and ultimately, the occupation.

Chapter five follows Oakes‘ involvement with Pacific Northwest fishing rights and the Fort Lawton takeover in Seattle. In 1970, after Oakes had resigned from the Alcatraz leadership, he was quickly recruited by Seattle activist Bernie Whitebear (Colville). Inspired by IAT, Whitebear had created United Indians of All Tribes (UIAT) and sponsored a similar Intertribal alliance that occupied the abandoned military post located in Seattle and known as Fort Lawton. After three attempts, UIAT secured Fort Lawton and subsequently created the Daybreak Star Center. Richard Oakes‘ leadership proved instrumental to the Fort Lawton occupation.

This chapter probes more deeply into Indian City Seattle and once again identifies the complex construction of an Indian City. Urban Indian communities formed institutions, chartered organizations, infiltrated college campuses, established business networks, and politicized entire communities; this, I argue, is Red Power. Seattle‘s brand of activism also surfaced from a vibrant localized Tribal movement known as the fish-ins. In the early 1960s, Northwest Coast and Columbia River Plateau Tribes protested the corporate and state-sponsored campaign to thwart Tribal fishing rights, long guaranteed by treaty. These particular movements, the fish-ins and Fort Lawton takeover refined and inspired Richard Oakes‘ commitment to a unique politic within Red Power. As a result, Oakes‘ political ideology shifted from a national Intertribal philosophy towards a grassroots, localized, Tribal focus on activism.

Few scholars have written about the Pit River Tribe and their desperate fight against both the National Forest Service and Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E). Chapter six begins in 1959, when Pit River refused to accept their proposed settlement from the Indian Claims Commission. The ―award” totaled a mere forty-seven cents an acre compensation for over 3.5 million acres of land in Northern California. Not only did Pit River refuse to accept the settlement, by the late 1960s, the Tribe had organized a fight to regain their ancestral lands. Coincidently, Richard Oakes‘ SFSC classmate Mickey Gimmell, was elected Tribal Chairman for Pit River, at the young age of twenty-six.

Richard Oakes, now the media savvy veteran leader of Alcatraz, molded his nationalist vision into a grassroots campaign for Pit River. Oakes organized protests on PG&E Corporation lands, dams, and parklands inside Mount Lassen National Park. The

local and state police responded with violent force against these occupations. Eventually, as Oakes‘ fame continued to grow, an attempt was made on his life during the height of the nationalist protests at Pit River.

Despite suffering paralysis on over half of his body, due to a failed assassination attempt Oakes continued to fight for Native issues in the early 1970s. Tragically, Richard Oakes had to foil several assassination attempts on his life. Besides his dramatic hospital recovery, Oakes resumed his push for land reclamations and reform.

The final chapter of *A Journey to Freedom* examines Oakes‘ participation in occupations at Pit River, Kashaya, and throughout northern California. During 1971-72, Oakes published his manifesto, which encapsulated his unique interpretation of the Red Power movement. The manifesto called for economic, political, social, legal, and cultural justice for Indian Country. Eventually, Oakes‘ fame and popularity in the Red Power movement met with tragedy. On September 20, 1972, Richard Oakes was gunned down by a YMCA camp director, Michael Oliver Morgan. For over thirty years, Oakes‘ death has been shrouded in mystery. In Morgan‘s murder trial the jury acquitted him, finding him innocent of both voluntary and involuntary manslaughter. The ―not guilty” verdict caused Indian Country, and especially the West Coast, to erupt in a protest that culminated in the Trail of Broken Treaties march on Washington, D.C. later in 1972.

Richard Oakes forged critical ideological foundations and strategies that would be mimicked nationally by many other Red Power activists and movements across Indian Country. His foresight and dedication served to inspire and ignite an entire generation of Native peoples, despite age or gender. Oakes‘ natural ability to bond quickly with others created a powerful coalition, an Intertribal movement to protect Indian rights and

promote self-determination. As an administrator and community organizer, he was influential in the strategic formation of ―Native American Studies" departments that emerged throughout the United States. His leadership was also instrumental in the Fort Lawton and Pit River takeovers in the 1970s.

Oakes influenced people both during his life and after his death. In 1972, after he was assassinated, his untimely death fueled the Trail of Broken Treaties march on Washington, D.C., and it also unified an outspoken movement rooted in self-determination ideology. Ultimately, this era of Intertribal Nationalism led to the reversal of federal termination policies and Congress‘ passage of more than twenty-six pieces of self-determination legislation. While scholars have churned out an abundance of scholarship on the Black Freedom and civil rights movement, scholarly attention to Native Nationalism or Red Power pales in comparison. ―A Journey to Freedom" attempts to remedy this historiographical gap while it complicates our historic understanding of Red Power and the Urban Indian experience.

CHAPTER ONE

AKWESASNE AND KAHNAWAKE

[Akwesasne is] a big reservation, six miles square, with three thousand people and three thousand problems. My growing up was hard, as it is for most Indians. The hopes were there the promises were there, but the means for achieving them weren't…

(Richard Oakes)

It was a crisp fall day in 1969 when Richard Oakes and others stepped onto dock number 40 in the San Francisco Bay. A crowd of reporters had gathered to witness the Indian ―takeover" of Alcatraz Island. The reporters snapped photos of Oakes holding up strips of red cloth and beads, mocking, with a smile, an attempt to purchase the Island from the government. Finally a boat was found to take the ―occupiers" to the Island. One by one, people climbed on board the *Monte Cristo* and other boats and started out. The motion of the boat sliced the rough currents, and the faces of the passengers reflected the excitement. As the winds picked up, many glanced back at the pier and the enormous crimson superstructure of the Golden Gate Bridge.

Eventually, the focus returned to the weathered concrete of the ―Rock." Dressed in blue jeans, a sweater, and his cherished pair of cowboy boots, Richard Oakes made his way to the side of the boat. Looking over at the waves and the Island, he turned to the crowd and motioned, ―Come on, Let's go. Let's get it on!" Within a few seconds, his shirt was off and his large frame disappeared into the chilled November waters, his boots still on as he swam for the land.

Oakes never looked back. He continued to swim through wave after wave. He seemed to lack any fear. The danger of being swept out to sea, or, worse yet, drowning never entered his consciousness. After two hundred and fifty yards, he was pushed in by the waves. He reached for the shore, pulling himself up on the sea-stained rocks. A lone dog approached and began to lick the fatigue and salt from his body. Richard Oakes had made a long journey, a journey to freedom.[1]

The life of Akwesasne Mohawk, Richard Oakes, is crucial to any discourse on contemporary American Indian leadership. Oakes helped organize the highly publicized ―takeovers" of Alcatraz, Fort Lawton, and Pit River. His assassination in 1972 galvanized the Trail of Broken Treaties march on Washington D.C. and it unified a movement that would usher in the era of self-determination in the mid-1970's. But Oakes's life served yet another purpose: it inspired and enlightened future generations of Native leaders. This dissertation will explore the life of Richard Oakes and illustrate how his actions reflected the unique voice of indigenous leadership within the Red Power movement of the 1960s-1970s.

Thomas Richard Oakes--(Ranoies [A Big Man or Thari hwasa tsɛ [He has strong beliefs]), better known as Richard George Oakes, was born to Arthur Oakes and Irene Foote on May 22, 1942 on the St. Regis Mohawk Reservation in New York.[2] St. Regis, also known as Akwesas ɔ:non, or ―those who live in Akwesasne, the land where the

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[1] Richard Oakes. ―Alcatraz Is Not An Island." *Ramparts*, (Dec. 1972): 38; interview with Joe Bill (Hooper Bay Eskimo) by Dennis Stanford, transcript, 5 Feb. 1970, Doris Duke Oral History Project, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, tape #458, side 1, 11.

[2] State of California. County of Sonoma. *Certification of Vital Record for Thomas Richard Oakes.* Prepared by Bernice A. Pererson, Recorder Sonoma County, California. May 15, 2001.

partridge drums," is located between the US and Canadian border, the state of New York, and along the southern Provinces of Ontario and Québec. Akwesasne or the Kanien'keha (Mohawk) Nation, meaning People of the Flint, is a sovereign Nation within the Great Iroquois Confederacy, known as the Haudenosaunee, or, "the People of the Longhouse."[3] The reservation is comprised of 28,000 acres, including several islands—the largest being Cornwall Island—within the mighty St. Lawrence River, and contains two rivers, the St. Regis and Raquette. The land holds a diverse geography accented by rolling hills and dense foliage that blend into a center of fertile lowlands containing several water inlets or marshlands. Akwesasne is split by state highway 37 between the New York towns of Massena to the west and Malone to the east. South of Akwesasne are the lush green Adirondack Mountains. To the north Akwesasne extends into the Canadian Provinces of Ontario and Quebec.

Farther east on the Canadian side is Akwesasne's "sister" community, Kahnawake, meaning "on the rapids." Kahnawake Reserve was formerly called Caughnawaga, an Anglicized and mispronounced title bestowed upon the Tribe. The 12,000 acre Reserve is also located across the St. Lawrence River from the booming

[3] For the purpose of simplification I will use the Akwesasne to refer collectively to both the Canadian and US sides of the Nation. The Iroquois Confederacy or Longhouse is comprised of six nations the Onieda, Seneca, Tuscarora, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Mohawk Nations. For a more detailed assessment of the formation of the Confederacy please consult the works of Daniel K. Richter. *The Ordeal of the Long-house: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992) 1-284, and Barbara Barnes Ed., *Traditional Teachings*. (Cornwall Island, Ontario: North American Indian Travelling College, 1984) 1-101.

Canadian metropolis of Montreal, in the Québec Province.[4] The community, as its meaning suggests, is in every aspect tied to the St. Lawrence River through economy, culture, socialization, and politics. For hundreds of years its uninhibited flow served as the life blood and center for the Nation. The geographic division between the two communities occurred in the mid 1700s, when the French established a separate Oswegatchie Mission at Akwesasne to relieve the overcrowded Caughnawaga Mission.[5] While these Nations are both predominantly Mohawk, their mission history points to an Intertribal past, as both communities were also comprised of minority populations of French, British, Abanaki, Onondaga, and other Iroquoian Nations. [6] Growing up in the Iroquois Confederacy impressed upon Oakes a traditional skill, living in an Intertribal worldview—a key political component of modern Indian political life. Within Oakes' Intertribal world was a keen understanding of geopolitical borders that bisect Akwesasne. While Canada is host to several other Mohawk Reserve populations, Tyendinaga, Ontario (named after the controversial Mohawk leader, Joseph Brandt), and Six Nations, Ontario (located next to Lake Erie), this chapter will focus exclusively on the Mohawk connections between Akwesasne and Kahnawake. Their history is a complex story that

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[4] Stephanie Phillips, "The Kahnawake Mohawks and the St. Lawrence Seaway" (MA Thesis, McGill University, 2000) 4. "…Caughnawaga was the Anglicized version of 'Kahnawake' used prior to 1892, when the community switched to the Mohawk spelling and pronunciation."

[5] Jack A. Frisch, "Tribalism Among the St. Regis Mohawks: A Search for Self-Identity," *Anthropologica* 12:2 (1970) 209-210.

[6] Jack A. Frisch, "The Abanakis Among the St. Regis Mohawks," *The Indian Historian* 4:1 (Spring 1971) 27-29. Edmund Wilson, *Apologies To the Iroquois*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1960) 11. "Among them were members of all the tribes in the Iroquois Confederacy…There were also a few Hurons, Eries, and Ottawas who had been captured and adopted by the Iroquois and had been living with them in the longhouse villages. Mohawks greatly predominated…"

crisscrossed multiple political borders and fueled an intense awakening for Iroquois Nationalism in the twentieth-century.

Equally, both Mohawk communities played a vital role in cultivating, from an early age, Richard Oakes‘s political ideals, values, identity, Mohawk awareness, and leadership potential. Before Richard‘s birth, Akwesasne and Kahnawake were actively involved in protecting their sovereign status. During the early part of the twentieth century the Iroquois relied on Mohawk guidance during World War I and later in denouncing the 1924 Citizenship Act and 1934 Indian Reorganization Act. To understand Oakes, we must first understand the environment and world he was born into and how this world influenced his life as a Native leader.

The center of Iroquois life is the Great Law of Peace that was woven in wampum by the individual known as the Peacemaker. These laws tie all Nations within the long house together, offering shelter and protection to each Nation. As a collective the Iroquois were a powerhouse of the Northeast that relied on Iroquois diplomacy to play off the French and British in the Seven Years War. Later the Confederacy refined this power for use during the American Revolution only to meet stern retribution from General Sullivan‘s campaigns in 1779. The Iroquois, despite constant warfare, continued to grow. The teachings from the Great Law of Peace served as one of many sources that influenced the ideals of democracy in the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution. Through the teachings of the prophet Handsome Lake, the Iroquois Longhouse religion flourished during the 1800s. Some of the most memorable leaders to emerge in the 19th Century were General Ely S. Parker, Seneca, aide to General Ulysses S. Grant and his

great nephew, Seneca, Arthur C. Parker, the famed anthropologist and leader of the Intertribal organization Society of American Indians (SAI) founded in 1911.

By 1918, the Iroquois independently declared war against Germany and enlisted as allies with both the United States and Canada during World War I. [7] Mohawks served gallantly in both Canadian and American regiments. The Great War would have a lasting and profound effect on Indian Country as a whole. An entire generation of fathers, brothers, and sons; future leaders and intellectuals, quickly signed up for military service on both sides of the international border. At government run Indian Schools, almost every male student was recruited or encouraged to enlist for military service.[8] Many Akwesasne and other Native Nations from the American side enlisted for service in Canada, because America entered the war much later than its Northern neighbor.[9] As a result over 17,313 American Indians registered for the draft and fifty-five percent were inducted. This was almost twice as high as the national average for other American

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[7] Thomas A. Britten, American *Indians in World War I: At War and at Home*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997) 69. See also, Susan Applegate Krouse, *North American Indians in the Great War*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007); and Micheal L. Tate, ―From Scout to Doughboy: The National Debate Over Integrating American Indians into the Military," *Western Historical Quarterly* 17:4 (October 1986) 417-437. For a more general history of World War I please consult, Martin Gilbert, *The First World War: A Complete History*. (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1994).

[8] ―Carlisle alone contributed 205 servicemen…" Russel Lawrence Barsh, ―American Indians in the Great War." *Ethnohistory* 38:3 (Summer 1991)278-279.

[9] The numbers of American Indians who served in Canadian regiments is unknown because Canada and the Indian Affairs Branch failed to develop a process to track numbers for this minority population of enlistments. ―…press reports indicated that hundreds of Native Americans from the United States enlisted in the Canadian army between 1915 and 1917." Britten, 60.

populations.[10] The casualties from the war also had a transformative impact on smaller Native communities with a higher number of enlistments. A significant number of young Indian men were lost to the battlefields of Europe, and yet many American and Canadian Indians were not even legal citizens of their representative countries. Why fight for either America or Canada?

Many members of the press and generations of scholars have attributed several characteristics to Native people's service in the Great War; these attributes included fearlessness, adventurous spirit, a general physical disposition for warfare, and the noble savage—noble off the battlefield, but savage in the face of war, and the extension of Native masculinity through continued warrior societies and traditions. For Mohawks and Iroquois in particular, these attributes were a far cry from their inherent political objectives in the war as allies. Service in the war effort was explicitly tied to Iroquois nationalism and alliance—the protection of treaty rights. Defeat by a foreign power warring against Canada or the United States jeopardizes the diplomatic interests for all of Indian Country. The Society of American Indians (SAI) relied on the rhetoric of patriotism—an American Indian's equality with White America. With this rhetoric the battlefields of Europe became a great ideological equalizer—or as President Woodrow Wilson termed it ~~"a~~ war to end all wars"—for Indian Country. Arthur C. Parker, first President of SAI, offered a striking definition of wartime Native Nationalism:

> Knowing the tragedy of broken treaties,' he will fight that there be not more treaties broken…The Indian fights because he loves freedom and because humanity needs the defense of the freedom-loving man. The Indian fights because his country, his liberties, his ideals and his manhood

[10] Jennings C. Wise, *The Red Man in the New World Drama*. Ed. Vine Deloria Jr. (New York: The Macmillan Co.,1971) 320.

> are assailed by the brutal hypocrisy of Prussianism. Challenged, the Indian has responded and shown himself a citizen of the world and an exponent of an ethical civilization wherein human liberty is assured.[11]

Parker's powerful words are laced with meanings—Native nationalist desires, freedom from oppression, equal citizen of the world, and treaty rights; and, Parker was also instrumental in composing the Iroquois Declaration of War. In 1918, Parker penned a note to fellow Seneca Walter Kennedy that stated: "…it is your independent right to act as a Nation and not as a ward-bound tribe that had no powers of a Nation. The Senecas have lost none of their sovereignty since 1812 and a war declaration would serve to emphasize your status." [12] Both of Parker's quotes point to another understanding of American Indian veterans, that protecting America's sovereignty is equal to protecting Indigenous sovereignty/treaty rights—a double "V" campaign (victory abroad is victory at home).

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[11] Barsh, 288. For more on the foundations of SAI please consult, D.Anthony Tyeeme Clark's essay "At the Headwaters of a Twentieth-Century "Indian" Political Agenda: Rethinking the Origins of the Society of American Indians," in Daniel Cobb and Loretta Fowler, eds., *Beyond Red Power: American Indian Politics and Activism since 1900*. (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2007) 70-90.

[12] Hazel Hertzberg, *The Search For An American Indian Identity: Modern Pan-Indian Movements* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1971) 175. While my own work refutes parts of Hertzberg's original thesis and use of the term Pan-Indian , her book also created new inroads into the study of SAI and early twentieth-century Native history. For more on the Survival of American Indians see also, Peter Iverson, *Carlos Montezuma: And the Changing World of American Indians*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982); Jane Hafen, "Gertrude Simmons Bonnin: For the Indian Cause." Theda Perdue ed., *Sifters: Native American Women's Lives*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) 127-140; Zitkala-Sa, Dreams *and Thunder: Stories, Poems, and The Sun Dance Opera*. P. Jane Hafen Ed., (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001); Raymond Wilson, *Ohiyesa: Charles Eastman, Santee Sioux*. (Urbana and Champagne: University of Illinois Press, 1983); and Joy Porter, *To Be Indian: The Life of Iroquois-Seneca Arthur Caswell Parker* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001).

During the war Mohawks, like other Native peoples, served in integrated regiments for both Canada and the United States. This was deemed by most contemporary observers as progressive military policy, despite the mandate that Black Americans serve in segregated units. American Indian service in integrated units allowed soldiers to forge unique bonds, to act as ambassadors for their respective Nations, and to establish new Intertribal networks. Those who returned home brought with them a new awareness about Europe, a common bond with other Native veterans, an experience of modern warfare, as well as physical and emotional scars from their service. Many Iroquois who returned home also discovered they were not entitled to military bonuses because they were not legally recognized as citizens of the United States. Through a concerted campaign by Iroquois leaders and the New York press, these soldiers finally received their bonuses by 1921.[13] New challenges to Iroquois sovereignty were just around the corner as the 1920s and 1930s gave way to the Indian New Deal. The Iroquois fight for veterans employed a refined and highly organized political tactic, a strategy of Iroquois Nationalism which Richard Oakes will mimic in future occupations.

The Iroquois unilaterally rejected the provisions outlined in the Citizenship Act of 1924 because they wanted to protect their sovereign status as an Indigenous Nation. Iroquois feared that approval of the Act translated as an acceptance of a federal mandate over their lives. Iroquois leaders believed that a vote in favor of the act might also give the U.S. government the authorization to revoke federal trust responsibilities with the Six Nations. Growing frustrations over this debate flourished in 1934, as John Collier,

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[13] Ibid., 168. Coincidently, the Iroquois received their bonuses before the rest of America. This payout added fuel to fire, as the campaign for the Bonus Army march on Washington, D.C. intensified during the Great Depression.

Commissioner of Indian Affairs, saw his ―ground breaking" Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) passed by Congress.[14] This act called for an end to the old allotment policies under the Dawes Act of 1887; it also advocated that a restricted measure of home rule be restored to Native Nations through a referendum.[15] Akwesasne would act as the epicenter for the Iroquois campaign against the IRA, as it was scheduled to be the first Iroquois community to vote on the act.

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[14] Before becoming Commissioner Collier gained notoriety by headlining the campaign in New Mexico against the Bursum Bill. After the defeat of the Bursum Bill, he served as the Executive Secretary for the Indian Defense Association until he was nominated Commissioner. For more information on Collier see Frederick E. Hoxie and Peter Iverson, *Indians in American History: An Introduction.* (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1998) 177-197.

[15] The Indian Reorganization Act is divided into four separate parts outlining provisions for self-government, education, lands, development of corporation bylaws, and a later deleted portion that dealt with Tribal jurisdiction or Tribal courts. Title One sanctioned that a Tribe could organize as a self-government under a constitution approved by the Secretary of the Interior, and create a corporation to apply for loans under a credit fund for economic opportunity. Title Two, influenced by the Meriam Report of 1928, pushed for a transfer from boarding schools to day schools, appropriations for scholarships and loans for higher education, and funding to revive cultural traditions in arts and crafts. Title Three abolished provisions under the Dawes Act for allotment, returned lands ―not allotted―back to the Tribe, and sponsored conservation plans on existing lands—such as forestry units. The final provision, Title Four, later omitted from the bill, called for the establishment of a Tribal court system and Tribal jurisdiction over Tribal lands. The Dawes Act was devastating to Native Nations. The accumulated land lost after the Dawes Act was 86 million acres out of a total of 138 million acres. The Dawes Act had also created a checkerboard effect on Reservations in which lands that fell out of inheritance were sold to white speculators, farmers, and ranchers---further eroding the land base. Even though the Dawes Act was repealed by the IRA, the damage it had already caused was tremendous for Native Peoples. For more on the Dawes Act see also chapter 16 in Angie Debo, ―Breaking up the Reservations," *A History Of The Indian Of The United States* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970) 299-315; Fredrick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001); and Emily Greenwald, *Reconfiguring The Reservation: The Nez Perces, Jicarilla Apaches, And The Dawes Act* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002).

John Collier's awareness of Iroquois opposition to the Citizenship Act led him to enlist the help of Henry Roe Cloud (Ho-Chunk) who would later serve as superintendent of Haskell Institute; anthropologist William N. Fenton, Indian Service Community worker; and W. K. Harrison, New York's Indian Agent; all of them conducted meetings to explain the provisions of the IRA at Akwesasne. As a Nation, Akwesasne is comprised of three governments: the traditional life chiefs; the New York State sponsored tribal _elected' chiefs--elected by only one-quarter of the population; and a separate Mohawk government on Cornwall Island to deal with Canadian affairs. On the opposite side of the forty-fifth parallel, the Iroquois of St. Regis, the Canadian name for the Reserve, was divided further between the traditional Life Chiefs (appointed by Clan Mothers) and the Indian Act (1876) popularly elected ―band council."

The transnational politics of Akwesasne, consistently reinforced the importance of protecting the traditional Longhouse government. Through solidarity and Intertribalism Akwesasne Mohawks could overcome the policies of two colonial governments. The Canadian Indian Act of 1876 was comprised of four main parts. First, the act defined who was Indian. Women who ―married outside" (married other nationalities outside the Reserve) were denied membership/identity as ―Canadian" Indian, yet Native men were afforded just the opposite. This gendered part of the act attacked the family through citizenship, which robbed Iroquois women of their freedom of choice, despite their prestigious Clan Mother status. Next, this legislation established a system of services for the Reserve, mainly rooted in education. Third, the act called for a formalized system to manage Native lands and resources. Finally, the most disruptive measure of the Indian

Act allowed for Canadian provincial governments to abrogate Indigenous treaty rights.[16] By the 1890s, this legislation had pushed the Canadian side of Akwesasne to revolt. Mohawk Clan Mothers wrote to the Governor General on June 2, 1899, and explained that Akwesasne refused the governance provisions of the Indian Act in favor of their traditional government:

> We have considered the elective system as not being intended for us Indians, and we would therefore return to our old method of selecting our life chiefs, according to our Constitutional Iroquois Government. As Your Excellency must know, the ancient custom of creating life chiefs is that they are selected according to the different clans, there being three from each clan, and also three women who select her special chief from among her clan. Of these chiefs, one is considered the head chief, the second is _the big man' and the third is the _crier'. As there is four distinct clans, there is twelve life chiefs, who hold their office for life.[17]

This announcement met with fierce resentment from Canadian authorities, Dominion Police were sent to Akwesasne Québec to force an election of an Indian Act ―band council." Over two-hundred Akwesasne protested against the election, confiscating arms from the Dominion Police and placing the Indian Agent under house arrest. Embarrassed

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[16] David H. Getches, Charles F. Wilkinson, and Robert A. Williams, Jr., Fifth Edition. *Cases And Materials on Federal Indian Law* (St. Paul: West Publishing Co., 2005) 953. See also, Robert N. Clinton, Nell Jessup Newton, and Monroe E. Price, Third Edition, *American Indian Law: Cases and Materials*. (Charlottesville: The Michie Company, 1991) 1222-1223. For more information on the overall effect of the Indian Act of 1876 on gender roles and identity at Kahnawake see Audra Simpson, ―To The Reserve And Back Again: Kahnawake Mohawk Narratives of Self, Home, and Nation" (Ph.D. Dissertation, McGill University, 2003). The Indian Act would not be amended until 1951—which gave Provincial authority the power to end treaty rights, and again in 1985 to repeal disenfranchisement of Native women. The Indian Act continues to be an influential and important legal document defining First Nations policy in Canada. Interestingly, in the 1960s Native activists tried to repeal the Indian Act, their efforts failed largely due to fears that a repeal of the Indian Act might instead promote a policy of Termination for Canadian First Nations.

[17] Jerry Gambill, ―How Democracy Came to St. Regis…" *Akwesasne Notes* 3:6 (Late Summer 1971) 23.

by their defeat, Canadian officials mounted a devastating counter strategy, secretly arresting the Life Chiefs. In May 1899, the Indian Agent sent out word that he wanted to meet with the Life Chiefs about job opportunities and community matters. Upon their arrival at the agent‘s office, a large police force headed by Colonel Sherwood served arrest warrants on the unsuspecting Mohawk diplomats. Jake Ice a traditional follower of the Longhouse, had heard about the arrests, as news quickly spread throughout the Reserve. He was met by Colonel Sherwood, who, in the struggle, shot the unarmed Jake Ice twice in the chest, killing him instantly. All of this occurred without any protest from the other police or the Indian Agent on site. Towns close to Akwesasne wrote scathing editorials denouncing the police action and Indian Act. The Life Chiefs arrested by Provincial Police were held in jail for over a year before facing trial. Beyond serving a long-term jail sentence, without trial, the majority were released except for two to three individuals who were to stand trial as examples. The Life Chiefs ordered to stand trial were forced to pay for both their prosecution and defense. Each of the defendants was set free with further warnings. The Agent eventually gathered a few individuals to hold a mock election, and the first twelve chiefs of the ―band council" were elected. For the Akwesasne, the memory and story about the imprisonment of Akwesasne Life Chiefs and the murder of Jake Ice would always remain connected to the ―band council" and the Indian Act.[18]

[18] Ibid, 23. The names of the traditional Life Chiefs who were arrested in 1899 were, ―Thomas Sand, Louis Thomas, Jacob Fire, Louis David, John Skin, John Nine Angus, John Angus Louis, Joseph Martin, Angus Papineau, Mitchell Bova, Peter Day, Louis Terrance, Mitchell Oak, John Beck, and William Mussell."

By the 1930s, leaders at Akwesasne were well aware of the devastating impact of the Canadian Indian Act, and this facilitated powerful suspicious about the long-term effects of the American Indian Reorganization Act. Caught between geopolitical borders, Akwesasne retains four different forms of representative government as established by Iroquoian, Canadian, and US policies.[19] Historically, this complex assortment of competing ―colonial" and traditional forms of governance has attempted to undermine and divide the overall political authority of Akwesasne. As a territory it straddles both the Canadian and American border. This location, within a borderland, is advantageous in some respects, as rival external laws and systems between borders have forced the community to rely more extensively upon their traditional government. These competing ―colonial" governments established by federal policies and borders were forged as a direct assault upon Akwesasne's sovereignty. Based on sheer numbers alone, Mohawks minimized the power of these competing modes of ―colonial" governance by limiting the power of the franchise (voting) and gradually redirecting policy/enforcement matters towards the consensus politic of traditional Life Chiefs.[20] More distinctly, the Band Council is elected by the Akwesasne populace, a power held exclusively by the people. At Akwesasne the ―band council" is held in check by the governance of the people, and by competing American and Canadian systems. Fittingly, Richard Oakes once described the politics at Akwesasne as, ―. a big reservation, six miles square, with three thousand

[19] See also, Frisch, 207-219.

[20] ―…in 1971, only a small percentage of people at Akwesasne participate in the elective system, and yet it is the only group recognized by the Government of Canada. At the Longhouse, hereditary chiefs still counsel for the Mohawk people, both in the U.S., and in Canada…Neither the United States nor Canada will acknowledge that they exist." Gambill, ―How Democracy Came to St. Regis," 23

people and three thousand problems. My growing up was hard, as it is for most Indians. The hopes were there the promises were there, but the means for achieving them weren't…"[21] Taken at face value, Oakes' statement suggests that the very core of Akwesasne politics is ripe with complexity, and it also speaks to their unique political reality as a transnational Native Nation. During the 1930s, despite these very real obstacles, complexities, and challenges, Akwesasne nationalists remained highly organized against outside threats to their sovereignty.

On June 8, 1935, Akwesasne women, representing the views of the Longhouse, gathered together at the polls to let their voices and opinions be heard. As the crowd of mothers and daughters came together, they attempted to confiscate the ballot box from Forresters Hall and later at the Mohawk Indian School. Altogether about 517 Mohawks refused to vote out of 800 eligible voters. This offered clear proof that Akwesasne women, like the traditional Clan Mothers, continued to hold the ultimate veto in political matters. Richard Oakes was raised in a community of strong and politically active women, within a Native Nation that honored a woman's political convictions and voice. Among those who refused to vote, many Mohawks regarded voting on a federal act as tacit acceptance of citizenship and a federal mandate over their lives. On both sides of the border, Mohawks solidified their sovereignty by their outright refusal to vote in national elections in Canada and the United States.[22] At the end of the day, only forty-

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[21] Richard Oakes. "Alcatraz Is Not An Island" *Ramparts* (Dec. 1972): 35.

[22] "The main reason offered for the failure to exercise the franchise is that by voting in the white man's elections, the Indian acknowledges that he is either a Canadian or an American; this would be contrary to the idea that the Iroquois, including the Mohawks, are a sovereign people. Another reason offered is that the franchise is the first step towards taxation." Frisch., 217.

seven people had voted for the act and about two hundred and thirty seven had rejected it. In a showing of solidarity, all Iroquois Nations within New York followed Akwesasne's lead in rejecting the IRA. In the end Collier was dismayed by the vote, but he respected the Iroquois view of home-rule by not forcing the Iroquois to accept the act by default.[23]

By the 1930s, the United States was knee deep in the turmoil of the Great Depression. Over 40 million Americans found themselves out of work, and the national unemployment rate reached a staggering high of 29 percent.[24] Richard Oakes's parents made calculated decisions for physical and economic survival. Americans in general questioned whether America as a democracy would survive this great economic peril. Akwesasne had felt the full force of the Depression's impact. In nearby Massena, the Aluminum plant laid off Mohawk workers first in a string of layoffs to save the company. Akwesasne's main sources of income, farming and dairy cattle, saw the futures market slide to a near halt. Jobs became scarce and survival dominated the minds of many

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[23] Laurence M. Hauptman, *The Iroquois and The New Deal*. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1981) 68-69. For more information on the Indian Reorganization Act see also, Clayton R. Koppes. ―From New Deal to Termination: Liberalism and Indian Policy, 1933-1953." *Pacific Historical Review*. Vol. XLVI, No. 4 (1977); D'Arcy McNickle. ―The Indian New Deal as Mirror of the Future*." Political Organization of Native North Americans*. Ernest L. Schusky, Ed. (Washington, DC: University Press of America, Inc., 1980); Graham D. Taylor. *The New Deal and American Indian Tribalism: The Administration of the Indian Reorganization Act, 1934-"45.*(Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980); Vine Deloria Jr. and Clifford Lytle. *The Nations Within: The Past and Future of American Indian Sovereignty*. (New York: Pantheon, 1984); and Akim D. Rinehardt, *Ruling Pine Ridge: Oglala Lakota Politics From The IRA To Wounded Knee*. (Lubbock:Texas Tech University Press, 2007).

[24] For more general information on the Great Depression, F.D.R. and New Deal reform see also, William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt And The New Deal 1932-1940*. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1963), Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism In Recession And War*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), and Jason Scott Smith, *Building New Deal Liberalism: The Political Economy of Public Works, 1933-1956* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

American Indians when the Emergency Conservation Work Act of 1933 created the Indian Division of the Civilian Conservation Corp. (CCC-ID). In the beginning, the Confederacy did not support New Deal programs, and the Canadian side of Akwesasne refused to support the CCC-ID project for fear of future flood damage. Despite community and international objections, the CCC-ID called for three massive building projects--the West Ditch along the St. Regis River in 1935, the Frogtown Ditch, half completed by 1936, and the East Ditch, some one-and-a-half miles long, that linked to the St. Regis River. These projects were created to drain the flooded marshlands located in the center of the reservation, opening these lands for future development by the Mohawk. The CCC-ID work employed a total of one quarter of Akwesasne‘s available workforce.[25]

In the mid to late 1930‘s, a new organization called the Akwesasne Mohawk Counselor Organization (AMCO) was founded by Mohawk educator Ray Fadden (Aren Akweks or Tehanetorens). The efforts of Fadden and others in AMCO to impart traditional teachings and Mohawk culture provided children like Richard Oakes an opportunity to be proud, informed, and grounded in their traditions. Fadden‘s commitment to American Indian and Iroquois education was dynamic and contagious. His first teaching job at the Tuscarora Indian School on the Tuscarora Reservation (located not far from Niagara Falls) lasted for three years. After leaving the Tuscarora Indian School, Fadden was employed by the Mohawk Indian School. At Akwesasne most of the schools are located off the reservation, including Massena High School, St.

[25] Hauptman, 120-122. —…the CCC-ID at its peak employed a total of 130 enrollees in revolving shifts, or nearly one-fourth of the total work force.”

Regis Mohawk, Salmon River Central (where Richard Oakes attended high school), Cornwall High School, Cornwall Island Elementary, Chenial, Québec Elementary and St. Regis, Québec Elementary.[26] Although many of these schools were located on or near Akwesasne, the non-Indian community exclusively controlled the administration for these schools. Much of the curriculum taught to young Mohawks, as Ray Fadden discovered, ignored Mohawk and Native cultures, languages, and histories. As a Mohawk teacher, Fadden challenged these constructs when he created the Akwesasne Mohawk Counselor Organization. It was a brazen attempt at a new form of Indian education, one administered and controlled by the community.

Patterned after the Boy Scouts of America, AMCO fostered a uniquely Iroquoian learning environment. Fadden stressed that this, "…organization is the first of its kind and was organized to train young Indian boys and girls in the history, traditions and crafts of their people, the Six Nations of Iroquois of New York state and Canada."[27] Fadden

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[26] . "The English language is spoken by 95% of the community. About 60% of the population speak the Mohawk language…" Cheryl A. Metoyer, "Perceptions of the Mohawk Elementary Students of Library Services" provided by the National Indian Education Association Library Project As Conducted on the Akwesasne (St. Regis) Mohawk Reservation. (Dissertation: Indiana University, 1976) 4 "Oakes is the son of Art Oakes of St. Regis and Albany, and the late Mrs. Oakes. He attended Salmon River Central Schools and was a steel worker when he left his job to enter San Francisco State College…"For more on Richard's high school see, Eleanor Dumas, "Richard Oakes Renews Cause In East: Saved by Medicine Men." *Watertown Daily Times*, October 15, 1970, n.p.

[27] Akwesasne Counselor Organization, *The Record, Laws and History of the Akwesasne Mohawk Counselor Organization*. (Hogansburg: New York, n.d.) 4. Copy in position of author, the latest date that appears in the publication is 1947. The forty-six page booklet outlines the curriculum for the program and includes numerous photos of its members. Unfortunately, few of the photos are labeled with members' names. It is unclear if Richard directly participated in the AMCO. For more on Fadden's role in the organization consult, Jerry Gambill, Ed. "'No Man Could Do More,'" *Akwesasne Notes* (Late Spring 1971) 3:4, 22.

aggressively sought to foster an Intertribal awareness among the membership, traveling to local and distant Indian communities, such as Qualla Boundary (Eastern Cherokee Reservation, North Carolina) or the Six Nations Reserve in Canada. Each of these trips, which coincided with Indigenous guest lecturers from Crow, Lakota, Tuscarora, Narragansett, Ojibwa, Seneca, and other Tribes, had a profound impact on its young participants. Tours of educational centers like Carlisle Indian School and Dartmouth, revealed the varying lengths Fadden explored to promote Indian education. Future Iroquois leaders like Mohawk Ernest Benedict and Tuscarora Mad Bear Anderson learned under Fadden‘s tutelage and AMCO. Later, Mad Bear Anderson became a teacher, confidant, and traditional guide for Richard Oakes in the White Roots of Peace movement.

By the mid 1930s, impressed by the success and strategy of AMCO, future Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Louis R. Bruce Jr., (Mohawk/Lakota) created an Iroquois branch of the National Youth Administration (NYA) under the Works Progress Administration (WPA). An extension of AMCO, the NYA had federal funding and employed Iroquois youth to build trails, parks, and new Reservation community centers. Encouraged by Fadden‘s design, Bruce employed Camp Counselors or older boys and girls to act as role models for younger camp members. Many of these Camp Counselors were already Counselors under the AMCO. Summer camp was headquartered out of Fadden‘s camp retreat, located in the Adirondack Mountains. Together both organizations encouraged the collection of oral history, study of Native medicine and arts, language revitalization, an appreciation for the outdoors, and a solid knowledge of Tribal governance and treaty rights. Although the government phased out the NYA due to

lack of funding during the war effort, AMCO continued to inspire and enlighten future generations.[28]

One of the most significant New Deal agencies to impact both Akwesasne and Kahnawake during the Indian New Deal was the WPA. The Works Progress Administration provided much needed employment, despite borders at Akwesasne and Kahnawake. In the beginning, Kahnawake and the Canadian side of Akwesasne residents were excluded from participation in American New Deal programs. Through pressures exerted by lawyers and the press, and potential bad publicity, President and former governor of New York, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his administration buckled under the pressure. By 1940, "Canadian" Mohawks were allowed to participate fully in all New Deal programs.[29] This decision established an important precedent because it acknowledged that despite the geopolitical border and Reserve/Reservation boundaries, Mohawks are Mohawks and they are also an independent Nation. Out of the WPA building projects Akwesasne and Kahnawake Mohawks forged a unique bond that was born out of a shared profession—ironwork. Ironwork was another industry that had employed Mohawks since the late nineteenth century and one that eventually would employ a young man named Richard Oakes. It was an industry that molded Richard Oakes ideas of organization, structure, detail, and leadership.

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[28] For more on the AMCO and NYA consult, Hauptman, 122-127.

[29] David Blanchard. "High Steel! The Kahnawake Mohawk And The High Construction Trade" *The Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 11:2 (Summer 1983) 51. "The New York Times covered this story under a banner entitled: "60 Indians in Brooklyn Barred from W.P.A.: Canadian Iroquois Not Aliens, Not Citizens." The Times…in this story [suggested that if the Kahnawake ironworkers became United States citizens, they would then qualify for work…Four days later, on May 20, the Times on its editorial page supported the Kahnawake's position…"

As an industry and an occupation, ironwork completely transformed the political economy of both Akwesasne and Kahnawake. Its beginnings can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century when, in 1851, Kahnawake Mohawks were first trained and employed to construct the Victoria Bridge, a timber-framed railroad bridge across the St. Lawrence. While construction of the bridge brought to a halt the once prosperous steamboat trade at Kahnawake, it was soon replaced by bridgework and later ironwork. As iron bridges increasingly replaced timber frames, Mohawk laborers quickly adapted and learned this new trade. By the late 1880s, Kahnawake agreed to a new iron framed railroad bridge to be constructed on Reserve lands. The agreement with Dominion Bridge Company called for the employment of local Mohawk men for the completion of the bridge. These crews were then trained onsite during the construction of this new iron clad bridge. With each new contract through Dominion, Kahnawake Mohawk crews trained more and more Mohawks in ironwork.[30]

The date August 29, 1907 will forever remain a tragic moment in the history of Kahnawake. On opposite sides of the Reserve, still visible today, stand two large steel crosses built to memorialize what became known as the Quebec Bridge disaster. Work on the bridge began in 1900, and it was designed as the largest cantilever span in the world, stretching out across the St. Lawrence River.[31] For a time work came to a halt on the

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[30] Bruce Katzer. ―The Caughnawaga Mohawks: The Other Side of Ironwork" *The Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 15:4 (Winter 1988) 41. See also Wilson, *Apologies To the Iroquois*, 13-17.

[31] Anonymous, ―Bridge Falls Drowning 80" *New York Times* (Aug. 30, 1907) 1. ―A cantilever structure or object that projects into space, supported at one end, unsupported at the other. Applied to bridges, the advantage of a cantilever is that it allows engineers to build inward over the river from each shore, meeting in the middle to form the span, and to do this without any support from below." Jim Rasenberger. *High Steel: The Daring*

bridge as inspectors noticed that the steel beams were beginning to twist under the enormous weight of the expanse. Workers like Tom Deerhorse and Harold Diebold, members of Kahnawake's famed lacrosse team, eagerly resumed work when the stop work order was lifted by August. A young ―punk," a rookie recruit just learning the trade, John Montour (Kahnawake Mohawk) remembered, ―Everything was going ok when suddenly I could hear the sounds of the rivet heads shearing and popping like gun fire. Then there was this tremor like an earthquake and a roar. Then this bad grinding sound and a thunder as the bridge fell into the water."[32] The mass entanglement of steel and men fell into the St. Lawrence, shockwaves and screams were heard from residents at Kahnawake as members of the community gathered around the Reserve's only phone at the community store. Loved ones ran to the inhuman scene of twisted metal and the terrified voices of loved ones still trapped below. A priest was called to the scene to administer last rites, as the tide slowly began to rise, drowning the few remaining survivors. After this horrific incident, which claimed the lives of ninety-six workers, including thirty-three Kahnawake Mohawks, women in the community gathered with Kahnawake Clan Mothers and instituted a new community directive. It stated that men working in ironwork were forever prohibited from employment on the same job.

The loss of the thirty-three men on the Quebec Bridge Disaster impacted every facet of the small community as wives lost husbands, mothers lost sons, and children lost fathers and uncles. The tragic disaster forced Kahnawake citizens to come to grips with

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Men Who Built the World's Greatest Skyline. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2004) 143-144.

[32] Blanchard, 48-49. See also two documentary films Dan Owen, ―High Steel" 1965, and the recent documentary by Kahnawake, Reaghan Tarbell entitled ―To Brooklyn and Back: A Mohawk Journey." 2008.

their commitment to the profession and the true risk with ironwork. Eventually, in an effort to increase their numbers, Kahnawake ironworking veterans began to recruit and train Akwesasne Mohawks in the trade. By the 1920s, ironwork saw a boom with the development of the skyscraper. The roaring twenties ushered in a dynamic growth spurt in New York‘s famed skyline, and Mohawks represented a sizeable percentage of the ironworkers recruited for such an undertaking. Mohawks, especially those from Kahnawake, found themselves caught in the middle between an economic boom and America‘s obsession with scientific eugenics and rampant Nativism.[33] As these political movements garnered national attention, evidenced by the national immigration acts passed in 1921 and 1924, Kahnawakes faced a new legal challenge.

In a shocking turn of events, Kahnawake Paul Diabo and his family were cited as ―illegal aliens” and forcibly deported to Canada. Mohawks rallied around behind the Diabo family, determined to press for their legal rights to work across the border, a freedom established by the Jay (1794) and Ghent (1814) Treaties. Ironworkers pulled their money together to create a defense fund for Diabo‘s lawyer fees. Akwesasne and Onondaga Tribes also contributed funds and engaged in fundraising for Diablo‘s defense. The case challenged the very constructs of the 1924 Citizenship Act for American

[33] Nativism as a movement strove to set limits on immigration to preserve a larger proportion of Anglo-Saxons in America. Much of this movement stemmed from a growing fascination and genetic pre-determinism that strove to use the study of science to prove that Anglo-Saxons were the ―superior” race. For more information on the constructs of this movement consult, Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults & Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). For more information on Immigration and Illegal Aliens please consult, Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens And The Making of Modern America*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) and John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

Indians and the 1921 and 1924 Immigration acts, which established further restrictions and quotas on U.S. citizenship. Diabo's case went before a federal court, which overturned Diablo's ―illegal alien" status and supported the provisions of the Jay Treaty of 1794.[34] The U.S. Immigration Department appealed the case to the Circuit Court level, and once again the court ruled that Mohawks have the right to free passage across the border. More importantly, the court echoed agreement with Chief Justice John Marshall's famed opinion in *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832) and stressed that Kahnawake remained a nation within a nation bound by treaties, impervious to the geopolitical borders between the U.S. and Canada. This was a significant legal victory for Mohawk ironworkers during a growing fervor of American Nativism; the verdict forever linked the Mohawk ironwork trade to the protection of Iroquois sovereignty and treaty rights. Increased Iroquois participation in the ironwork profession became an extension of enforcing one's collective and individual political rights as representatives of a sovereign Native Nation.[35] The victory in the Diabo case worked its way into the oral tradition of Mohawk ironworkers and eventually influenced young Richard Oakes's fascination with the trade.

Having won a decisive victory in the courts, during the 1920s and 1930s Kahnawake and Akwesasne Nations found that employment in ironwork remained

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[34] Anonymous. ―Old Treaty Saves Indians." *New York Times* (Jul. 8, 1926) 5. ―The provision of the treaty invoked was that granting the Indians living along the Canadian border the right to hunt and fish on both sides of the line or to establish homes anywhere in North America without interference of either of the signing Governments." See also, Associated Press, ―Fight Indian's Exclusion: Six Nations Will Test Application of Law to Canadian Iroquois." *New York Times* (Dec. 29, 1926) 25, Associated Press, No Title, *New York Times* (Jan 23, 1927) W18, Canadian Press, ―Indians Meet In Canada: Tribal Gathering to Discuss Border Question and Cayuga Claims." *New York Times* (Oct. 30, 1928) 28.

[35] Blanchard, 50-51. See also, Rasenberger, 158.

increasingly steady. Mohawk crews worked alongside others to create the modern marvels that highlight Manhattan's famed skyline: the Fred F. French Building, the Graybar Building, One Fifth Avenue, the Empire State Building, Bank of Manhattan, R.C.A. Building, Chrysler Building, Waldorf-Astoria, Rockefeller Center, Triborough Bridge, Bayonne Bridge, the Pulaski Skyway, Henry Hudson Bridge, George Washington Bridge, and the Bronx-Whitestone Bridge.[36] Many ironworkers joke that the first meal at the famed Waldorf-Astoria Hotel was enjoyed by Mohawk steel workers. Some of the greatest photographs of ironworkers dangling from solitary beams at extreme heights featured Mohawks.

Work in the High Steel industry is one of the most dangerous of all professions, but, consequently, one of the highest paid. Mohawks were attracted to this trade, not because of some "super human ability," but rather because few people applied for this dangerous work, thus leaving a large job market open for them.[37] Randy Horn from Kahnawake commented on the danger:

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[36] Collected from three main sources Gay Talese, *The Bridge*. (New York: Walker and Company, 2003) 106; Morris Freilich, "Scientific Possibilities in Iroquoian Studies: An Example of Mohawks Past and Present." *Anthropologica* 5:2 (1963) 175; and Tarbell "To Brooklyn and Back: A Mohawk Journey" Documentary. See also, National Public Radio, "All Things Considered" (Jul. 1, 2002) www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyID=3048030. "For over one hundred years Mohawk ironworkers have helped shape Manhattan's skyline, the twin towers, the Chrysler Building, the Empire State…" Wilson, *Apologies To the Iroquois*, 20-23. "…Cities Service Building,...Daily News Building, the Chanin Building, the City Bank Farmers Trust Building,…the Bayonne Bridge, the Passaic River Bridge,…the Little Hell Gate Bridge,…the Marine Parkway Bridge,…the West Side Highway,…London Terrace, and Knickerbocker Village."

[37] Rick Hill, "Skywalkers: The Legacy of Mohawk Ironworkers." *Turtle Quarterly*, 1, no. 4 (no date): 2-4. "Most of the Indians putting up the Kauffman steel are from the Indian reservation near Montreal. They don't think there's much truth to the legend that they're better on high-steel because they're more sure-footed than whites. Meyer Berger.

> The height didn't even bother me…I could go a hundred and twenty at the time; you think twice now when you're walking on the steel, walking on the steel with the wind…some gusts…could throw you right off…suddenly the wind picks up and you just try to balance yourself. You would have to jump from the top of the beam onto the bottom of the beam and grab the top and hold on…you crouch down and you grab the flanges of the beam so you won't fall off, and when the wind dies down you get back up and keep going.[38]

Ironworkers had to adjust to an occupation that required them to deal with the anxiety of injury or instant death. Every day a worker left home, his family was constantly reminded that it could be the last time they might see their father or brother. It was an anxiety that created a bond between families and ironworkers, an unspoken silence and acknowledgement. When tragedy did occur, Mohawk families and ironworkers came together and raised funds for the victim's family. At the Indian bars in New York, workers held wakes and drank in absolute silence to honor the fallen. Each ironworker had to contend with the finite realities of life and this occupation.

By the 1930s, Mohawks had constructed some of the most famous buildings of the Manhattan skyline. These jobs, along with the CCC-ID, WPA, and NYA transformed the community and allowed Akwesasne and Kahnawake to survive the depths of the Great Depression. Ironwork in New York also gave way to the creation of an Indian City within North Gowanus, Brooklyn. Since Mohawks wanted to live beside other Mohawks, they formed their own Indian City in Astoria, Queens. By 1922, the community had relocated from Queens to Brooklyn due to its easy commute into Manhattan and closer

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"Indians Go Home to Squaws Near Montreal After Each Week's Work on Building Here." *New York Times*, (May 4, 1955), 31.

[38] NPR. "All Things Considered." (2002), transcribed by author.

proximity to more employment opportunities.[39] Eventually this largely Mohawk City would earn the nickname ―Downtown Caughnawaga" or ―Little Caughnawaga."

Mohawks also settled in Brooklyn because of its proximity to Ironworkers Local 361 of the International Association of Bridge, Structural and Ornamental Iron Workers Union, which was comprised mostly of Akwesasne and Kahnawake ironworkers. Back at Akwesasne most Ironworkers are also members of the Local 440, based in Hogansburg. Ironworkers created an increasingly migratory community; often families moved back and forth between the Indian City and their home communities. Children who came back in the summers were often referred to as ―Brooklyn Bums," a title that Richard Oakes had to contend with at a young age as his family frequently moved between Akwesasne and Brooklyn.

The Mohawk population in Brooklyn had always remained high. At its peak the population in the 1940's was over seven-hundred.[40] By the 1970s, the total American

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[39] ―The New York Research Council of the College of the City of New York undertook a study of Mohawks in Brooklyn a few months ago. The council established that the steelworkers had their first big colony within New York City at Astoria, Queens. They started drifting toward lower Brooklyn around thirty-five years ago." Meyer Berger. ―Dodgers, by Leaving, Probably Saved Colony of Mohawks, Skilled on High Steel Jobs." *New York Times*, (Nov. 4, 1957), 22. ―The earliest settler in Brooklyn in my sample arrived in 1916, but I learned of one family that settled there as early as 1910." Katzer, 44.

[40] Randy Kennedy. ―Mohawk Memories: An Indian Community Flourished and Faded In a Section of Brooklyn." *New York Times*, (Dec. 26, 1996), 33. ―There are between 600 and 800 Indians around Red Hook in Brooklyn, most of them Mohawks who work on bridges and on skyscraper construction…" Meyer Berger. ―Redskin Colony of the Big City, Fifty Strong, Making Last Stand to Save Its Culture." *New York Times* (May 18, 1956), 26. Journalist Meyer Berger in another *New York Times* article places the population at 800 in 1957. Whereas Joseph Mitchell in ―Mohawks in High Steel" reprinted in Edmund Wilson's *Apologies To The Iroquois*, placed the population around 1949 at 400 individuals. Wilson, 3. By 1950, at least 400 Mohawks lived in Brooklyn; as

Indian population in New York City was estimated to be at ten to twelve thousand people.[41] In recent years, the Mohawk population has steadily declined as new highways cut the commute to Akwesasne or Kahnawake down to approximately five hours. For over fifty years, Mohawks created and maintained a distinctly Mohawk neighborhood that stretched between, ―Nevins, Dean, State, Schermerhorn, Hoyt, Smith and Bond Streets…[and along Pacific Street, Fourth Avenue and Sixth and Seventh Avenues."[42] This area of North Gowanus, now known as Boerum Hill or Red Hook, was comprised of 10 square blocks of primarily Mohawk residents:

> North Gowanus is an old, sleepy, shabby neighborhood that lies between the head of the Gowanus Canal and the Borough Hall shopping district. There are factories in it, and coal tipples and junk yards, but it is primarily residential, and red-brick tenements and brownstone apartment houses are most numerous. [43]

Tom LeClair from Kahnawake remembered his first visit to Brooklyn, ―When I was 19 years old, in 1966, I came to State Street. It was the best. It was the most beautiful place in the world."[44] Like previous immigrant groups, other Mohawks thought New York City would be made out of gold. Most of them quickly found that their expectations were short lived, but that the community itself was a transplant from their homelands. Out of this

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many as 800 were there by the end of the decade. Apartment buildings filled up with Mohawk families." Rasenberger, 159.

[41] Laurie Johnston. ―Indians Here Get U.S. Funds To Help Them in Urban Life." *New York Times*, (Aug. 30, 1974), 31.

[42] Ibid, 22. ―When spring comes they send their families back to Caughnawaga and to St. Regis and see them only on week-ends."

[43] Joseph Mitchell, ―The Mohawks In High Steel." in *Apologies to the Iroquois*, Edmund Wilson. (New York: American Book-Stratford Press Inc., 1960), 25.

[44] Peter Duffy, ―Remembering Mohawk Ironworkers' Urban Haven." *New York Times* (Jul. 18, 1999), CY8.

bustling community Mohawks formed their own organizations, institutions, businesses, and centers that became the foundations for their own Indian City.

Indian bars were one of the first institutions that comprised the Indian City in Brooklyn: the Wigwam Bar on Nevins Street, the Spar Bar and Grill on Nevins and Atlantic Avenue, and Doray Tavern located in Boerum Hill. The Wigwam was owned by Kahnawake Mohawk Irene Vilis. Her husband Manuel Vilis, a veteran of the Normandy invasion during World War II, had purchased the bar shortly after his discharge from service. The bar was often smoky, dimly lit, and hosted a juke box in the corner. The walls were decorated with the posters of famous Indian leaders, including a large poster of renowned Sac and Fox athlete Jim Thorpe. Above the entrance was a sign that read, ―THE GREATEST IRON WORKERS IN THE WORLD PASS THRU THESE DOORS." [45] One wall also contained the hard hats, or modern Gustoweh, of those who had lost their lives while on the job.[46] It was a vivid memorial that served as a constant reminder about life and danger within the industry. The bar also was a place where ironworkers could relax, kick back, and tell stories of their great adventures. For many, Indian bars were the social hub for the community, a place to gather information, talk politics, and find affordable solutions for urban life in Brooklyn. However, these serene moments were sometimes interrupted by fights. In 1947, the *New York Times* reported the death of one Mohawk Ironworker, Stephen Staceys, which occurred outside Tom's

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[45] Gay Talese, *The Bridge*. (New York: Walker & Co., 2003), 104.

[46] ―By the time they leave the school, it is fair to say, all children in Kahnawake have visited Ray Fadden's ―Six Nations Museum" in the Adirondaks. One of Fadden's lectures is on the various headwear of the Six Nations. At the end of this lesson he asks the children what the modern day gostowa of the Mohawk is. He then takes out an ironworker's hardhat and announces: ―This is the new symbol of the Mohawk warrior.'" Blanchard, 60. See also, Rasenberger, 159.

Cafeteria on Nevins Street. The short article spoke to the negative forces that can emerge with bar culture, ―A dozen men, chiefly Mohawks, were in the brawl, throwing sugar bowls, crockery, glassware and chairs, the police said. Angus Deerhouse of 459 Pacific Street saw Staceys collapse, led him outside and got help, but it came too late."[47] While this episode was rare, bar fights did occur on occasion. Most of these fights were led by competing factions of Mohawk riveting gangs, each working to secure the next job contract. Details about the riveting gangs will be explored at greater length in Chapter two.

Some memories of the bar were fondly recalled by the children, many of whom were sent by their mothers to fetch their dads at supper time. Future Mohawk and Native activist Kahentinetha Horn reflected on her childhood and the bar:

> We used to live on the third floor, of this tenement, and it was right across from the Wigwam Bar. My mother would tell us, ―you know to watch to see what was happening." If there was a big outburst of screaming and hollering we'd go look to see if our father was a part of it, and they would come rolling out of there and land right out on the sidewalk. Then we would watch, it was a lot of fun. We didn't have television in those days—we eventually got a television but it was never as interesting as what was going on at the Wigwam Bar.

Horn's remembrance pinpoints a key factor in how the Mohawk community viewed the bar culture. The bar culture itself was not a progenitor of self-destructive behavior, nor necessarily the promoter of habitual alcohol abuse, rather it was purely about entertainment. The Indian bars served another component, as a place for dating.

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[47] Anonymous. ―Mohawk Indian Is Slain: Knifed to Death During Brawl in Brooklyn Cafeteria," *New York Times*, (Jan. 26, 1946), 15. In my research this was the only incident reported in the *New York Times*, which suggests that this was a rare case. I used this article to demonstrate that Indian Bars were not always a positive force within Indian City, Brooklyn.

The Spar, Wigwam, and Doray stocked a particular Montreal Ale, as a way to enforce the large Kahnawake ties to Canada. Couples on date night were able to watch television, listen to stories from those who recently returned from Akwesasne or Kahnawake, and enjoy a drink reminiscent of home.[48]

Beyond the Indian Bars, Mohawks assumed a large presence in the community and their presence began to transform the tiny district. On Sundays, a majority of the community frequented Cuyler Presbyterian Church on Pacific Street. On one Sunday, Dr. David Monroe Cory, the minister of Cuyler Presbyterian, overheard the Mohawk language being spoken by members of the congregation. Dr. Cory began to take language lessons from members of the Mohawk community, eventually hosting church services exclusively in the Mohawk language. Despite the Catholic faith of the community, Mohawks by the hundreds began to fill the pews of Cuyler Presbyterian. The minister even went as far as to challenge the non-Indian church opinions and hosted an annual powwow. As an institution of the larger Indian City, Cuyler Presbyterian quickly became assimilated into Mohawk custom and culture. The church became more than a place of worship or a gathering place for Mohawk families; it also emerged as an institution that promoted the continued use and practice of the Mohawk language.[49]

Grocery stores in the community also began to stock their shelves with a specific brand of cornmeal, ―Quaker White Enriched and Degerminated Cornmeal," for use in making a traditional boiled corn and bean bread. Every grocery store competed for

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[48] Wilson, 29-30.

[49] Kennedy, 29,33. ―Mohawk was spoken constantly in Brooklyn, on the job, and at social gatherings but most parents chose not to pass the language on to their children. In a sense Mohawk became known as the secret language, used when parents didn't want their children to know what they were talking about." Tarbell, documentary.

Mohawk business and gradually every Gowanus store began to carry this particular brand of cornmeal.[50] Beyond fulfilling their traditional matriarchal roles, Mohawk women quickly emerged as the economic center for the community. On pay day Ironworkers were notorious for handing their paychecks immediately to their wives, who managed the bills, meals, and expenses for the entire family. In addition to managing the financial affairs of their families, Mohawk women also took employment in the many industries around Gowanus, such as the metal stamping factory of Fred Goat or the Gem Safety Razor Corporation.[51] Other Mohawk women owned their own businesses, such as the local boarding houses that took in new Mohawk residents or ironworkers.[52] During the 1920s and 1930s, Mohawk women relied on an older tradition of beadwork that they sold at state fairs and boardwalks during the off season of ironwork.[53] With the benefit of a dual income, many Mohawk families became prosperous, but they were also quick to uphold social and cultural ties to their extended family both in Brooklyn and back home.

While the Gowanus, Brooklyn community was largely Mohawk, most of the Native organizations that emerged were Intertribal. One of the most significant of these

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[50] Wilson, 4.
[51] Ibid, 25.
[52] ―Ironworkers would come and…you just made room for them you would double up the girls…and give them a room…ironically it was the grandmother that actually brought the family to New York, after her husband was injured on the job in the 1920s, she had to support her family. She bought a boarding house in downtown Brooklyn and opened it up to Mohawk ironworkers." Tarbell, documentary.
[53] ―The work reached its pinnacle with the production of ―whimsies," which have been sold at Niagara Falls since before 1880. For years, the Native people of the area have produced and sold embossed beadwork as a way to supplement their income, and whimsies have always been a popular product. These small pieces of beadwork are fashioned into change purses, pincushions, wall pockets, women's purses with both drawstring and metal-frame European closures…" David Dean. *Beading in the Native American Tradition*. (Loveland: Interweave Press, 2002) 101.

urban organizations was the Indian League of the Americas (ILOTA). Although it was headquartered out of Brooklyn, only half of its membership was Mohawk.[54] Founded in 1951, the League was originally called the Intertribal American Indian Council, it sponsored an annual powwow and was instrumental in founding the first Indian Center in New York.[55] ILOTA was also part of a growing number of Native organizations that found their home in New York. The Untied Association for the Advancement of American Indians, Inc., also sponsored an annual American Indian Day in Prospect Park, Brooklyn. The many powwows and pageants these organization introduced played a central role in curbing discrimination and educating the public about Native customs, culture, and history.[56] Relying on the local YMCA, Louis Mofsie (Hopi and Ho Chunk) founded the Thunderbird American Indian Singers, and in 1968 he explained that the Thunderbirds ―started primarily to get younger children interested and exposed to their rich background."[57] Powwows were more than a public display of nationalism. They were also designed to showcase Native children as active participants in learning about their distinct cultures. These powwows also were Intertribal by design, and they brought together the larger community of Native peoples from New York's greater boroughs.

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[54] Jean Katharine Wagner, *An Examination And Description of Acculturation of Selected Individual American Indian Women In An Urban Area*. (New York University, Anthropology PhD. Dissertation, 1972), 158.
[55] Anonymous, ―Manhattan Powwow Attracts Hopis and Hobbyists," *New York Times*, (Mar. 25, 1968), 34 and Muriel Fischer, ―Brooklyn Melting Pot for American Indian, Too," *New York Times*, (Jun. 18, 1972), 85. The American Indian Community House is the current Indian Center in New York which was founded in 1969. The Indian Center is instrumental in providing cultural resources for Native peoples throughout New York. It also contributes services in the form of job placement, housing assistance, health care, and education. In chapter 3, I will discuss at greater length the importance of Indian Centers as an institution of the Indian City.
[56] Anonymous. ―Indians Dance In Park," *New York Times*, (Sep. 25, 1960), 76.
[57] Anonymous, ―Manhattan Powwow Attracts Hopis and Hobbyists," 34.

Eventually, these organizations would spur the founding of the American Indian Women's League, that, by the 1960s, sponsored a series of monthly lectures for the larger Indian community.[58]

Richard's father, Arthur Oakes, was an ironworker and, like most Mohawk ironworkers, had to live close to the work site in Brooklyn, New York. Richard Oakes and his family lived in a lively Mohawk-centered community in New York. This largely Indian City was built and maintained by a community that strove to protect their political and cultural traditions as Mohawks. While the institutions of this Mohawk city have faded in the early twenty-first century, the community still represents a unique dimension of Mohawk history. Former residents often reminisce about life during the height of the Mohawk City. In one interview in the *New York Times*, a Mohawk woman Ms. White recalled the roaring days of the Mohawk city:

> The talk over the beer mugs at the Spar Bar and the Wigwam was always of the latest job: the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, the hangars at Kennedy International Airport, the Seagrams Building, the Time & Life Building. ―There were a lot of skyscrapers built over those two bars back in those days…It was like I didn't leave home because they were there, my people were there, and I felt safe."[59]

Understanding the political, historic, and economic relationship between Akwesasne, Kahnawake, and Brooklyn is crucial to any discourse on Richard Oakes's childhood. As a community biography, Oakes' early years were shaped by the historical forces emerging out of these distinct Nations, communities, and institutions. The next chapter will explore how these unique political environments eventually shaped Richard Oakes's worldview and political outlook as an Akwesasne Mohawk.

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[58] Judy Klemesrud, ―The American Indian: Part of City, and Yet…," *New York Times*, (Sep. 18, 1968), 34.
[59] Kennedy, 33.

Oakes‘ worldview was shaped by a rich and politically active community. Akwesasne was largely an Intertribal Nation that imparted a long history of resistance and Tribalism to Oakes. The teachings of the Longhouse and the politics of a borderlands Nation dealing with both Canadian and American policy complicated Oakes‘s political views. Each member of the community from Traditional Life Chiefs, Mohawk Clan Mothers, Ironworkers, teachers, storytellers, and veterans fought to protect the sovereign rights of the Mohawk Nation and Iroquois Confederacy. In the years to come Richard Oakes increasingly relied on Mohawk teachings and community as the foundation for his unique understanding of Native Nationalism.

CHAPTER TWO

THE EMERGENCE OF A LEADER

I quit high school in the eleventh grade and went into iron work. My father and uncle taught me the trade. They passed it down, and when I was sixteen, I just started working. I worked all over, living on the reservation and off the reservation. I lived in New York, Massachusetts, the New England states…I went where the work was. I was an iron worker for eleven years. I made good money, but beyond that there was nothing.

Richard Oakes[1]

It is important to note that in our Indian language the only translation for termination is "to „wipe out" or „kill off."" We have no Indian words for termination…

Earl Old Person, Blackfeet[2]

Richard Oakes childhood was split between the bustling Mohawk communities of Brooklyn and Akwesasne. Each community, industry, and life way had an adverse effect on Oakes political and social development. His education was tied to several complicated and distinct issues that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s. Termination legislation, the Saint Lawrence Seaway Project, and the disruptive force of gang life were all a part of young Oakes Mohawk awakening. During these years America emerged as an economic and diplomatic superpower in an era of dynamic social change. Five months before his

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[1] Richard Oakes, "Alcatraz Is Not An Island," 35.

[2] Richard Drinnon, *Keeper of Concentration Camps: Dillon S. Myer and American Racism*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 239-240. Statement Against the 1966 Omnibus Bill, from Earl Old Person, Chairman of the Blackfeet Tribe, Montana. For excerpts of Earl Old Person's speech, see also Vine Deloria, Jr., Ed., *Of Utmost Good Faith*, (San Francisco: Straight Arrow Books, 1971), 219-221.

birth, the war in the Pacific tragically crept up on the Pacific Fleet in Hawaii, culminating in the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor added intensity to the Iroquois fight to preserve the sovereign powers of the Longhouse throughout the duration of the war. One month after Richard's birth on June 12, 1942, several Iroquois leaders were in Washington D.C., where they issued the following statement on the footsteps of the Capitol: "Now, therefore, we do resolve that it is the sentiment of this council that the Six Nations of Indians declare that a state of war exists between our Confederacy of Six Nations on the one part and Germany, Italy, Japan, and their allies against whom the United States has declared war…"[3] This declaration of war followed a long courtroom battle over the right of the United States government to draft non-citizen Iroquois through the Selective Service Act.[4] President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the media heralded

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[3] Associated Press, "Chiefs of Iroquois Tribes Vote to Join War: Call on Six Nations Fight Against the Axis," *New York Times*, (Jun. 13, 1942), 17. See also, Lawrence M. Hauptman, *The Iroquois Struggle for Survival: World War II to Red Power*. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 6.

[4] "Their struggle, they said, is to maintain their identity as members of the Iroquois Indian Confederacy, which they hold to be an independent, unconquered nation, subject to its own lawmakers and not to Congress." Associated Press, "Indians in Court Seek Rights of Free Nations; Insist U.S. Has No Power to Draft Youth," *New York Times*, (Oct. 21, 1941), 25. Article includes a photo of Seneca, Dwight J. Merson; Harry Patterson, Tuscarora; Wilfred E. Hoffman, attorney; Ivan A. Burnham, Mohawk; and Clinton Rickart, Tuscarora, outside of federal court. Both Harry Patterson, Ivan A. Burnham, and Clinton Rickard are adorned in traditional Plains styled war bonnets, use of popular "American Indian" images provided an air of "authenticity," for Iroquois leaders. This style of dress was also a direct refusal to accept mainstream cultural norms, and their attire symbolically and publically demonstrated their sovereignty. One more interesting note about the photo, Seneca Dwight J. Merson is dressed in a suit, while Harry Patterson in Plains style regalia carries a briefcase. "Clinton Rickard wrote to President Roosevelt, "Canada, unlike the United States, kept its treaty with the Six Nations by not requiring any of the members to register or to be subject to compulsory military service."…in 1941 the Iroquois in Canada were notified that they would have to

the Iroquois declaration, which quickly erased public and political scrutiny over the Iroquois draft resistance. American and Canadian Mohawks faced the difficult legal decision between the acceptance of conscription or selective service. To allow either government the right to draft Mohawk citizens was a breach of sovereignty and acceptance of federal mandate. Eventually both countries would change their draft or conscription policies to accommodate Six Nations political rights. Several Akwesasne and Kahnawake Mohawks eventually contributed honorably to the war effort, serving gallantly in both the European and Pacific campaigns. A select group of Mohawks in the American campaign would also serve as code talkers, a covert group who used their Native language to create a code that baffled Japanese code breakers.[5]

In New York Mohawks used their collective skills in ironwork to promote wartime industry. In the *New York Times* Mohawk Paul Horn commented on Mohawk labor at the Brooklyn Navy Yard:

> Many of his Mohawk brothers, who have long been known as skilled ironworkers, are working the Navy Yard, said…[Paul Horn who is recording secretary of his union, Local 11 of the International Association of Bridge and Structural Iron Workers, A.F. of L. Eighteen hundred Indians of several tribes are filling defense jobs in this city, and about 5,000 through the country…[6]

Mohawk adults turned out by the hundreds to work in wartime industries. Many Mohawk women also began working in the wartime factories; they learned riveting and iron work,

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register for conscription, but when they called their treaties to the attention of Canadian authorities, the ruling was reversed." Alison Bernstein, *American Indians And World War II: Toward a New Era in Indian Affairs*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 30.

[5] Edmund Wilson, *Apologies to the Iroquois*, 91.

[6] Anonymous, "Indian War Bonnet Awarded To Stalin: Mohawk Chief Presents Gift at Ceremony in Brooklyn for 1941's Greatest Warrior,'" *New York Times*, (Feb. 21, 1942), 21.

an occupation dominated by Mohawk men.[7] In general, Mohawk families also profited from the desegregation of the wartime industries and in turn relied on iron work to promote the war effort. Some estimates place the number of American Indians who served in the wartime industries at 40,000, about ten percent of the total Indian population.[8] In Canada, First Nations service is documented at around 4,000 enlisted, and small numbers of First Nation women also enlisted in the Canadian Women's Army Corps.[9] American Indian women represented one-quarter of the entire Indian wartime labor force. As a whole American Indian service and participation in the war effort proved exceedingly high. A young Richard Oakes and his family, like many Americans, were affected by the war.

Despite exceptionally high service rates of Native peoples during World War II, the Bureau of Indian Affairs suffered several setbacks; funding for the agency was cut for the war effort, offices were relocated to Chicago, and staff depletions nearly paralyzed

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[7] "By 1943 at least 12,000 women had left the reservations to work in factories and in the nurses corps. Native American women worked as riveters, inspectors, sheet metalworkers and machinists." Jere Bishop Franco, *Crossing the Pond: the Native American Effort in World War II*. (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1999), 83.

[8] D'Arcy McNickle and Harold E. Fey, *Indians And Other Americans: Two Ways of Life Meet*. (New York: Harper & Brothers Pub., 1959), 149. "...Indian Bureau officials estimated that 24,521 American Indians, exclusive of officers, had served, and another 20,000 off-reservation Indians had also enlisted. The combined total figure of 44,500 comprised more than ten percent of the Native American population of approximately 400,000." Franco, 62.

[9] The 4,000 number is relatively low, mainly due to inconsistencies in Canadian Indian Affairs Bureau policy and records. For only First Nations people under the Indian Act were counted in conscription. This would exclude large numbers of Metis and other First Nations people not recognized as holding "Indian Status." For more information see also, R. Scott Sheffield, *The Red Man's on the Warpath: The Image of the "Indian" and the Second World War*. (Vancouver: The University of British Columbia Press, 2004); and Grace Poulin, *Invisible Women: WWII Aboriginal Servicewomen in Canada*, MA thesis. Trent University, 2006.

the agency. Programs such as the CCC-ID and NYA lost funding, and by 1949 the BIA office in Buffalo, New York had officially closed its doors. Along with cutbacks in the BIA, and while Mohawks fought under the United States' flag in foreign lands, opposition to Native sovereignty and Treaty Rights was slowly cultivated in Congress by Nebraska Senator Hugh A. Butler. The Senator's campaign for "Termination" utilized the slogan of "freeing Indians from the chains enslaving them to the federal bureaucracy."[10] By the end of the war, Akwesasne soldiers and wartime laborers who had allied against European fascism now faced a new enemy, Termination legislation.

In 1947 Senator Butler introduced three bills, known jointly as the "Butler Bills," which transferred civil and criminal jurisdiction over the Iroquois to New York state courts and challenged the Canandaigua Treaty of 1794 with a lump sum payment. Iroquois leaders organized several protests outside the United Nations building in New York, and employed the help of the press and the three-year-old National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) to help overturn the legislation. At Akwesasne the fight intensified as the Elected Tribal Chiefs, empowered by the state of New York, fought with the Traditional Life Chiefs of the Longhouse. This political "factionalism" at St. Regis, was employed by Senator Butler and others as an argument to promote further state intervention into Iroquois affairs. Despite fierce debate and public opposition to the bills, they passed Congress, leaving the Iroquois in limbo between Federal and State authority.

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[10] Bess Furman, "Campaign Pushed To 'Free' Indians," New York Times, (Jul. 22, 1947), 46. Laurence Hauptman, *The Iroquois Struggle for Survival*, 48.

Overturning Termination legislation commanded most of Richard Oakes‘ political activism. In 1953, the same year that saw the passing of famed Sac and Fox athlete Jim Thorpe and the end of the Korean War, Congress passed Public Law 280 and House Concurrent Resolution 108, which highlighted Butler‘s attempt to terminate the Federal Trust responsibility.[11] Both of these legislative measures of the ―Red Scare" era sought to hand civil and criminal jurisdiction of Tribes over to the State and to terminate treaty and trust responsibilities with more than one hundred Tribes, including all Tribes within California, New York, Florida, and Texas.[12] While the mid-1950‘s was a time of intense debate over civil rights and desegregation, the adverse effects of this mood had a devastating impact on Indian policy. Lawmakers viewed Reservations as federally sponsored segregation and a haven for socialists. The elimination of Federal-trust status, or Termination, was championed under the crusade of national civil rights reform and

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[11] Anonymous, ―Jim Thorpe Is Dead On West Coast at 64," *New York Times*, (Mar. 29, 1953), 1. Public Law 280 also,"passed in 1953…Congress took the unprecedented step of passing general legislation extending state civil and criminal jurisdiction into Indian country…Since HCR 108 was a statement of policy only, individual acts were needed to implement the policy in regard to specific tribes…This means that approximately 109 tribes and bands were terminated. A minimum of 1,362,155 acres and 11,466 individuals were affected…" David H. Getches, Charles Wilkinson, and Robert A. Williams, Jr., *Cases And Materials On Federal Indian Law*. (St. Paul: West Group, 2005), 204-205. Under the Fair Deal policy Truman appointed Dillon S. Myer as Director of Indian Affairs, a former administrator of the War Relocation Authority who launched administrative efforts to terminate Tribal governments. For more information on Dillon S. Myer see, Richard Drinnon, *Keeper of Concentration Camps: Dillon S. Myer and American Racism*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

[12] For a more detailed and historical account of the Termination era and its policies see, Donald Fixico, *Termination and Relocation: Federal Indian Policy, 1945-1960*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986). See also, Kenneth R. Philp, *Termination Revisited: American Indians on the Trail to Self-Determination, 1933-1953*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), and D‘Arcy McNickle and Harold E. Fey, *Indians and Other Americans: Two Ways of Life Meet*,120-200.

anti-Communism.[13] Nevada Senator George Malone reflected the influence of McCarthyism when he supported Termination measures with these words: ―While we are spending billions of dollars fighting Communism…we are at the same time… perpetuating the systems of Indian reservations and tribal governments, which are natural Socialist environments."[14] By the early 1950's, the state of New York had taken full advantage of the Butler Bills by enforcing the right of ―eminent domain" for the construction of the Saint Lawrence Seaway Project.

Just as menacing as Termination legislation, American Indians faced yet another imminent threat—a boom in hydroelectric construction. While most Americans were experiencing post-war economic affluence, Tribal Governments and their citizens battled against multinational corporations, state, and federal governments to protect against the further confiscation and erosion of their natural resources and land base:

> The Allegany Senecas lost one-third of their reservation to flooding by the Kinzua Dam…Tuscaroras found themselves 550 acres poorer by the time the Niagara Reservoir was completed in 1961…The Sioux of Standing Rock, Cheyenne River, Lower Brule, Crow Creek, and Yankton reservations, and the Mandan, Arikara, and Hidatsa at the Fort Berthold reservation were the most devastated. The Shoshone, Arapaho, Crow, Cree, Chippewa, Blackfoot, and Assiniboine were forced to give up land for the [Pick-Sloan project…in total 550 square miles. In western Canada, the Swampy Cree at Cumberland House and Easterville and the Rocky Cree at South Indian Lake, as well as the James Bay Cree in northern Quebec, were all dispossessed in favor of hydroelectric projects…The

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[13] Stephen Cornell, *The Return of the Native: American Indian Political Resurgence*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 121. ―…euphemisms used by Congress to describe termination: it was purportedly a program to ―free" Indians from federal supervision and to eliminate ―restrictions deemed discriminatory" against Indians. In fact, termination did little to promote ―freedom" or to root out ―discrimination." Getches, Wilkinson, and Williams Jr., *Cases and Materials on Federal Indian Law*, 205-206.
[14] Clayton R. Koppes, ―From New Deal to Termination: Liberalism and Indian Policy, 1933-1953." *Pacific Historical Review*. XLVI, No. 4, (1977): 544.

> tragedy is not that Kahnawake's case was unique, but that it was all too common.[15]

The hydroelectric crisis was most prominent in New York as Iroquois leaders pulled their legal resources together to halt the tides of America's need for increased energy consumption.

The St. Lawrence Seaway Project was designed as one of the largest canal projects in North America, implemented by the joint effort of Canada and the United States. The seaway dwarfed the Panama and Suez Canals, making it one of the world's largest canal endeavors. It, ―..consisted of a twenty-seven-foot deep channel, dug through dry land and dredged lake bottoms, stretching from Montreal to Lake Erie, and capable of lifting ships 600 feet above sea level as they sailed inland. The new waterway with its fifteen locks replaced a fourteen-foot deep system of canals and thirty time-consuming locks."[16] The proposed construction of the Seaway adversely affected the political, social, economic, and cultural life at Akwesasne and Kahnawake.

Kahnawake Anthropologist, Stephanie Phillips' research pinpoints the socio-cultural effects and power of place that emerged before the Seaway Project:

> In wintertime people skated and sledded on the frozen water, but the river truly came alive in the summer months. Women brought their laundry (few people had running water at the time), hung it on the trees, and then waded into the water. People brought their lunches, cooked by the shore, and swam until dark. The river was also a rich source of food: frog legs, berry bushes, and fish almost all year round. Some made their living selling fish, and those with slender incomes appreciated this food source. Others rented the summer cottages that dotted the shore to non-Natives who came to vacation in the community.[17]

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[15] Stephanie Phillips, *The Kahnawake Mohawks and the St. Lawrence Seaway*, 3.
[16] Laurence Hauptman, *The Iroquois Struggle for Survival*, 133.
[17] Stephanie Phillips, *The Kahnawake Mohawks and the St. Lawrence Seaway*, 15.

The Seaway project ended this memory and life way for hundreds of Akwesasne and Kahnawake residents. Ultimately the very movement and flow of the river and the fish populations were threatened by an international development that ignored Native North American human and treaty rights. In 1947, Mohawks and other First Nations people called upon a Special Joint Committee meeting to abolish the Indian Act of 1876. While the protest to abolish the Indian Act waged, the political outcry created reforms to the Indian Act in 1951. It was a partial victory which officially ended provincial authority and laws over First Nations. Some Native activists allied against abolishing the Indian Act, many feared the Indian Act might be replaced by a Canadian policy of Termination.[18]

By November of 1954, the state of New York had claimed Barnhart Island through ―eminent domain" for the building of the Seaway Project. The Iroquois claim to Barnhart Island involved several treaties and renegotiations of treaties that had occurred from the late eighteenth to the middle of the nineteenth century. After the War of 1812, the island had changed hands from Canada to the United States under the second 1822 Treaty of Ghent, which stated that all Mohawk rights with regards to the island were to be honored. With this legal precedent in mind and through the power of treaty, the Iroquois filed suit against the state of New York for compensation. In *St. Regis Tribe v. State of New York* the Court of Appeals eventually dismissed the case, and by 1959 the Supreme Court had refused to hear the case.[19]

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[18] Getches, Wilkinson, and Williams, Jr., *Cases and Materials on Federal Indian Law*, 953.

[19] Anonymous, ―Indians Set Back" *New York Times*, (Feb. 25, 1959) 23.See also, Wilson, *Apologies to the Iroquois*, 108-110.

By March of 1959, Iroquois leaders announced their intent to march on Washington D.C., and they scheduled meetings with retired Brigadier General Herbert C. Holdridge to discuss strategy. The meeting was attended by Akwesasne Mohawks, Tuscaroras, and Onondagas. On March 18, 1959, over one hundred Iroquois led by Tuscarora leader, Wallace ―Mad Bear" Anderson picketed outside the White House.[20] During the previous year, Mad Bear had gone to Cuba to meet with Fidel Castro and promote Cuban sponsorship of the Iroquois joining the United Nations.[21] The delegation of Iroquois leaders also demanded an audience with President Dwight D. Eisenhower about the illegal confiscation of Iroquois lands. Recuperating from the fallout over McCarthyism, Eisenhower's administration, aware of recent Cuban and Iroquois ties, refused an audience with Iroquois leaders. For Eisenhower's Vice President, Richard M. Nixon, whose career was partially built on being tough on communism, an election year loomed near. Having failed at the White House, the delegation focused their energies on Glenn L. Emmons, the Indian Affairs Commissioner. Two days later, the remaining force of one hundred Iroquois leaders failed to serve a citizen's arrest on Commissioner Emmons. While their protest was largely a failure, Iroquois leaders had successfully swayed support from members of Congress. Republican Senator William Langer from North Dakota told the *New York Times* that, ―…President Eisenhower should have

[20] ―He went into the Navy when he was sixteen and remained there till he was twenty-one. He drove a landing craft in the Pacific war in the Seventh Amphibious Fleet; was at Saipan and Okinawa; and he later served in Korea. He applied, he says, after the war, for a loan under the GI Bill of Rights, but discovered that this was impossible because he lived on reservation property. Up to the time of the war with the Power Authority, he spent every winter in the Merchant Marine." Wilson, *Apologies to the Iroquois*, 163.
[21] Ibid, 272.

received the Indians…They really had a just complaint."[22] More importantly, this singular event reveals that Iroquois leaders already understood how to use media as an alternative lobby for political change.

On September 16, 1955, back at Kahnawake, Canadian authorities unveiled a plan to confiscate 1,262 acres of Reserve land for the Seaway. Within one month of the decision eviction notices had been sent to Kahnawake residents. With construction of the Seaway well underway, Kahnawake homeowners lacked any figures for just compensation. In a series of back room negotiations between the Indian Affairs Department and the Seaway Authority, property values were negotiated. Kahnawake protested this negotiation, hired lawyers, and began to fight eviction notices leveled on families by the Seaway Authority. Like Akwesasne, Kahnawake tried to protect their land rights through the courts. By 1957, the Montreal Superior Court overturned Kahnawake's appeal against the Seaway. All together, by the time the Seaway was completed in 1959, Akwesasne had lost 130 acres and Kahnawake lost a total of 1,262 acres of riverfront land.

This was the first in a long series of pitched political battles that Richard Oakes witnessed at an early age. Despite the loss of Akwesasne and Kahnawake land to the St. Lawrence Seaway, another battle ended in a short-lived victory on the Tuscarora Reservation in southwestern New York.

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[22] Associated Press, "Mission In Capital Dropped By Indians," *New York Times*, (Mar. 21, 1959), 14. See also, Associated Press, "100 Indian Raiders Move In On Capital," *New York Times* (Mar. 19, 1959), 35; and Associated Press, "Indians Besiege the White House Over 'Injustices,' *New York Times* (Mar. 20, 1959), 16.

In 1958, Tuscarora leaders battled Robert Moses and the New York State Power Authority.[23] Moses sponsored plans to build a storage reservoir that would confiscate 1,383 acres of Tuscarora land, or nearly one-quarter of Tuscarora lands. Approximately, 124 Tuscarora families lived in the area and agriculture from its rich fields also supported the local economy. Chief Henry Patterson, who had protested against the draft, stated, ―We cannot sell it…That‘s against the rules of the six-nation confederacy. We cannot sell the land to a private concern."[24] One year later, Patterson‘s strong rhetoric was challenged by the lump sum figure of three million dollars, in addition to home relocation, the right to clear the harvest, construction jobs for Tuscarora citizens, and the option to purchase 1,200 more acres to curb the land lost by the hydroelectric project. The compromise represented a significant change from the Power Authorities original offer of $1,000 an acre.[25] The final offer proposed by Moses was weighed in Tribal Council and, eventually, the Federal Power Commission decided in favor of protecting Tuscarora land. Moses and the New York State Power Authority would have to build a much smaller reservoir and were prohibited from taking any Indian land. It was a decisive victory and would propel future traditional leaders like Tuscarora Mad Bear Anderson into the national spotlight. Eventually, despite the legal victory, Tuscarora would lose 550 acres of land to the reservoir project. [26]

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[23] For more information on Robert Moses consult, Hillary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson, Eds., *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York*. (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 2007) and Robert A. Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1974).
[24] Allen Drury, ―Tuscarora Cites Bar To Land Sale," *New York Times* (Nov. 27, 1958), 36.
[25] Anonymous. ―Tuscaroras Win New State Offer," New York Times (Jan. 25, 1959), 35.
[26] Wilson, *Apologies to the Iroquois*, 138-162

As he was growing up, Richard was known for being adventurous. He was encouraged to follow the ways of his people. In 1954, when he was just twelve years old, he hid on board a bus taking Iroquois leaders to Washington, D.C., for a meeting. After the bus had pulled away from Akwesasne, Richard Oakes emerged from his hiding spot. It was too late to turn the bus around, so they made room for the young man. He rode all the way with the delegation, from Akwesasne to Maryland, listening to stories and speeches. This moment of self-determination was the foundation of Oakes' youthful emergence into the American Indian political world. His was a fortunate opportunity to become immersed in Iroquois politics. While in Washington, he served as a young ambassador, and he witnessed his Nation's sovereign role in the world.[27] At a young age Oakes had asserted himself politically and he had gained a unique educational experience. Despite his Nation's repeated protests over the seizure of Barnhart Island, construction on the St. Lawrence Seaway Project began in the summer of 1954, an event that Richard witnessed.[28]

By 1957, conflict over the removal of families from an eighty-acre site along the Raquette River found its voice in the leadership of Standing Arrow (Francis Johnson), a Mohawk iron worker and Navy veteran who was in his mid-twenties. Standing Arrow led a group of protesters who occupied land at Kahnawake to protest construction of the

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[27] "Mad Bear Anderson told me later how Richard had sneaked onto the bus taking the Iroquois leaders to Washington when he was only 12." Dean Chavers, "Around The Campfire: The Leader of Alcatraz" *Indian Country Today*, 16, n.10 (Sep. 9, 1996): A5.

[28] By May of 1954 in *Brown v. Board of Education* the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. Shortly thereafter schools at St. Regis would begin busing students to local schools in outlying communities as a part of desegregation. This decision would lead to the, "…closing of all but three of New York's Indian schools by 1965." Laurence Hauptman, *The Iroquois Struggle for Survival*, 14.

Seaway. After eviction by Seaway authorities, Standing Arrow relocated the encampment on acreage along Schoharie Creek, located next to the New York Thruway near Fort Hunter, New York.[29] The occupiers, totaling around 400 families, sought just compensation for the land and challenged the court's refusal to hear Iroquois demands. This takeover in action publically challenged Canadian and U.S. law that used the right of "eminent domain" to evict Mohawk families for Seaway construction. The occupation lasted almost two years, until March of 1958, when the occupiers were evicted by a court order.[30]

The protest and eviction, however, would fuel frustration and resentment in the life of Richard Oakes:

> I was involved in the 1959 struggle to blockade the building of the Lawson [St. Lawrence Seaway] Dam, the seaway project which was taking parts of our reservation without compensation. Also the building of a bridge from the U.S. to Canada on the reservation and the building of facilities to house the maintenance men and the various aspects of the bridge, all on Indian Land without just compensation, so it has really been a big part for me to try to rectify some of this.[31]

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[29] Ibid., 149. "Standing Arrow…insisted that 'more than 2,000 Indians from reservations in Quebec, at Caughnawaga, Oka, and St. Regis, their life changed by the St. Lawrence Seaway,' were considering his call to resettle their original homeland in the Mohawk Valley. Citing the Treaty of Fort Stanwix of 1784, the Mohawks claimed a fifteen-square mile territory and insisted that the New York State treaty of 1789 that ceded land [to the state] was invalid because the state had no legal right to enter negotiations with the Mohawks after the formal adoption of the United States Constitution in 1788." See also, Michael James, "Memo to Washington: The Mohawk Indians Are on the Warpath Again," *New York Times*, (Aug 17, 1957), 17; and Wilson, *Apologies To The Iroquois*, 39-57.

[30] Anonymous, "Mohawks Quit Camp," *New York Times* (Mar. 22, 1958), 37.

[31] Troy Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island: Indian Self-Determination & The Rise of Indian Activism*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 102. "Fidel Castro of Cuba invited Six Nations and Miccosukee delegates to visit Cuba, which they did in July 1958." Troy Johnson, Duane Champagne and Joane Nagel, *American Indian Activism: Alcatraz to the Longest Walk*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 131.

These events may have molded his rejection of school. Despite the opportunity for learning, Richard was dissatisfied with the education offered in the off reservation Salmon River Central schools. Oakes stated that, ―all they wanted me to do was to become a part of the machinery, to make me into what they wanted: a white Indian. I wanted to do something for my people. But I didn't know what."[32] He eventually dropped out in the eleventh grade and began to learn the trade of ironwork. Young men were often inspired to join the profession as a way to be closer to their fathers. Richard Oakes had grown up having overheard stories of danger and brotherhood in the trade from his father and uncle. It was an industry that held an aura of mystery, as young men were often disciplined if they were caught even touching their father's tools. The reasoning behind this was not to create an interest in the occupation as much as it was to protect the ironworker from distraction on the job, a misplaced tool might lead to tragedy on the job site. Ironwork, as young Oakes soon experienced, was a very masculine profession.

Richard's father, Arthur Oakes and his relations had worked as ironworkers for most of their lives, and Richard continued in the family and Mohawk tradition. By the late 1960s, Arthur Oakes would reach new heights during the erection of the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan. Iron workers often competed for bragging rights over working the greatest number of stories; Richard had entered a new world. Oakes started working at sixteen, the average age for entering the profession being seventeen. To join the Local 361 in Brooklyn members had to be at least eighteen-years-old. As it was customary to working the job, Arthur Oakes was most likely a ―pusher," or foreman,

[32] Richard Oakes, ―Alcatraz Is Not An Island," 35.

which would explain how Richard could enter the profession at such a young age, and when he first joined the trade he was called a ―punk." As a rookie Oakes had to learn the ropes of the profession, older and more experienced workers often played pranks on the new recruits. These pranks taught the ―punks," or rookies, valuable lessons that could save their lives and potentially mold them into valuable workers. Another reason for the name was to make work crews aware of your lack of experience; in this way other ironworkers could keep an eye out for you.

Oakes gained a physical presence in ironwork and would be known later as ―A Big Man." Iron work is one of the most dangerous professions in the work force. Obviously, Oakes learned to cope with fear as he managed to work twenty to forty stories above the earth. Three separate types of crews worked in tandem on any given job site: derrick operators, connector gangs, and rivet gangs. The Derrick operation relied on a set of electronic signals, or sound bursts transmitted from the top of the structure to the crane operator, sometimes forty stories below. The connector gangs set the mobile beams into place with spud wrenches and large bolts. This assembly prepared the way for the ―flyboys" of the industry, the riveting gangs. One of Richard's main duties was serving as a catcher in a riveting gang:

> There are four men in a riveting gang—a heater, a sticker-in [catcher], a bucker-up, and a riveter. The heater lays some wooden planks across a couple of beams, making a platform for the portable, coal-burning forge in which he heats the rivets. The three other men hang a plank scaffold by ropes from the steel on which they are going to work. There are usually six two-by-ten planks in a scaffold, three on each side of the steel, affording just room enough to work; one false step and it's goodbye Charlie. The three men climb down with their tools and take their positions on the scaffold; most often the sticker-in [catcher] and the bucker-up stand on one side and the riveter stands or kneels on the other. The heater, on his platform, picks a red-hot rivet off the coals in his forge

> with tongs and tosses it to the sticker-in, who catches it in a metal can. At this stage, the rivet is shaped like a mushroom; it has a buttonhead and a stem. Meanwhile, the bucker-up has unscrewed and pulled out one of the temporary bolts joining two pieces of steel, leaving the hole empty. The sticker-in picks the rivet out of his can with tongs and sticks it in the hole and pushes it in until the buttonhead is flush with the steel on his side and the stem protrudes from the other side, the riveter's side. The sticker-in steps out of the way. The bucker-up fits a tool called a dolly bar over the buttonhead and holds it there, bracing the rivet. Then the riveter presses the cupped head of his pneumatic hammer against the protruding stem end of the rivet, which is still red-hot and malleable, and turns on the power and forms a buttonhead on it. This operation is repeated until every hole that can be got at from the scaffold is riveted up. Then the scaffold is moved.[33]

Often these gangs worked under blistering conditions of ninety-five-degree heat, and to fight the sweltering heat men took off their shirts to cool down while working. Accidents happened. Richard occasionally missed some rivets, catching them only as they seared against his upper torso, inflicting permanent scars.[34] Oakes proudly carried the scars from this industry for the rest of his life. For some, it was a rewarding trade; for others, it was just plain hard, muscle-grinding work. Riveting gangs competed with other Riveting gangs to be the fastest and best on a job site. Each gang earned not only a wage but a reputation that potentially spawned more work in the future. Each member of the riveting gang depended on the skill and concentration of their fellow members. They depended upon each other to remain safe. The loss of one member or a whole crew was devastating. The pressures and stresses that Richard Oakes inherited from the industry had to take their toll at times. While he was employed in iron work, Oakes began running with a street gang in New York, possibly as a way to vent the frustrations of his

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[33] Joseph Mitchell, ―The Mohawks in High Steel," 16-17.
[34] Dean Chavers of Albuquerque, interview by author, 15 August 2001, Albuquerque, tape recording--transcribed, tape 1, side 1, 7. Interview in author's possession.

profession and youth.[35] Ultimately, as so often is the case, Richard ran into conflict with the law. Gang life at this time, was confined to turf wars of young youth who sought proof of their masculinity and the quasi respect of their peer group.[36] Many of these wars were fought over access to public space, such as parks, entertainment, and municipal services.

During the 1950s, gang violence in Brooklyn had steadily increased as the number of juvenile arrests more than doubled. Gangs in Brooklyn, like the rest of America, were divided along racial lines as each neighborhood youth assembled his own means for protection. Richard Oakes not only gained a physical presence in iron work, but by the early 1960s had earned street credit. Street credit was earned in turf battles between rival district gangs; often these scrimmages were tests of endurance and many ended in bloodshed. Many street battles were waged with chains, bats, broken bottles, and bare knuckles. Death was rare in these street brawls, and as an unwritten rule gang violence almost exclusively targeted other gangs. As a minority population among Brooklyn gangs and often outnumbered, Indian gangs struggled to maintain their street credit. By 1960, a reported sixty-two gangs existed in Brooklyn alone. The violence

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[35] —…he had troubles as a youth in New York City when as a gang member he had frequent brushes with the law..” Anonymous, —Killer of Indian Is Arraigned,” *San Francisco Examiner*. (Sept. 21, 1972): 16.

[36] For more on the history of gangs in New York consult, Timothy J. Gilfoyle. *A Pickpocket"s Tale: The Underworld of Nineteenth Century New York*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2006) and Luc Sante. *Low Life: Lures And Snares of Old New York*. (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1991).

between racially comprised gangs mirrored the larger racial conflict that was brewing in many American cities.[37]

Between 1958 and 1959, while protests flared over construction of the St. Lawrence Seaway, Oakes was arrested twice, once on a disorderly conduct charge in Malone, New York, and later for petty theft in Syracuse, New York. For the last charge, Richard was sentenced to Reformatory School at the Elmira Recreation Center in Elmira, New York. Elmira held the dark reputation of being more of a prison than a school. Frequently, Elmira Reformatory School sponsored a repressive environment that fostered more aggression from its pupils. Shortly after his release, he again joined his street gang in New York City. Only two years after his release, he was arrested again in 1962, on assault and robbery charges, which were reduced to a misdemeanor for carrying a dangerous weapon. For this arrest, Richard served ten days in a Yonkers, New York jail, and on the twenty seventh of November, just four days after President John F. Kennedy's assassination, he was sentenced to three years at the Reformatory School in Elmira.[38]

Caught between his youth, the troubles of his people, and the dangers of his job and gang life, Richard was forced to seek another outlet for his frustrations—education. By the early 1960s, he had completed his requirements for a high school degree and was out on parole for good behavior. Despite his troubles with the law, Oakes had earned a reputation as a skilled laborer and was recruited for construction jobs throughout the New England area. During the summer of 1964, a race riot erupted in Harlem and Rochester,

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[37] Wendell Pritchett, *Brownsville, Brooklyn: Blacks, Jews, and the Changing Face of the Ghetto*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 114-115, 154-155, and 206.
[38] U.S. Department of Justice. Federal Bureau of Investigations. FOIA request. *File on Thomas Richard Oakes*. Prepared August 28, 2001, Arrest record. Washington, D.C., 14.

leading New York Governor, Nelson Rockefeller to call up the National Guard. Risking parole violations in 1965, Richard continued to live a migratory life, moving between construction sites and Akwesasne. He witnessed an America battling on the streets and in the courtroom over civil rights. While in New York, he heard the news of Malcolm X's assassination. By March 1965, the nightly news featured highlights of civil rights demonstrators being beaten in the streets of Selma, Alabama. One year later SNCC leader Stokely Carmichael, who was on the James Meredith March, issued the national call for Black Power as opposed to Freedom Now.[39]

While the Civil Rights movement struggled between nationalism and integration, American Indian leaders also struggled to redefine Native political and human rights. While the 1961 Chicago Conference organized by Salish-Kootenai historian D'Arcy McNickle and members of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) produced the Declaration of Indian Purpose; it also gave rise to a new political organization known as the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC). The Declaration of Indian Purpose called for the repeal of termination legislation and the promotion of Indian sovereignty or home rule.[40] NIYC promoted Intertribal conferences and chartered organizations of American Indian college students from across the country. The organization hosted conferences and

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[39] Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer. *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1991), 288-290.

[40] Daniel M. Cobb, *Native Activism In Cold War America: The Struggle For Sovereignty*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 30-57. See also, Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., *Red Power: The American Indians" Fightfor Freedom*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), 37-40.

offered variant forms of support to Native nationalist causes.[41] By 1967, Vine Deloria, Jr., the Executive Director of NCAI, had sanctioned the use of the term ―Red Power," a term that would hold crucial meaning throughout Oakes' life.[42]

Soon Richard Oakes began to pursue higher education by moonlighting at Adirondack Community College. From there, he enrolled at Syracuse University, possibly as a means to avoid the draft for the Vietnam War.[43] While working on a bridge in Rhode Island, Oakes reflected on the growing protests throughout the country and his nation's role in protecting Iroquois' human rights. In 1968, spontaneously, he quit his job and made plans to move across the country to San Francisco, where he hoped to see the world. Perhaps it was the death of his mother Irene Foote that prompted Oakes to relocate. Women in Iroquois society are the foundation and strength within many families. Mohawk women lived lives counter to the ―cult of domesticity." Oakes' mother

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[41] By 1964, NIYC supported direct action and the fish-in movement initiated by Northwest Coast Tribes in Washington State.

[42] ―This appearance was an outgrowth of the National Congress of American Indians' meeting in Denver. The then Executive Director of this national Indian organization apparently sanctioned the use of ―Red Power" in these terms: ―to run the reservations" ; ―to participate in American life on our terms"; ―to withdraw from everything if the tribes so wished"; and claimed that ―treaties give rights."…Most importantly, it seems that this media presentation coalesced Indian sentiment to include these wants—―self-government," "not asking the bureaucrats,"…In short, the dominant theme centered upon self-determination by native enclaves." Rupert Costo, Ed., *Indian Voices: The First Convocation of American Indian Scholars*. (San Francisco: The Indian Historian Press, 1970), 300.

[43] ―…the number of American Indians who served in Vietnam is accepted as 42,000, it is nevertheless exceptionally high. During the Vietnam War the total Indian population of the United States was less than one million persons. American Indians thus made up nearly 1.4 percent of all the troops sent to Southeast Asia, while Indians in general never constituted more than 0.6 percent of the total population…Approximately one out of four eligible Native Americans served in military forces in Vietnam, compared to one out of twelve in the general American population." Tom Holm, *Strong Hearts Wounded Souls: Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996) 123.

took care of the family finances, as most Mohawk ironworkers turned over their earnings to their wives. It would not be the last time Richard Oakes experienced loss.

The 1960s was the season of ―love and revolution," which found its capitol in San Francisco. By the late 1960s, San Francisco was awash with counter-culture philosophy. College students were experimenting with Timothy Leary's LSD, listening to Janis Joplin's smashing vocals, chanting Black Panther slogans of ―fight the power," and immersing themselves in the Haight Ashbury ―tribal" aura of non-conformity. Richard M. Nixon was about to upset Hubert Humphrey in the 1968 Presidential election. The world that Oakes entered soon provided new horizons to his hectic life.

In 1967, Oakes gave up everything familiar, packed his few belongings in a car, and began the long journey across Indian Country to California. Along the way, he stopped at different reservations to learn about the state of affairs of various other Native Nations. Oakes recalled: ―I was working in Newport, Rhode Island when I decided to go out to California. I was building a bridge at that time, working a long shift. I just decided to go to California, gave up everything, and drove right across the country. I wanted to come on out and see the world. It was a great experience."[44] He went to the local bars and listened to others sharing their stories about the problems within their Tribes. Before his trip he had read about other Nations and the history of Native people, but like most young people, he wanted to experience the truth. For many youth, the answers radiated from San Francisco.

Arriving in the Bay area, he first got a job as a truck driver. Eventually, he found permanent work as a bartender at Warren's Slaughterhouse Bar, owned by Ruby and

[44] Oakes, ―Alcatraz Is Not An Island," 35.

Frank Loureiro, (Klamath), and located in the Mission District of San Francisco. Soon Richard started dating Anne Marufo, a 27-year-old Kashaya Pomo from Stewart's Point Rancheria, and a single mother with six children: Yvonne, Rocky, William, Tanya, Joseph, and Leonard. Stewart's Point is located in Northern California just off the jagged coastlines and nestled in among pine groves. Anne has often been described as resilient, quiet, shy, reserved, and extremely protective of her family. Richard loved Anne's kids as his own, and her kids clung to Richard.[45] She was the counter-balance to Richard Oakes and at times she was the only one who could cool Richard Oakes frustrations. They quickly fell in love and were married by 1968.[46]

Shortly after their marriage, an altercation occurred between Richard and a gang of Samoans in the district. On September 14, 1968, Richard was arrested outside the Star Hotel on 16th Street.[47] He had been in a fight and assaulted a police officer trying to restore order. Upon his arrest, the officers witnessed something in Richard that many would come to recognize, his potential for leadership.

The San Francisco Police Department had been working to curb violence between Native Americans and Samoans in the Mission District. After Richard's arrival, they began to look to him to resolve their difficulties with community relations. Much of the rivalry between the two groups, in Brooklyn, was over turf, dating, and competition over the meager resources in the district. Street gangs had emerged within the Samoan and

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[45] Chavers interview, Tape 1, Side 2, 5.
[46] ―After living with Richard Oakes for five years,…" Anonymous. ―Anne Oakes' Emotions," *The Press Democrat* (March 17, 1973), 1. This quote is the best evidence to conclude that Richard and Anne Oakes were possibly married in 1967. This is also the same year that Richard Oakes moved from New York to San Francisco.
[47] FBI file, 15, 32.

Native communities to enforce _street laws‘ and protect their relations.[48] Richard Oakes was caught in the middle; with his prior record, he was all too aware of the consequences for his involvement. He was no longer single—he had responsibilities to his wife and children. Instead of a long stay in jail, the Police department offered him work as a community organizer. His job was to calm differences between the two groups and help to restore peaceful relations in the Mission.

On April 4, 1968, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated outside his hotel room in Memphis, Tennessee. His death shocked and stunned the nation. His funeral became a portrait of his life, as the black and white television displayed over three hundred thousand people marching behind him. His coffin was carried through the streets of Atlanta on an old farm wagon pulled by two Georgian mules. During his lifetime he had led one of the country‘s most powerful civil rights movements. His non-violent tactics for peaceful demonstration would influence the generations to come. Just two years prior to King‘s death, Hank Adams (Assiniboine/Lakota) who was part of the five-year-old National Indian Youth Council, had listened to King deliver an infamous anti-Vietnam address in a small crowded church in Riverside, New York.[49] Iroquois leaders had worked with King on his Poor Peoples Campaign and would now march beside Ralph Abernathy in the assassinated leader‘s memory. To say that the Native community felt only a loss would be an understatement. Following King‘s death, riots

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[48] For more information on the rivalry between Samoans and Native people, please consult Joan Abloan, ―Retention of Cultural Values and Differential Urban Adaptation: Samoans and American Indians in a West Coast City," Social Forces. 49:3 (1971): 385-93.

[49] Hank Adams, interview by Robert Warrior, no location, Dec. 20, 1994, transcribed, 52-53, From Robert Warrior‘s Private Collection. Copy in possession of author.

broke out in over one hundred cities. Americans watched as racism dismantled their cities and the National Guard arrived to ~~re~~store order." For Native peoples whispers of revolution were in the air.

The city that Richard Oakes had entered was different from the rest of San Francisco, it was a city unrecognizable to most residents of San Francisco—it was an Indian City. Chapter 3 will uncover the historical advent of the Indian City that was constructed in San Francisco. Richard Oakes understood the politics of the Indian City having grown up in the Mohawk Indian City of Brooklyn, New York. He had a unique insight into the institutions, organizations, and built environment of the Indian City. Richard Oakes, like thousands of other American Indians, found himself in the middle of a vibrant Indian City.

CHAPTER THREE

BETTER RED THAN DEAD

They discovered, as we did, that the "better life" the BIA had promised all of us was in reality, life in a tough, urban ghetto. Many people were unable to find jobs, and those who did were often offered only marginal employment. Urban Indian families banded together, built Indian Centers, held picnics and powwows, and tried to form communities in the midst of large urban populations.[1]

The urban environment of San Francisco encapsulated and inspired a unique utopian Intertribal vision of Tribal sovereignty. It was a vision that forged a new awareness of Native empowerment and independence during the late twentieth century. From the early 1920s, San Francisco was home to a vibrant and politically active Native community. In the decades to follow, the Bay Area Indian population doubled and eventually tripled in size by the 1970s. This twentieth century mass exodus from reservations and rural communities to western cities represented one of the greatest per capita internal migrations of a people in the United States.

Several external factors influenced this great migration; World War II, the controversial Bureau of Indian Affairs Relocation Program, and the destructive Federal policy of Termination. Each successive generation of new Indian migrants into San Francisco faced extraordinary odds; discrimination, isolation, inadequate public housing, police brutality, unemployment, assimilation, and acculturation. Indigenous San Franciscans collectively challenged these overwhelming odds by constructing political,

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[1] Wilma Mankiller and Michael Wallis. *Mankiller: A Chief and Her People*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 73. Wilma Mankiller was the first woman to be elected as the Principal Chief of the Western Cherokee Nation (1985-1995). Her autobiography documents her family's struggle in the 1960s for economic opportunity within the Relocation Program in San Francisco.

economic, social, and cultural coalitions. These coalitions were supported by community organizations, centers, and institutions that lent their services to political objectives.

Community leaders struggled to draw enough media and public attention to unmask the truth behind Relocation and Termination. Bay Area activists competed with a counterproductive bureaucratic utopian vision that consistently enforced a paternalistic _father knows best' policy. The best known of these policies was the BIA's Relocation Program, which systematically and geographically segregated Native people throughout San Francisco—a form of de facto gerrymandering. Through these programs the federal government disenfranchised Native peoples from their Tribal communities, while systematically sponsoring relocation into distant cities and districts to prevent the advent of a solid Native population and voting bloc. Whereas termination policy was established to destroy Tribal governments, relocation was forged under the guise of terminating individual connections to Tribal communities.

Ultimately, Native peoples transformed what appeared to be the failed experiment of urban migration and relocation, and developed a new cultural and political vision—Intertribalism. The San Francisco Indian community formed institutions, chartered organizations, infiltrated college campuses, established business networks, and politicized an entire community. By operating through these new community institutions and organizations Native peoples erased old identity questions and stereotypes, and formed a new consensus politic.

The urban Americanization experiment was reinvented by a more populated Intertribal community, as thousands of individuals from different Tribal backgrounds created political coalitions to challenge destructive government policies. Migrants who

typically found themselves at the bottom of the Red Ghetto, in the North Mission District, strove to protect and reinforce their Tribal identities by accepting an Intertribal identity as ‗American Indians.' This process of Intertribal community building is what I define as creating an Indian City, because it served as a localized model and pattern for other urban Indian communities. By exploring this historical phenomenon one can better understand the roots of the Red Power Movement in the late 1960s. This was a movement that fused together a powerful voice on a tiny island in the Bay Area. The 1969 occupation of Alcatraz became more than just a social experiment; it was an idea. This ―utopian" idea of full independence or home rule, known collectively as sovereignty, ushered in a new era of Native politics, self-determination.

Incredibly, San Francisco's 1960s Indian community has received little attention from scholars. This chapter explores the complicated invention of what I term as an ―Indian City;" a city that both opened and closed doors to Native peoples, but also gave birth to a movement where assimilation took a back seat to intense nationalism and Intertribalism.[2] The urban environment itself did not transform Native peoples into

[2] Very few studies have been devoted to Native San Francisco: Dr. Joan Ablon writes two articles in 1964 and 1971, and Dr. Ann Metcalf in 1980. These works are very general and lack a cohesive structure in which to understand the internal workings of the Indian city. I have chosen to use the term Intertribal because it implies that Native people do not relinquish their tribal identities in the process of claiming an American Indian identity like the dated universal term of pan-Indian suggests. The loose association implied by the term pan-Indian negates the unique process of reinvention that occurred within the urban Indian community. It was a process that tied and bound the community together through a shared acceptance of an Intertribal reality. I have chosen to use the term Intertribal because it implies that Native people do not relinquish their tribal identities in the process of claiming an American Indian identity as the term ―pan-Indian" suggests. The loose association implied by using the term pan-Indian negates the unique process of reinvention that occurred within the urban Indian community. It occurred through a shared acceptance of an Intertribal reality. This treatment of Indian city relies on a

transnational focus that attempts to understand the complexities of members from over one-hundred different and distinct Tribal Nations who converged in San Francisco. I have also chose to use the term ―Intertribal" over ―Supratribal" because the term Intertribal originates from the Native community, and identifies both federal and state recognized and non-recognized Indigenous peoples. Hazel W. Hertzberg's *The Search For An American Indian Identity* was a seminal book for the 1970s and explored what she termed as the modern ―Pan-Indian" movement. Her definition of this term: ―In ot until the Progressive Era, however, did a number of organized movements arise, national in scope, based firmly on a common Indian interest and identity as distinct from tribal interests and identities, and stressing Indian accommodation to the dominant society…"[2] Hertzberg's definition of pan-Indian stressed that Native peoples dismiss their Tribal heritage for a new identity as American Indian. Vine Deloria, Jr., automatically dismissed Hertzberg's use of the term in his provocative review entitled, ―The Rise and Fall of the First Indian Movement," *Historian*, 33:4 (Aug 1971), 663. Deloria stated, ―The author herself freely admits that Indians do not use this phrase [pan-Indian , most abhor it…The mere use of Pan-Indian, originating as it does within anthropological circles, makes the past seem more past then it really is. In fact it makes that particular past the province of scholars and not Indians…[it only perpetuates the tension already existing between scholars and Indians." Despite Deloria's review, ―pan-Indian" and its definition has persisted and remained entrenched in scholarship about Native peoples. In his work, *The Return of the Native: American Indian Political Resurgence*, by sociologist Steven Cornell expands upon the work of famed anthropologist Nancy O. Lurie by pressing the term ―supratribal." Cornell defines supratribalism in a footnote on page 243 as, ―a generalized Indian identity and to the tendency on the part of Indians in certain situations to organize or act on the basis of that identity as opposed to particular tribal identities." Sadly, Cornell only reinvents the wheel, and imposes a new term, but with the same hidden principals as its progenitor ―pan-Indian." He liberated the term from Nancy O. Lurie who broke up its application into four distinct levels: 1) the nationalist or supratribal/pan-Indian, 2) inter-tribal or pan-Indian, 3) tribal or reservation, and 4) real Indians or ―full-bloods," in Ed., S. Levine and N.O. Lurie, *The American Indian Today* (Baltimore: Pelican Books, 1970), 314. Clearly, Lurie was more interested in carving up Indian identity into political and biological ―authenticity.' Scholarly acceptance of these terms (supratribalism and pan-Indian) denies a key element from Native history—Intertribalism. As a process of historical study Intertribalism in definition and application uncovers the roots of Indian Cities and its relationship to the constructs of Red Power. Native peoples do not willingly give up their Tribal (political, national, social, and cultural) connections to become American Indian. Rather these Tribal connections are protected and reinforced in Intertribal spaces and places that can promote a uniquely diverse acceptance of an overall American Indian identity for the promotion of Tribal political gains. Beyond two-world theory, of Indian v White worlds, Intertribalism dismisses this former ultimatum. Intertribalism adds complexity and depth towards understanding twentieth-century Native history as a shared and complex transnational experience rather than an absolute choice between two worlds. This footnote is part of a

victims, but instead urban Indians built Intertribal institutions and a community that forever altered their political relationship with the Federal Government. The cultural, political, social, and economic relationships that Native peoples developed in San Francisco during the 1960s raises several important questions: How did the urban space of San Francisco facilitate the growth of Intertribal identity? How was the city transformed by newly politicized Indigenous activists? What created the ―Red Ghetto," and how did American Indians adapt and survive within this new space? How did Native peoples maintain distinct nationalities while creating Intertribal spaces such as cultural and political organizations, Indian bars, and Indian Centers? Using these questions as a starting point, this chapter further exposes how Richard Oakes and Indigenous activists created alternatives to a life of assimilation or Tribal disaffiliation and transformed their urban neighborhoods, public, and private spaces into an Intertribal ―Indian city."

The Great Native Migration

The majority of historical scholarship that discusses internal migration of ethnic groups in the United States tends to focus on African Americans. However, excluding the depression years, Native peoples migrated to urban centers at a rate of four times than that of African Americans.[3] Economic necessity constituted the primary reason that Native peoples moved to cities during the early twentieth century, and particularly in the postwar period. During the 1960s the average annual income on Indian reservations

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larger research project involving the new historical theoretic and construct of what I term as Intertribalism.

[3] Arthur Margon. ―Indians and Immigrants: A Comparison of Groups New to the City," *Journal of Ethnic Studies*. 4: 4 (Winter 1977): 18.

totaled $1,500.00 per family versus $2,850.00 per family in cities.[4] A high unemployment rate compounded this situation, reaching well above ninety percent for some communities.[5]

The top industries within reservation communities were agriculture, timber, and mining. Sociologist Joseph G. Jorgensen analyzed BIA reports from 1968 and estimated that Americans grossed 170 million dollars from agricultural products. Of that, Indian agriculture accounted for only sixteen million dollars. Similarly, of 803 million board feet of lumber harvested from Native lands, Indian communities only received fifteen million dollars (this amounts to a little over eighteen cents per board feet of lumber removed from Native lands). Mineral leases yielded thirty-one million dollars to select Indian communities, and yet, only ten thousand jobs were created for a total Indian population of 764,000.[6] Most reservation communities lacked a stable economic infrastructure to keep these profits within their borders. Additionally much of the profit that accrued to Native peoples via agricultural and extractive industries were derived through the leasing of lands, which stripped most Tribal governments of their right to control the production of resources on Indian land.

Depopulation led to further economic disparity for many reservation communities. In the twentieth century, three major events led to an increase of migration

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[4] Jack O. Waddell and O. Michael Watson. Ed. Joseph G. Jorgensen. ―Indians and the Metropolis." *The American Indian in Urban Society*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), 83. Donald Fixico. *The Urban Indian Experience in America*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000): 73. For the urban figure I used the average between ten Indian Cities: Oklahoma City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Minneapolis, Buffalo, Albuquerque, Seattle, San Francisco, New York, and San Diego.
[5] M. Annette Jaimes. Ed. *The State of Native America*. (Boston: South End Press, 1992):245.
[6] Ibid. 82-83.

from the reservation to the city: World War II, the Bureau of Indian Affairs Relocation Program, and Federal Termination Policy that Congress framed in 1953.[7]

The first migration of Native peoples to urban centers was felt during and after World War II, as approximately 44,500 Native men and women enlisted in the armed forces. Many of these troops were exposed to other worlds in their platoons and travels. The military proved through desegregated regiments that Indians could actively compete on the battlefield among soldiers from different backgrounds. The regimented life of the military and service in wartime industry mobilized thousands of Native peoples to actively pursue life and opportunity in an urban setting after the war. Like thousands of their comrades, many Native veterans took advantage of the GI Bill to secure loans and an education, while others applied for VA loans to purchase homes or open businesses in western cities, and some even relocated to the burgeoning suburbs. For some veterans, the urban environment was a place that would enrich their new found foreign and domestic wartime experiences.[8] For others, the city represented the ultimate escape where

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[7] For a detailed account on the Relocation Program see, Donald Fixico. *Termination and Relocation: Federal Indian Policy, 1945-1960*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986).

[8] Alison R. Bernstein. *American Indians And World War II: Toward A New Era In Indian Affairs*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 60. ―military life provided a steady job, money, status, and a taste of the white world to previously isolated and unassimilated Indians." Bernstein explains further on page 150, ―Fewer than five hundred of the more than three thousand Indians who decided to live in San Francisco and Los Angeles found steady employment. Even as the economy moved close to full employment, Indians were, for the most part, unskilled or semiskilled laborers, and among the first to be laid off as the job market increasingly required better skilled workers…Neither the reservation nor the urban environment seemed capable of fulfilling the expectations created by their wartime participation in the larger society." 150. For more information on World War II see also, Jere‘ Bishop Franco. *Crossing the Pond: The Native American Effort in World War II*. (Denton: University of North Texas Press,

one could get lost in the crowded streets, delight in window shopping, and experience new foods. It was a different and exciting reality far from the pace of reservation life or life within the many rural non-reservation communities of Oklahoma.

Enlisted men began the flow of Native peoples to western cities during World War II, but others soon followed, looking for semi-skilled factory jobs in wartime industries.[9] Both Indian men and women helped to desegregate industry in Western cities, and many of them achieved unprecedented economic prosperity. Native women by the thousands championed the call to factories in the aircraft industries.[10] Many men and women were recruited directly from local boarding schools to work in the factories.

1999) and R. Scott Sheffield. *The Red Man's On the Warpath: The Image of the "Indian" and the Second World War*. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004).

[9] Joan Ablon. "Relocated American Indians in the San Francisco Bay Area: Social Interactions and Indian Identity," *Human Organization*, (1964): 297. Bernstein, 86 "In 1940 the number of Indians dwelling in cities was less than five percent of the entire Indian population. By 1950, that figure had quadrupled to nearly twenty percent."

[10] Bernstein. 73. "Estimates place the number of Indian women working in war industries in 1943 at 12,000 or slightly more than one-fourth of the total population that had left the reservations for war related work." See also, "The War Manpower Commission offered women free training in light defense jobs that could eventually pay as much as $120 a month." James B. LaGrand. Indian Metropolis: Native Americans in Chicago, 1945-1975. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002): 36; and Nicholas G. Rosenthal. "Repositioning Indianess: Native American Organizations in Portland, Oregon, 1959-1975," *Pacific Historical Review* 71:3 (Aug. 2002): 419. For comparison Rosenthal estimates that in Portland alone, "…warships created 140,000 jobs and brought 260,000 new people to the city…" His essay, on page 421, also lends another key term, "Indianness" to the overall debate which he defines as an, "Indian identity, that acted as a complement to their more typically American lives." Once again this lucid term by Rosenthal's definition is more closely associated with "pan-Indian." Although he diverges slightly, Rosenthal posits that Native identity is more "fluid," containing "boundaries" that are being constantly "negotiated." By Rosenthal's definition "Indianness" places historians upon a slippery slope into a destructive debate about authenticity (inherent difference)—it assumes that scholars can clearly take apart ethnic boundaries and define or label who is Indian or non-Indian (that to be Indian one cannot be American). More importantly, Rosenthal's article represents yet another dynamic study in the area of urban Indian history in Portland, Oregon.

Overall around 40,000 Native peoples relocated to urban environments to acquire employment in wartime industries.[11]

As soldiers returned home and the war came to a close, demand for workers decreased. Native peoples were usually the first to be laid off from their new-found employment. Historian Alison R. Bernstien notes, ―[b y 1950 the unemployment rate for urban Indians had reached fifteen percent nearly three times that of whites." As quickly as opportunity had come to Indian wartime laborers, tragedy was just around the corner. Despite increased financial savings from the wartime years, many Native peoples survived on dual incomes—supporting family and relations back at home or on the reservation while subsisting in the city. Many lacked the flexible savings to deal with the sudden loss of employment. Those who could afford it returned to their home communities, while those who lacked such funding sought affordable housing, semi-skilled jobs, and continued to fight for better jobs and living conditions.

During the war, the first wave of Native migrants to San Francisco settled in Hunter's Point, a district formed among the shipyards of Little Tokyo. However, much of the Native community was soon dispersed throughout greater San Francisco.[12] The majority who settled in Hunter's Point were African American families who sought

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[11] Larry Burt. ―Roots of the Native American Urban Experience: Relocation Policy in the 1950s," *American Indian Quarterly*, 10:2 (Spring 1986):86.

[12] Japanese Americans were relocated from San Francisco during the war out of fear of the American public of spying or sabotage. Yet, many of these families had been in San Francisco for several generations. Both their business and homes were sold and their communities interned in camps administered by the Department of Interior. During the relocation program administrators actively sought to spread the Indian population into diverse areas to accelerate forces of assimilation. This is more than likely a reason why the return rates were so high for relocatees at the inception of the program.

employment in the shipyards, and eventually former Little Tokyo became known by outsiders as Harlem West.[13] Former resident, Wilma Mankiller, (Cherokee) recalled:

> Shipyard employees and hourly wage earners made their homes there. Although the shipyard did not close until 1974, jobs started to become more and more scarce in the 1960s. The workers who resided at Hunter's Point fell into financial difficulties, and the housing area became little more than a ghetto…We found a few Native Americans living at Hunter's Point, including another Cherokee family…My Mother also became friends with people from different backgrounds…Outside was another story. There was a great deal of animosity between black youths and Samoan youths of Hunter's Point. Sometimes it seemed like a war zone when rival gangs clashed on the streets…When the officers stopped to make a call and left their car unattended, every window was shattered. That was standard procedure. All of the police, across the board, were considered to be –the enemy." Living in Hunter's Point also gave me an insight into cultures I otherwise might not have ever known.[14]

Soon, Native and African American families began to compete for skilled and semi-skilled employment, housing, and economic mobility.

Housing in Hunter's Point proved a more affordable solution for the thousands of laborers who relocated to San Francisco for employment during the war. Without the advantages of the VA loan, Native laborers were forced to budget, and many latched onto affordable rentals throughout Hunter's Point. Due to the huge influx of laborers relocating into the Bay Area during the war, this sudden population boom created a severe housing shortage and pushed the value of real estate far beyond the grasp of many

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[13] In 1966 a race riot erupted along the streets of Hunter's Point out of protest for the police shooting of a Black teenager who allegedly stole a car. The riot lasted a total of five days with cases of looting and arson, although no one was mortally wounded, many of the white businesses throughout the city begin leaving ethnic neighborhoods and disrupted the tax base, employment, and subsequently led to further ghettoization. This affected the large Native populations in the Mission District and the riot will eventually influence the formation of the Oakland based Black Panther Party in 1966. For more information on the 1966 riot see Arthur E. Hippler. *Hunter"s Point: A Black Ghetto*. (New York: Basic Books, 1974).

[14] Mankiller and Wallis, 108-110.

Native families. Despite official numbers, Native peoples faced de facto discrimination and redlining when applying for mortgages, especially when buying a home in all-white neighborhoods. Coupled with high unemployment, many Indians found themselves at the end of a very short economic stick.[15]

While military service and the promise of jobs drew many Indigenous peoples to western cities during World War II, federal Indian policy determined the nature of the migrations during the postwar years. By 1952, the BIA had launched one of the most dramatic programs in its history: the Relocation Program. The program began in 1948 when the BIA used the Hopi and Navajo Tribes as test cases.[16] In 1956 Congress passed the Indian Vocational Training Act (Public Law 959) to provide job training to migrants. Along with job training, relocatees received a one-way bus ticket to one of six relocation centers located in; Chicago, Cleveland, Dallas, Denver, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. The federal government also provided temporary housing, supplementary income for

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[15] ―Prohibition of discrimination in redevelopment proposals, in public housing, as well as in employment, became policy slowly, and in the case of public housing only after extensive litigation."
William Issel. ―Liberalism and Urban Policy in San Francisco from the 1930s to the 1960s," *The Western Historical Quarterly*. 22:4 (Nov. 1991), 440.

[16] ―The Outing Program was expanded from the Charlisle School to all of the other federal Indian schools…During World War II the BIA revived the Outing Program concept, using it as a wartime recruitment agency to send Indians to off-reservation work, railroad track repair, ammunition depot labor, farmwork, and domestic service…In 1955 the BIA began a program called American Indian Voluntary Relocation…The intent from the first Outing Programs was to permanently disperse Indians so that there would not be any Indian communities. American Indian identity would cease to exist. Human obstacles to the transfer of reservation land and natural resources would be permanently removed."
William Willard. ―Outing, Relocation, and Employment Assistance: The Impact of Federal Indian Population Dispersal Programs in the Bay Area." *Wicazo Sa Review*, 12:1 (Spring 1997): 30.

furniture and household necessities, and job counseling for one year after arrival.[17] However, the BIA rarely provided migrants with the promised retention-based services. Many Natives, such as LaNada Means (Shoshone/Bannock), who was in her twenties, found that the Relocation promises made by the federal government were only lies:

> The only programs the BIA has are vocational training for menial jobs, and I didn‘t especially want to be a beautician. Actually, I wanted to try college again, but when I told this to a BIA counselor, he said they didn‘t have any money for that and told me I was being ‗irrational and unrealistic.‘ All types of problems develop when you‘re on relocation. The Indian who has come to the city is like a man without a country. Whose jurisdiction are you under, the BIA‘s or the state‘s? You go to a county hospital when you‘re sick and they say, ‗Aren‘t you taken care of by the Indian Affairs people?‘ It‘s very confusing. You hang around with other Indians, but they are as bad off as you are. Anyway, I started sinking lower and lower…I married…I got pregnant again…things didn‘t work out in the marriage…I ended up in the San Francisco General psychiatric ward for a few weeks. I was at the bottom…Indian people get to this point all the time, especially when they‘re relocated into the big city and are living in the slums. At that point, you‘ve got two choices: either kill yourself and get it over with—a lot of Indians do this—or try to go all the way up, and this is almost impossible.[18]

Native peoples who participated in the Relocation program were promised housing, jobs, and financial assistance. Most found these few options to be dead ends; as a result, relocation was viewed by Indigenous critics as a failure. Economist Alan Sorkin calculated that, ―From 1953 to 1957…three out of ten who were relocated returned home

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[17] The six centers were Chicago, Cleveland, Dallas, Denver, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. Alan L. Sorkin. *The Urban American Indian*. (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1978), 27. Most received a monthly check for a year of $140.00 until they found work, then this payment was cut off. Peter Collier. ―The Red Man‘s Burden," *Ramparts*. (Feb.1970): 30.

[18] Peter Collier. ―Better Red Than Dead," *Ramparts*, (Feb. 1970): 30. LaNada Means was interviewed by Peter Collier for this article. Eventually LaNada would be the primary Native student organizer on the Berkeley campus and was to become a co-coordinator with Richard Oakes of the famed Alcatraz takeover in 1969.

during that same fiscal year in which they migrated."[19] On the other hand, some people like Yvonne Lamore-Choate (Quechan) found her experience to be quite rewarding in the end:

> The group I was in was made up mostly of single women who were either going to attend some kind of business school or cosmetology school. It was fun getting to know each other, but by the end of the week we would all scatter to different parts of the Bay Area: some would remain in Oakland, others would go to San Jose or Hayward, and some of us to San Francisco. Our paths would cross again over the years at one Indian bar or another. In the 1960s, there were Indian bars everywhere, and they all seemed to be doing a very lucrative business.[20]

Both LaNada Means and Yvonne Lamore-Choate's experiences offer a different glimpse into the complex associations that Indigenous peoples forged with the program. For some, the relocation program and living situations in the "Red Ghetto" were far better than conditions in their homelands. Additionally, the opportunities for Native women greatly increased outside of some paternalistic and corrupt Tribal governmental systems. For couples the economic gain was twofold, now Indian couples could enjoy the financial rewards of a double-income. For Native children it meant new horizons and public education through which they avoided boarding schools. Such benefits often brought families closer together.

The advantages for many Indian families outweighed the costs of relocation, which was strictly voluntary, and the BIA screened all applicants and searched for those

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[19] Sorkin. 33. Eventually, by 1959 the BIA ceased keeping statistics on its relocation program to avoid criticism. Therefore, little data exists except from Native organizations and the Census Bureau. Joan Ablon suggests the return rate is as high as 75% in the early years. Joan Ablon. "Relocated American Indians in the San Francisco Bay Area: Social Interaction and Indian Identity," *Human Organization*. (1964): 297.

[20] Susan Lobo. *Urban Voices: The Bay Area American Indian Community*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002), 38.

they believed would adjust to urban living. Applicants were rated on age, previous work experience, police record, marital status, and education. The program, for instance, preferred married applicants over single individuals, for relocation officers assumed that family connections increased a migrant's chance for success. Veterans held a good chance of being selected for relocation. In fact, almost half of the Indigenous peoples who relocated to San Francisco were World War II veterans. While the relocation program convinced many Native peoples to move to San Francisco, about one-third of the total Native population relocated without government assistance. There is no doubt that relocation was a force of transformation to Native peoples. In 1969, Richard Oakes (Akwesasne Mohawk) commented on the program:

> The San Francisco Bay Area has been, as have many urban centers, recipient of a large scale Native American migration. Because of the relocation program of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, there are representatives of most of the major tribes residing here. Many are facing urban situations for the first time and find it an unknown and disruptive experience. The variety of tribal identities, the lack of communication between these, and public images of the "Indian" which are culturally undefined and often confusing in institutional application…have added to the stress of urban "adjustment" and the formation of self-identity.[21]

By 1972, the relocation program had relocated 100,000 Native peoples out of a total population of 764,000 Indigenous Americans in the United States. By 1960, local Native organizations estimated that the San Francisco Indian population was around 10,000.[22] Nationally, in 1960, about 27% of Indian Country lived in urban enclaves; by 1977, cities claimed almost 50% of the total Native population throughout America.[23]

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[21] Richard Oakes. "Native American Studies." *Hayakawa Papers*. San Francisco State University Archives, Ethnic Studies-NAS, 1969, 2, San Francisco, CA.
[22] Ablon. 297.
[23] Sorkin. 10, 25.

The House Concurrent Resolution 108 (passed in 1953), and commonly known as the ―Termination Act," also affected the Native migration experience. From 1953 to 1958, this resolution led the federal government to terminate its trust responsibilities with 109 Indigenous Nations throughout America. Termination policy devastated many Native communities, overturning the protection of Tribal land, negating treaty rights, including health care and education, and threatening a way of life for thousands of Native peoples. Statistics on those moving into the city because of Termination legislation is lacking, but the successful termination bills in effect accounted for a large proportion of the nearly one-third of the Native peoples who relocated to San Francisco at their own expense.[24]

One major criticism of the Relocation and Termination era was that the Government sought to exploit a large unskilled labor force, which weakened the already meager labor force on many reservations. Some statistics indicate that as much as twenty-five percent of the U.S. mineral wealth is located solely on Native lands.[25] Compounding this statistic was the government's increasing dependence on uranium for atomic weapons and energy, which demanded an exploitable labor force and smaller populations to limit the extent of exposure, and diminished the powers of some Tribal governments to

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[24] For more on Termination see also, Donald L. Fixico. *Termination and Relocation: Federal Indian Policy, 1945-1960*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986); Richard Drinnon. *Keeper of Concentration Camps: Dillon S. Myer and American Racism*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); and Kenneth R. Philip, *Termination Revisited: American Indians on the Trail to Self-Determination, 1933-1953*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999).

[25] Al Gedicks. *The New Resource Wars: Native and Environmental Struggles Against Multinational Corporations*. (Boston: South End Press, 1993), 41. See also, Donald L. Fixico. *The Invasion of Indian Country in the Twentieth Century: American Capitalism and Tribal Natural Resources*. (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1998): 143. ―Overall, geologists report that twenty-five to forty percent of America's uranium, one-third of its coal, and approximately five percent of its oil and gas are on Indian reservations in the West."

fight against multinational corporations.[26] Coupled with the BIA's relocation program, large tracts of land were taken out of trust status when individuals left their reservation communities. These large plots of land created a checker board effect and ripped Tribal control of these lands from their respective Tribal governments.[27] Termination and Relocation legislation accelerated suspicions of resource exploitation across Indian Country and it promoted the systematic economic and diplomatic destruction of Tribal governments.

Mission District

> *The North Mission is demographically different from the 24th Street corridor. The North Mission is less vital economically, and while it borders on the predominantly gay and lesbian Castro District to the west, it also borders on the once industrial but now gentrifying South Market area. Its residents come from a wide variety of cultures…*[28]

Before 1906, the Mission District was primarily comprised of worker tenements, and the famed Mission Dolores one of the Franciscan Missions, dating back to 1776.

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[26] Possibly explaining why the government pushed to relocate Navajos and offered free train passage and jobs on the Santa Fe Railroad to members of Laguna Pueblo. Box-car towns were established in cities along the railroad lines and specifically in Richmond, California located just south of San Francisco. For more on this please consult, Kurt M. Peters. ―Contiuing Identity: Laguna Pueblo Railroaders in Richmond, California." in Susan Lobo and Kurt Peters, Eds. *American Indians and the Urban Experience*. (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2001), 117-126.

[27] ―The BIA made it easy for Indians to remove their land allotments from trust status immediately after leaving reservations. This further eroded the Indian land base since non-Indians were usually better able to purchase fee patented land…the problem of Indian and non-Indian land as it became so intermingled that it was impossible for Native Americans to muster blocks of reservation land for tribal enterprises…leaving an unbalanced population of those least able to make a tribe economically viable." Burt, 92.

[28] James Brooks, Chris Carlsson, and Nancy J. Peters. Ed. *Reclaiming San Francisco: History, Politics, Culture*. (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1998), 237.

After the devastating earthquake and fire of 1906, working class Irish families moved into the area, looking for cheaper lands for housing. Tenements were promptly built in the district for workers helping to rebuild the city. Eventually, because of the high population of working class residents, unions relocated their headquarters into the district. Following the unions, other ethnic laborers arrived, including Italians, Germans, Russians, and Scandinavians. Throughout the thirties the Mission District was at the center of organized labor, which sponsored successful strikes around the Bay Area.

By World War II the population in the area had nearly doubled.[29] As older emigrant groups moved out, new migrant workers, such as African Americans, Mexican Americans, Samoans, and Native Americans, replaced them. Neighborhoods like the Mission were typically characterized by low-income housing (left over from the early 1900s), high unemployment, and crime. As the incoming Native populations grew in number, they competed with other ethnic groups for services, housing, and jobs. By the 1960s, the Mission District—especially the North Mission—was home to the largest concentration of Native peoples in the city and was the site of the San Francisco Indian Center.[30] Lanada Means recalled, "[w]henever Mayor Alioto went to the Mission District

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[29] "…the city's transformation lay in post-World War II efforts by planners and developers to transform a quaint West Coast port into an international corporate center of commerce, finance, and administration…a consequence, blue collar activities in the manufacturing and wholesale trades have declined steadily since World War II, while retail, finance, insurance, real estate, transportation, utilities, and tourism have generally expanded." Little did Native relocatees to San Francisco realize that city planners were redefining the work force, and that the job market for blue-collar labor was quickly disappearing.
Brian J. Godfrey. "Urban Development and Redevelopment in San Francisco," *Geographical Review*, 87:3 (Jul. 1997): 316.

[30] Fredrick M. Wirt. *Power in the City: Decision Making in San Francisco*. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), 245. For further information on Samoan and

where many of us lived, he would meet with the Latino and Spanish groups, the Mission Rebels (Blacks) and the Indians…We were recognized as a political unit and gradually we became politicized."[31] These coalition politics were critical to the unification of the Mission District, as Wilma Mankiller remembers: "My spirits were buoyed in the mid-1960s whenever I heard more news from the San Joaquin Valley about the National Farm Workers Association, led by Cesar Chavez…I attended several of their benefits and consciousness-raising events held throughout the Mission District."[32] Forming alliances with the National Farm Workers Association and creating powerful coalitions was a focus for many Native peoples in the Mission District. Further, competing for scarce urban resources coalitions could bolster municipal reform. Al Miller (Seminole), later instrumental in the formation of Native American Studies and the Alcatraz takeover, collected the local paper Nuestra Misión de San Francisco, a publication put forth by the League of United Latin American Citizens.[33] The periodical was a way to organize the diverse citizenry of the Mission District into a voting bloc. Several of the articles suggested forming a separate and unique "world-wide" municipal government independent from San Francisco's City Hall. This type of coalition politics created

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Native interactions see Joan Ablon. "Retention of Cultural Values and Differential Urban Adaptation: Samoans and American Indians in a West Coast City," *Social Forces*. 1971, 385-93.

[31] Lanada Boyer, "Reflections of Alcatraz," in Susan Lobo and Steve Talbot, Ed., *Native American Voices: A Reader*. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 2001), 507-508. For more on the Mission District see also, Mike Miller, *A Community Organizers Tale: People and Power in San Francisco*. (Berkeley: Hey Day Books, 2009), 43 and Marjorie Heins, *Strictly Ghetto Property: The Story of Los Siete de la Raza*. (Berkeley: Ramparts Press, Inc., 1972), 18-20.

[32] Mankiller and Wallis, 154-155.

[33] League of United Latin American Citizens, *Nuestra Misión de San Francisco*, 1:3 (July-Aug. 1969). "Mission Coalition (San Francisco)" Box 4, File 28, *Al Miller Papers*, San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco, CA.

institutional and organizational support for Native peoples throughout the Mission District.

By 1960, local Native organizations estimated San Francisco's Indian population to be around 10,000; by 1970 San Francisco contained the third largest urban Indian population in the U.S. numbering around 20,000, and hosting over one hundred different Indigenous Nations.[34] Unfortunately, the majority of this population found themselves in the Mission District at the end of broken promises from the termination and relocation era. The development of a new infrastructure and political awareness was crucial to turn back the tide of destructive federal policies toward Indigenous peoples. An Intertribal awareness and creation of institutions that politicized Native concerns at the local, state, and national levels culminated with the advent of a new city—an Indian City.

Indian City

Although, the North Mission District most closely represented an urban American Indian ethnic neighborhood, unfortunately most of the Native population was widely dispersed throughout the greater San Francisco area. Therefore, Native peoples were typically mobile, between jobs, and increasingly migratory between urban and reservation communities. The Indian City or Native neighborhood was created and defined by Indian institutions and businesses. In San Francisco the first institution that characterized the development of an Indian City was the bar culture or "Indian Bars," the

[34] Joan Ablon, "Relocated American Indians in the San Francisco Bay Area: Social Interactions and Indian Identity." Human Organization, (1964): 297. Ann Metcalf, "Indians in the San Francisco Bay Area." Urban Indians. (Chicago: The Newberry Library, 1980), 90. Proceedings of the Third Annual Conference on Problems and Issues Concerning American Indians Today.

most famous one being the Klamath-owned Warren's Slaughterhouse Bar located in the North Mission District.[35] Indian bars served as an entry point to the city and were the first stop on the road to urban survival for many Native peoples. At neighborhood bars, many learned about opportunities for housing, jobs, and Tribal politics, and this atmosphere fostered a much needed Intertribal interaction. These bars often cut across class lines as the necessity arose to interact with other Natives who possessed a shared history and a common background. Bars also were places that promoted social interaction through dating or "cruising" for dates. For newcomers to the city, the bar was a place where they met or located people from their community and established networks of friends. These networks were crucial for sustaining and building an Intertribal community; they imparted survival skills to new migrants within the urban environment. Political organizers within the community took advantage of these networks for lobbying purposes. Warren's was the first place that future American Indian Movement leader Russell Means (Lakota) learned about the policy of Termination.[36] Ultimately, an important function of these bars fostered atmospheres of entertainment, relaxation, and a refuge from the pressures of an urban environment. In particular Warren's was also a place of employment for Native peoples: hiring managers, bartenders, and waitresses who accented its cultural atmosphere.

On the other hand, joints like Warren's sometimes fostered a hostile social setting and encouraged the habitual dependency of some of its clients. Dean Chavers (Lumbee),

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[35] Russell Means and Marvin J. Wolf. *Where White Men Fear to Tread*. (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995), 96.

[36] "…we congregated in a nearby bar called Warren's. It was owned by a family of Klamath Indians from northern California. By talking to those people, I found out about an Eisenhower administration program known as termination." Means and Wolf, 96.

described Warren's as, "…the grungiest bar in the history of the world…I went there only about once or twice, no more than that, it was a rough bar."[37] Joints like Warren's sometimes fostered a hostile social setting and encouraged the habitual dependency of some of its clients. Typically police patrolled the bars of the North Mission District. They relied on racial profiling and stereotypes, which led to higher arrest rates for Native peoples.[38] A 1977 study conducted by Jensen, Stauss, and Harris revealed that arrest rates for Indians were seven to twenty-two times greater than the arrest rate for Blacks in alcohol related offenses.[39] The Jensen, Stauss, and Harris study further elaborates that the arrest rate for urban Indians was four times larger than any other ethnic group in the city, the total arrest rate being 27, 535 per 100,000 population.[40] Despite the threat of racial profiling by Police outside the bar or violence inside the bar, Native peoples continued to frequent Warren's. In 1972, activist Richard Oakes, former bartender at Warren's wrote: "Drinking seems to fill a void in the life of many Indians. It takes the place of the singing of a song, the sharing of a song with another tribe, the sharing of experiences that another tribe member might have had. Drinking is used as a way to create feelings of some kind where there aren't any. It fills a void, that's all."[41] As competition between different ethnic groups in the Mission District increased over housing, jobs, and limited resources, so did crime between groups. One explanation that contemporary researchers provided

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[37] Dean Chavers, interviewed by author, August 15, 2001, tape recording—transcribed, tape 1, side 1, 8. Interview in author's possession.
[38] Troy Johnson. 25.
[39] Gary F. Jensen, Joseph H. Stauss, and V. William Harris. "Crime, Delinquency, and the American Indian," *Human Organization*. Vol. 36, No. 3, (Fall 1977): 252.
[40] Ibid. 253.
[41] Richard Oakes. "Alcatraz is Not An Island," *Ramparts*. (Dec. 1972): 36. Oakes' personal account of the takeover was published shortly after his assassination on September 20, 1972, and is the only known autobiography of the leader.

for the high arrest rates was simply discrimination because Indians represented one of the most visible populations within the city.

Indian Centers coexisted with the bar culture as important institutions that facilitated a more formalized networking system. The San Francisco Indian Center, also located in the North Mission District, was a focal point for bringing the community together socially and politically. Much like the bar culture, Indian Centers served a function of networking and supplied information about jobs, housing, and health care for the Bay Area community. The Indian Center was originally established in the early fifties by the Society of St. Vincent De Paul, a Catholic organization. By the mid-sixties, however, the Society turned over the management of the center to the American Indian Council of the Bay Area.[42] Wilma Mankiller recalls what the Indian Center meant for her: ―Located upstairs in an old frame building on sixteenth street on the edge of the very rough and tough Mission District, the Indian Center became a sanctuary for me. For me, [the Indian Center] became an oasis where I could share my feelings and frustrations with kids from similar backgrounds."[43] The Indian Center established programs to aide in job counseling, social work, health outreach programs, and a distribution center for food and clothing. After relocatees were cut off from Federal program aid, many took refuge in the programs administered by their local Indian center.[44] Eventually, Indian Centers

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[42] Ablon. 299. ―The American Indian Council of the Bay Area is a cross-tribal political group working for the general betterment of relocatees. The Council has traditionally sponsored the Annual Indian Day Picnic, and in recent years come into national notice by their widely publicized criticisms of the Relocation programs."
[43] Mankiller and Wallis. 111.
[44] Ann Metcalf. ―Indians in the San Francisco Bay Area," *Urban Indians*. (Chicago: The Newberry Library, 1980), 97. Proceedings of the Third Annual Conference on Problems and Issues Concerning American Indians Today.

throughout the country competed for grants from the Federal government to cover their operating expenses and program budgets. The San Francisco Indian Center created a governing board of directors responsible for appointing a director and maintaining the annual budget for the institution. For many migrants in San Francisco the Center was an organization that located temporary housing, friends and relatives, and assisted in their overall adjustment.

In 1969, the San Francisco Indian Center was destroyed in a suspicious fire. Most Natives blamed this catastrophe on the Samoan community, illustrating the depth of interethnic rivalry present in the district. A temporary Indian Center was established in a makeshift office on 16th street that eventually served as mainland office for Indians of All Tribes, who were responsible for the eighteen-month occupation of Alcatraz Island.

By 1971, the Indian Center hosted an estimated forty or more local organizations.[45] These disparate cultural and political organizations and associations became the third component in the development of the Indian City's infrastructure. Organizations ranged in function from Tribally specific (Navajo, Eskimo, Chippewa, and Tlingit-Haida Clubs) to a wider range of Intertribal associations. The Tribally specific clubs emphasized language revitalization and contact with relatives and were usually quite small in attendance. Intertribal organizations of the Bay Area were vital to the longevity of the urban Indian community, from churches to alumni associations. A total of six or more Indian churches were located in the Bay Area; they ranged from the American Indian Baptist Church to the Native American Church (NAC). The Native American Church in San Francisco operated under a confederacy of roadmen devoted to

[45] Ibid. 97. See also Ablon. 299.

grandfather peyote.[46] Church culture served as the meeting grounds for families and individuals that cut across Tribal and class differences.[47]

A host of different activities were arranged by organizations, which provided a recreational purpose (baseball and basketball teams), to dance clubs that hosted local powwows. Powwows sponsored by the San Francisco Indian Center, happened once a month and served to facilitate an Intertribal awareness. On reservations powwows were strictly Tribal in nature, but as the Intertribal community increased in numbers, new intertribal dances and songs were created. Through powwow culture the Indian community was able to unite around differences in tradition, language, art, dance, and powwows also sponsored an Intertribal awareness about survival.[48]

Powwows became another source of income for many Indians in the city, as traders sold traditional crafts to the general public, and Indian business owners used sponsorship of these cultural activities to advertise. In California a total of 450 Indian-owned businesses were located primarily in urban areas. These businesses eventually

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[46] Despite the passage of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, Native American Church members were harassed by law enforcement officials, who viewed peyote as a narcotic rather than a religious sacrament. _Roadmen' is the proper name for spiritual leaders within the Native American Church.

[47] Further research is needed on Native church service within the San Francisco area; secondary literature on this is lacking any real numbers and its treatment by scholars is vague at best.

[48] Theorists of urban Indian migration, Alan Sorkin, Shirley Fiske, and John Price, account for only three levels of institutional infrastructure in the creation of an Indian City, Indian Bars, Indian Centers, and Organizations. However, during the late sixties, other agencies must be included. The rise of Indian owned business, Native American Studies, and neighborhoods must also be taken into consideration of what created an Indian City. For more on Powwow culture see also, Clyde Ellis, *A Dancing People: Powwow Culture on the Southern Plains*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), and for an urban perspective Joan Weibel-Orlando, *Indian Country, L.A.: Maintaining Ethnic Community in Complex Society*. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999): 132-152.

formed a statewide association called UIDA or United Indian Development Association, which aided other Native peoples when seeking loans for commercial development.[49] Two of the most notable businesses in the San Francisco area included Adam Nordwell's Termite Business and Warren's Bar. Nordwell served on the American Indian Council of the Bay Area and was President of the local Chippewa Club. Nordwell used profits from his business to fund organizational development in the Bay Area and to support agencies of protest within the community and provide jobs for those who sought employment. Warren's Bar was owned by a member of the Klamath Nation from Oregon, who also utilized Indian employment and circulated money back into the Indian community. Both business owners however lived outside of the Mission District and Hunter's Point, which was typical of middle-income individuals, but robbed the district of a much needed tax base for redevelopment and financial infrastructure.[50]

Every Indian City relied on the formation of neighborhoods with high concentrations of Native peoples. Indian neighborhoods like the "Red Ghetto" in the Mission District were typically characterized by low-income housing, high unemployment, and crime. As the Native population increased in the district, Native peoples increasingly found themselves competing with other ethnic groups for municipal services, housing, and jobs. One particular immigrant group that the Native Community was in a constant rivalry with were the Samoans. Much of this rivalry involved the

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[49] Sorkin. 115.

[50] For more on Indians in the Marketplace see also, Brian C. Hosmer, *American Indians In The Marketplace: Persistence and Innovation Among the Menominees and Metlakatlans, 1870-1920*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999) and Brian Hosmer and Colleen O'Neill, Eds., *Native Pathways: American Indian Culture and Economic Development in the Twentieth Century*. (Boulder, University Press of Colorado, 2004).

formation of street gangs for protection between Samoan and the Native gang, better known as the Thunderbirds in the Mission District.[51] Both of these gangs competed for dates and ultimately for rule over turf within the district. It is hard to pinpoint a sole cause for this interethnic rivalry, yet one piece of legislation proposed in 1965 by Daniel Inouye sought to identify Samoans as Native Americans. This measure surely eroded the already fragile relationship between leaders of both Native and Samoan communities. Native peoples viewed this as an assault on trust responsibilities and the meager funding resources available through the Bureau of Indian Affairs.[52]

Neighborhoods instituted their own forces of stability as families come together for civic activities, such as powwows or picnics at the Indian Center. Much of the housing was substandard, with high rents and landlords who discriminated against Samoans or Natives. Due to prejudice and low income, many families were highly mobile, moving on average three to four times in a single year because of eviction or other circumstances.[53] This increased mobility within the community necessitated a growing dependence on the institutions that comprised San Francisco's Indian City. Most families that came from the reservation typically had either a poor credit rating or no

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[51] Troy Johnson. 157. The Thunderbirds become known for their trafficking in heroin and for their violent tactics of enforcing street laws to their liking. Yet for many in the Native community the Thunderbirds were a harmless gang of young toughs.

[52] Weibel-Orlando, 189. For more on Samoan History see also, Craig R. Janes. *Migration, Social Change, and Health: A Samoan Community in Urban California*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990) and Donald Denoon, Stewart Firth, Jocelyn Linnekin, Malama Meleisea, and Karen Nero, Eds., *The Cambridge History of The Pacific Islanders*. (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[53] Sorkin, 69. —Many restrictions discriminate intentionally or unintentionally against the Indian renter: refusing children, limiting number of occupants, refusing to rent to welfare mothers, demanding a breakage fee along with rent that puts the price out of reach, and stringent credit checks."68.

rating at all and represented large families, which gave some landlords the ‗legal' justification to discriminate. If the Mission District was so ghettoized, why did so many Native peoples choose to remain under these circumstances? Many Natives refused to live in these conditions and returned to their home communities, but for many, their communities at home were often worse off than conditions in the Red Ghetto, ―…in 1970, 46 percent of all rural Indian housing had inadequate plumbing facilities compared to 8 percent for urban Indians…19 percent is considered crowded (more than one resident per room), compared to 44 percent for rural Indians…"[54] Eventually, as federal funding for urban Indians began to rise in the late sixties, it led to competition for reservation communities. This was one of the sparks that began a political and cultural split between urban and rural/reservation Indians.[55]

The Birth of Native American Studies

Another element of the Indian City emerged with the development of Native American Studies programs and student organizations. In 1967, San Francisco State College was engulfed in one of the most heated campus strikes to date. The strike was organized by the BSU or Black Student Union around the controversial firing of a Black

[54] Sorkin. 22-23.
[55] Understanding this split deserves further research. For example, how members of both urban and reservation communities perceived each other's role in shaping further federal Indian policy. Those who left their communities for relocation gave up large allotments to promote non-Tribal agriculture, resource development, and increased the checker board effect on many reservations. Yet, this split is contested by scholars, ―establishing rural/urban as the defining characteristic of identity is not realistic from an Indian point of view and serves to alienate Indian people from their homelands." Lobo and Peters, 76.

faculty member who had connections with the Black Panther Party.[56] Eventually, the strikers founded a new organization, the Third World Liberation Front, and fought to establish a new Ethnic Studies Department. After countless arrests and the shutting down of the entire campus, negotiations produced an Ethnic Studies department that housed a Native American Studies Department, along with others. The University drew on federal funds from the Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO) to recruit over thirty Native students from the Bay Area for its first NAS class. Richard Oakes was in this first class of students, and he became the first coordinator for the NAS department. In a statement of purpose Oakes wrote that:

> The courses which are proposed as community oriented will offer the community and the student opportunity for interaction with a philosophy of self-help based on group identification. As noted above, the San Francisco Bay Area offers a situation wherein the student might expand his studies, possibly innovate worthwhile constructive programs, seek reform and otherwise contribute to the solution of pressing urban problems.[57]

By the middle of April 1969, Richard Oakes and several other Native American students had created SCAN or Student Coalition of American Natives. The organization served to bring Native American students together to aid in the development of Native American Studies, and to serve as a voice for the Native student population at San Francisco State. The organization quickly elected Richard Oakes as their President and a

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[56] For more information see Dikran Karagueuzian. *Blow It Up!* (Boston: Gambit Inc., 1971). or William H. Orrick, Jr. *Shut It Down! A College In Crisis*. (Washington: GPO, 1969), A Report to the U.S. National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence.

[57] Richard Oakes. *Native American Studies*. San Francisco: San Francisco State College. 1969, 1, San Francisco Public Library, Box 4, File 32, ―San Francisco State Native American Studies."

young Al Miller (Seminole) as Vice President.[58] Through SCAN Richard Oakes and others provided an established network for new Native students enrolling at the college. Soon members of SCAN created the building blocks for another organization in conjunction with the San Francisco Indian Center called MANY.

Movement of American Native Youth or MANY was a ―non profit corporation dedicated to helping American Indians through the implementation of action programs initiated by American Natives."[59] One idea it proposed was the creation of a Native retail outlet where community members could sell their artwork and traditional crafts. The outlet would train members of the community in how to run and operate their own businesses. Sales from the outlet were to return back to the community, helping relocatees with supplemental income during their transition. One positive outlook for the program was to draw community members together into an economic force and in the process develop a Native Arts district. Art existed as a bridge connecting outside communities and neighborhoods with an appreciation for Native culture.

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[58]Other members of SCAN included: David Tyler (Klamath), Patrick Genaaha (Diné), Gerald Sam (Washoe-Piaute), Gary Ray Hodge (Klamath), and Joseph ‗Zoe' Bill (Hooper Bay Inuit). Letter to Hayakawa from Richard Oakes, ―Request for funds." *Hayakawa Papers*. San Francisco State University Archives, Ethnic Studeies-NAS-folder, San Francisco, CA.

[59] Anonymous, ―M.A.N.Y. Movement of American Native Youth." *Al Miller Papers*, San Francisco Public Library. ―San Francisco State—NAS," Box 4, File 32, San Francisco, CA. One of the first acts of this organization was to draw attention to police action or inaction with regards to Warren's Bar. In a notice posted in the Indian Center the following M.A.N.Y. flyer stated, ―The frequent fist fights that take place in all of the bars, the serving of minors in some of the bars in the area, the unavailability of policemen until 1:00 [a.m.] when they swoop down in numbers to harass the wrong people, bartenders looking on with indifference while people fight & the bathrooms of the bar having stopped-up, overflowing commodes. These and many other problems exist which no one seems either willing or able to do anything about." *Al Miller Papers*, San Francisco Public Library. Indian organization-American Native Youth Corp., Box 4, File 23, San Francisco, CA.

A third program that Oakes established was a newsletter for Native students at San Francisco State that would serve as a forum to openly publicize their criticisms on any issue. The newsletter was aptly titled Native American Critic and Review. Richard Oakes urged students to take action and accept responsibility for their future. Slowly NAS gathered student support for SCAN and other organizations. Oakes had a visible presence in the community as he worked among its members and expanded the enrollment numbers for the Native American Studies department.

One of the most important decisions that Richard Oakes made was the establishment of an NAS community advisory board, which linked the campus to the greater San Francisco Indian community. Those selected to the board would have an overwhelming impact on the program and the community. The first positions filled were Jeanette Henry Costo (Eastern Cherokee) and Rupert Costo (Cahuilla). In 1964, Jeanette and Rupert Costo were instrumental in the creation of the American Indian Historical Society, located on Masonic Avenue in San Francisco. The Society was also responsible for the groundbreaking academic journal *The Indian Historian*. This publication brought together Indian scholars and scholarship from a diversity of disciplines for an interdisciplinary journal on Native American Studies.

The third member of the advisory board would forever change the students and communities political understanding. Belva Cottier (Lakota), aside from being affiliated with the San Francisco Indian Center, was responsible for the 1964 takeover of Alcatraz Island. She informed Oakes and the other students that under treaty stipulations from the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 the Lakota people could reclaim any surplus land that the government had abandoned. Cottier had worked on the historical and legal research

needed for the occupation, and she explained the dramatic details of the failed attempt to secure the famed island. Soon Richard Oakes and LaNada Means in their coalition of community institutions and Native Studies programs at San Francisco State and Berkeley offered the ultimate proposal to the failed government experiment of relocation and termination, occupation of Alcatraz Island.

Alcatraz Occupation and the Construction of an Indian City

In the late night hours of November 20, 1969, two boats carefully deposited the occupation force of over eighty men, women, and children onto the desolate Alcatraz Island. Overnight the organization Indians of All Tribes (IAT) set up security posts throughout the island, discouraged the coast guard from invading the island, and created a media barrage of press releases from the San Francisco Indian Center. After the devastating loss of the San Francisco Indian Center to a highly suspect fire; the community and student leaders created the ultimate proposal to transform Alcatraz into an Indian City. The island would host a center for Native American Studies with a traveling university; an American Indian Spiritual Center to practice Native religion not yet protected by the federal government; an Indian Center of Ecology to formulate conservatory plans; a Great Indian Training School complete with a center for traditional arts and crafts, a Native restaurant, and an economic school to study ways in which to increase employment and standards of living; and finally, their proclamation called for the creation of an American Indian Museum to expose the "true" history of Native America.

Contrary to government officials who sought to evict Indians of All Tribes from the island, IAT was highly organized. It included a mainland office, donated by Dr. Dorothy Lonewolf Miller (Blackfeet), who along with Dean Chavers, mainland coordinator, administered all accounts, bookkeeping, and established the IAT bank account.[60] The organization eventually created the IAT Newsletter, a radio show Radio Free Alcatraz, the Big Rock School, a health care system, complete with one Doctor and a Registered Nurse, and a host of other programs. On the island, IAT elected a seven member Intertribal council including Richard Oakes, Al Miller, Ross Harden (Ho-chunk), Ed Castillo (Cahuilla), Bob Nelford (Inuit), Dennis Turner (Luiseño), and Jim Vaughn (Cherokee). The Council established the housing and security committee and began a new school. The IAT improvement committee marked dangerous areas, sorted through clothing donations, planted shrubs, chopped wood, and cleared away trash, debris, vines, and weeds accumulated through years of neglect. Everyone on the Island was employed to work on sanitation, day-care, cooking, laundry, supply lines, or repairs. Rules were established that advocated total sobriety and a drug-free environment for all residents. The symbol and Intertribal idea of Alcatraz and Indians of All Tribes that Bay Area students and community members gave birth to became larger and larger.

Soon occupiers were attracting the attention of politicians, ranging from California Governor Ronald Reagan to President Richard Nixon, and a media frenzy that fueled national and international support for the occupiers. Although hundreds and

[60] The mainland office was also in charge of sending out telegrams, approving supply runs with the General Services Administration (GSA), approval of interviews and press, writing press releases, lobbying city, state, and federal officials, sorting mail for the occupiers, and many other duties.

thousands of Native peoples made pilgrimages to the island, sent in monetary and logistical support, the occupation would only last another nineteen months.[61]

Beyond securing title to the island, the Native occupation of Alcatraz fueled hundreds of similar occupations throughout Indian Country, and became a catalyst for the Red Power Movement. In Seattle, Washington Bernie Whitebear (Colville) and Indians of All Tribes from Alcatraz created United Indians of All Tribes and transformed the abandoned Fort Lawton into the Daybreak Star Center, Pit River Tribe launched a campaign to restore lands stolen by Pacific Gas and Electric Corporation, Taos Pueblo regained control over Taos Blue Lake, the Trail of Broken Treaties March on Washington, and ultimately the occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973 all have long roots in the takeover of Alcatraz island. In turn, Red Power as a national movement relied on urban Intertribal institutions and organizations forged out of Indian Cities. It was also a movement that mobilized the entire San Francisco Indian community around a central belief, that the path to social justice would ultimately transform Native political relationships with local, municipal, state, Tribal, and federal governments.

This path to social justice and self-determination was rooted in an urban-centered Intertribal perspective. In many ways Alcatraz and IAT were symbolic of the utopian desires of Native migrants into San Francisco, a microcosm of the ideal Indian City most wanted to live in. Alcatraz emerges not as an abandoned prison in the Indian community,

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[61] For more information on the Alcatraz takeover see, Troy Johnson. *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island: Indian Self-Determination & The Rise Of Indian Activism*. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996); Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like A Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee*. (New York: The New Press, 1996); and Troy Johnson, Duane Champagne, and Joanne Nagel, Eds., *American Indian Activism: Alcatraz To The Longest Walk*. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997)

but as a sacred space emblematic and redefined as Native self-determination and Red Power. The rippling effect brought together Native peoples from rural, urban, and reservation communities and forged a new Intertribal reality that forever changed federal Indian policy. Richard Nixon‘s administration eventually passed a remarkable twenty-six pieces of legislation that ended old policies of termination and solidified a new self-determined commitment to Indian Country.

Emerging from the development of an Indian City was a new Intertribal perspective that altered how Native peoples define themselves and their world. This new awareness affected the local political and organizational structure of groups like Aztlan, a Chicano Movement, which forged together a uniquely Intertribal perspective that protected and enhanced their claim for human and civil rights. Brown Beret‘s in Los Angeles would stage an Alcatraz like takeover of Catalina Island. The Black Panther Party, founded by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, explored community building through breakfast programs like those launched by the San Francisco Indian Center. The hippie movement‘s capital of Haight and Ashbury co-opted the Intertribal philosophy of urban Indians that defined its cultural style and political movement. In 1970, the national environmental movement founded Earth Day in San Francisco, and would eventually capitalize upon Native images to commercialize its conservationist agendas. As the Federal government shifted money to states and municipal governments for Indian programs, local governments had to reinvent themselves as Indian cities. The impact of Indian cities had a profound influence and ultimately reshaped national Indian policies and cities for decades to come.

Ironically, the occupation of Alcatraz—a former prison—was extremely liberating for me. As a result, I consciously took a path I still find myself on today as I continue to work for the revitalization of tribal communities… I always remember where the journey started. It was in San Francisco—at Alcatraz and at the American Indian Center, and in my own home where, starting about the time of the Alcatraz takeover, native people often came to sip coffee, make plans, and build indestructible dreams. The occupation of Alcatraz excited me like nothing ever had before. It helped to center me and caused me to focus on my own rich and valuable Cherokee heritage.[62]

[62] Mankiller and Wallis, 192-193.

CHAPTER FOUR

"I'M NOT YOUR INDIAN ANYMORE"

Relying on connections he had established throughout the Bay Area's Indian community, in the fall of 1969, Richard Oakes began to work diligently on a plan to takeover Alcatraz. Oakes' vision for Alcatraz was not born in the solitude of the university, it was the culmination of a long journey from the small St. Regis Reservation in New York to the streets of San Francisco. Surrounding his vision was a growing backdrop of civil unrest flooding campuses and cities across America. Richard Oakes began to believe that change was inevitable as the world around him exploded in protest. Oakes took his message and vision of change to the center of the Indian community in San Francisco. He continued to absorb valuable lessons that ultimately he would need to force progressive change throughout Indian Country.

A "tribal" atmosphere had hypnotized the Thoreauean type of civil disobedience at the epicenter of the counter-cultural revolution in San Francisco. Self-determination was not only the cry of the Aquarians; it was also echoed by other organizations like the Black Panther Party. It was a fight to take control of one's own destiny, to be the sole determining factor in the political and social infrastructure of one's own community. During the 1960s, the zealots of rebellion were transforming bureaucrats and members of the older establishment into figures of distaste. Many Americans viewed them as puppets of conformity destined to rob a generation of its freedom.

Throughout the 1960s the media flocked to the fires of rebellion and the proponents of this idealistic liberation. Images blanketed television screens with curtains

of protest against the war and the Black Panther Party (BPP) with its idea of Black Power. The Black Panthers called upon the consciousness of America to retaliate or to understand why they had the right to decide their own fate. While seeking to take control of their political future, the Black Panther Party also sought to control their cultural image. Members of this movement began to sympathize with more populous movements, and with indigenous efforts for empowerment and liberation from colonial forms of government. Black Panther Party members paralleled aspects of their movement's foundation around a link with Native American history and struggles. This became apparent when members of the party changed their names to resemble famous Indian heroes, such as ―Geronimo" Pratt. Perhaps they believed that appropriating select Native American images of ―rebellion" would enable them to establish a symbolic link with traditional American radicalism. Huey Newton is best known for his poster image—dressed in black leather, seated in a wicker chair, holding a shotgun in the midst of symbols of Africa. The tribal images purposefully placed in Newton's poster provided the Black Panthers the authenticity needed to appear as a movement rooted in indigenous struggles. Propaganda played a critical role for the political organization to advertise their powerful ideology to a commercially fed public. Ultimately these ―tribal" images of revolution sensitized San Francisco to aspects of self-determination.[1]

During the 1960s, communes were springing up all over the Haight-Asbury tenements, and art colonies were quickly recruiting members. Richard Oakes and the Native American community found themselves surrounded by the propaganda of the

[1] For more information on the Black Panther Party see, Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer, *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1991) 349-372 & 511-538.

street and the ideals of liberation; they faced the difficult task of deciding what meaning, if any, these counter-cultural philosophies had in their own lives. Liberation theology was awash through the free speech movements, third world liberation, Brown Berets, and Students for Democratic Society.[2] Battle lines were being drawn in the hills of San Francisco, and Native students began to search for answers. The concept of freedom in Oakes' life and actions would be closely allied to these ideas of liberation that the other movements of San Francisco already embraced.

Beyond the struggle to study at SFSC, Oakes was also engaged in the pursuit to seek new answers to the perplexing issues afflicting Indian Country. Through meetings with NIYC leaders like Mel Thom and Clyde Warrior, alternative classes in the Far Out (West) lab, and conversations with representatives of the White Roots of Peace, Native students had begun to learn more about their complex histories, and also how their understanding of themselves as Native people would be a viable factor in determining a brighter future for Indian Country. Born out of these meetings was a genuine intertribal perspective, an awakening within the Native residents of the Bay Area.

On the streets of the Mission district and during late nights at Gatorville, Richard Oakes was organizing a fight to unify Native people. Having heard the stories told by Belva Cottier about the 1964 occupation of Alcatraz, Oakes was left with a blueprint for 1969. Five years had passed since the first takeover, and the newly sensitized media were awaiting the next big movement. The stage was set for Richard Oakes and other students

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[2] For a more detailed account of the history of the 1960s see, David Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994) 1-268, and David Farber Ed., *The Sixties: From Memory To History*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994) 1-316.

to rally around the energy of liberation. The media establishment in San Francisco helped to propel various movements into the spotlight, educating the public about organizations‘ demands. Without public support, the struggle for liberation would have proven an even more daunting task for Native students.

The streets, campuses, and personal trials of each Native student served as valuable lessons to pave the road to Alcatraz. More importantly, Richard Oakes and other Native students were learning how to work through a bureaucratic system to make their voices heard. A year earlier, LaNada Means had taken over an abandoned bungalow on the Berkeley campus and claimed squatter‘s rights to secure a center for Native students. Oakes and other students had braved the waters of administration to create a viable Native American Studies department at San Francisco State. These student leaders and their larger Native community possessed a strong ability to negotiate risk and take the necessary action to see their visions through. Only through this type of determination could the takeover of Alcatraz be born.

Because of his commitment to an Alcatraz occupation, Oakes was faced with the real prospect of losing his job, housing, and education, or even confronting jail time and separation from his family. The fear that Alcatraz would be a failure was an obvious pressure in Richard‘s life, but one that he could handle. Sacrifice was not an unfamiliar reality for Oakes, nor was it a new experience for many other Native people in the Bay Area. Everyday battles for adequate housing, education, a voice in politics, paying the bills, and putting food on the table found their way into many Native households. Alcatraz would not be a failure as long as the preparations included professional legal assistance and the risks were measured; increasingly, failure was not an option.

Legal aid stood at the forefront of the support that Richard and other Native students deemed necessary to promote their rights to take over the island. Lacking a firm understanding of the law, the students were in dire need of legal representation. Therefore, lawyers would prove integral to the promotion of solidarity for the takeover, and ultimately to protect the ideology of Native self-determination. Richard Oakes sought assistance from the San Francisco Native community to locate effective representation. One such lawyer, Aubrey Grossman, was known in many circles as a radical. Aubrey Grossman was a longtime labor attorney, a supporter of unions and defender of civil rights, and, as a result, he had been blacklisted during the thirties. He was almost disbarred for his political beliefs, which included sympathy for socialist ideologies. Consequently, Aubrey Grossman had given up securing a high power job and resigned himself to protecting individual liberty. He was a perfect legal ally for this movement, and soon became a true friend to Richard Oakes and other Native students. The legal case for Alcatraz had reached the framing stage.[3]

The students also recruited another lawyer, F. Browning Pipestem (Missouri-Otoe/Osage). A graduate of the University of Oklahoma law school who was practicing in Washington, D.C., Pipestem proved a critical part of the legal framework for Alcatraz.

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[3] As early as 1934, when he was in law school at UCLA, Grossman participated in the San Francisco General Strike. Eventually he served as a lawyer with the International Longshore and Warehouse Union. In 1950, he represented Willie McGee in Mississippi, who was sentenced to a public electrocution for allegedly raping a white woman. By the 1960s, Grossman was working to defend the rights of conscientious objectors. Tom Price, ―Aubrey Grossman—Passionate Defender of Civil Liberties." *The Dispatcher*. (Jan. 2000): 1-3. This article can be found online at: www.ilwu.org. ―…[he had been black listed before he even passed the bar, total radical…[there were very strong forces in the California Bar that were trying to keep him from getting a license, so he always represented the underdog…" Dean Chavers Interview, Tape 1, Side 2, 11. interview in Author's possession.

He possessed a strong background in Indian law, and he used his location to lobby White House staff and Congress to support the occupation. More importantly Pipestem, a Native lawyer, was trusted and respected by Richard Oakes and the other students. His role in the occupation would be felt much later during the settlement of Alcatraz.[4]

With the questions of failure out of the way, Oakes and other organizers were left with a hole in their attempt; they needed support from older residents within the Native community. If Alcatraz were viewed solely as a student movement it might lack credibility; it might be seen as just another student movement. To counter this probability Richard was forced to make alliances within the older, established leadership of the Indian community. Oakes had been living in the Bay Area since 1968, but he was still a newcomer to San Francisco and the internal politics of its Native community. Those intent on the takeover of Alcatraz must secure representative members of the core leadership in the Native community at large, and they must be involved in the planning.

Native dances in the Bay Area were becoming increasingly popular during this decade; historically, these frequent social gatherings had formed the communal fabric for many Native peoples. Powwows brought Native people back to sharing the drum, traditional songs and language, and to movements celebrating tradition. During the early twentieth century, these dances had been outlawed in many Native communities, but now they were returning and even experiencing a revival. When Northern and Southern Plains songs filled the air, the Intertribal was born, straight, fancy, grass, traditional,

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[4] For more information on the late Browning Pipestem see, Jane Glenn Cannon, ―Attorney brings heritage to profession." *Native News*, (March 1, 1999): 1-5. Internet copy: http://www.mail-archive.com/nativenews@mlists.net/msg00544.html, a reprint of an article from the *Norman Transcript*.

shawl, all working together. Richard and Anne attended several dances, exposing their children to the arena and the culture. Richard found these gatherings helped him find out what was going on in the community. The dances were a type of Native media center. One contact Richard made at these events was Adam Nordwall (Red Lake Anishinabe), who was a regular at most dances. During one of these gatherings Richard Oakes met Nordwall, and plans for Alcatraz soon took a much different turn. Adam Nordwall, a short and limber fellow, owned his own successful termite extermination business in the Bay Area.

Catastrophe struck the Bay Area in the early hours of October 10, 1969, when a fire ravaged the San Francisco Indian Center. The three-story center had served thirty-thousand Native people in the Bay Area since 1958.[5] Arson was suspected as the cause of the fire, but no one was ever brought up on charges.[6] The cause of the fire was inconsequential in light of the enormous loss. The community was devastated, for they had lost a place that provided health care, employment, legal aid, social programs, important documents, and more. For many, the destruction of the center became yet another driving force that accelerated the Native community's claim to Alcatraz. The occupation of the island would not only draw attention to the political needs of the Indian community, it also held the real possibility of replacing the Indian Center. A few days after the fire, a makeshift Indian Center was created in a rented storefront on 16th Street,

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[5] Troy Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island: Indian Self-Determination & The Rise of Indian Activism*. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 53.
[6] "Some people blamed the Samoans for the fire. Others thought that a cigarette had been carelessly thrown into some trash that was piled against the rear wall of the building." Karen Ducheneaux and Kirke Kickingbird, *One Hundred Million Acres*. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1973) 214.

not far from the charred remnants of the old center. Although the new center lacked any tables or chairs, it was soon packed with concerned students and community members searching for new alternatives.

October 1969 proved to be a month of major impact on the greater San Francisco Indian community. Jesse Six Killer's (Cherokee) American Indians United, a national organization based out of Chicago, hosted a conference in the Bay Area. From October twenty-fourth through the twenty-sixth, participants came together to discuss the state of affairs of Urban Indian Country. American Indians United brought with them a unique message:

> …cities…must recognize and adjust to the needs of Indian People. The failures of the cities and in particular, various government bureaucracies to recognize and adequately serve and include Indians in the power structures continues to deprive Indian people of their right to self expression. Urban Indians by-and-large are not being extended invitations by urban officials to self-determine their own destiny. Therefore, urban Indians must take it upon themselves to develop new methods for gaining access to political and economic structures which have bureaucratic control over Indian affairs…[7]

This conference and its message pointed to a growing voice of protest within the Indian community of San Francisco. Only a few months earlier, community leaders had organized protests in front of the federal building and vocalized their concerns before the National Council on Indian Opportunity (NCIO). The conference carried with it the potential and the ideology for self-determination.

Securing viable media connections was another obstacle that Richard Oakes worked diligently to solve during the fall semester at SFSU. Nordwall invited Richard

[7] *Al Miller Papers*, San Francisco Public Library, Indian Organization—American Indians United, Box 4, File 22, San Francisco, CA.

and Anne Oakes to a Halloween party held at the home of Tim Findley, a local reporter with the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Richard Oakes had discovered that Adam Nordwall and Tim Findley were close friends. Findley would prove valuable to the efforts of the occupation because he also had connections with the maritime community in San Francisco. When Richard and Anne Oakes arrived, the party was in full swing, with reporters conversing about a multitude of topics between drinking beers and smoking cigarettes. Richard Oakes and Adam Nordwall kept a critical eye on one another as the party wore on. Both were observing how the other handled himself around the media. As the evening continued and conversation on Native topics grew increasingly intense, some reporters began to sense that a story was to be made…but from where…and when? Shortly thereafter, Adam, after a short conversation with Richard, decided to make an announcement. Standing before a large group of Findley's guests, he announced plans to take over Alcatraz Island on the afternoon of November 9, 1969. Oakes recalled, "…one fellow had jumped the gun and was already making plans with local reporters."[8] Stunned by the early date, Oakes was pressured into carrying the news back to the students.

With a fixed date came new problems. The SFSC and Berkeley students had been planning an occupation to coincide with their summer breaks in 1970, so as not to interfere with their classes. The November date might distract the most important occupation leadership—the students. As soon as word of the November ninth date spread, distrust for Adam Nordwall quickly emerged.[9] Fear swept the conversations in the

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[8] Richard Oakes, "Alcatraz Is Not An Island," 38.
[9] LaNada Boyer (Means), "Reflections of Alcatraz," no date. Unpublished, Robert Warrior's Private Collection. Excerpts from this essay were later published in Duane Champagne, Troy Johnson, and Joane Nagel, *American Indian Activism: Alcatraz to the*

―Indian Psychology" course at San Francisco State. Had all of their work and planning been for nothing? Was Adam or the older establishment going to help or hinder the occupation? These were serious questions, but they were easily answered when the need for transportation, media, and legal support was brought up.

Unbeknown to Adam Nordwall, Richard Oakes, along with other students from Berkeley and San Francisco State, had already made an attempt to occupy Alcatraz. As Joe Bill (Hooper Bay Inuit), a student at SFSC recalled, ―…first part, [or last part of October…first time we went down there the same night and hired a boat, but he didn't want to go at night and so we cancelled it and went back and had another meeting."[10] This occupation failed to materialize for the very reasons that Richard Oakes was working to recruit Aubrey Grossman, Tim Findley, and others. He sought the necessary legal aid and media connections to insure a successful occupation of the abandoned prison.

During the fall planning for the occupation Oakes relied further on his wife Anne for her support. The love for his wife and her kids served as a positive distraction from

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Longest Walk. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997) 88-103. ―The Native community people who worked with us considered Adam [Nordwall] to be an opportunist and a con artist. They warned us from having anything to do with him."pg 15. Dean Chavers Interview, ―…he tried to appoint himself as the leader for it [Alcatraz , and the students attitude toward Adam was get the hell out of here. Leave us alone, that was Richard's attitude, LaNada's ‚Dennis'[Turner], [and] all them. Oh Christ here comes Adam again you know glory hog. That's all he was. Of course he wrote that book and claimed total credit for it, it was such a lie, the whole book is a lie…" Chavers Interview, Tape 1, side 1, 1.

[10] Interview with Joe Bill, 2-5-70, by Dennis Stanford, Doris Duke Oral History Collection, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico, tape 458, side 1, 10, Albuquerque, NM. Backing up Joe Bill's statement is Ross Harden,―Both Bill and Harden indicate that an attempt to occupy the island was planned as early as September or October 1969 by student groups but failed to materialize due to lack of logistical support." Troy Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island*, 53.

the daily struggles of administration, deadlines, organization, and studying. Anne also had a strong tie to politics in her own community. The Marrufo's, Anne's family, were pushing to take a larger role in the Tribal politics at Kashaya.[11] Anne was able to bring experienced advice and grounding to Richard, who was still a newcomer to California Indian politics. Like Richard, Anne was under tremendous pressure as she managed to keep up with six kids, maintain a stable household on a meager budget, and hold together her marriage. These times proved difficult for their marriage since Richard was often away from home, attending meetings, networking, and organizing. The family of eight was confined to one vehicle, an older station wagon, which forced Richard to seek alternative transportation. He often hitched rides with friends from San Francisco State or grabbed one of the crowded seats on the city bus to make meetings. At times the finances were tight for the couple since they were forced to get by on Richard's modest student income and took shelter in their community.

On the morning of November 9, 1969, reporters, having kept their secret, showed up by the dozens to witness the historic moment when the newly formed organization Indians of All Tribes (IAT) planned to take over the Island. The crowds grew, but no boat was in sight. Reporters grew restless as singers gathered around the drum to ease the spirit of disinterest settling in amongst the crowd. When Adam Nordwall arrived, he began making his way to the pier where the crowd had congregated. Oakes and others hurriedly approached, asking Adam about the boat that was supposed to take them to the

[11] Alcatraz Collection, San Francisco Public Library, Indian Organizations—Sonoma Co. American Indian Council, Inc., Box 2, File 33, San Francisco, CA. The newsletter includes relations of Anne and briefly mentions their involvement with the leadership on the Sonoma County American Indian Council.

island. Nordwall started to make a run to the phone booth when he noticed a large historic triple mast ship docking at the pier. Meanwhile, Oakes rounded up the restless crowd to read the Proclamation for the Indians of All Tribes.[12] The reporters huddled in close to Oakes with microphones and tape recorders. Oakes, who was holding a handful of beads and red cloth, began reading:

> To the Great White Father and All His People: We, the [N]ative 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.[13]

As Oakes continued to read the proclamation his crisp voice added life to the words. Those listening observed a transformation in him. Perhaps it came from a new awareness that he was vocalizing their right to determine their own future. No matter how eloquent

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[12] It is unclear exactly who the author of the Proclamation was as it is signed auspiciously Indians of All Tribes. Some of the evidence suggests that it was drafted at the Indian Center in a joint meeting between student leaders, Adam Nordwall's organization United Bay Area Council of American Indian Affairs, and other community leaders. No one person can claim authorship, and the document remains a community document.

[13] Indians of All Tribes, "Proclamation:" *Indians of All Tribes Newsletter*, 1, no.1 (Jan. 1970): 2. Adam Fortunate Eagle, *Alcatraz! Alcatraz!*: The Indian Occupation of 1969-1971, (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 1992) 44-45.

his reading, Oakes could not distract attention from the urgent need to secure transportation; without it they could be chewed up by the press.

Nordwall, dressed in his traditional dance regalia, made his way down the pier where Ronald Craig, the Captain of the *Monte Cristo*, was docking. Craig (who used his Canadian ship for reenactments) was startled to see Nordwall—in full regalia—striding up to his vessel. The captain was already dressed in *his* period clothing: complete with a frilly cravat. Craig agreed only to ferry the occupiers around the island. Adam knew that Oakes was approaching the end of the proclamation and quickly agreed to Craig's terms. The weary-eyed protesters hurried on board and were soon casting off toward Alcatraz. Craig found the opportune moment to add to the drama. Noticing that the press was eagerly taking pictures of the voyage, he fired a blank round from the ship's cannon. A surge of cheer emerged from the onlookers back on the mainland and among the passengers on the boat.

Just as the boat neared the Island, Richard Oakes, then Jim Vaughn (Cherokee), Ross Harden (Ho-chunk), Walter Heads, and Joe Bill jumped overboard and swam toward the island.[14] In a blatant act of self-determination they decided to go where the

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[14] "…the four of us swam over there [Alcatraz …Richard Oak[e s…Jim Bob…who else…Ross Hard[e n…and there was another guy…Walter Heads and I…we stayed there a couple of hours because it was cold…" Interview with Joe Bill, 2-5-70, by Dennis Stanford, Doris Duke Oral History Collection, pg 11, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM. See also, Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz*, 57. Later accounts by both Nordwall and Findley claim that Oakes never made it to the island, see Johnson, Champagne, Nagel, *American Indian Activism*, 81 and Adam Fortunate Eagle, *Alcatraz! Alcatraz!*, 58. However in Tim Findley's original article in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, "14 Indians Invade, Claim Alcatraz." (November 10, 1969):1, he states, "Four young braves dived off the barge Monte Cristo and swam to shore during that assault, but were taken back off again by a friendly yachtsman after a caretaker threatened to summon United States marshals." Findley contradicts himself having

Monte Cristo would not take them. Each of them followed Oakes' lead, diving into the cold waters of the Bay, and all at different distances from Alcatraz. Once on the Island, the group made plans to come back that night and "take it over." After fifteen minutes, the group was escorted back to the dock. Reporters seized upon the moment to dramatize the events of the day. Back at the pier, dripping wet and freezing, Oakes found new hope. He realized that the eventual occupation was just a matter of time. After returning to the mainland, the occupiers went to the Indian Center for an impromptu meeting to discuss returning to Alcatraz that same evening.

As 5:00 p.m. approached, on the sleepy Fisherman's Wharf a small group of Native people met with the Captain of the *New Vera II* and his crew who were busy scrubbing down their fishing boat. LaNada Means, with her long black hair, strolled over to the small vessel to speak with the captain. LaNada soon discovered that this particular fisherman was unaware of the earlier attempt to seize Alcatraz. She used this to her advantage stating that they were in need of transportation to the island to perform a

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changed his story almost thirty years later, most likely an error of hindsight on the reporters part. Richard Oakes in his own words stated, "…the main boat and the press boats, well they just kept on going. They went right on by. People on the boats saw me…but they just kept on going…I landed just to the left of the dock, on the rocks. I was being dragged in by the waves or the current, or something, underneath the barge [there was a water barge parked at the docks . I was exhausted when I hit land. I've done a lot of swimming, but this was the toughest swim I've ever made." Richard Oakes, "Alcatraz Is Not An Island," 38. Dean Chavers in his interview stated that Tim Findley actually wrote Adam's first book. The overwhelming evidence is that Richard Oakes did make the swim. It is possible that all the confusion centers around Walter Heads. "Richard Oakes got the urge to dive into the water from the Monte Cristo, and the other four followed. Walter Hatch [Heads] was unable to finish the difficult swim, but the others made it to shore." Johnson, Champagne, and Nagel, *American Indian Activism*, 153, John Garvey and Troy Johnson in "The Government and the Indians: The American Indian Occupation of Alcatraz Island, 1969-71". Because of overwhelming evidence mentioned in this footnote, I chose to conclude that Richard Oakes and others made the swim to the island.

ceremony. Noticing that the captain was growing weary, she offered to pay him $3.00 for every person he ferried. It was an offer he could not refuse and it must have seemed harmless—a way to earn a quick buck. The small group began to pile into the boat when they noticed that Richard Oakes was not there. They waited but soon the captain put the boat into gear. About that time LaNada and Earl Livermore spotted Oakes and a group of San Francisco State students running up to the pier. Encouraged by the added number of passengers, the captain reluctantly turned around to pick up Richard Oakes and the others. This now increased their numbers to twenty-five, a slightly smaller group than had been assembled that afternoon.

They were on their way once again to Alcatraz without the press or the extravagance that the morning attempt had provided. As the night swallowed up the light of the small fishing boat, the passengers huddled together to keep warm and dry. The cool dark air and the spray from the boat chilled their faces. With the captain distracted by the demands of piloting the boat, the organizers began discussing their assault plan. The *New Vera II* made a risky landing as it surged next to the docks. The captain, fearing damage to his vessel, began to tie the boat to the docks. The opportune moment had presented itself, and Richard Oakes and fourteen others made their way onto the docks.[15] Caught off guard, the captain soon took notice of his missing passengers. Fearing that his boat would be confiscated or worse yet a startled guard might be trigger happy, he threw

[15] The fourteen occupiers were Richard Oakes, LaNada Means, Rick Evening (Shoshone/Bannock), Jim Vaughn, John Mortal (Cherokee), Joe Bill, Kay Many Horse (Lakota), Linda Aranaydo (Creek), David Leach (Colville/Lakota), Ross Harden, Burnell Blindman (Lakota), John Whitefox (Shoshone), John Virgil (Apache), Fred Shelton (Inuit). This information was pulled from two flyers found in Alcatraz Collection, San Francisco Public Library, Indians on Alcatraz, Box 3, File between 2 and 5, not marked in collection, and Box 3, File 27, San Francisco, CA.

the craft into reverse, breaking the rope. Eleven of the others, including Earl Livermore and Adam Nordwall, would be stranded on the boat as it pulled away, but more importantly, the students had made it onto the island.

While the enormous spotlight of the lighthouse circled the silent Bay, the fourteen occupiers began to study the layout of the land:

> We landed at about six o'clock and hid. I guess the caretaker was alerted that we had landed…He, his three patrolmen, and their ferocious guard dog came out and tried to find us. There were fourteen of us hiding in the grass, and at times they passed within inches of us. Even with their dog they couldn't detect us. We could see that dog, wagging his tail and barking occasionally. I guess he was used to us by then. They soon gave up the search, and we split up into three groups, just to be safe. Some of us slept outside and some in the buildings. It was cold that night. The next morning, we did a lot of exploring, looking for food, wood supplies, places to sleep, and generally getting the lay of the land for the next landing. The place was desolate. It was so run down that it was already beginning to feel like a reservation.[16]

As the morning light crept into the main cellblock through the shattered remnants of windows, they discussed a plan. Despite having only two loaves of bread and no water, they decided to split up to prevent an easy capture. They prohibited each other from divulging where the other groups were hiding if the authorities captured them. This strategy might just give them the advantage of remaining on the island undiscovered, prolonging the occupation. It was not long before a large press core, followed by T.E. Hannon, Regional Director of the General Services Administration (GSA), the federal agency in charge of administration for the island, and the Coast Guard arrived on the island.

[16] Richard Oakes, ―Alcatraz Is Not An Island," 38.

Ironically, after a game of cat and mouse, the press was the first to locate Richard Oakes, Ross Harden, and others holed up in the main cellblock. The reporters informed Richard that the Coast Guard was there to arrest them unless they agreed to leave peacefully. It was a perplexing and tough proposal. If they abandoned the island, it could cause ill feelings among supporters on the mainland and within the group occupying the island. However, an arrest and possible jail time or fines, could devastate any future attempt to claim Alcatraz. After weighing the terms and probabilities, Richard Oakes made the decision to fight again another day. Without proper provisions, support, and more people on hand, Oakes was aware of the difficult choice that had to be made, and he quickly agreed to the terms.

Eventually, Ross Harden and others began the search for the hidden remnants of the occupation force. Many were no doubt confused and dismayed by Richard‘s choice to abandon the island. For the sake of solidarity, they emerged from their hiding places. They realized what Richard was already planning: with a larger population the settlement of Alcatraz could be sustained. The fourteen occupiers made their way down the main road to the docks where Hannon and the Coast Guard eagerly awaited. The press following the organizers realized that the students had acquired a keen knowledge of the layout of the island. Once he had arrived at the receiving docks, Richard Oakes treated the moment like a press conference and began to read the Proclamation. Hannon and others listened as Oakes continued to read after the preamble:

> 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. It has inadequate sanitation facilities.
> 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 exceeded the land base.
> 10. The population has always been held as prisoners and kept dependent upon others.
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> 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.[17]

The proclamation also called for the creation of several institutions on the island: a center for Native American Studies with a traveling university; an American Indian Spiritual Center to practice a Native religion not yet protected by the federal government; an Indian Center of Ecology to formulate conservatory plans; a Great Indian Training School complete with a center for traditional arts and crafts, a Native restaurant, and an economic school to study ways in which to increase employment and standards of living; and, finally, the proclamation identified the need for the creation of an American Indian Museum to expose the ―true" history of Native America. After patiently listening to Oakes read from the Proclamation, Hannon offered the settlers a ride back to the mainland. Richard Oakes, wanting the last word, turned toward reporters, and, with a characteristic grin announced, ―We‘ve proven our point. Beyond that, the next time we

[17] Indians of All Tribes, ―Proclamation," *Indians of All Tribes Newsletter*, 1, no.1 (Jan. 1970): 2-3. See also Adam Fortunate Eagle, *Alcatraz! Alcatraz*!, 45-47. The version of the Proclamation that appears in Fortunate Eagle is similar to the one above but he only lists 9 points instead of the 10 that appear in the newsletter.

come, we‘re going to come to build…If a one-day occupation by white men on our land years ago established squatter‘s rights, this should establish our rights here.” As the occupiers grabbed their bed-rolls and began to climb aboard the Coast Guard Cutter, humor overcame them when one of them shouted, ―Y ou got any food on board?” [18]

Overnight the occupiers found their risky attempt was a hit with the local media. Despite all the excitement, hilarity, and drama of the past two days, one objective remained certain, Alcatraz was a real and obtainable goal. If anything, the first two assaults would be recognized as reconnaissance missions. They now diverted their attention towards obtaining a larger occupation force. New recruits were needed along with enough provisions to maintain a stable residence. The students could have easily settled for the meager success of the two previous occupation attempts, but it soon became certain they were serious about their claim.

Richard Oakes soon made his way to Los Angeles and the campus of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). In the sprawling city, a much larger Native student and community base could be recruited for the third invasion. Oakes worked through the night to draft a compelling speech for recruitment. During the Fall Semester of 1969, Edward Castillo (Cahuilla) was teaching a course on Native American History for the University of California, Los Angeles. When he received a notice from Ponca historian Roger Buffalohead that Richard Oakes was going to present a proposal for a protest at San Francisco State, Castillo agreed to have the then-unknown Oakes speak to his students. As Castillo described the moment in Campbell Hall:

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[18] Tim Findley, ―Invaders Say We‘ll Be Back”, *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Nov. 11, 1969): 1, 26.

> I clearly recall Oakes's speech to our students. He made a positive impression: He was a handsome adult, solidly built. Although he obviously was not a polished public speaker, he delivered his message with simplicity and power. I was delighted to hear that he proposed to lead a coalition of American Indian students from San Francisco State, UC Berkeley, and UC Riverside to occupy the abandoned federal prison on Alcatraz Island…He then read the declaration that explained the reasons for seizing the island. Cleverly, it made truthful comparisons between Alcatraz and Indian reservations (i.e., isolation, lack of running water, lack of employment) and, better still, offered to pay the government twenty-four dollars in trinkets for the land![19]

Afterwards Richard spent time with the Native students and faculty discussing plans for another assault. These meetings took Oakes to the Los Angeles Indian Center and local Indian bars to recruit for the target date—November 20, 1969. Ironically, the students had planned their new date around Adam Nordwall's departure from San Francisco. Nordwall would be out of town attending the first conference for the newly formed National Indian Education Association. The core group of organizers clearly desired to control the next attempt for Alcatraz. Oakes was recharged, returning to San Francisco confident after his successful recruiting efforts at UCLA.

It must have been difficult for the student leaders to maintain their excitement as they resumed their studies at Berkeley and San Francisco State. Those who attended the regular meetings at the new Indian Center continued to discuss the topic of Alcatraz. The day before D-day on November 19, Aubrey Grossman met with organizers to discuss non-violent strategies of civil disobedience.[20] Meanwhile a large contingency from

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[19] Johnson, Champagne, and Nagel, *American Indian Activism*, 121.

[20] ―It would be at night. It would be nonviolent. We had an attorney come in at the final meeting on November 19 to train people in nonviolence. He told us if we raised our arms to defend ourselves it could be called resisting arrest and could result in another charge added to the indictment." Dean Chavers, ―Around the Campfire: The Indian Leader of Alcatraz." *Indian Country Today (Lakota Times)* 16, no.10 (Sep. 9, 1996): A5.

UCLA arrived in university vans and parked outside the Indian Center. Ed Castillo remembered the climate of the meeting, which was anything but non-violent:

> When our group arrived at the Indian Center, a rancorous debate was under way in a meeting of perhaps two hundred people. A tall, long haired, non-Indian biker-type (with what appeared to be an Indian wife) was expressing his apprehension about the wisdom of the proposed Alcatraz enterprise. Abruptly, someone jumped up from the audience and punched the biker's lights out. Apparently, the time for debate had passed. Thereafter, the discussion turned to logistical questions about our transportation to the island.[21]

Obviously uniting a large group from diverse backgrounds, many brought with him/her their own valid opinion, was no easy task. Certainly those observers left standing were positive that the takeover would happen that evening. Richard now was rapidly becoming the catalyst who could solidify or dismantle the movement.

Aside from the intensity of this meeting, life was growing increasingly stressful in the Oakes' household. During mid-November Tim Findley was scheduled to meet with Richard, as well as Shirley Keith, who was a Native student from San Francisco State. During the meeting, Richard seemed to be collapsing from all the planning and frequent meetings. Findley and Keith both took notice of Oakes' drinking; he was drinking even more as the three discussed the logistics of the occupation. At this moment, Anne was busy with the kids, patiently waiting in their station wagon for Richard to finish with yet-another meeting. As waiting time wore on, Anne naturally became agitated and entered the smoky little bar. Once at the table she sat down beside Richard, and her anger somehow reached a boiling point. Perhaps it was seeing Richard drinking so much or finding him in a deep conversation with Shirley Keith. It is unclear just what triggered

[21] Johnson, Champagne, and Nagel, *American Indian Activism*, 122.

her next response. Before Richard or Tim could react, Anne jumped up from the table, grabbed an empty beer bottle, and shattered it against Shirley‘s mouth. Richard Oakes, who was shocked, angry, and most likely embarrassed, quickly got Anne out of the bar. Unfortunately, Shirley was left with a busted lip, and a fear of Anne Oakes. Richard‘s focus on organizing for the occupation meant he was being pulled away from his family. If anything, he would make sure to include his family more in the future. Oakes had been used to a single life, free of commitment, and was still stumbling at times to maintain his marital responsibilities. The situation could have been handled without violence, but emotions had obviously gotten the best of Richard and Anne.[22]

One positive contact that came from the meeting with Findley was Peter Bowen, who owned the No Name Bar in Sausalito. Bowen‘s bar was infamous as a frequent watering hole for dozens of ―liberal" reporters. Coincidently, he also was the owner of a large boat capable of transporting the members of Indians of All Tribes to the former prison. Al Miller made a cautious phone call to Peter Bowen asking for transportation to an undisclosed location in the Bay. Bowen quickly understood just what Miller was asking…transportation to Alcatraz. After a pause, Peter agreed to be the taxi for the occupiers, as long as they waited till 2:00 am, when he closed the bar.

Earlier that evening Richard Oakes and the UCLA students went down to the Berkeley Marina. They were in search of a backup boat to take them to Alcatraz. Relying

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[22] Ibid, 80. Tim Findley recalls the events of the meeting. Dean Chavers in his interview confirms this incident. Tape 1, Side 2, 4, interview in author‘s possession, ―You know [Anne …was very protective of Richard…and she busted Shirley Keith in the mouth one night down at the bar by the bus station in San Francisco. She thought Shirley was coming on to Richard…I guess. She just walked in…picked up a beer bottle and popped [Shirley …in the mouth. She was a tough little lady…"

on their previous experience, the students wanted some insurance in case Bowen backed out. Edward Castillo reflected on the long trip across the Bay:

> …Oakes located the designated boat, but the skipper suddenly erupted into an agitated harangue. After a short while, Oakes walked back to the caravan of cars to tell us that the ―chicken-shit coward" now refused to transport us to the island. Oakes later explained that the captain feared the Coast Guard had been alerted to this new attempt to take over the island, and he believed his boat would be confiscated. Fortunately, we had a back-up boat and captain at the Sausalito Marina across the bay. There followed another trip across the Bay Bridge, through San Francisco, and over the Golden Gate Bridge. It was my first sight of that famous landmark, and I studied it with a degree of awe. The night was clear and cold, with just a hint of fog coming through the channel.[23]

Discouraged, the caravan of cars and vans turned around to meet at the No Name Bar. The reporters lingering at the bar were acutely aware that something newsworthy was about to happen. Clearly it was difficult to conceal over eighty Native people with sleeping bags and provisions crammed into a bar near closing. Once Bowen had completed his last chore, he and another fellow named Brookes Townes worked diligently to gather up the occupation force on their boats. Richard soon realized that someone still needed to notify the press. Chavers, who was a journalism student at Berkeley, was the perfect choice. He and a UCLA student hurried back to the Indian Center to write a press release. Bowen wrote about the events that evening:

> …[it began with a marathon of phoning sessions involving Indian spokesman Al Miller and Richard Oakes, crew for the boats, many faceless voices all wanting assurance you‘re for their cause, lawyers who promise full legal support should your boat be impounded by the Federal authorities, and one lone trusted establishment radical reporter. Several drinks and hours later arrangements seem complete. Crew ready, lawyers reassuring…Indians arriving at Midnight…silently 30 Indians file down onto the two floating piers which immediately wallow and sink causing many a wet moccasin. Crews from both boats report the island is lit up

[23] Johnson, Champagne, Nagel, *American Indian Activism*, 123.

> like a Christmas tree. ―They're ready for us." But the momentum is on. Everyone feels they're part of a great movement…Huddled on the bow, waiting to cast off, three young Indian students explain the poverty of their reservation years to a crewman. Miller and Oakes go over their plans for disbursement and tactics should they encounter resistance…One of the boat owners stepping from the water barge moored to the dock into one hell of a splash and a miraculous climb up 15 feet of sheer steel bulkhead minus his glasses and cap. All this while provisions are rushed ashore, more proclamations read and from under one pile of bedding emerges a very small and sleepy Indian child [Yvonne Oakes]. One of the youngest invaders ever anywhere.[24]

Like Richard some fifteen years earlier, Yvonne was imitating his actions as a stowaway on Bowen's boat. Yvonne, who was only twelve-years-old, was just one of many children who joined the occupation force. The occupiers believed that having their families with them would deter a hostile removal by Federal officials. They borrowed the strategy from the civil rights movement. Yvonne, in a spontaneous burst of energy, had a front seat to witness her community's claim over Alcatraz.

Security Guards on the island were more than aware of the takeover. Soon enough the island was surrounded by the searchlights of Coast Guard cutters and helicopters.[25] It

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[24] Peter Bowen, ―Under Cover of Darkness." *San Francisco Fault*. (Nov. 24, 1971): 1-9. Newspaper Clips. San Francisco Public Library Archives, ―San Francisco Indians-Alcatraz Indians", San Francisco, CA.

[25] ―This time the Coast Guard put up a blockade. They tried to take our boat that night, but some of us jumped on the Coast Guard boat and told them that if they tried to take our boat, we'd take theirs. They told us to get off the island, and we told them, ―No. This is Indian Land. Stay clear 200 yards." They got out. They set up a blockade. They sailed around in circles…This went on for a couple of days…Also, that night, there were helicopters, circling overhead. With the Coast Guard's searchlights and all, it was quite a spectacle. The little Irish guy, the caretaker, came out and started blowing his bugle. He called up his boss on the phone and said, ―The Indians are here, the Indians are here. I think they're here to stay. It's taken them thirty minutes to unload their boat." He told us that we were trespassing, but we just didn't give a damn. We told him that *he* was trespassing, and if he would cooperate, we would set up a Bureau of Caucasian Affairs and make him head of it. He laughed like hell, and later really did help us. He came over to our side." Richard Oakes, ―Alcatraz Is Not An Island," 39.

must have been quite a spectacle from the slumbering shores of the mainland. Amidst all the excitement the settlers began to congregate in the Warden's house. A tiny fireplace began to put out a small amount of heat from paper cups and twigs. Richard Oakes, Al Miller, and others gathered around the drum and started singing victory songs. Resting on the center of the mantel was a black-and-white poster of Chiricahua Apache leader Geronimo. The dream was now becoming a reality, but soon it was distracted by the birth of a new day.

At sunrise the settlers were abruptly awakened when they heard helicopters landing on the island. Reporters and cameramen exiting the helicopters were greeted by the newly formed IAT security force, and began working for interviews. Security posts had been set up and maintained throughout the long night to observe Coast Guard actions. An office for the Bureau of Caucasian Affairs (BCA) was formed in the receiving office by the docks. Settlers armed with buckets of red paint began to transform the signs, walls, and brittle concrete with slogans of "Red Power"—phrases of home.[26]

A cooking area was established in the courtyard outside the main cellblock. Wood for heat and cooking was rare, but soon settlers began collecting scrap lumber and breaking apart wooden palettes for fuel. It was evident to reporters covering the event that the Indians of All Tribes were highly organized. Yet getting supplies to the island

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[26] "The phrase *Indian Land* may have been the most ubiquitous message. The words were part of large-scale signs prominent on the barracks building facing the dock, on the water tower, and on a wall near the old warden's house. Specifically, on the side of the barracks, just above what is now the park rangers' main office, were the words *Indian Land, Indians Welcome,* and *United Indian Property*…The water tower called out to bay traffic, *Welcome, Peace and Freedom*, while declaring the place *Home of the Free…Indian Land*. *You are on Indian Land* was yet another reminder written in dripping block letters along the walk up to the cell-house." Johnson, Champagne, Nagel, *American Indian Activism*, 189.

remained a top priority. The prison had only three working toilets, clean water was scarce, and food was tightly rationed. As word of the occupation and the need for supplies spread, the Coast Guard would have their hands full. Boats ferrying supplies to the island began an assault on the blockade. Overnight, IAT carried out a plan designed by Richard Oakes, which arranged for a total of six supply drops on Alcatraz. Opposite the Golden Gate side of the island, members started throwing Molotov cocktails at the rocks below, distracting the Coast Guard's attention. Another faction used rickety ladders tied together with ropes to descend the steep cliff walls to reach the shore and haul in key supplies. This routine of cat and mouse with the Coast Guard went on until daybreak.

By the next day, the occupiers were on edge, expecting U.S. Marshals, the Coast Guard, or someone to evict them from the Island. Dennis Turner (Luiseno) summed up the mood on the Island when he stated, "We won't resist…how will they find us? It's why we are here in the first place—we are the invisible Americans."[27] As afternoon approached, the waters of the bay filled with boats, largely pleasure cruisers, which confused the blockade on Alcatraz. Under maritime law, motored boats must yield to sail or wind-powered boats and the Coast Guard was outnumbered in their effort to maintain the perimeter. Several boats easily slipped past the blockade and brought more supplies and reinforcements to the occupied prison.

While Anthony Garcia (Apache) and Stella Leach (Colville/Lakota) organized a much-needed health clinic, Richard Oakes and R. Corbin Houchins, a lawyer for

[27] Tim Findley, "Invaders Claim Rock Is Theirs," *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Nov. 21, 1969): 5.

individuals on the island, phoned a message to William Devoranon, Regional Coordinator of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, San Francisco:

> To the Government of the United States from Alcatraz Island, Indian Territory. We native peoples of North America have gathered here to claim our traditional and natural right to create a meaningful use for our Great Spirit's land. Therefore, let it be known that our stand for self-determination is on Alcatraz. We invite the United States to acknowledge the justice of our claim. The choice now lies with the leaders of the American Government—to use violence upon us as before to remove us from our Great Spirit's land, or institute a real change in its dealing with the American Indian. We do not fear your threat to charge us with crimes on our land. We and all other oppressed peoples would welcome spectacle of proof before the world of your title by genocide. Nevertheless, we seek peace.[28]

Houchins was able to lend impromptu legal advice to the occupiers. By four o'clock that afternoon, T.E. Hannon, William Devoranon, and Aubrey Grossman made their way out to Alcatraz for an official meeting. Hannon reiterated the Federal government's position that the occupiers were trespassers and for their safety should evacuate the Island. A compromise was reached as Hannon promised to allow one supply boat to land in the evening and demanded that the occupiers vacate by noon the next day. Coincidently, IAT gave the government two weeks to surrender Alcatraz. At that time federal officials were unaware that this takeover would last another nineteen months, despite repeated negotiations. Government officials counted on a lack of organization and media attention to drown out IAT's hopes for a prolonged occupation.

Contrary to Hannon's expectations, IAT was highly organized. It opened a mainland office, donated by Dr. Dorothy Lonewolf Miller (Blackfeet), who along with Dean Chavers, mainland coordinator, administered all accounts, took charge of

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[28] Troy R. Johnson, *We Hold The Rock: The Indian Occupation of Alcatraz, 1969-1971*, (San Francisco: Golden Gate National Parks Association, 1997), 31.

bookkeeping, and established the IAT bank account.[29] On the Island, IAT elected a seven-member council including Richard Oakes, Al Miller, Ross Harden, Ed Castillo, Bob Nelford (Inuit), Dennis Turner, and Jim Vaughn. By unanimous decision Richard Oakes and Dennis Turner were elected as spokespersons for IAT. Clearly Richard Oakes was emerging as a leader. He had been the catalyst in the movement thus far: he led the charge, recruited supporters, ran supplies, and handled the media and government superbly.[30] Richard used his gift of oratory, drawing from a long history of Iroquois

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[29] The mainland office also was in charge of sending out telegrams, approving supply runs with GSA, approval of interviews and press, writing press releases, lobbying city, state, and federal officials, sorting mail for the occupiers, and many other duties. Steve Talbot remembered, ―I saw what an exhausting task it was for Dean Chavers…when he took over the responsibility. Chavers, who was an agreeable person, became testy and rather unpleasant after working days on end with little or no sleep. Telephone and other messages, money and donated supplies, technical assistance, and many other coordination tasks for Alcatraz support took place out of this CAP storefront." Johnson, Champagne, Nagel, *American Indian Activism*, 109.

[30] ―The media had identified Richard Oakes as the leader on the island and he wanted the responsibility so that was agreeable with us. Richard was smart, aggressive, a handsome Mohawk who always knew what to say. We were proud of Richard." LaNada Boyer, ―Reflections of Alcatraz," unpublished essay, no date, 18. Robert Warrior's Private Collection. ―The women pretty well selected the leaders and we went ahead and selected Richard Oakes to represent us…" James Fortier, *Alcatraz Is Not An Island,* documentary. ―Once the press were notified, I mostly faded into the background. This was Richard's show, and he made the most of it. For three days, the only way the media could talk to him was by telephone. Richard could talk to them via telephone from the caretakers house…[he gave more press briefings than major world leaders. He handled himself really well." Dean Chavers, ―Around the Campfire: The Indian Leader of Alcatraz." *Indian Country Today (Lakota Times)*, 16, no.10 (Sep. 9, 1996): A5. Often those writing about Alcatraz choose to avoid labeling Richard Oakes as the ―leader' of Alcatraz. This is because IAT did everything by ―consensus" in honor of traditional forms of Native representational government. Yet, historically Native forms of ―consensus" government do not lack leaders or leadership. Richard although labeled by the press later as the ―president" of Alcatraz is what many in IAT would find offensive. The offense was the press failure to honor or understand ―consensus" government. I will explore this topic in more detail further into this chapter. Richard was a ―Native leader" who walked alongside the people and not out in front. This was evident in his statements to the press. Oakes constantly refers to IAT first and continually uses the word ―we" instead of ―I."

orators, to calm the nerves of occupiers: ―We have nothing to fear. We are not seeking to destroy the U.S. government. We are not seeking to overthrow the U.S. government. We are seeking to change that which must be changed."[31]

It was critical to the efforts of IAT to keep a unified message before the press. Without a stable message, different opinions could alter the original motivation. The goals must remain clear. Having multiple spokespersons by consensus would lead to confusion among the public, government, press, and Indian Country as well. Although occupiers proposed a law of consensus, the structure and organization were not without leadership. This leadership was led and sponsored by the citizens of IAT. Oakes would maintain a precarious role as part of the leadership core on the Island. Only time would demonstrate just how important Oakes presence was for maintaining a successful settlement.

While Indians of All Tribes worked to sponsor a clear title to the land, the White House was scrambling to formulate an informed response. The Richard Nixon White House received a ticker tape wire that said, ―Indians Seize Alcatraz."[32] Nixon aides soon realized the enormity of the situation and quickly postponed any local attempts at removal. Leonard Garment, Nixon's Special Assistant for Minority Affairs, quickly appointed Brad Patterson, Garment's assistant in charge of Indian Affairs, to represent the White House and to assume control over local law enforcement with regards to Alcatraz. At the time of the takeover, Richard Nixon was drafting his new Indian policy that would eventually usher in the era of Self-Determination. Nixon was caught in the

[31] James Fortier, *Alcatraz Is Not An Island*. Documentary.
[32] Ibid., Quote from Brad Patterson, White House staff member.

public cross-fire between the Anti-war and Black Power movements, and he was not eager about to sponsor any more bad publicity that could thwart his policy-making efforts. Eventually, Richard Nixon signed a remarkable twenty-six pieces of legislation that altered the Federal government's relationship with Indian Country forever.[33]

By Sunday November 23, 1969, a thick fog had consumed the tiny island. That afternoon Richard Oakes climbed onto the back of an old Chevy truck calling a general meeting to order. After updating the community on recent issues, he swore in Joe Brewer to the island. Brewer proposed to IAT that he be allowed to film a documentary on the island. Lifting his right hand and repeating after Richard, he swore confidentiality before IAT.[34] This action exemplifies the tight control exerted by IAT over the media and, more importantly, over their own image.

Life on the island was not without its lack of breaks between press visits, security patrols, and general maintenance. During these times occupiers relieved stress by playing softball in the courtyard or catching the Michigan vs. Ohio State football game on television. Many of them fished for Bay Cod or trapped an occasional crab. The down time and activities that consumed these times not only relieved tension, they brought a marked feeling of community to the Island. The nightlife strengthened the mood, as Richard Oakes explained:

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[33] Troy Johnson, ―The Occupation of Alcatraz Island: Roots of American Indian Activism." *Wicazo Sa Review*, 10, no.2 (Fall 1994): 71. For more information on Nixon see also, Jack Forbes, *Native Americans and Nixon: Presidential Politics and Minority Self-Determination, 1969-1972.* (Los Angeles: UCLA American Indian Studies Center, 1981) 1-124.

[34] Joe Morris, ―Nov. 20, 1969-June 11, 1971," *Alcatraz Indian Occupation Diary* (self published, 1998), 113.

> —We did a lot of singing in those days. I remember the fires at nighttime, the cold of the night, the singing around the campfire…songs of friendship, the songs of understanding. We did a lot of singing. We sang into the early hours of the morning…A few of us would go off alone and start talking about our experiences on the different reservations, about the more advanced problems and finding solutions for them."[35]

It was this type of unity that drove hundreds and thousands to Alcatraz, which soon became a —Mecca of Indian Country." Oakes stated later that such unity was undreamed of. The occupation called upon a revival traditional ways, an awakening of Intertribal unity that had not taken place since the Ghost Dance of the late-nineteenth century. Solidarity was the key to creating one of the most powerful symbols of the 1960's Red Power movement: —Alcatraz."

Over the next couple of days Oakes challenged Walter Hickel, Secretary of the Interior, to meet with occupiers and officially hand over title to Alcatraz.[36] In response Hickel agreed to meet with IAT, but he explained that he did not have the authority to grant title. The Coast Guard began to loosen their control over the blockade on the island. Richard kept up pressure on government officials to force a response: —We want this island," Oakes said again and again. —This is the beginning of our fight for justice and self determination—and Alcatraz. Then Alaska, yes, Alaska is next." "There is a dual sense of justice in this country, one for Indians, one for whites. If they're going to

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[35] Richard Oakes, —Alcatraz Is Not An Island," 39.

[36] —Before it was known as the Bureau of Indian Affairs, our —governing agency" was the War Department. We were called —Prisoners of War" then. The two agencies are synonymous. During the Second World War, the Japanese prisoner of war camps were run by the same people that run the BIA. Somebody in Washington probably said, —Hey, this is a natural!" We still consider ourselves prisoners of war. We'll always be at war with the values of this society!" Richard Oakes, —Alcatraz Is Not An Island," 40. This identifies the resentment many Native people held for the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Oakes apparently held the same view of the BIA.

continue to treat us in this manner, why not set up dual governments."[37] The occupation was already turning into a waiting game. The government hoped the press would lose interest, whereas Richard Oakes and IAT were sponsoring a solid media campaign. Oakes even offered to take the GSA's T.E. Hannon fishing to discuss the occupation.[38] Hickel eventually postponed a visit to the Island, citing a pinched nerve in his neck. Typical candor from Oakes framed his reply, "I just wonder…if that nerve happens to be his Indian nerve."[39]

As Thanksgiving approached, the support for IAT increased and restaurants around San Francisco donated turkeys and other food. Monetary donations flooded the mailroom at the mainland headquarters. Press from around the world arrived in the Bay Area to cover the takeover. San Francisco Mayor Joseph Alioto, on business in Europe, recalled: "You have no idea how much publicity this has had in Europe. Everywhere I went I was asked about Alcatraz and the Indians. They're using Alcatraz as a means of negotiating their serious and in my opinion justifiable claims. The Indians and the federal government will have to work out their differences…between themselves."[40]

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[37] Mary Crawford, "Alcatraz Indians Call for Help,"*San Francisco Examiner*, (Nov. 25, 1969): no page number, News Clippings--*Alcatraz Takeover*. San Francisco State University Archives, San Francisco, CA.

[38] "Fish and Wildlife editor of the San Francisco Sunday Examiner-Chronicle telephoned to see if Mr. Hannon would like to go fishing in the Bay with Indian spokesman Richard Oakes to 'talk things over in private.'" GSA, Reports #2, Confidential, National Archives Pacific Sierra Regoin, San Bruno, CA Series: *Records Relative to the Disposal of Alcatraz Island, 1961-73*, box 15. November 26, 1969, Robert Warrior's Private Collection.

[39] Tim Findley, "More Indians in Trek to Alcatraz," *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Nov. 28, 1969): 30.

[40] George Murphy, "Call Goes Out to Nation's Indians," *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Dec. 6, 1969): 3. "I don't know what happened but I think it had started to attract so much publicity that there were reporters here from all over Europe and at one time we had

Governor of California, Ronald Reagan, having witnessed the overwhelming public support for IAT, began pressuring the federal government for more assistance for California's Indian health needs.[41] Native people from across the country, both young and old, had begun making "pilgrimages" to Alcatraz. The symbol and idea of Alcatraz and Indians of All Tribes that Bay Area students and community members gave birth to was becoming larger and larger.

Thanksgiving day hosted over three-hundred Native people, some from as far away as Washington State and Oklahoma. A powwow and huge feast was planned for that afternoon. Cooks on the island worked double time to organize provisions for a large turnout. When the dances began young hoop dancers shared the arena with older traditional dancers wearing their "war hair."[42] One young occupier who made his way onto the Island was John Trudell (Santee), who lived in Los Angeles. Trudell listened carefully and at great length to Richard as he talked about the goals, objectives, and history of the occupation. Trudell liked what he heard so much that he returned to Los Angeles to bring his family back to stay on Alcatraz. Grace Thorpe (Sac and Fox), the

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reporters here from seven different countries…it was so obvious that in the European papers and the European TV…that the government was finally forced to back off and…leave us alone." Stella Leach. Interview by Irene Silentman and Anna Boyd. Feb. 5, 1970. *Doris Duke Oral History Project.* American Indian Historical Research Project. Special Collections: Center for Southwest Research. University of New Mexico at Albuquerque, 32.

[41] Associated Press, "Reagan Asks Finch for Indian Aid," *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Dec. 2, 1969): no page number. Press accounts vary on the number of Native people visiting the Island, some state that on the weekend numbers swell to between 600 to a 1,000. As far as permanent settlers it averaged between 90 to 250 people. These numbers were taken from articles appearing in the *San Francisco Chronicle* from November 30 to December 2, 1969.

[42] Many Native men before being sent off to fight in World War II, cut off their long hair and saved it. Occasionally dancers would wear their hair like a toupee in the arena. It was a symbol of sacrifice and honor.

daughter of Jim Thorpe—one of the greatest Indian athletes of all time—put her possessions into storage and began making the long trip West from Oklahoma to the former prison. One young occupier summed up what Alcatraz meant when he stated, ―On the mainland we were a minority…[here we on Alcatraz we‘re a majority.”[43]

After two weeks on the island, Richard Oakes took breaks between interviews and long meetings to spend time repairing the Island‘s crumbling docks and hauling in supplies. Whenever he had a free moment, Richard offered support, ran supply lines, or used his blue-collar skills for needed repairs across the Island. Dressed in a large raincoat he climbed beneath the docks on a hand-held ladder to stabilize loose boards and patch hazardous areas. Richard proved that he was not simply a ―pencil-pusher," he was also the muscle behind physical improvements on the island. The IAT improvement committee marked dangerous areas, sorted through clothing donations, planted shrubs, chopped wood, and cleared away trash, debris, vines, and weeds accumulated through years of neglect. Plumbers eventually brought 45 toilets from the original three back to working order. Electricians rewired parts of the island and brought more power options back to the abandoned prison.

Responding to Indians of All Tribes penchant for organization, government officials created a task force to construct a proposal for self-determination. The committee pulled representatives from various agency offices in and around the Bay Area.[44] On December 2, 1969, Richard Oakes, Dennis Turner, and Aubrey Grossman

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[43] Joel Tlumak, ―Indians: The Rock Packing ‗Em In," *San Francisco Examiner*, (Nov. 30, 1969): 1.

[44] ―The committee is made up of regional heads for the department of Labor, Health, Education, Housing and Urban Development, Welfare, Interior, Economic Opportunity,

met with the committee. After the hour and a half meeting Richard emerged with the following review: ―We're still going to stay on Alcatraz. Alcatraz offers us the insulation necessary for us to develop intellectually…[We invite all the Federal people…to come to The Rock and talk to the Indians there…[We've open[ed the lines of communication. The Federal Government has to respond to the needs of the people…"[45] As a reply to Richard's invitation, T.E. Hannon made a trip out to the island with U.S. attorney Cecil Poole. Oakes greeted both Hannon and Poole with a smile. He was beginning to acquire valuable tools for dealing with federal officials. Clearly, every government official he met had their hands tied, and all were limited by their position to create effective policy changes. The IAT Council also began to reach out to their communities and home lands. They created an organization, C.A.I.N., Confederacy of American Indian Nations, which sought to unify delegates and representatives from all Tribes into a larger Confederacy:

> …there is a sense of urgency beneath the apparent lassitude [on Alcatraz …Sitting at a desk in the old Warden's office, he talks about the hope of beginning a new organization, the Confederacy of American Indian Nations [CAIN], to weld Indian groups all over the country into one body capable of taking power away from the white bureaucracy. He acknowledges that the pan-Indian movements which have sprung up before have always been crushed. ―But time is running out for us," he says. ―We have everything at stake. And if we don't make it now, then we'll get trapped at the bottom of that white world out there, and wind up as some kind of Jack Jones with a social security number and that's all. Not just on Alcatraz, but every place else, the Indian is in his last stand for cultural survival…But the past is not really at issue. What is at stake today," as Richard says, ―is cultural survival. Some occupiers have known

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Justice Department's Community Relations Service, Commerce Department's Economic Development Administration's Small Business Administration, and General Services Administration." Tim Findley, ―Multi-Agency Talks: Week of Decisions on Indians," *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Dec. 2, 1969): 1.

[45] George Murphy, ―Powwow on Indian Justice," *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Dec. 3, 1969): 6.

> Indian culture all of their lives; some have been partially assimilated away from it and are now trying to return."[46]

On December 6, 1969, Indians of All Tribes sent an official invitation to Tribal leaders to attend a conference to discuss the Confederacy and formulate plans for a new Cultural Center on Alcatraz. This meeting would take place on December 23, during the very onset of winter and just two days before Christmas. The date already spelled trouble for the conference. On the same day that invitations were sent out across Indian Country, Richard was interviewed by Lynn Ludlow of the *San Francisco Chronicle*. The article "Man in the News" appeared in the Sunday edition of the paper and featured a photo of Oakes standing behind Anne with his arms around her:

> Richard Oakes is Mohawk; his wife Annie is a Pomo, and their five children he says are Pomohawks…the family lives on Alcatraz. They symbolize the Indian unity…Mrs. Oakes was sorting donated clothes. Her husband was explaining why the Alcatraz experience means so much to him and other Indians… "It's the first time we've gotten all the Indians together—perhaps we can develop an all-tribe consciousness," he said…A young man was leaning over the rusty motor of a long dead government pickup truck. "How's it going?" Oakes asked… "It's coming along."…the island to Oakes represents hope and liberation, "a living monument to the American Indians, a place for the living, not the dead." He is reserved, especially with outsiders. On his sweater, next to an Indian neck ornament, is a button that says: "We Won't Move." "We might—might—just wake up the conscience of America…For 400 years, America has been trying to change us. Now let us do it ourselves. …it meant giving up a $300 a week job, in Rhode Island for the subsistence of money offered by the Educational Opportunity Program. It doesn't really bother me…I was making money, I wasn't making anything else. Last week he was informed that the college would cut off his EOP allowance if he were arrested and convicted. "What's happening here on Alcatraz is more important…We're not giving up anything, We're gaining."…Oakes avoids the rhetoric of the radical campus left… "What the Indian learns, he explained is seldom pertinent to the needs of the Indian community. He seldom returns to the reservation. So far our biggest problems are freelance photographers and the hippies…They stay and eat up our stores,

[46] Peter Collier, "Better Red Than Dead," *Ramparts*, (Feb. 1970): 27, 28.

> then leave. Then we have to clean up after them." A sailboat lined with gawking spectators floated past the island, and someone aboard shouted the woo…woo…woo…woo…cry. ―It's hard to say whether they're friend or foe…We get quite a bit of harassment from sailboats and cabin cruisers. But I'll wave at them anyway…We're only young people concerned about our future…These are the future leaders of most of these Indian tribes"…Then the Pomohawks came and took him away."[47]

Contrary to the growing publicity and countless demands placed upon him, Richard was working to build a home for his family on the Island. His and other children were not only exposed to the civics of IAT, they were soon enrolled in classes in the caretaker's House.

Linda Aranaydo (Creek) and others organized the Big Rock School, sponsored by a grant written by Dorothy Lonewolf Miller. Classes focused not just on reading, writing, and mathematics, they also centered on the cultural development of students. Richard and Anne's kids received traditional arts and crafts instruction from older residents. Students were able to learn mainstream academics in the setting of their own community. At recess the children made use of broken-down trucks and tractors for jungle gyms. Children enrolled in the school gained experience from residents by having constant exposure to their community.[48] Eventually the children became a popular target for many of the photographers visiting the Alcatraz. Both Yvonne and Rocky Oakes were the

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[47] Lynn Ludlow, ―Man In The News: Oakes Has One Goal For Alcatraz: Unity," *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Dec. 7, 1969): 13. I chose to include major portions of the article because it posed a rare glimpse into Richard's life during these times.

[48] ―We moved onto Alcatraz Island because we feel that Indian people need a cultural center of their own…And without a cultural center of their own, we are afraid that the old Indian ways may be lost…We feel this is the first and most important reason we went to Alcatraz Island… ―It's not just the land we want to retrieve," explained Oakes, ―It's the life." Mark K. Powelson, ―Alcatraz Revisited," *San Francisco Focus*, (January 1984): 34, Oakland Indian Friendship House Community History Project, News Clippings on Alcatraz, Robert Warrior's Private Collection.

subjects of many photos, Rocky wearing a fur coat overlooking the bay and Yvonne smiling with a flower in her mouth. Most of the photos of children on Alcatraz showed smiles and excitement, an indicator of the quality of life on the Island.

Life on the Rock was not without its moments of conflict, few of which made press coverage early in the occupation. Increasingly Richard found himself in the center of most of the conflicts, as jealousy began to rise among IAT members. In 1968 the American Indian Movement (AIM) was founded in Minneappolis, Minnesota, to protect the rights of all Native people. During the first week of the occupation AIM sent a delegation to San Francisco to learn more about the occupation. Dennis Banks (Anishinabe), Russell Means (Lakota), Clyde Bellecourt (Anishinabe), Eddie Benton Benai (Anishinabe), and Lehman Brightman made a trip out to Alcatraz. While visiting the Island, AIM witnessed the effectiveness and potential of the occupation. Russell Means had been a part of the original 1964 invasion and he finally saw the fruits of their earlier effort. It is unclear just how the event transpired but certain members of AIM began to assert that the leadership on the Island be resigned to their organization. Richard Oakes was the final voice on the matter. Oakes found the AIM representatives by the docks and approached them: ―they said to Richard …you guys did a good job, you took it over and we'll take it and run it from here. Richard just says, ―get the fuck off this Island, I'll kick your ass,' and he meant it. They didn't even blink they got on the boat and left…Richard was that kind of a guy. He would clean your clock, he was not afraid to fight."[49] Richard obviously did not make any points with AIM, but he did earn the respect of those who elected to remain silent. Potentially he would even earn the respect of AIM

[49] Dean Chavers interview, Tape 1, Side 2, 4. Interview in author's possession.

members, who witnessed firsthand the determination that founded Alcatraz. AIM knew what many were just learning, the leadership on the Island would protect their objectives by any means necessary. This would not be the last physical challenge to leadership on the Island.

Richard Oakes made plenty of mistakes along the way and one serious misjudgment was with Frank Chase. Oakes was under fire from many different sources, and the stress of being the lead spokesperson was mounting. Frank Chase, who was dating LaNada Means' sister, caught Richard on the wrong day: "Frank…crossed Richard some way one day out at Alcatraz and Richard just mopped the floor with him, beat the crap out of him. He shouldn't have beat that guy up…He was a tough guy…He would not back down from anybody."[50] Fighting would not serve any purpose in unifying the membership. For some on the island, this behavior was not acceptable from the leadership. Richard had to learn to control his emotions, and he would have ample opportunities in the coming months.

One person who worked with Richard to teach him self-control was Peter Blue Cloud (Mohawk). At times Peter would speak to Richard in Mohawk to set him at ease; Oakes was just beginning to learn his Native language. Blue Cloud also worked with several others to organize the first newsletter for Indians of All Tribes, to be released in January.

Soon enough Anne would give Richard another reason to learn self-discipline. He was going to be a father for the first time. Life was not easy for the Oakes family, and Anne was slowly growing despondent about keeping the family on the Island. Richard

[50] Ibid.

was a role model for many, and he was just learning about the responsibilities such a position requires. Rocky, Anne's oldest son, got into a fight with a group of other children on the Island. Apparently, he was being harassed by a few of the other kids because of Richard's leadership. Mimicking Richard, Rocky rose to the occasion and began to fight with the other boys. Unfortunately, Rocky was not built like Richard, and received a serious beating from the other kids.[51] Tensions on the Island were not just reserved for the adults, they were now beginning to affect the youth.

In the meantime support and donations were flooding the mainland headquarters, accruing a three-week total of twelve thousand dollars. IAT received more publicity when Hollywood celebrities like Jonathan Winters, Dick Gregory, and Anthony Quinn made their way out to Alcatraz. On December 15, Anthony Quinn, on leave from the set of *Nobody Loves a Drunken Indian*, visited the former prison. Some occupiers on the Island flocked to get a glimpse of Quinn, while others kept their distance from all the brouhaha. Quinn immediately hit it off with Richard Oakes, and he invited him to attend local functions with the actor. For the next couple of days Richard left the Island and tried to secure a donation from Quinn. It appeared that Quinn did not intend to donate much to IAT, and perhaps he used Richard and the occupation to promote his next movie. Regardless, Richard came away empty handed and returned to the island. Some even

[51] "Anne said her oldest boy had been beat up two weeks before because of jealousy among the children presumably because Richard was the leader.'" General Services Administration, "Correspondence Confidential A," Box 15, File 9A. Robert Warrior's Private Collection.

speculated that he was offered a movie contract. Rumors were quickly spreading about Richard.[52]

Another celebrity of Indian Country fame, folk musician Buffy Sainte-Marie (Cree), provided crucial support for the occupation. On December 18, 1969, she staged a benefit concert at Stanford University with all proceeds going to Indians of All Tribes. Earlier in the day Buffy brought her guitar and wonderful charm to residents on the Island. Her songs of freedom were welcomed and broke the monotony of the solitary life on the Rock. That very evening, after intense speeches by members of IAT and a riveting performance by Buffy, Richard walked out on stage and presented a bouquet of flowers to the singer. Throughout the long evening Oakes chose to remain backstage and behind the scenes, allowing others to share the vision of Alcatraz. Adam Nordwall, who was Master of Ceremonies that evening, noticed Richard on stage and immediately turned the microphone over to Richard to speak. Caught off guard, he simply thanked the crowd for their generous donations and left the stage. Richard was not scheduled to speak, but his presence brought a symbol of authenticity to the festivities that night. He was the most identifiable person from Alcatraz and although some in the crowd were disappointed that he didn't say more, most were eager to call it a night. Oakes was maintaining control,

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[52] "…when Oakes came back on the 'Rock' we asked him what Quinn came up with. Oakes said Quinn promised us forty teepees from a Mexican movie set he was working on and the use of his publicity setup. After that there were lots of stories floating around the island. The tribe was bullshitting that Oakes got money, a home, and a movie contract…I asked Oakes if any of this was true. He told me it was a bunch of lies. No money, no home, and no contract. So all we got from Anthony Quinn the movie star was a lot of promises on top of promises." Joe Morris, *Alcatraz Indian Occupation Diary*, 105.

revealing that the event was not just about his views. He was encouraging others to make a deeper public commitment to the cause.[53]

Back on the Island preparations were being made for a larger population scheduled to visit on December 23, 1969, for a conference. By late December winter was in full force across Indian Country and many people would not travel. The date of the conference had another serious flaw. It was just two days before Christmas. Attendance was expected in the thousands, but only a fourth of that total made the long journey out to Alcatraz. The media were prohibited from attending the Conference. This was a bold move, but a large media presence might have distracted the participants. The meeting was broken down into committees, with Richard as the moderator of finance. The clear focus, because of the dismal showing, was aimed at plans to transform the Island into a Cultural Center and University. Some IAT members and the press criticized the conference as a failure, but this critique was based on attendance and not substance. As plans were debated and drafted, the occupiers became all too aware of the daunting tasks that lay ahead of them to complete the transformation of their vision.

Although IAT chose to ban reporters from the conference, they did manage to create their own media center—"Radio Free Alcatraz." Al Silbowitz, manager of KPFA-FM, a radio station out of Berkeley, received a grant to sponsor "Radio Free Alcatraz." Silbowitz worked through the winter chill of the prison to install radio equipment on Alcatraz. "Radio Free Alcatraz" began broadcasting on December 22, 1969, to an audience with a population in the thousands. The listening audience was not confined to California, Radio Free Alcatraz was also re-broadcast by KPFA's sister station in New

[53] Robert Warrior and Paul Chaat Smith, *Like A Hurricane*, 28.

York. John Trudell was elected host of the program that featured interviews with many of the original occupiers. Richard Oakes was one of many IAT settlers who sat down to an interview with Trudell. During the interview Oakes spoke about the idea of Alcatraz and the changes needed in Indian education:

> …You see, the situation is that the whole school system, the BIA school system should be chopped, should be shelved, and restructured in such a way that the Indian culture is revealed, so that the Indian person going to these schools, if these schools are still in operation, will get the knowledge and the understanding of who he is, what he is, and why he is in that situation, as well as an understanding of the different Indians surrounding him; the different Indians in the whole United States and Canada and Alaska. We have a great history and I think it should be brought forth.[54]

Radio Free Alcatraz became another vehicle in the cause to transform Alcatraz—Indian Country. It provided listeners with an opportunity to be an insider to the many conversations dominating the Island.

Back east in Washington, D.C., Browning Pipestem was surmounting a successful lobbying campaign. Congressmen George E. Brown, Jr. and Phillip Burton were working to pass a bill through congress to grant title of Alcatraz to IAT.[55] In the United Nations, U.S. delegate Shirley Temple Black, referenced Alcatraz when she was speaking

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[54] Troy Johnon, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island*, 102.

[55] ―Rep. George Brown, D-Calif., of Los Angeles, introduced legislation with 10 other congressmen in Washington D.C. calling for President Nixon to transfer title to the island to the Indians… ―The occupation of Alcatraz by the attention of the American people to the fact that we have neglected the cultural needs of today‘s Indians, Brown said." Anonymous, ―A Hanukah Gift to The Indians," *San Francisco Chronicle*, (December 8, 1969): 3. See also, Anonymous, ―New Support for Alcatraz Indians," *Oakland Tribune*, (Dec. 26, 1969): no page number, Oakland Indian Friendship House. Community History Project, News Clippings, Robert Warrior‘s Private Collection. Eventually on December 23, 1969 House Joint Resolution 1042, 91st Congress first session introduced a bill to grant title of the island to IAT, ―…the resolution was referred to the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs…" Rep. Mr. Brown of California, ―House Joint Resolution 1042," 91st Congress, first session, Box 3, File 27 San Francisco Public Library Archives, *Alcatraz Collection*, San Francisco, CA.

before the U.N. Social Committee on the general problem of refugees, ―The value of Alcatraz today is symbolic…[i t represents an anguished cry from impoverished descendants…"[56] Other politicians differed in their opinion on Alcatraz. San Francisco's Representative, Republican William Maillard stated, ―It doesn't look realistic to me…I'm skeptical that they really want Alcatraz. [They] are using the occupation to dramatize some very real needs they have."[57] T.E. Hannon continued to make frequent trips to the island to investigate conditions and to report back to Brad Patterson. At Oakes' request, regional committee members met with occupiers on Alcatraz to hear first-hand the demands of residents.[58] Both Browning and Grossman continued to work diligently on the legal framework for the transfer of title to the island. The holidays were fast approaching, and the settlement was nearing its month-and-a-half anniversary.

Christmas quickly approached the tiny island. A small scraggly pine tree was decorated to represent the holiday. Children on the island used lids from tin cans and yarn to decorate the thinning tree. Each lid was painted with the names of Tribes, events like the ―Trail of Tears," or ―Wounded Knee;" some bore the single word, ―genocide." Each ornament represented the historic sacrifice made by previous generations. Joe Morris was approached by the IAT Council to be Santa Claus for the Christmas Party:

> We had a big celebration for Christmas 1969. A lot of Indian people came out to the island that day. We had Indian singing, Indian music, food, and speeches made by people from different tribes. Most of them spoke about their problems and getting the shitty end of the stick from the state and federal shafters. Speeches were made by Richard Oakes, Earl Livermore,

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[56] Tim Findley, ―The Indians Claim Alcatraz Victory," *San Francisco Chronicle*, (December 9, 1969): no page number, Robert Warrior's Private Collection.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Anonymous, ―Regional Officials to Meet With Indians on Alcatraz," *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Dec. 10, 1969): no page number, Robert Warrior's Private Collection.

> Grace Thorpe, Stella Leach, John Foster, and George Woodard. This meeting went on for about four hours…we had to elect a Santa Claus, and I made a deal with Richard Oakes. We split the job, one-half hour a piece with the Santa Claus suit, passing out the Christmas presents to the kids. All these presents were donated by the big stores in San Francisco. There were about fifty presents for the kids. I think Richard turned out to be a better Santa Claus than I was. He laughed like Santa Claus, saying ―Ho ho ho," and just having a lot of fun.

Contrary to Richard's tough image, he was more than willing to make Christmas a special day for the children. Presents were handed out and as the evening wound down, Morris helped Richard and Anne put the kids to sleep in their tiny apartment. The door of their residence was tagged in red paint that simply read, ―Oakes Place." That night after all the Oakes children had fallen fast asleep Richard, Anne, and Joe Morris stayed up talking into the late hours. Richard had mentioned that he feared for the safety of his family and his own life. Anne had been having bad dreams and had confided to Richard about the dark premonitions: ―She was afraid that someone in our family would be hurt if we stayed on the island. She felt that it was time to leave. I had been thinking about leaving to develop the idea of Alcatraz in other places. However, I put her off. I wish I had listened."[59]

On Christmas Eve Richard encountered another confrontation back at the pier on the mainland. While boarding a boat heading toward the Island, Oakes crossed a group of men who had been drinking too much. In the early days of the occupation, IAT enforced a strict prohibition policy of no alcohol or drugs on the island. The last public image or stereotype the occupiers wanted to market was that of the ―drunk Indian." It was

[59] Richard Oakes, ―Alcatraz Is Not An Island," 40.

important to maintain tight control over their image and Richard was confronting it head on:

> …they noticed a group of Indians in a heated argument that was turning into a brawl. A large, striking Indian was keeping several drunk Indians from joining him in his boat to the island. He didn‘t want them there if they were drunk. The drunks finally gave up and left. [Colin] Wesaw and the others approached the man and learned he was Richard Oakes….Oakes found out they had come all the way from Chicago and immediately offered them a ride across the Bay to Alcatraz…Oakes seemed kind and generous, with a good heart for his people.[60]

Ideas about drinking differed on the Island. Some altruistically believed that they could help those in need and allowed some intoxicated individuals shelter on Alcatraz. For those seeking an escape from the law, the former prison offered shelter on a different level—that of a hiding place. Caretakers Don Carroll and Mr. & Mrs. John Hart complained to Hannon that drug and alcohol abuse were making life increasingly difficult.[61]

Oakes‘ leadership position on the island was increasingly threatened by those heightened rumors and gossip. The climate and mood changed on Alcatraz as the New Year approached. News coverage of the occupation began taking a back seat to the Charles Manson trial, the violence at the Rolling Stones‘ Altamont Speedway concert, and the growing revolt of the anti-war movement. As more people visited and exited the island, one of the core leadership groups, the students, began returning to their classes, permanently leaving the island. New leadership was moving into the former prison with their own objectives for Alcatraz. Lawana Quitiquit (Pomo) would charge Richard with

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[60] Warrior and Smith, *Like A Hurricane*, 33.
[61] GSA, ―Daily Reports-Mr. Don Carroll, caretaker at Alcatraz," Box 14, Robert Warrior‘s Private Collection.

stealing money from the movement. She handled the sorting of mail that was delivered from the mainland. Lawana recalled that Richard forbid her to open his mail. Donations were still pouring in to IAT. The table in the mailroom supported stacks of bills, all of which were contributions sent through the mail. Lawana began to suspect that Oakes was pocketing money earmarked for IAT.[62] She possessed no actual proof for this allegation, but her speculation was enough to encourage more challenges against Oakes. It is just as likely that Richard was making deposits into the IAT bank account and was also saving receipts.[63] Al Miller remembered the opposition towards Richard growing:

> …[Richard Oakes was really hot on Indian's all over the country start'n to do things for themselves. He was a dreamer you know…that's what his dream was. See there was a lot of people that wanted to talk with the press. They wanted to state what they thought Alcatraz was about, but Richard was protective of it. Because we had given birth to it…[Richard would always talk about this being the catalyst for other activities and we need to protect it. The more people that we would get on the island the more leaders would emerge, people thinking they should be the rightful leader…Richard he was confrontational. He would get up in front of people if he saw somebody being mistreated…his face in theirs…his wife Annie would tell him, "Don't trust everybody because some of these guys are jealous of you, and you should know that"…but [Richard trusted people. He trusted everybody and thought everybody was a good person. Resentment was building up against him.[64]

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[62] Warrior and Smith, *Like A Hurricane*, 63-64. Quitiquit is the only source for this allegation, and no investigation was ever conducted as to whether or not Richard stole money. It is at best a rumor that had stark consequences for Richard's credibility on the island.

[63] When researching the *Alcatraz Collection* at the San Francisco Public Library, I did find several receipts signed by Richard Oakes. It was only a handful of the total receipts acquired during the occupation, but does reveal that Richard did save receipts—he was careful about money. "Finance—Miscellaneous, (Undated), Box 2, File 23, *Alcatraz Collection*, San Francisco Public Library Archives, San Francisco, CA.

[64] Ed Castillo stated, "There were more and more challenges to Richard's leadership, not only were they verbal, but they became physical as well." Fortier, *Alcatraz Is Not An Island*, documentary.

Oakes realized that the dream of Alcatraz and his own life were in jeopardy. On January 3, 1970, Richard and Anne headed for the mainland to run a few errands. They left behind their now thirteen-year-old daughter on the island. Yvonne Oakes was old enough to take care of herself in her parents‘ brief absence and to baby sit her younger siblings.

Later that day Yvonne was playing tag with Ed Willie and another boy in the dining hall. The Kitchen staff, thinking that the kids were up to no good, told them to play outside. They then ran over to the Ira Hayes building—the caretakers‘ building—and started running up the stairwell. Yvonne headed up first, laughing and carrying on, while racing the two boys to the top of the three-story stairs. The next thing the two boys heard was Yvonne scream and saw her falling head first down the corridor between the stairs. Yvonne lay lifeless on the concrete floor, unconscious and bleeding. Stella Leach, a registered nurse on the island, was one of the first on the scene; her clinic was in the same building. John Hart‘s son, who was staying in the apartment next to where Yvonne lay unconscious, scrambled to call the Coast Guard. [65]

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[65] Ibid., Ed Willie interview. —..Thomas Scott, who was the PMDS realty officer in charge of Alcatraz during the occupation, alleged that there were, in fact, eyewitnesses who saw Yvonne pushed to her death…It is my opinion after having discussed Yvonne‘s death with a number of people who were on the island at the time, and taking into consideration the hostile atmosphere toward the Oakes family, that Yvonne Oakes was most likely pushed to her death on Alcatraz Island.” Troy Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island*, 152-153, Robert Warrior differs in point of view from Johnson when he cites only Lawana Quitiquit on the event in his book *Like A Hurricane*. Lawana speculated that Yvonne had been sniffing glue and playing carelessly, and she merely slipped and fell. Her account has never been substantiated by anyone else, and remains an isolated opinion. The official report that Hannon would publish listed the events similar to Ed Willie‘s. —[Stella Leach said she had warned the Oakes child several times away from the stairwell and corridor before the accident occurred. About three minutes after the last warning, she heard a cry outside her clinic door and went out to [find ….the injured child. Mrs. Leach was in the clinic with David Leach…and another young Indian.” GSA, Correspondence Confidential, Box 15, File9A, Robert Warrior‘s Private

Yvonne was rushed to the Public Health Service Hospital in San Francisco and was immediately placed in critical condition. As soon as Richard and Anne learned of the news, they rushed to the hospital. It is uncertain just how much they knew about Yvonne's condition before arriving at the hospital. Anne became frightened by the reality of the premonitions she had experienced a week earlier. Richard did his best to comfort her and to study Yvonne's condition. Dr. Roller, Chief of Professional Services, who operated on Yvonne explained the procedure to Richard and Anne. Yvonne might just pull through, but to what extent she would recover was unknown. Richard asked Dr. Roller if there were any signs that Yvonne's fall had not been an accident. Roller stated that he could not detect any physical signs that would warrant such a claim. Richard and Anne stood helplessly aside and began maintaining a constant vigil outside Yvonne's room.

T.E. Hannon arrived at 2:30 in the afternoon to offer condolences and express his regrets to the family. Soon Anne's family arrived from Kashaya. Her mother and father were also accompanied by Anne's two brothers and sister. Richard went down to the

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Collection. "There was a mystery about how a young girl like Yvonne could fall down a stairwell. She was either chased or thrown down the stairwell by her killers." Joe Morris, *Alcatraz Indian Occupation Diary*, 107. In Paul Chaat Smith's interview with Robert Robertson, a federal negotiator revealed on page 9 that, "the young man's [Richard's daughter was murdered out there…[in the old employees apartment complex, (inaudible) balcony to her death…I was told that by several of the people out there." Robert Robertson, interviewed by Paul Chaat Smith, Smithfield, Virginia, tape recording, Dec. 1, 1993, transcribed, Robert Warrior's Private Collection. Also, Robert Warrior's interview with Sid Mills on 12/16/94 by phone, page 16, "…you know, one of Richard's kids were killed over this [Alcatraz]." It is still uncertain if Yvonne was murdered or if her death was an accident. I do not agree completely with Troy Johnson that Yvonne was 'murdered.' There is ample evidence that Yvonne was indeed pushed, but by whom and why is left to mystery and it is highly probable that she was murdered.

hospital cafeteria to get a cup of coffee with a reporter. While Richard was gone Anne, confided in Hannon, mentioning the jealousy towards Richard on the island, and that dissension was growing among members of IAT. She also stated that there was too much drinking and fighting, ―nothing was going right." When Richard arrived back at the waiting room, he told Hannon that he was not interested in discussing Alcatraz; Yvonne was his only concern. Hannon informed Oakes that if he suspected foul play, he would request an official investigation. Pausing for a moment, Richard asked Hannon not to forcefully remove IAT from Alcatraz. Hannon asked Richard to visit him at his office, in a few days and they would discuss the matter further.[66]

For the next five days Richard and Anne clung onto any hope that Yvonne might pull through her injuries. In an interview on January 4th Richard, his voice trailing off, said, ―I don't know what I'll do…[m y wife doesn't want to go back there: I don't know…"[67] The hospital kept Yvonne under constant supervision and promised the sad and worried couple that the hospital would absorb the costs. Friends and family regularly visited the hospital to offer Oakes sympathy and assistance. Yvonne's brothers and sisters offered prayers for their sister's speedy recovery. Emotions ran high each day as the family hung onto the every word of doctors and nurses. Richard for the first time in his life was powerless, but he had to remain strong for Anne and the kids.

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[66] GSA, Correspondence Confidential A, Box 15, File 9A, Robert Warrior's Private Collection. Excerpts taken from Hannon's reflections on the day's events at the hospital. See also, Robert Robertson Interview, 1 Dec.1993, Smithfield, VA, by Paul Chaat Smith, transcribed, 9. Robert Warrior's Private Collection.

[67] Tim Findley, ―Child Badly Injured In Fall on Alcatraz," *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Jan. 4, 1970,): 1+. Robert Warrior's Private Collection.

On January 8, 1970, Yvonne Rose Oakes, having struggled for five days, passed away under the tearful watch of her family. Services were donated by the Daphne Funeral Home, which was flooded by a large group of family and friends who offered the Oakes family their condolences. Richard and Anne sat on a couch inside the funeral home staring in disbelief, the shock apparent in their eyes. Yvonne was laid to rest at her birthplace the Huckleberry Heights Reservation, located by Stewart's Point Reservation.[68] Richard and Anne rarely spoke of Yvonne's passing. Richard reflected, "…sorrow couldn't bring her back. We could only take it and deal with it. Even in death she was still within the circle, the circle of life, our universe."[69]

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[68] Bill Boldenweck, "Death Batters Alcatraz, Indian Dream Still Intact," *San Francisco Examiner*, (Jan. 9, 1970): no page number. News Clippings--*Alcatraz Takeover*, SFSU Archives, San Francisco, CA.
[69] Richard Oakes, "Alcatraz Is Not An Island," 40.

CHAPTER FIVE

INDIAN CITY SEATTLE

Richard Oakes was the most recognizable face of the Alcatraz takeover. As a leader he had formed a vast network of associations throughout Indian Country and with the federal government. His central belief that Alcatraz was an idea held vast meaning for many Native organizations and individuals struggling to make sense out of Red Power. Now, through the actions of Richard Oakes and others, the Intertribal foundations of this movement were visibly enacted through the takeover of Alcatraz Island. Oakes understood that the Island was central towards the promotion of a vast Intertribal network. This very network held the potential to challenge destructive federal policies and create a powerful coalition. Activists and leaders from the famed Fish-Ins occurring in and around Seattle were enthralled by this very vision. Inspired by Alcatraz and Richard Oakes, Seattle Indian leaders constructed their own Intertribal coalition that linked prominent Fish-In leaders, Indians of All Tribes, Indian City Seattle, and sympathetic public support into one of the most successful takeovers of the Red Power era—Fort Lawton. This chapter will explore, once again, the complex invention of the Indian City and how Red Power coalition politics reclaimed lands from a former military base to construct a new Indian Center in Seattle, Washington. Richard Oakes played a vital role in the success of the Seattle movement as the idea of Alcatraz also began to take over Indian Country.

On January 15, 1970, Oakes was appointed by William Oliver, later the director for American Indian Studies at UCLA, to the San Francisco Regional Council of the National Council on Indian Opportunity. Oakes was the only participant and occupier of

Alcatraz to be selected for this position. By the afternoon of the fifteenth, Indians of All Tribes (IAT) officially filed their Articles of Incorporation with the State of California. IAT was now seeking grant money to build their cultural and educational center on Alcatraz, and the incorporation was crucial. The Articles listed Richard Oakes as one of the seven council members of IAT. The majority of the by-laws followed typical state guidelines of voting and governance. Instead of the traditional consensus model that IAT had touted in the beginning, the council now was to operate by two-thirds majority. The Indians of All Tribes Council held separate meetings from the general membership and could call a meeting to order with only four members of the council present. Richard Oakes and other initial occupiers began to see that the ―traditionalist" ideas of Alcatraz were being transformed.[1] Over the next few years, Oakes would engage in a wide variety of occupations in a concerted grassroots campaign for home rule. Most historians have focused almost exclusively on Oakes' role at Alcatraz, but in reality Alcatraz was just the beginning of a much larger movement.

Disappointed in the fighting and dissension on the Island, Tim Findley published two scathing reports in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Findley drew a strong parallel in his comparison of life on the Island to the novel, *Lord of the Flies*, an association which

[1] On page five of the Articles of Incorporation the Quorum or Majority section is described as, ―Two-thirds shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business, and no action shall be taken without the approval of at least a majority of those Council members present…" Council members listed include ―Stella R. Leach, Alan D. Miller, Judy Scraper, David A Leach, Dennis Evans R. Turner, Richard Oakes, and Ray Sprang." Anonymous, ―Legal Matters," Box 3, File 13. Alcatraz Collection, San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco, CA.

haunted the remaining months of the Alcatraz occupation.[2] Although dissent and counter opinions were welcomed, Alcatraz residents were now asserting their own opinions through physical violence. It was this strong-armed discord that Oakes and his family could no longer tolerate. After moving from the Island, Richard Oakes eventually resigned from the IAT council.[3] Those in opposition to Oakes' leadership on the island sought to conceal his resignation by postulating that he was voted off the island.[4] Richard

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[2] Findley produced two articles to this effect on January 7th and 8th, 1970. Some on the Island viewed Findley's remarks as hearsay and rumor. Their effect was to change the course of the movement by pointing out the forces of dissent that pushed Richard Oakes away from Alcatraz. "If there is a single 'leader'…It is Stella Leach, a 50-year-old [Lakota] woman with an arrow-sharp tongue and a strongly aggressive personality. She and her son, David, 22, both serve on the current seven member governing council…She hides her animosities poorly reacting sharply… 'Oakes never had any particular status,' she snapped. 'He was elected spokesman for a while, and that's it. He's still on the council his status hasn't changed.' Many, perhaps, most of the original occupiers…have…left the island." Stella seemed to be the most avid member of the 'anti-Oakes' faction on the island. Stella Leach joined the occupation after the second day, and was not privy to the earlier occupations." Tim Findley, "Alcatraz Dissension Grows," *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Jan. 7, 1970): 4. "…if fights broke out during the long cold nights on the island and sides were being formed in a dozen different personal disputes…Oakes…was losing in a minor power struggle on the seven-member governing council. He was victimized by…rival jealousies and distrust. Part of the quarreling was over finances. At least some of the contributions were addressed to Oakes himself, a fact that caused added friction." Tim Findley, "Factionalism and Feuds," *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Jan. 8, 1970): 4.

[3] Alcatraz Collection, "General Meeting," February 6, 1970, Box 1, File 34, p 1. "Election of council member to replace Richard Oakes who resigned…Charles Dana to replace Richard's seat on council." This was handwritten in a notebook that contained minutes from the general meeting.

[4] "To [Lawana Quitiquit and others, it was obvious that the money was not the real issue. "They were looking for anything," she said. No one knew if Oakes took those letters and deposited all the money in the communal bank account or if he used the money to cover the legitimate expenses of being Richard Oakes. And that finally was what he was accused, tried, and convicted of—being Richard Oakes." Warrior and Smith, *Like A Hurricane*, 64. Warrior and Smith allege that Richard was voted off the council, but the council minutes from Alcatraz read differently. According to the council minutes, Richard Oakes resigned his position, and was not voted off the IAT Council. One

Oakes became the scapegoat for the dysfunctional climate that was slowly ripping apart the movement. By leaving the bickering behind, Richard could, at best, concentrate his talents more effectively on the greater goal—liberation. Alcatraz was the symbol, but Oakes knew action would be the determining factor in the struggle to protect sovereignty. Al Miller recalled the day Richard Oakes resigned: ―I still remember the last conversation. He said, well you guys…do what you can with it. I don't have the heart for it."[5]

He returned to life at San Francisco State and settled back into his residence at ―Gatorville." There Oakes resumed his coursework and the regimented routine of classes—a far cry from the freedom he had experienced on Alcatraz. He carried with him complicated lessons drawn from IAT and an education born outside the classroom. Oakes continued to work for the Native American Studies department and raised money for the newly established Yvonne Oakes Memorial Fund. Created in Yvonne's honor, this fund was designed to generate much-needed revenue for the Native American Studies department that was still struggling to remain financially afloat.[6] Even though Richard Oakes was no longer affiliated with Indians of All Tribes, he continued to publicly support the original goals of the organization he had helped to create. More importantly, Oakes had established a network of lifelong friends and associates, and he was not forgotten.

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purpose in pointing this out is to show the controversy that still surrounds Richard's role in Alcatraz and that leadership always comes with a price.

[5] *Alcatraz Is Not An Island*, documentary.

[6] National Archives Pacific Sierra Region San Bruno, CA Series: *Records Relative to the Disposal of Alcatraz Island, 1961-73*, GSA box 15, Reports #2, Confidential. On Jan. 29, 1970, the Yvonne Oakes Memorial Fund was founded at San Francisco State College, the proceeds to go to the Native American Studies department for research.

Recognized for his talents at organizing, he was recruited by the El-Em Pomo at Round Valley Reservation in northern California, who were struggling to keep a proposed dam from flooding their homelands. The Army Corps of Engineers proposal sought to relocate the El-Em, sacrificing their 19,000 acres of ancestral lands for California's hydroelectric needs. By March of 1970, Oakes was attending meetings with leaders from the community to organize a direct-action and media campaign to block the proposed dam. The idea of Alcatraz was spreading, and Richard Oakes began to lead the second phase of the IAT occupation.[7] Ultimately the El-Em relied upon Red Power strategy in their successful pursuit of land reclamation with the takeover of Rattlesnake Island. Oakes continued to organize with Northern California Tribes as well as Indian Cities.

Bernie Whitebear (Colville), a former Green Beret with the 101st Airborne Division, had heard Alcatraz's message when he and a delegation from Franks Landing (including Al Bridges, Hank Adams, and Ramona Bennett) visited with Oakes and toured Alcatraz a few months before March of 1970. Franks Landing, a famed Nisqually fishing site, for years was the epicenter for the struggle to protect fishing rights. Stretching back to the 1950s, Franks Landing was a Nisqually Nationalist movement actively maintained by the Franks family to protect their right to harvest treaty salmon from the Nisqually

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[7] "…I know that Richard Oakes and a couple of others went up to Round [Valley , must have been a couple of months ago…." John Trudell, Interview by Ron J. Lujan, Feb. 5, 1970, *Doris Duke Oral History Project*, American Indian Historical Research Project-Special Collections, Center for Southwest Research University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, Tape #455, Side 1, pg 3. See also, D.C., "Round Valley: Are Army Engineers & BIA A Conspiracy?" *Indians of All Tribes Newsletter*, 1, no.3 (1970): 10-11. For more background on Round Valley see William J. Bauer, Jr., *we were all like migrant workers here: Work, Community, and Memory on California's Round Valley Reservation, 1850-1941*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

River. By March of 1970, Bernie Whitebear, who had come of age politically during the fishing rights movement in Washington State, was so overwhelmed by the vision of Indians of All Tribes and Alcatraz that he, along with veterans of the fishing rights movement and Alcatraz takeover, had formed their own organization United Indians of All Tribes (UIAT), in Seattle. The roots of this organization were not planted overnight. Both the Indian City of Seattle and the politically charged Northwestern Indian Nations cultivated it from years of resistance and much talk over reform. For over a hundred years the Puyullup, Nisqually, Muckleshoot, and other Northwest Coast and Columbia River Plateau Tribes had maintained and protected their right to harvest salmon guaranteed in the treaties of 1854-1855. The takeover of Fort Lawton in Seattle relied upon a well established network and coalition of northwest Native Nations and Indian City Seattle. Just as the occupation of Alcatraz is linked to the complex and rich Intertribal history of San Francisco, likewise the struggle for Fort Lawton must also be historicized in the context of the Indian City.

Indian City Seattle

Seattle was forged out the multiple Native Nations that have claimed the Puget Sound region as their homelands since time immemorial. Puget Sound provides an outlet for several major rivers carrying rich fresh water flows that emerge from the fortress of Mountain ranges that surround present-day Seattle. The Sound straddles the international border between Canada and the United States and its expanse is comprised of hundreds of islands. The surrounding lands and ocean around Puget Sound created rich and powerful Native Nations, many of which were organized around the sophisticated potlatch system

of Native economy. The potlatch was an event that occurred primarily in the winter months as notable families reinforced their kinship and citizenship by redistributing their wealth among the entire Tribe. The potlatch tradition was a time to impart sacred knowledge, as traditional stories were often reenacted in elaborate staged performances that solidified the shared history of the Tribe. Puget Sound was host to elaborate coastal whaling communities like the Makah, who constructed elaborately carved cutter boats that traveled hundreds of miles and snared the largest of whales for their community. By the twentieth century many of these powerful Nations, despite attempts at assimilation, acculturation, and allotment, remained strong and rooted to their traditional ways. Seattle increasingly had become a suburban hub, linked both economically and culturally to the Nisqually, Duwamish, Muckleshoot, Suquamish, Skokomish, Puyallup, Quinault, Tulalip, Lummi, and many more Native Nations. Seattle had even derived its name from the famed Duwamish leader Chief Sealth.

From the 1920s to the 1970s, American Indians in Seattle had created their own institutions and organizations that would become the core of Seattle‘s Native community. Like San Francisco and Brooklyn, during these years, Native peoples increasingly relied upon the ―Indian City” to defy the political, social, and economic constructs of government-related assimilation and acculturation programs. The mass post-World War II migration from Reservations and rural spaces to the city represented one of the greatest per capita internal migrations of a people in the United States. Before the 1970s, the national urban Indian population was growing at a rate of three and a half times faster than the mainstream population.

Ironically, Seattle's American Indian population was rather low by comparison to San Francisco, growing from 1,729 in the 1960s to around 12,000 by the 1970s. At face value, these census figures obscure the true Native Seattle population. U.S. Census officials failed to acknowledge that Seattle's urban Indian community was first, highly mobile; secondly, comprised of thousands of Canadian First Nations people; and finally, situated in close proximity to western Washington Pacific Northwest Tribes. Each of these Nations utilized the markets of Seattle and nearby Tacoma to enrich their economic and political opportunities. The City effectively became a vehicle and tool to recruit protesters and supporters, sell treaty salmon, and gain national exposure for the benefit of the Tribes. Seattle held a unique position in the twentieth century urban Indian complex because it was one of the few major West Coast cities not selected by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) controversial Relocation Program. [8]

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[8] The other obvious problem with census data on Native Seattle is that it excludes the highly mobile and transient labor force that is often seasonal. This is an unfortunate circumstance. If the 1960 Census were taken out of season, it meant that the Indian population was not completely accounted for. Also, because of the large number of migrants living in single room occupancy hotels in and around Pioneer Square and Skid Road, these populations were more than likely excluded from an official count (because of income). Ironically, Indian Centers across the country have always struggled with census officials to provide accurate measures for urban Indians. These measures have only just begun to change in recent decades. The real consequence of failed reporting is that low numbers prohibited American Indian job agencies, non-for-profits, and organizations from securing competitive funding from outside grants and federal programs. Census figures for this essay were compiled from a variety of sources including: Karin M. Enloe, "Helping Indians Help Themselves," An Urban American Indian Success Story: Identity, Activism and Community Building in Seattle, 1958-1972," (University of Washington, M.A. Thesis, 1990) 32; "During the first five months of 1962, 5,592 persons visited the center. They represented 97 tribal groups, coming from as far away as New York. Many of the tribesmen from Canada were among the visitors seeking aid," Erle Howell, "A Seattle's Indian Center: The Needy Get A Helping Hand," *The Seattle Times*, Feb. 3, 1963, 3; "Only 5 percent of the patients using the Seattle Indian Health Board had health insurance. Records showed that 55 percent were

Several external factors typically shaped this great migration to Seattle, including World War II, the BIA's Relocation Program, and the Federal Termination legislation that emerged during the 1950s. Indians who moved to Seattle often faced extraordinary odds: discrimination, segregation, isolation, inadequate public housing, police brutality, and unemployment. In response, Indigenous Seattle collectively challenged these overwhelming odds by constructing political, economic, and cultural coalitions among themselves. Community centers, organizations, and institutions that comprised Seattle's Indian city gave strength to these coalitions.

By 1952, the BIA had launched one of the most dramatic programs in its history: the Relocation Program. Along with job training, Indian relocatees received a one-way bus ticket to one of six relocation centers located in: Chicago, Cleveland, Dallas, Denver, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. Eventually the program was expanded to include other major metropolitan areas. However, Seattle was never selected as a target city. Of course only speculation can attest for the reasons why Seattle appeared to lack the appropriate qualities necessary to "lose" or "melt" Native peoples within its urban milieu. Perhaps, it was due in part to Seattle's location—it was surrounded by Federal and Indian trust land—and it also may have been linked with the hotly-contested historical issue over fishing rights in Washington State. The closing of Celilo Falls, the ancient fishing site of the Columbia River, in the mid-1950s, captured national headlines. The construction of

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transient, moving back and forth from Seattle to reservations, and 60 percent of the patients had low incomes." Donald Fixico, *The Urban Indian Experience in America*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 117.

Dalles Dam drowned the famous falls and eradicated over 450 fishing stations and permanently disrupted a sacred salmon harvesting area.[9]

While Native peoples in Seattle did not come under the auspices of the federal policy of Relocation, they encountered the classic challenges met by relocates, and their community activists met the challenges by politicizing and advertizing this new Indian City. Seattle also served a largely migratory Native labor force, attracting fifty-five to sixty percent of the city's migratory labor from local Tribes. Furthermore, Indian city leaders maintained a strong resistance against the forces of local segregation and discrimination. The growth of Indian Cities, as both San Francisco and Seattle demonstrate, represented another challenge to the Federal Indian policies of Termination and Relocation.[10]

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[9] See also, Andrew Fisher, *Shadow Tribe: The Making of Columbia River Indian Identity*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010)

[10] During the 1960s the average annual income on Indian reservations totaled $1,500.00 per family versus $2,850.00 per Indian families in cities. In Seattle the average annual income grew from $2,321.00 in 1960 to $5,439 by 1970. See Fixico, *Urban Indian Experience in America*, 73. A high unemployment rate reaching well above ninety percent for some communities compounded this situation. The top industries within reservation communities were agriculture, timber, and mining. Sociologist Joseph G. Jorgensen analyzed BIA reports from 1968 and estimated that Americans grossed 170 million dollars from agricultural products. Of that amount, Indian agriculture accounted for only sixteen million dollars. Similarly, of 803 million board feet of lumber harvested from Native lands, Indian communities received only fifteen million dollars (this amounts to a little over eighteen cents per board feet of lumber removed from Native lands). Mineral leases yielded thirty-one million dollars to select Indian communities, and yet, only ten thousand jobs were created for a total Indian population of 764,000 people. Most reservation communities lacked a stable economic infrastructure to keep these profits within their borders. Additionally most of the profits that accrued to Native people via agricultural and extractive industries were derived through the leasing of lands, which stripped most Tribal governments of their right to control the production of resources on Indian land. For a detailed account on the Relocation Program see, Fixico. *Termination*

Ultimately, Native peoples in Seattle challenged municipal, state, and federal policies, and, in so doing, they developed Intertribalism, which emerged as a new cultural and political vision. The Seattle Indian community, like its counterpart in San Francisco, formed institutions, chartered organizations, infiltrated college campuses, established business networks, and politicized an entire community. By operating through their own community institutions and organizations, Seattle‘s Native peoples began to erase old identity questions and stereotypes, and, like the Indian Cities of Brooklyn and San Francisco, they formed a new consensus politic.

Between 1900 and the 1920s, Seattle‘s Native population had experienced a rapid increase due to the corporate canning and logging industries. These industries provided seasonal labor, which meant that a majority of Seattle‘s Indian population was migratory, moving between Seattle and the reservations. Initially the Indian Bureau tried to force Native layoffs at the canneries to promote farming on the reservations. However, the Office of Indian Affairs plan reflected a dearth of knowledge about Puget Sound and its primary industries. Soon enough Indian Affairs would ease up on its enforcement of government-backed labor discrimination in Seattle. By 1920, the Indian migration into Seattle had increased by 31.8 percent, and the new industrial boom was altering Seattle‘s skyline and enlarging its opportunities. Energized by the new politicization and nationalism of the Society of American Indians, formed in 1911, Native peoples increasingly began to press for greater freedom in the economy by arguing for land reform and the protection of treaty fishing rights. Like the Brooklyn neighborhood where

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and Relocation: Federal Indian Policy, 1945-1960. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986).

Richard Oakes was employed in ironwork, large numbers of American Indians in Seattle joined labor unions to protect their wages in the logging and canning trades. The largest concentration of Native peoples resided in downtown Seattle and along the waterfront, where they lived in low-rent or transient boarding houses. By the 1920s and 1930s, following a heightened sense of nativist sentiments and the economic depression, national unions began to oust and bully out their Native membership, and labor increasingly became a closed shop catering to Anglo-American Unions.[11]

Throughout the 1920s and into the 1940s, the Northwest Federation of American Indians rallied behind the goal of protecting their fishing and treaty rights. Another major intertribal organization that held meetings throughout the state of Washington was

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[11] ―Alaskans dominated the Seattle Indian community…Seattle Indians came from fourteen U.S. states as well as Alaska, Canada, Mexico, and Chile." Russel Lawrence Barsh. ―Puget Sound Indian Demography, 1900-1920: Migration and Economic Integration," *Ethnohistory* 43:1 (Winter 1996), 84. This represents Seattle as being a Pacific Rim Western city, especially with high numbers of Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino in the labor force. On page 89, Barsh offers an argument that in Seattle, the two worlds theory of Reservation v. Urban or White v. Indian lacked any merit, ―Coast Salish [, the predominant Native culture surrounding Seattle,] did not have to choose between cultures; they could work in a sawmill during the week and go to a longhouse on the weekend, just hours away by boat or train." Most importantly Barsh's work underscores the extremely transient nature of Seattle's Native labor populations. Strikingly Barsh claims that, ―…Indians were highly integrated into fishing and shoreworkers' unions until the 1920s, when the postwar recession intensified competition for jobs and white-only unions were formed," 93. This underscores a discriminatory national labor trend as identified in David Montgomery's *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925*, ―Backed by scholarly treatises on eugenics and ―racial traits," congressmen like Johnson and William Dillingham set out on a four-year quest for legislation that would exclude people of ―undesirable" nationalities, without closing the doors to northern Europeans…By 1923, the National Industrial Conference Board's leaders had concluded that immigration was ―essentially a race question—a question of the kind of citizenship and national life we desire to develop in the United States…In short, Congress and the Department of Labor had undertaken the scientific management of society's entire labor force." (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 461-422.

the Northwest Indian Congress. In order to attract tourist dollars to the host city, the congress created the Northwest Festival of American Indians, a three-day festival, complete with a fundraising ball, parade, and powwow competition. They held one event in 1926, in Everett, Washington (a one-hour drive north of Seattle). Despite the parade-like atmosphere, the organization observed strict rules about settling tribal boundary lines and claim allocations. Ironically, the title for a *Seattle Times* article that appeared in 1926 declared ―City becomes Indian Village." Over 3,000 Native peoples gathered in Everett for the festival representing over twenty-one Nations from Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. The event capitalized upon local tourism and boosterism but, more dramatically, it exposed local politicians and Seattle lawyers to significant Tribal political issues, including fishing and treaty rights.[12]

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[12] Matthew Klingle. *Emerald City: An Environmental History of Seattle*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007),176-177. ―In 1914, Pacific Northwest Indians founded the Northwest Federation of American Indians…In 1923, with the help of…white attorneys, the federation persuaded Congress and the Bureau of Indian Affairs to let… [Native Nations sue for claims arising from unmet treaty obligations." Unknown. ―Northwest Indians Gather in Everett: Pageant Is Feature of Redskins' Conclave." *The Seattle Times*, June 6, 1926. ―Questions discussed at the convention included the matter of tribal claims which Arthur E. Griffin, a Seattle attorney who was representing the Indians, declared were still unsettled…Senator William Bishop of Jefferson County discussed the fish, tax and citizenship questions…Indians were being ―arrested for fishing without a permit." Other articles describing this claim include, Unknown. ―$400,000 To Be Paid Clallam Indian Tribe." *The Seattle Times*, Feb 1, 1926, n.p. Unknown. ―Indians To Go On ―Warpath' for $5,000,000: Snoqualmie Tribe Will Hold Powwow on March 16; Seek Land Payment From U.S." *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Mar. 4, 1940, n.p. Unknown, ―Indians will Sell Seattle For 3 Million: Tribe Claims All Land in City, But Is Willing to Be Reasonable; Hires Attorney Here," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Feb 4, 1940, n.p. Coincidentally, because of the Citizenship Act of 1924, Northwest Indian Nations could use their new citizenship rights in the state and federal courts to pressure/protect land claims. This is just a random sampling of articles that demonstrate the nationalistic tones of the era.

Beyond politics, Indigenous Seattle also underwent socio-cultural changes, illustrated by newspapers stories of Native Women with bobbed hair, also known as the ―Native flapper." This new generation of Indians revealed to Seattle that they loved Ronald Colman just as much as the next young woman. Everything changed when the stock market crashed in 1929. Shortly thereafter, Seattle businesses began increasingly to lay off workers. Growing economic fears and sympathy with eugenic movements led white employers to exclusively target Indian and Filipino laborers for layoffs. A fortunate few urban Indians opted to return to their Tribes to find jobs, while others began the tedious process of applying for any government sponsored employment through the Indian New Deal, such as the Indian CCC. Despite the mass layoffs, Seattle's Native community remained steady at 3,000 people.

In addition to a harsh economic climate, discrimination in Seattle was also quite overt with ―No Indians Allowed" signs posted in many downtown business windows. A select few American Indian couples owned their homes during the Great Depression. Another small group of Native home owners consisted of Indian women who had married white men. Unlike Native men, white men faced little discrimination in securing home loans or credit. These mixed-marriage couples became a minority vanguard that openly challenged segregation within Seattle neighborhoods and businesses. Still, the majority of the American Indian population in Seattle faced segregation, which meant they were forced to settle in the haunts of Pioneer Square and Skid Road districts.[13]

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[13] Unknown. ―Wigs Over Bobbed Hair Stir Wrath of Indian Beauties." *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Oct. 31, 1925, no page number, and Unknown. ―War Whoops Went Out With Bustles," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Mar. 31, 1938, no page number. Each article particularly deals with a side of the ―modern women" and the mass culture shift of the

The major push/pull factor for Native migrants moving into Seattle occurred during and after World War II, when more than 40,000 Native men and women secured employment in the west coast defense industries. With increased federal expenditures for new shipyards and hangers came thousands of new jobs and training in the wartime factories. Adeline Garcia, Haida, reflected, "I came to the big city to go to work and save our country and get an education." Garcia worked in the Shipyards as a welder and later reapplied her skills for work at Boeing. Native laborers, by their large presence alone, would help to desegregate the wartime industries in many Western cities. For the first time, hundreds of American Indians gained a new economic independence. Beyond the war factory, approximately 44,500 Native men and women also enlisted in the armed forces.

Despite this unprecedented support for the war effort, many Native laborers were laid off at the end of the war to provide jobs for returning troops. Historian Alison R. Bernstein explains, "By 1950 the unemployment rate for urban Indians had reached fifteen percent nearly three times that of whites." As quickly as opportunity had come to Indian wartime laborers, victory and tragedy waited just around the corner. Many laborers had very little savings to deal with this sudden loss of employment. Like their counterparts during the 1920s, those who could afford it returned to their home

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twenties that Indians embraced along with non-Natives. For more on housing and discrimination consult Thrush,151-161. See also, Barsh, 89. Barsh makes a very suspect claim, "In cities they [Native peoples were generally found in white, working-class neighborhoods, consistent with their occupational levels, which suggests that they experienced relatively little discrimination." Yet, what Barsh fails to include in this account is the circumstances of intermarriage, where white males married to Native women could live in these predominantly white neighborhoods. If most Native people worked in the cannery or sawmills their neighbors were Japanese or Chinese rather than white. This was a form of probably race/classism during the 1920s and 1930s.

communities, while those who lacked travel funds sought affordable housing and semi-skilled jobs, and continued to fight for better employment and living conditions in Seattle.[14]

Many Native veterans who returned to the Puget Sound after the war began to embrace traditional ways and the sacred act of harvesting salmon. Approximately a couple of hours south of Seattle in 1945, a young Billy Frank, Jr., Nisqually from Franks Landing, experienced his first arrest for salmon fishing. Between jobs Billy Frank worked as a non-union laborer in nearby Olympia, Washington, the state capitol, and as a salmon harvester on his family‘s traditional allotment lands known as Frank‘s Landing. This initial arrest sparked a thirty-year war, that eventually drafted Richard Oakes, to defend

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[14] The Garcia quote is from Karin M Enloe, ―Helping Indians Help Themselves" An Urban American Indian Success Story: Identity, Activism and Community Building in Seattle, 1958-1972, M.A. Thesis, (University of Washington, 1990), 32. Many of these troops were exposed to other worlds in their platoons and travels. The military proved through desegregated regiments that Indians could actively compete on the frontlines and in their travels among soldiers from different backgrounds. The regimented life of the military and service in the wartime industry mobilized thousands of Native people to actively pursue life and opportunity in an urban setting after the war. Like thousands of their comrades, many Native veterans took advantage of the GI Bill to secure loans and an education, while others applied for VA loans to purchase homes or start businesses in western cities, and some even relocated to the burgeoning suburbs. For some veterans, the urban environment was a place that would enrich their new-found foreign and domestic urban wartime experiences. For others, the city represented the ultimate escape, where one could get lost in the crowded streets, delight in window shopping, and experience new foods. It was a different and exciting reality, far from the pace of reservation life or life within the many rural non-reservation communities of Oklahoma. Bernstein, 73. ―Estimates place the number of Indian women working in war industries in 1943 at 12,000 or slightly more than one-fourth of the total population that had left the reservations for war related work." ―The War Manpower Commission offered women free training in light defense jobs that could eventually pay as much as $120 a month." LaGrand, James B. *Indian Metropolis: Native Americans in Chicago, 1945-1975*. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002): 36. See also Thrush, 163-165.

the rights of Northwest Tribes as spelled out so clearly in the 1854 Treaty of Medicine Creek and other treaties negotiated between tribes of Washington Territory and Isaac I. Stevens, territorial governor in 1854 and 1855. In the acclaimed book *Uncommon Controversy* the importance of fishing for Native Peoples is straightforward:

> Fish, particularly salmon, still are an integral part of Indian life….They still represent meanings and relationships so old and tenacious that even Indians who no longer fish will fight to preserve the accustomed rights in the rivers and streams with which they are traditionally connected. Fishing is the heritage of hundreds of years of use and development. It is a stronghold of the Indian person's sense of identity as an Indian. It is a remaining avenue of close relationship with the natural world. And in this modern world, it is at the heart of his cry for recognition and respect. [15]

Billy Frank, Jr. would eventually enlist in the Marines for two years and return to Frank's Landing and the Nisqually lands by the mid-1950s. Frank would witness the struggle for fishing rights that intensified during the termination mood of the1950s with the passage in 1953 of Public Law 280, which gave certain states—including Washington—legal jurisprudence over select criminal and civil matters once under Tribal jurisdiction. The state of Washington eagerly sought to exploit the loose script of this federal law to their own advantage. Unbeknownst or ignored by state officials, hunting and fishing rights procured through federal treaty provisions, were excluded from the reaches of state jurisdiction. [16]

In 1957, the State of Washington drafted its own legal interpretation of Public Law 280 to include the regulation of hunting and fishing rights. This same year, the State

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[15] American Friends Service Committee, *Uncommon Controversy: Fishing Rights of the Muckleshoot, Puyallup, and Nisqually Indians*, edited by Mary B. Isely and William Hanson (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1970), 71.
[16] Robert T. Anderson, Bethany Berger, Philip P. Frickey, and Sarah Krakoff, *American Indian Law: Cases and Commentary* (St. Paul: Thomson/West, 2008), 139-143.

of Washington Supreme Court decision *State v. Satiacum* came to deadlock. The court's opinion did reverse charges against the defendants and also reaffirmed the rights of Puyallup citizens to fish within their lands as guaranteed by treaty right. Although the decision was not a total victory for the state or the Tribes it signaled an extended courtroom and legal journey to protect treaty fishing rights for Native people in the State of Washington.

The debate over Celilo Falls and the growing legal pursuit to protect fishing rights was also occurring during the height of the anticommunist hysteria known as McCarthyism and the federal Indian policy dubbed Termination. House Concurrent Resolution 108 (passed in 1953), more commonly known as the "Termination Act," also affected the Natives who moved to cities. From 1953 to 1958, this legislation ended federal trust responsibilities for 109 Indigenous Nations throughout America. Termination policy devastated many Native communities, overturning the protection of Tribal land held under trust, negating treaty rights, and threatening entire ways of life for thousands of Indians. As a consequence of termination legislation, over 1,362,155 acres of Indian land were legislatively transferred from Tribal ownership to the control of the Federal Government. This legislative land grab was second only to the Dawes Act of 1887, which had led to the loss of over 90 million acres of Tribal lands. Statistics on the number of Indians who moved into the city as a result of Termination legislation are lacking. Fortunately, most Tribes in Washington State escaped the devastation that had befallen so many other Native Nations. The Colville Nation of North Central Washington was almost terminated. The Colville tribe came under severe pressure from federal and internal sources to support termination through a Tribal referendum, but Colville voted

collectively against voluntary termination. This policy literally had a stranglehold over several non-federally recognized tribes as well. Each of these Tribes had to work twice as hard to protect treaty rights and gain federal-trust status for their respective citizens. [17]

Countering this wave of destructive federal policies in the 1950s, Native activists and organizations in Seattle constructed the first Indian-controlled and managed Indian Center in the United States. As one of the founding institutions of the Indian City, it remains by far one of the most important. The Seattle Indian Center was similar to the San Francisco Indian Center that Richard Oakes frequented in the Mission District. The center extended social services to urban Indians, ran a trade/craft shop to sponsor local Native artists; it introduced youth programs, annual powwows, job placement and assistance, food and clothing banks; it provided legal assistance and meeting space for local Native organizations; and it offered health care referrals.

The Indian Center in Seattle was born through the progressive efforts of the American Indian Women‘s Service League, founded in 1958. Their first President, Pearl Warren, Makah, became the official spokesperson and advocate for the Indian Center. Warren selected the First Avenue location for the Indian Center, just north of Pioneer Square, and home to many Seattle Natives. Some of Seattle‘s Indian leaders envisioned a greater Indian Center, one that would require financial support and would be located

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[17] See Also, Lawney L. Reyes, *Bernie Whitebear: An Urban Indian"s Quest For Justice*. (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2006) 84. While no Tribes were federally terminated in Washington State, this legislation would greatly alter the political/legal rights of Tribes applying for federal-trust status. At least seven Tribes, around the Seattle region, fell into this non-recognized status: Chinook, Cowlitz, Duwamish, Snohomish, Snoqualmie, Snoqualmoo, and Steilacoom. Only one, the Snoqualmie, gained federal recognition in 1999. Without federal-trust status each non-recognized Tribe is without federal protection, funding, and treaty/legal rights. This continues to be a disparaging situation that Termination legislation exacerbated for non-recognized Tribes.

outside the Red Ghetto of Pioneer Square. By 1967, Warren became even more vocal about this dream, —We feel the city should give us back some land…and we won't settle for any old haphazard deal. We want an Indian-style longhouse-a place with a meeting room, craft workshop and display center." This push for a new Indian Center foreshadowed the growth of Native Nationalist movements in and around Seattle during the late 1960s.[18]

Another facet of support for the Indian City appears in the printed record. For years Native peoples in Washington State published newsletters and their own newspapers. Between 1922 and 1924, *The Real Americans* was published in Western Washington. The newspaper, although short-lived, focused on national and local Indian news. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, two of the most popular Seattle Indian publications appeared under the titles: *Northwest Indian News* and *Indian Center News*. Stories ranged from local events, community happenings, and historical information and reporters covered news about national political issues ranging from termination policy to fishing rights. Together, these publications created a vital link among Native populations and were critical aids for collectively organizing the larger Intertribal Native community.

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[18] —The Center is financed by donations from various churches, including Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Jewish and Protestant. A portion of the expense is provided by the United Good Neighbors. Many women's groups in churches, lodges and service clubs make regular donations in cash or commodities."Howell, —At Seattle's Indian Center," p. 3, and see also, Enloe, 41-43, 73. —Ramona Bennett, a Puyallup, —My heart wasn't full. Then a friend invited me to a cultural program at the Seattle Indian Center. I went, and became involved in the American Indian [Women's Service League. For the first time, I really belonged. The Indian Service League gave me opportunities to socialize and volunteer, and the healing began."

These media outlets also served the larger goals of the Indian Center, to inform and unite the Indian City Seattle. [19]

Several Indian cultural organizations arranged a number of activities for the Indian community, which provided a recreational outlet, including baseball, basketball teams, and dance clubs that hosted local powwows. The Seattle Indian Center and the Northwest Intertribal Club sponsored powwows that occurred at least once a month and fostered Intertribal awareness. Powwows also provided another source of income for many Indians in the city, since traders sold traditional crafts to the general public, and Indian business owners used sponsorship of these cultural activities to advertise themselves. Like the United Indian Development Association in San Francisco, Seattle's American Indian Professionals Association also provided fellowship and assistance to Indian business owners throughout greater Seattle. This organization enabled Indian doctors and lawyers to fraternize and to establish occupational relationships. Indian businesses ranged from Indian bars to Haida-owned, Walt's Barber Shop located on Pike Street in downtown Seattle.[20]

Branching out from the Indian Center and Powwows, another critical and controversial institution of the Indian City appeared in the form of the Indian bar. Indian Skid Road contained a handful of "bow and arrow joints" and due to post-war anti-Indian discrimination, most of these bars came into existence during the 1950s. Like Brooklyn and San Francisco, Seattle Indian bars often served as both entry points for newcomers to

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[19] *Northwest Indian News* had two critical runs from 1957-1961 and 1971-1980, whereas the *Indian Center News* ran from1960-1971—mirroring Pearl Warrens executive term as President of the American Indian Womens Service League.

[20] Enloe, 50 and Unknown, "Greetings from Walt's Barber Shop," *Northwest Indian News*, Nov. 1971, 5.

the Indian City and as the first stops on the road to urban survival for many Native peoples. Historian Coll Thrush explains: ―The best documented of the Skid Road Indian bars, the Britannia Tavern, catered to veterans, loggers, railroad men, and migrant laborers, most with tribal origins in Canada, Washington, Alaska, and the northern-tier states. At the Britannia, Indians could catch up on gossip from the reservations, drop guards required by urban life, and simply be Indian." Thrush continues, ―As at the Service League's Indian Center, there was a sense of family at the Britannia; patrons often referred to the bar's co-owner, a Puget Sound Indian woman, as ―Ma," ―Mom," and ―Little Cousin." Even Native people who did not live on Skid Road found the Britannia to be ―home territory." Thrush argues that Indian bars offered more than just a social component. They served as a place where people offered tips on jobs, services through the Indian Center, housing opportunities, and health services. Political organizers within Native Seattle often took advantage of Indian bars for lobbying purposes. At one Indian tavern Bernie Whitebear announced his commitment towards becoming a dedicated Seattle Indian activist.[21]

While this description provides a very positive outlook on Indian bars, another deeper issue remained. Indian bars sometimes fostered a perilous social setting and encouraged the habitual dependency of some of their clients. Like the Mission District of San Francisco, Police typically patrolled the bars of Indian Skid Road. Law enforcement often relied on racial profiling and stereotypes, which led to disproportionally higher

[21] Thrush, 175. See also, Reyes, 84, ―One night…in one of the Indian taverns, Bernie vowed to change the image forged by the dominant culture. He pledged that he would dedicate his life to focusing the blind eyes of the U.S. government on the poverty, hardships, and needs of the Indian people living in urban areas."

arrest rates for Native peoples.[22] These arrests inflicted their own damage to families and the economy. Arrests led to higher unemployment rates and weakened the economic and political solvency of the Indian City.

The neighborhood itself became the fourth institution of Seattle‘s Indian City. Despite the widespread Indian population scattered throughout greater Seattle, Pioneer Square and Indian Skid Road proved the primary home to the core Native community. Much of the housing in this area was substandard, rents were high, and slumlords exploited Native tenants. Due to prejudice and low income, many families in this neighborhood were highly mobile, moving on average three to four times in less than a year because of eviction or other circumstances. This increased mobility within the community necessitated a growing dependence on the institutions that comprised Seattle‘s Indian City.[23] Successful political organizing and protest within Seattle‘s Indian

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[22] See also, Chadwick, Stauss, Bahr, and Halverson, 164, ―A Tlingit attorney in Seattle, Halverson, reports that Indian clients who sought him out for assistance in a five week free-aid-program had experienced unfair mortgage foreclosures, consumer fraud, illegal evictions, serious felony charges,…drivers‘ license suspensions, insurance cancellations, and drunkenness in public.” And page 165, ―…six to one ratio of Indian to white arrest for Seattle…[or one arrest for every four Indians, convincingly demonstrate the need…[for additional research of prejudice and discrimination by law enforcement.”

[23] Alan L. Sorkin, *The Urban American Indian*. (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1978, 69. ―Many restrictions discriminate intentionally or unintentionally against the Indian renter: refusing children, limiting number of occupants, refusing to rent to welfare mothers, demanding a breakage fee along with rent that puts the price out of reach, and stringent credit checks.”68. Many Natives refused to live in these conditions and returned to their home communities, but for many their communities at home were often worse than conditions in the Red Ghetto, ―…in 1970, 46 percent of all Indian housing had inadequate plumbing facilities compared to 8 percent for urban Indians…19 percent is considered crowded (more than one resident per room), compared to 44 percent for rural Indians…” Eventually, as federal funding for urban Indians began to increase in the late sixties, it led to competition for reservation communities. This was one of the sparks that created a political and cultural split between urban and rural/reservation Indians.

city, just like the Indian cities of San Francisco and Brooklyn, relied on knowing the American Indian neighborhood.

Founded in 1969, and central to the Indian City, the Seattle Indian Health Board reflected the cumulative work of several Indian organizations in the city. The goal of the Board was to establish a medical facility to provide health services for Natives in Seattle, and one of its executive directors was Bernie Whitebear. The looming obstacle for the Seattle Indian Health Board was to find a land base for the new clinic. Sponsored by the Public Health Hospital, the clinic was only open three days out of the week. This made it rather difficult for emergency situations, and accessibility was limited.[24]

The last institution within Seattle's Indian City was the Native American Studies program created at the University of Washington. In 1968, the Black Student Union (BSU) organized a sit-in at the administrative offices for the university. The BSU had demanded increased enrollment for all minority students as well as the creation of a viable Ethnic Studies department. Native students had a long history of enrollment at the University Washington, but even active recruitment in the late 1960s only increased the Native Student population from 25 to 100 students. The American Indian Studies program, like that of San Francisco State, shared similar goals but one particular objective linked the program with the Indian City. The objective promoted student participation in American Indian community development. This core component sought to partner students with local Indian agencies to conduct research and develop programs

[24] Enloe, 68, Fixico, 117, "Only 5 percent of the patients using the Seattle Indian Health Board had health insurance." Most reservation communities have a clinic or Indian Health Service (IHS), however in urban environments most Native people were refused service for lack of insurance. See also, Reyes, 93-97.

for Seattle. Out of the core program University of Washington students would forge a coalition to foster political support for fishing rights and ultimately the Fort Lawton takeover.[25]

Fort Lawton Occupation and the construction of an Indian City

The roots and ideology behind the Fort Lawton takeover originated in two other events: the Fish-Ins of the mid-1960s and the Alcatraz takeover in November of 1969. For decades, Puyallup and Nisqually had collectively fought to protect their right to harvest salmon from state and game officials who cut nets, confiscated boats, and arrested hundreds of Natives for invoking their basic treaty rights. By 1964, iconic Hollywood figures attracted the national press when celebrity voices stepped in to offer support at the Fish-Ins. Soon, Marlon Brando was arrested near Franks Landing; Cree folksinger Buffy Saint-Marie lent her soulful voice and joined the struggle; and, eventually, black comedian Dick Gregory served time in jail and created his own hunger strike to bring national attention to fishing rights.

Each of these acts was supported by an organization founded in January of 1964 by Janet McCloud (Tulalip), Don Matheson (Puyallup), and Al Bridges (Nisqually), called Survival of American Indians Association (SAIA). This organization attracted a key new member in Fort Peck Assiniboine Hank Adams. Adams had spent his early years on the Quinault Reservation along the Washington coast, and later he had joined the

[25] Unknown. ―UW Indian Studies – New Courses," *Northwest Indian News*, (Nov. 1971), 5. For more information on the BSU strike please visit the Seattle Human Rights and Labor History Project online at http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/BSU_beginnings.htm, see The Early History of the UW Black Student Union, by Marc Robinson.

leadership ranks of the National Indian Youth Council. By 1964, Hank Adams had dropped out of the University Washington after two years to join the SAIA and the fishing rights cause full time. The Fish-Ins, as Janet McCloud labeled them, began early in 1964, and attracted the press, who witnessed Native peoples being arrested for having exercised their most basic treaty right. When Hank Adams joined SAIA, after a successful NIYC support protest/fish-in in March of 1964, he skillfully relied on a similar formula of coalition through media pressure, legal counsel and physical and financial support from Seattle's Indian City. After nearly a decade of fierce challenges on February 12, 1974, federal judge George Hugo Boldt in *U.S. v. Washington* issued a landmark ruling in favor of the Tribes and the Fish-In movement to protect their treaty right to harvest salmon.

Many of the lead organizers for the takeover of Fort Lawton emerged from this fishing rights struggle. Bernie Whitebear (who had fished in protest with Bob Satiacum well before the fish-ins) often ran supplies for the fishing rights movement. By the time the idea to take over Fort Lawton came into being, Whitebear, Adams, and others were seasoned protest veterans. Obviously, in its most simple terms, land reclamation, treaty rights, and self-determination became the core objectives and definition of Red Power politics.[26]

Hundreds of miles away on November 20, 1969, another coalition of Native activists in San Francisco bay was laying siege to Alcatraz Island. Overnight the

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[26] American Friends Service Committee, *Uncommon Controversy: Fishing Rights of the Muckleshoot, Puyallup and Nisqually Indians*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1970), 108. Charles Wilkenson, *Messages from Frank"s Landing: A Story of Salmon Treaties, and the Indian Way*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 49.

organization Indians of All Tribes, led by Akwesasne Mohawk student activist Richard Oakes, took over the island. Over the course of the next few months Fish-In leaders like Al Bridges (Nisqually), Hank Adams, and Bernie Whitebear made pilgrimages to this new "Indian Land." Hank Adams was the new executive director of Survival of American Indians Association, while Whitebear was an important link between Seattle's Indian City and the nationalist fishing rights struggle. Richard and Anne Oakes had both supported the fishing rights movement by providing room and board to Ramona Bennett (Puyallup), who sold treaty salmon in San Francisco Bay for SAIA. Both Hank Adams and Ramona Bennett remembered Richard Oakes as a visionary and a leader who saw beyond the localized struggle when he asserted that, "Alcatraz is not an island, but an idea." The idea declared that through organized direct action, Native peoples and Tribes could control and determine their own destinies. Oakes' simple and powerful vision inspired thousands of Native Peoples across Indian Country. In Seattle, Bernie Whitebear was enthralled and energized by IAT and Richard Oakes. Soon the two started coordinating Seattle's response to Alcatraz—the takeover of Fort Lawton. [27]

Whitebear was so inspired by Indians of All Tribes that he and other Northwestern Natives formed their own Seattle-based organization, United Indians of All Tribes (UIAT). Bernie Whitebear, along with Ramona Bennett and Bob Satiacum (both of whom were leaders in the Fish-Ins) created UIAT as an answer to Seattle's pressing need for a new cultural center. Bennett, a member of SAIA, had ample contacts in Seattle, and she was an alumni of Seattle Community College and the American Indian

[27] Hank Adams and Ramona Bennett interview, taped on March 2009, Lamy, Washington. Interview in author's possession.

Women's Service League. Bennett was a brilliant organizer and understood that Native success with fishing rights also hinged on Native success in Seattle. For many in SAIA, a takeover of Fort Lawton, like Alcatraz, could secure critical media attention for fishing rights. Fort Lawton, located on a site of one hundred-plus acres, was a former military installation built to protect the coastline, and had recently been declared surplus property by the Defense Department. Its coastal location and large open acreage made the fort prime open space land for neighborhood associations and property owners eager to increase the worth of their homes with the creation of a large public park. The city began entertaining proposals from the community as to the future of the site. A host of organizations from the local Magnolia Club (a prominent neighborhood association that borders Fort Lawton) to the Sierra Club formed a committee during the mid-sixties to decide the fate of Fort Lawton. Their ultimate plan envisioned the creation of additional park land for local residents of Magnolia and property owners. Contrary to Seattle organizers, Whitebear and Bennett understood the potential of the site, and they began a concerted campaign to achieve their goals, having teamed up with members of Indians of All Tribes from Alcatraz, to secure Fort Lawton for the Native community of Seattle. They selected March 8, 1970, as the first date in a long series of staged occupations to win title to Fort Lawton.

Relying on his military training, Whitebear coordinated the siege on the Fort. After he read out loud a Proclamation that claimed the fort by "right of discovery," over fifty Native people and supporters scaled the gates surrounding the fort. Once they were inside, Military Police jumped into full alert and jeeps filled with officers raced to the scene. The Military Police succeeded in squelching the campaign, arresting fifty UIAT

members on trespass charges.[28] Overnight Fort Lawton, like Alcatraz, was instant news. Reporters fought to get an interview from any official associated with UIAT. Only one week passed before UIAT made a second attempt on the fort.

Bernie Whitebear received numerous offers of support from many national Native organizations, from the west coast San Francisco based United Native Americans to east coast national Native newspaper *Akwesasne Notes*. Their effort eventually caught the attention of actress and activist Jane Fonda, who was eager to participate in the second siege. Fonda had appeared in over 18 Hollywood films including *Cat Ballou* (1965) and *Barbarella* (1968). Jane Fonda was also the daughter of famed actor Henry Fonda known for his stellar performance in film *Grapes of Wrath* (1940). By 1969, her brother Peter Fonda was equally famous for his iconic countercultural role in the film *Easy Rider*. By the late sixties Jane Fonda had lent her celebrity status to popular protest movements including the anti-war movement, feminist movement, Alcatraz takeover, and the Black Panther Party. Grace Thorpe, who had coordinated Fonda‘s visit to Alcatraz, drove to Frank‘s Landing. Thorpe planned to meet up with Janet McCloud (Tulalip) a coordinator for the Survival of American Indians Association (SAIA). When she finally arrived, Grace Thorpe saw the famous actress sitting in the McCloud‘s kitchen. While the three visited, McCloud explained the latest in a series of campaigns for protecting fishing

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[28] ―After being asked to leave by the military and refusing, the Indians were beaten with clubs and dragged to waiting vehicles. All tapes and photographs were destroyed by the military. The Indians were then placed in the stockade to be processed. They were put into 12 by 14 foot cells and abused and intimidated by those on duty. No one was fed for 6-8 hours. Because of personal grudges, the last 10 persons to be released were beaten by 20 unarmed MP‘s in their cells, resulting in two persons having dislocated shoulders and the others suffered bruises.” Anonymous, ―United Indians Invade Fort Lawton,” *Indians of All Tribes Newsletter*, 1, no.3 (1970): 1.

rights. A long war was being waged in the courtroom, and further protests sought to protect traditional fishing and treaty rights of Northwest Coast Tribes. Fonda told Thorpe that she was on her way to Seattle to aid UIAT in their struggle for Fort Lawton. The next day the popular actress and Grace Thorpe left for Seattle. Jane Fonda insisted on driving alone and was soon out of sight, barreling down the road. Although the two had briefly discussed the occupation, Thorpe was concerned that the celebrity did not know where she was going.[29]

On March 15, 1970, UIAT made their second attempt. The organizers looked around but still saw no sign of the actress. In a repeat performance, organizers scaled the fences, while Grace Thorpe and others scaled the high cliffs, attacking the fort on the opposite side. One MP reported to his commanding officer, ―It's impossible to stop them. Wow! Now I know how Custer felt."[30] Additional organizers were arrested when they tried to establish an impromptu settlement of tents and lodges inside the military base. UIAT members were handed expulsion papers for a second time, and many sustained injuries from the clash with police. The military forced reporters to hand over to them all pictures taken during the siege. The military establishment could not afford any more bad press. They had received enough negative publicity at the hands of anti-war protesters. Many of the occupiers looked around, asking, where are all the reporters? The next day the papers headlined ―Fonda Arrested." Apparently Jane Fonda went to the wrong fort, where she was promptly arrested. The press coverage of Fonda's arrest was beneficial

[29] Grace Thorpe of Prague, Oklahoma, interview by author, 28 August 2001, by phone, tape recording—transcribed, tape 1, side 1, 7.
[30] Mike Barber, ―500 gather at Daybreak Star center to honor Northwest Indian leader," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, (July 21, 2000): no page number.

but had distracted public attention from Fort Lawton to Fort Lewis, a base located near Tacoma, over 80 miles away from Fort Lawton.[31]

Over the course of the next few weeks UIAT maintained a 24-hour-a-day settlement at the main gate to the fort. To prevent further occupations the military installed barbed wire around the fort's perimeters. Those arrested in the first attempt were scheduled to go to trial April 2, 1970 on charges of trespass. Instead of attending their trial, on March 15, 1970 UIAT joined forces with Richard Oakes and many others at their encampment located just outside the fort. Security noticed that a large group was massing at the gate and dispatched soldiers to survey the situation. The occupiers informed the soldiers that they would be packing up and asked for their assistance. While the soldiers anxiously began breaking down tents and lodges, the occupiers slowly moved toward the now-opened main entrance. Whitebear began to read the proclamation: —

> We, the Native Americans, in our independent sovereign rights and rights of alliance, herewith claim the land known as Fort Lawton…by the acknowledged right of discovery. In the name of all Indians, therefore, we claim this land before the international community for all our Indian nations. We know this claim is just and proper, that this land is, in perpetuity, rightfully ours!"[32]

Just as Whitebear finished reading the proclamation, everyone made a sudden dash for the gates, running at full stride, as soldiers looked on in disbelief. Dropping tent polls and tables, the soldiers pursued, racing forward as the protesters fanned out in multiple

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[31] Jerry Gambill ed., —Fonda:" and —Laird Is Sued By Jane Fonda," reprinted in *Akwesasne Notes*, 2, no.2 (May 1970): 4.
[32] Jerry Gambill, ed., N. Magawan, —Indians Attack Attack Army: Indians Want First Crack at Surplus Land," *Los Angeles Free Press*, reprinted in *Akwesasne Notes*, 2, no.2 (May 1970): 5.

directions. This strategy attempted to prevent the use of tear gas and held the potential for some protestors to go undetected, thereby prolonging the occupation.

Altogether about eighty people joined in the effort to seize Fort Lawton on March 15, 1970 only to wind up again in the hands of angry MP's. The tiny brig at the fort began to overflow with prisoners, and soon they ran out of space as occupiers pushed against the bars of the small 12-by-4 foot cells. One witness stated, ―As they stood and sat in the crowded brig of the abandoned post, Oakes used his gift for oratory to encourage and inspire the activists."[33] Richard's voice conveyed a unique form of confidence, a leader who clearly understood the emotion, time, patience, and sacrifice it required of activists to lead a takeover; the crowded military brig came to silence when he spoke. Oakes had been a negotiator all of his life, moving between gangs and police, ironworkers and foremen, students and administrators; this situation was all too familiar. Tensions escalated as the occupiers pushed officers back to the booking hall, where they witnessed the physical abuse of fellow protesters. One detainee, who was still handcuffed, was repeatedly slammed head first into a wooden column by an excited officer. Another witness saw a woman being inappropriately handled by disgruntled officers. The crowded brig grew loud in protest over the brutality they had witnessed. Outside, the brig officers tauntingly jammed their fists into the air and mockingly displayed the victory sign with their hands. Richard Oakes and Bernie Whitebear watched as their attempt came to an abrupt halt.[34]

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[33] Johnson. *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island*, 163-164.
[34] Ibid.

Despite the taunts of soldiers and the arrest of numerous supporters, the March 15 UIAT takeover had won a decisive victory. Ultimately, after a long fight, Fort Lawton was turned over to UIAT, who would eventually found the Daybreak Star Center on the controversial site. The numerous occupations and press attention had unified the Seattle populace into a concerted campaign supporting UIAT's claim to Fort Lawton. Bernie Whitebear and others began drafting plans to convert the retired base into a cultural and ecological center.

Just a few days before the third attempt on Fort Lawton, on March 23, Richard Oakes and eleven other protestors were arrested in their attempt to take over the Bureau of Indian Affairs office in Alameda, California. Their protest specifically highlighted job discrimination that occurred within the BIA. Native people did not hold any positions of authority in the regional office. Thirty people stormed the BIA in protest. In an effort to advertise their cause, Richard Oakes refused to leave the building and was arrested. Afterwards, he was released on probation, his arraignment was set for June 12, 1970. Months later the BIA's Alameda office, in an effort to subdue growing protests, appointed its first Native American Director, Al Trimble (Lakota).[35] Oakes, despite great odds and adversity, was beginning to see new possibilities for Red Power.

United Indians of All Tribes along with Indians of All Tribes, Alcatraz, and Indian City Seattle had sought to create an environmental preserve and ecology center,

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[35] Ibid, 225. See also, Anonymous, ―Indian Leader Is Badly Beaten," *San Francisco Chronicle*, (June 13, 1970): no page number, News Clippings—*Alcatraz Takeover*, SFSU Archives, San Francisco, CA. ―…the Indians demanded and finally won appointment of one of their own. He is Al Trimble, who now occupies the No. 1 office in the bureau's Alameda establishment. It serves the needs of more than 32,000 Indians in the Northern California—Bay Area region." William Flynn, ―Indians Seek Solidarity to Give Them Political Muscle," *San Francisco Examiner & Chronicle*, (Nov. 22, 1970): 21.

educational and cultural centers, an Indian museum, and a halfway house for Native migrants coming to Seattle. After three failed attempts to claim the fort by right of discovery, countless arrests, physical confrontations with Military Police, picket lines in front of the courthouse, a twenty-four hour occupation settlement outside the fort, and a concerted letter-writing campaign to state Senators and Seattle Mayor Wes Uhlman, UIAT ultimately won the war for a new cultural center. By November 1971, Mayor Wes Uhlman presented a drafted a proposal that would provide UIAT with over $600,000 in Model Cities money to construct the Daybreak Star Center. The countless occupations and press attention unified the Indigenous Seattle populace, who joined in a concerted campaign supporting UIAT‘s claim to Fort Lawton.

The legacy of this movement has yet to be fully measured. Whitebear had secured Pearl Warren‘s great dream of establishing a land base and constructing a new longhouse for Seattle‘s Indian community. In turn, Red Power as a national movement increasingly relied on urban Intertribal institutions and organizations forged out of Indian Cities like those in Brooklyn, San Francisco, and Seattle. Fort Lawton, like Alcatraz, was also a movement that mobilized the entire Seattle Indian community around a central belief, that the path to social and political justice would ultimately transform Indigenous relationships with local, municipal, state, Tribal and federal governments.

This path to social justice and self-determination was rooted in an urban-centered Intertribal perspective. In many ways Fort Lawton and United Indians of All Tribes mirrored the growing desires of Native migrants and Native Nations in and around Seattle; each was a central ingredient towards creating a viable Indian City. The Daybreak Star Center, like Alcatraz, emerged not as an abandoned piece of property or

open-spaced park, but as a sacred space emblematic of and redefined as a symbol of Native Nationalism and Red Power. The rippling effect had brought together Native peoples from rural, urban, and reservation communities and forged a new Intertribal reality and awareness. Upon his release from the BIA takeover in Alameda, Richard Oakes began to work with the Pit River Nation in Northern California for land reclamation. Fort Lawton, like Alcatraz, had relied upon a non-violent and media driven Intertribal movement, the strategies Oakes and others had created with Alcatraz was already gaining legitimacy throughout Indian Country. This newfound fame and strategy, while successful in Seattle, would meet violent opposition from law enforcement and corporations at Pit River. For Richard Oakes, now the iconic face of Red Power, the next few years became a constant struggle just to stay alive.

CHAPTER SIX

"ALCATRAZ IS NOT AN ISLAND, IT'S AN IDEA"

Oakes had found new inspiration during these months, and he was honored when Anne gave birth to their daughter Nuwhakawee—Little Fawn. After leaving Seattle, Richard Oakes returned to San Francisco, a proud new father, stimulated by the potential of Alcatraz, Fort Lawton, and the Alameda BIA takeover. The idea of self-determination had to be applied outside the urban context to effectively protect Native sovereignty. Oakes sought to merge the sheer numbers, resources, and contacts from within the Indian City into an Intertribal coalition that could lend further support to Pit River. In part this coalition held the real potential to strengthen the political resolve and objectives sought by Pit River leaders, who often stood outnumbered against larger forces. The idea of Alcatraz was not compromised when Oakes resigned from Indians of All Tribes. Moreover, Alcatraz had become a catalyst for grassroots occupations spreading throughout Indian Country: from Ellis Island to Pyramid Lake, the BIA offices in Denver, and, at Akwesasne, Mohawks reclaimed Stanley and Loon Islands. In this explosive climate, Mickey Gemmill (Pit River) offered Oakes the opportunity to bring liberation theory to the tiny Pit River Rancheria located in Northern California. Gemmill, a fellow student at San Francisco State and a psychology major, had recently been appointed Tribal Chairman at Pit River. Only twenty-five-years-old, Gemmill had been catapulted to the top leadership position in his Tribe.

Pit River has a long and rich history rooted in protection of their land rights. By 1970, Pit River had around 530 residents. The small Nation had survived the onslaught of the Spanish Mission period; the ethnic cleansing campaigns of gold miners and the U.S.

military; and a local politic who sought to annihilate the community during the nineteenth century. In 1853, the State of California negotiated a treaty with 18 different Nations and Tribes, some collectively known as Pomo. The treaty outlined the settlement of land claims and eventually led to the formation of Rancherias. However, the treaty process had excluded representatives of Pit River Nation. Consequentially Pit River had never agreed to a settlement or treaty to cede any portion of their 3.5 million acres of ancestral homelands. The traditional land base for the Tribe is located within four sacred landmarks, Mt. Lassen and Mt. Shasta to the north, and in the south, Goose Lake and Eagle Lake. The territory contains a rich geologic history with lush and thick forests in the center, ancient lava flows in the north, and dozens of lakes and rivers elsewhere. The Pomo had survived on the abundance of salmon and deer in the interior and on the coast they had harvested abalone and the rich stocks of the Pacific Ocean. The struggle to hold on to this environmentally rich land found its way into the twentieth century, as the Indian Claims Commission (1946) investigated Pit River's title.[1]

In 1959 the Claims Commission offered to award Pit River a mere 45 cents an acre for the 3.5 million acres of land.[2] The payment would be divided into a per capita disbursement amounting to a few hundred dollars a person. Pit River refused to accept the settlement, and by the late 1960s, the Tribe had decided to fight to regain their

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[1] For more on the legal background at Pit River see also, M. Annette Jaimes, "The Pit River Indian Land Claim Disputes In Northern California," *The Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 14, no. 4 (Winter 1987): 47-64, and Dennis Levitt, "Pit River Occupation Force," *Los Angeles Free Press*, Oct. 23, 1970, 4.

[2] Jaimes, "The Pit River Indian Land Claim Dispute," 50-51. Dennis Levitt, "Second Pit River Occupation Fails," *Los Angeles Free Press*, (Dec. 4, 1970): 23., and Dennis Levitt, "Pit River Occupation Force," *Los Angeles Free Press*, (Oct. 23, 1970): 4. The commission returned and made only cash payments that were notoriously below land values.

ancestral lands. One evening in April of 1970, Richard Oakes, Mickey Gemmill, and Dean Chavers listened as Pit River elders Charlie Buckskin, Raymond Lego, Willard Rhoades, and Ross Montgomery explained the history of the conflict illuminated by the light of a single kerosene lamp. Both Oakes and Chavers were enthralled by the stories that each elder shared on that evening in Raymond Lego‘s cabin.

Dean Chavers was inspired by the simplicity and power of Lego‘s words, and he began making the long commute with Richard from San Francisco to Pit River. Weekends turned into weeks as the two friends made the six-hour drive in Chaver‘s Volkswagen. Along the way Oakes and Chavers went over strategies and held long conversations about Tribal sovereignty.[3] The frequent journeys to and from Pit River were all too familiar to Richard Oakes. As a young man he had grown accustomed to the migratory lifestyle of the high steel trade. Increasingly, both men were humbled by life at Pit River. Oakes‘ tiny Gatorville apartment appeared strikingly luxurious compared to living conditions at the Rancheria. John Hurst, a local reporter with the Redding based *Record-Searchlight*, described living conditions:

> [Willard Rhoades] dwelling is an ancient and tiny trailer abutting a wooden lean-to[.] Rhoades and his wife, Mildred have no running water, no refrigerator. They get sporadic electricity from their own generator. There is barely enough room to turn around in the trailer…The children have washed for school outside in the cold morning air. There is no running water in Lego‘s cabin. The children studied their school lessons by kerosene lamp the night before. There is no electricity in Lego‘s cabin. Of the 530 Pit River Indians…not more than one or two families have running water or plumbing in their homes. Many families have no electricity…two telephones in the entire [Tribe . Families live as a rule in

[3] Chavers Interview, Tape 1, Side 1, 5-6, 10, in author‘s possession.

> makeshift cabins, with as many as eight, 10 or 12 people crowded into two, three or four tiny rooms…[4]

Contrary to the harshness of life for many residents at Pit River, numerous wealthy corporations and the federal government had claimed thousands of acres of their ancestral lands. Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) maintained six dams and some 52,000 acres to appease California's growing need for power; Los Angeles Times-Mirror Corporation and Hearst Publishing all operated successful timber camps (96,000 acres combined); Southern Pacific Railroad maintained 38,000 acres; Pacific Telephone and Telegraph, 18,000 acres; Kimberly-Clark, some 80,000 acres; with smaller corporations and ranches consuming 100,000 acres; and the federal government through the National Parks and other ventures, held the remaining acreage.[5] Richard Oakes knew that the battle against these national conglomerates and the Federal Government would require the legal talents of Aubrey Grossman. Pit River appointed the gregarious Grossman to head their legal counsel, and he willingly volunteered his legal expertise to the Tribe.

Oakes began hosting community meetings and organizing sessions to formulate a decisive attack to regain Pit River lands. The media and courtroom would play a crucial role in advertising and protecting the claim. Richard Oakes organized his contacts, inviting local press to participate in the meetings. Without the press, the isolated

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[4] Jerry Gambill ed., John Hurst, "The Pit River Story: A Century of Genocide," *Record-Searchlight*, reprinted in *Akwesasne Notes*, 3, no.2 (March 1971): 44. Mickey Gemmill stated, "Most Pit River Indians are unemployed for most of the year. A few make good weekly paychecks in the logging camps—but that's seasonal work for half the year. For food, a good many have to hunt and fish—even though the once salmon-filled creeks are now salmon-less and the hunters have to out fox the law in shooting deer out of season…" "Our only weapon is the law," declared Gemmill…" Joel Tlumak, "Pit River Indians' Struggle for Land," *San Francisco Examiner & Chronicle*, (June 21, 1970): 25.
[5] Dennis Levitt, "Pit River Occupation Force," *Los Angeles Free Press*, (October 23, 1970): 4.

Rancheria faced potential obscurity by an apathetic public and corporate muscle. A successful campaign, as Oakes understood it, also depended on his ability to recruit large numbers of Native people. The foundation of the support rested on the shoulders of Pit River residents, Aubrey Grossman, the press, local Native college students, and Indians of All Tribes. Galvanizing such a force depended on direct action during the summer months to allow Native students a larger role in the numerous occupations.

By May 1970, a second occupation was well under way at the Round Valley Rancheria, located 180 miles north of San Francisco. At the same time, Oakes was working with the El-Em Pomo to coordinate the takeover of Rattlesnake Island. The effort was launched as a test case to lend solidarity and support for Pit River occupations. Rattlesnake Island or ―Mu-Do-N," located near Clear Lake, California, is a sacred site and a burial ground for the El-Em Pomo ancestors. Protection of the island was heightened when the El-Em learned that the Boise-Cascade Lumber Company (based in Idaho) had plans to subdivide the island for a vacation resort. Construction on the island ensured that ancestral graves would be desecrated or, at worst, destroyed. On May 1, 1970, a large force of El-Em Pomos and representatives from Indians of All Tribes made their stand on the island. The occupiers erected tents and shelters and began running supplies to the 64-acre Rattlesnake Island. Representatives from the Boise-Cascade Company quickly made their way to the island. Realizing that their economic venture to produce a resort on a burial ground might be a hard sell, the company entered into negotiations with the El-Em.[6]

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[6] Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz*, 225. D.C., ―Round Valley: Are Army Engineers & BIA A Conspiracy?" *Indians of All Tribes Newsletter*, 1, no.3 (1970): 10-11. Chavers

Oakes and others at Pit River realized the Rattlesnake Island victory gave them the momentum needed to reclaim their lands. Pit River proposed staging a series of occupations at Lassen National Forest and on PG&E lands. Grossman counted on the local authorities. He expected them to evict the occupiers, but more importantly, he hoped the occupiers would be charged with trespassing. The burden of proof would then rest with the Federal Government and the corporations. They would be forced to prove that Pit River, in spite of the Claims Commission ruling, did not have title to the lands. The courtroom was the prime battleground for Pit River to assert their claim. The occupations were scheduled to begin on June 5, 1970.

The sun was just beginning to set when a large group of Pit River residents, supporters, and Richard Oakes drove to Lassen National Forest. Under a blanket of stars, cars and trucks packed with men, women, and children slowly made their way to the park. Nobody knew what to expect and anticipation ran high; a rush of excitement highlighted the conversations. As the caravan approached the entrance to the park, they could make out the glow of numerous headlights, and then, as the cars slowed down, those near the front saw the outline of a large force of officers awaiting their arrival. Word of the occupation had been leaked. The caravan came to a stop, and people began exiting their vehicles to get a closer look; why had they stopped? Near the entrance, the caravan‘s obstacle came into clear focus, as Forest Service Rangers and Shasta County

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Interview, 13. Dean Chavers wrote a grant for Rattlesnake Island for the Tribe to maintain the site. –At a demonstration at Kent State University in May, Ohio National Guardsmen panicked and shot into an angry crowd, killing four students. A few days later, state police and National Guardsmen in Mississippi fired on students at Jackson State College and killed two of them.” David Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994) 232.

Sheriff's deputies mingled with U.S. Marshals in full riot gear.[7] Those who parked towards the rear of the caravan ran past a long row of parked cars to join their fellow occupiers. Just inside the entrance stood riot clad officers eagerly awaiting a response from the 105 Pit River holdouts.[8] The Forest Service was not allowing anyone to pass into Lassen National Forest without a fight.

Fearing that violence would pospone any attempt at a trespass charge, Raymond Lego faced the caravan, "All right, we'll leave."[9] It appeared too easy a victory for law enforcement as the caravan turned their cars around and disappeared into the night. Driving their packed station wagon, Richard told Anne that they were on their way to Big Bend, California. Pacific Gas and Electric maintained a vacant campground for corporate guests and company picnics. Pit River decided to make their stand at the campground. Richard and Anne's son "Little" Joseph was asleep in the back seat. He had slept through the spectacle at the park's entrance. John Hurst, a local reporter covering the story, found irony in Joseph's ability to sleep throughout the ordeal. Hurst realized that despite his own anxious response, this was nothing new for the three-year-old. Only three months earlier Joseph had lived at one of America's most feared prisons, Alcatraz.[10]

As the caravan made their way along winding roads to Big Bend, Shasta County Sheriff John Balma sent two deputies to tail the large motorcade. Some members of the caravan noticed the new additions and broke away from the train of cars to create a

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[7] M. Annette Jaimes, "The Pit River Indian Land Claim Disputes In Northern California," 55.
[8] Dennis Levitt, "Indians reclaim ancestral land: Pit River occupation Force," *Los Angeles Free Press*, (October 23, 1970): 4.
[9] Ibid, see also Chavers Interview, Tape 1, Side 2, 11.
[10] Jerry Gambill, ed., John Hurst, "Little Joseph age 3, will endure," *Record-Searchlight*, (no date): no page number, reprinted in *Akwesasne Notes*, 2, no.5 (Sep. 1970): 27.

distraction. Some locals feared retaliation by Sheriff Balma and local police, but many more were inclined to be decoys. Arriving late that evening, Richard Oakes and others found the quaint cabins at the campground deserted. The cabins, which were complete with all the modern conveniences, must have seemed a luxurious retreat for Pit River residents. Each cabin had running water, electricity, air conditioning, and appliances—a realization of the profits reaped from corporate claimed lands.

Raymond Lego assembled the large group, now reduced to around eighty men, women, and children. Pausing as he glanced at the cabins and then at the people who had come together, he began to speak. Determination was evident in his voice as Lego, with a commanding posture, read their proclamation, ―Don't feel you're a stranger here. This is your land. This is my land. This is Indian Country. My ancestors lived here. The Great Spirit planted them here. Just like he did the oak trees and water. Feel welcome. Let your spirit be free."[11] Singers gathered around the drum and victory songs filled the night air. Occupiers organized into groups to discuss their strategy and to insure a unified stance when officials arrived to evict them. To Richard and Anne the climate that evening must have reminded them of nights spent on Alcatraz.

By morning the settlers made full use of the PG&E campground and its ―luxurious" amenities. Anne took the children to the swimming pool while the afternoon sun strolled among the pines. Cooks began preparing breakfast and lunch; anticipation grew as the hours passed. It was not long before they could hear a large motorcade approaching the campground. The occupation force came together near the entrance to

[11] M. Annette Jaimes, ―The Pit River Indian Land Claim Disputes In Northern California," 55.

witness the spectacle. Shasta County Sheriff John Balma emerged from his patrol car, followed by eighty-five deputies dressed in riot gear. Richard Oakes stood beside Raymond Lego as Sheriff Balma approached them. Lego politely asked the Sheriff to leave their property unless he could produce a document proving that PG&E owned the land. Balma smiled and ordered the camp cleared; everyone was to be charged with trespass. Occupiers willingly assisted officers with their arrest, trying hard not to crack a smile as they were escorted to squad cars. The burden of proof, they knew, rested with PG&E; it would now be up to Aubrey Grossman and the courts.[12]

After a long afternoon of swimming and watching the police arrest his parents, ―Little" Joseph fell asleep again on the lap of reporter John Hurst. Richard and Anne, wearing handcuffs, rode in separate vehicles. They were on their way to be booked and processed in Redding, California, a fifty-mile trip. Later that evening, a good friend of the couple arrived at the county jail—Buffy Sainte Marie. Only thirty-five men and women had been arrested as Buffy strolled into the crowded jail. Cheers went up from the prisoners as they instantly recognized the popular Native folksinger. While Buffy Sainte Marie spoke words of encouragement to the prisoners, deputies grew irritated, informing the singer she would be arrested if she continued to talk with the prisoners. Buffy turned to the deputy, smiled and began to sing to her friends behind bars. She had driven from Los Angeles to Redding and after an impromptu concert, she posted bail for many of the prisoners, including Richard and Anne.[13]

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[12] Ibid, 55-56.
[13] Grace Thorpe Interview, Tape 1, Side 1, 8, and Dean Chavers Interview, Tape 1, Side 1, 11.

At the arraignment the next day, Aubrey Grossman presented his clients‘ defense argument before Shasta County Judge, Billy C. Covert. The locally elected judge did not possess a law degree, but he had served in law enforcement. Grossman presented a polished argument to the court, urging the judge to prosecute PG&E for trespass and dismiss all charges against his clients. Grossman cited the Claims Commission ruling of 1959, which upheld Pit River‘s historic deed to the land, and maintained that this was indeed an unconstitutional false arrest. PG&E lawyers grew anxious while Shasta County Deputies stood nervously in the courtroom, now realizing why the occupiers welcomed the trespass charge.[14]

The lawyers representing PG&E immediately considered dropping charges to prevent further debate on the issue of title. Afterwards, as Grossman conveyed the legal situation to his clients, he discussed probable outcomes and defense strategies. Meanwhile another group of occupiers and reporters were again laying siege to the campground at Big Bend. Like the thirty-five settlers the previous day, they also hoped to be arrested for trespass in order to prevent PG&E from dropping charges. Richard and Anne left the arraignment to spend time with their children. It had been a long couple of days for the family.

On Monday afternoon, June 8, 1970, the small band of reporters and Pit River holdouts waited for arrest at the campgrounds. To pass the time they staged a football game, Pit River versus the journalists. The climate appeared joyful in light of pending arrests. After the game a journalist asked the occupiers to pose for photos documenting

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[14] Jerry Gambill ed., Bill Slius, ―Judge refuses to lower bail for arrested Indians," *Record-Searchlight*, (June 9, 1970): no page number, reprinted in *Akwesasne Notes*, 2, no.5 (Sep. 1970): 29.

the takeover. A drizzling rain began to fall on the campground. One by one patrol cars raced into the campgrounds, sliding to a halt as officers exited their vehicles and spread throughout the camp. A force of sixty officers, complete with helmets and riot sticks, located only ten occupiers. Reporters rushed to get photos of the arrests and to interview Sheriff Balma, who was irritated by the bleak numbers in the camp. Balma questioned the tiny group as to the whereabouts of any more holdouts. Fortunately, those arrested were charged with trespass and taken to Redding for booking.[15]

News of the arrests spread fast and Richard Oakes rallied another force to reoccupy the vacant camp. Before leaving, Balma had assigned two deputies to stay behind, and had all cabin doors bolted shut to prevent entry. Balma was becoming acutely aware of Pit River's strategy, since PG&E officials demanded that no more arrests be made on trespass grounds. At about a half hour before midnight, Richard Oakes led a caravan of cars and trucks through the drizzling rain into the PG&E camp. The parade of cars surrounded a row of cabins while two deputies turned their spotlights on the group. The standoff was underway as Oakes shouted commands to fellow drivers to turn on their high beams. He wondered what it would take to get arrested. Reporters with the caravan likened the event to a complex game of checkers. Waiting patiently for any response, one of the patrol cars darted out to flank the perimeter. Oakes quickly responded, "Get your car on the road and block'em." Still nothing happened, no arrests…what now? Richard Oakes then told the drivers to try and enter the cabins; again, the deputies sat motionless, assured that the cabins were bolted shut. Finally Oakes opened up their perimeter and

[15] Jerry Gambill ed., John Hurst, "2:25pm," *Record-Searchlight*, June 9, 1970, no page number, reprinted in *Akwesasne Notes*, 2, no.5 (Sep. 1970): 28.

allowed one of the deputies to pull forward in his prowler. Standing in the rain, soaked, and confused, Richard asked the deputy what was it going to take:

> ―I don't know. You tell me," the officer said, ―We just might do something if anyone enters a cabin." It was all very friendly. Oakes explained the Indians' position. ―But it's already in court. What are you going to gain by getting more people arrested?" the officer asked. ―Think of the public that's paying for these courtroom and enforcement expenses," he added. ―The taxpayers will get mad at PG&E, not us," another Indian predicted. ―No, the public will get sick of the Indians," the deputy replied. ―Your move," said Oakes—grinning. The patrol car left. ―Now it's our move," Oakes told the Indians…[with no arrests the group decided to call it a day. Oakes pronounced the final benediction: ―The game is being called on account of the rain."[16]

Obviously, Richard understood that it was going to take more drastic measures to solicit an arrest. Pit River leaders decided to elevate their strategy to ―guerrilla" tactics to encourage a response. On Tuesday morning June 9, 1970, yet another occupation force made their way back into the PG&E camp. Meanwhile, in Redding, Judge Covert listened to arguments in the arraignment proceedings for forty-four occupiers charged with trespass. Richard and Anne attended the arraignment and listened patiently as Grossman presented their case. Grossman demonstrated that the court did not have the jurisdiction to prosecute his clients, who represented a federally recognized Nation. Again he cited the Claims Commission's ruling of 1959 as a reference to Pit River's legal right to occupy the lands in question. Grossman continued to urge that Judge Covert arrest PG&E officials on trespass and to dismiss charges against his clients. Fearing possible political suicide, the judge declined to prosecute PG&E officials.[17]

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[16] Jerry Gambill ed., Bill Sluis, ―1:30p.m.," *Record-Searchlight*, (no date): no page number, reprinted in *Akwesasne Notes*, 2, no.5 (Sep. 1970): 28.
[17] Ibid, Anonymous, ―Indians take offensive: Arrest PG&E," no cite, 28.

While proceedings in court continued, the occupation at Big Bend escalated. Trees were cut to barricade the entrance to the camp to prevent an easy eviction. Sheriff Balma arrived shortly with a force of eighteen to arrest four men and three women. After the Sheriff entered, the barricade was quickly erected, as trees fell over the road. As if he had a crystal ball, Balma, somehow produced a bulldozer and in seconds had removed the fallen trees. He arrested the protesters, not on trespass charges but rather for destroying private property.

After the arraignment Richard Oakes and Mickey Gemmill elected to occupy Lassen National Forest for a second time. Another caravan was organized and as occupiers converged on the park, they held the element of surprise. This occasion produced no roadblocks as they freely drove through the entrance. Around thirty men, women, and children huddled together by a large bonfire. As evening wore on, –49" songs were heard throughout the camp. Leaders talked in detail about the events of the last few days. Word spread quickly to the camp that Forest Service Rangers were congregating at the entrance and were planning an assault. Gemmill feared that under the protection of darkness the police assault potentially could take an ill-fated turn. He quickly organized everyone to make a daring escape. Near the entrance the caravan was cornered and forced to pull over. Park Superintendent Richard Boyer walked nervously, with a flashlight in hand, as he frantically searched for Gemmill, but he had escaped Boyer's sting and was now on his way out of the park. Frustrated, Boyer arrested twenty-

two supporters, not for trespass, but for leaving a fire unattended and unlawful assembly.[18]

On June 10, Oakes and Gemmill met with Raymond Lego in his weathered cabin back at Pit River to discuss the current courtroom battle. The kerosene lamp burned into the night as they debated their next move. At the arraignment hearing the day before, Gemmill was offended by Judge Covert's reluctance to prosecute PG&E. If the court would not prosecute, then Pit River would have to prosecute the conglomerate. They decided that Mickey Gemmill, Richard Oakes, Charlie Buckskin, and Raymond Lego would make a citizens' arrest on PG&E President Shermer Sibley in San Francisco.[19] The leaders were still reeling with anger over another event earlier that day. In an effort to discredit Gemmill, PG&E officials had flown in Ike Leaf, the former Tribal chairman for Pit River. At a press conference, the elderly Leaf claimed that Mickey Gemmill was not the "official" Tribal Chairman for Pit River and that he was the "true" chairman. As the real chairman, Leaf renounced Pit River's claim on PG&E property. The press conference, open only to reporters, was not only sponsored by PG&E but was also held at Shasta County Sheriff's offices. Gemmill and others at Pit River were irritated by PG&E's lavish attempt to discredit their leadership and governance. By morning they were on the road to San Francisco, eager to assert their sovereignty and to arrest the PG&E president.[20]

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[18] Ibid, John Hurst, "Arrests squelch Lassen occupation," *Record-Searchlight*, (no date): no page number, reprinted in *Akwesasne Notes*, 31.
[19] Ibid, Anonymous, "Richard Oakes family needs aid," *Record-Searchlight*, (July 15, 1970): 22.
[20] "Doc Jenkins, who preceded Gemmill as Pit River chairman…said the Modoc County man had indeed been [Tribal Chairman until 1965, when he "turned renegade and joined

On June 11, 1970, after enduring numerous takeovers, the PG&E press conference, and Judge Covert's reluctance to prosecute the company, the four leaders pulled into San Francisco. Richard Oakes had contacted Grace Thorpe, who arranged for a press conference that afternoon at Dorothy Lonewolf Miller's office on California Street. The speakers made eloquent statements reflecting on the history of the Pit River movement. As the leaders spoke, they brought forth a symbolism founded in Red Power politics, something reporters were accustomed to hearing from Richard Oakes. At the end of the press conference, Grace Thorpe hailed a cab and the five were off to PG&E headquarters, racing through the hilly streets of San Francisco to Market Street.

As the taxi pulled up to the headquarters the four men emerged from the cab, where they were soon joined by a crowd of reporters. Grace Thorpe hurried to pay for their cab as the small group entered the building. She walked through the main entrance and immediately saw that the leaders were already at the elevators surrounded by security. Trying to appear inconspicuous, Thorpe ducked into a nearby stairwell and began searching for the president's office. Security informed the four leaders that they would only allow one of the men to meet with an official representative of the company. They selected Mickey Gemmill, the Tribal Chairman, to officially carry out the arrest. Head of Security, James Neel escorted Gemmill and a drove of reporters to the corporate secretary's office.

Once Gemmill reached the office, PG&E employees stood outside their own offices to get a glimpse of all the excitement. The hulky James Neel opened the door for

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up with the Bureau of Indian Affairs." Ibid, John Hurst, "PG&E flew Leaf to press confab," *Record-Searchlight*, (June 11, 1970): 30.

Gemmill, but blocked reporters from entering. Gemmill presented his charges for an arrest to the corporate secretary, who appeared shocked by all the attention. Neel informed Gemmill that PG&E Security would not permit any of the employees to leave the office with him. Gemmill would need a warrant and police support before Neel would honor such a request. The Tribal Chairman promised further occupations and legal actions if the company continued to denounce Pit River's title.[21]

Despite their failure to arrest the PG&E president, they had succeeded in advertising their legal case to the press. Meanwhile, Grace Thorpe had returned to the lobby, unsuccessful in her search, but just in time to catch up with the others. Together again, the five made their way back to the office on California Street. When they arrived at the office they began discussing future strategies and assessed the events earlier that day. Grace noticed that Richard had poured himself a full glass of whisky and was quickly downing it. Worn out with their efforts, Grace Thorpe, Raymond Lego, and Charlie Buckskin called it a day and left the office. Richard Oakes and Mickey Gemmill decided to continue their conversation at Warren's bar.[22]

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[21] "The $5 billion claim includes $3.5 billion from an estimated land value of $1,000 per acre (they were offered 44 cents an acre in the settlement proposed by the Indian Claims Commission; land improvements of $500 million; and $1 billion in profits assuredly taken from the land since 1853." Jerry Gambill ed., Anonymous, "$5 Billion Damage Suit: Pit Indians," *San Francisco Chronicle*, (June 12, 1970): no page number, reprinted in *Akwesasne Notes*, 2, no.5 (Sep. 1970): 30.

[22] Grace Thorpe Interview, Tape 1, Side, 1, 4-5. Grace Thorpe had been with Richard Oakes all day until she, like Lego and Buckskin, decided to leave the office on California street.

At Warren‘s, Richard and Mickey met up with Arnold Gemmill (Mickey‘s Brother) and Louis Mitchell (Mohawk).[23] Louis was a close friend of Richard‘s and was staying at his family‘s Gatorville apartment. The bar was packed wall-to-wall with people as the four shared stories and beers. As a former employee, Warren‘s seemed a comfortable place for Oakes. He had frequently recruited for Alcatraz and SFSC at the bar. By evening, he was unaware of who else was in the bar. While Richard talked to some old friends, he heard his name called out. He turned around just as a pool cue smashed against his skull, sending the six-foot, two-hundred-and-thirty-pound Oakes crashing to the floor. The assailant struck again, delivering another punishing blow to the right side of Richard‘s head. He lay lifeless on the floor as the perpetrator quickly fled the scene. Louis Mitchell, Mickey, and Arnold Gemmill could not react fast enough, finding Oakes unconscious. They assumed that the alcohol had taken an ill effect and that the experienced fighter was just knocked out. The three worked hard to get Richard Oakes back to his apartment.

Hoping not to frighten Anne, Mitchell, told her that Oakes had been in a fight and was drunk; he just needed to sleep it off. Anne was not happy with Richard‘s drinking. Mitchell helped get him to their bedroom. Louis Mitchell, who was also exhausted, went to the couch in the living room and passed out. When morning came Anne tried to wake her husband up, but he would not respond. Frantic, she woke Mitchell up and demanded to know exactly what had happened to Richard. She noticed that he had been bleeding

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[23] San Francisco State University Archives, News Clippings, Alcatraz Takeover, Anonymous, ―Alcatraz Invader Beaten," *San Francisco Examiner*, no page number. ―Last night…he was brought home unconscious by Mickey Gemmill…and two other Indians Louis Mitchell and a man she knew only as ―Arnold." Assuming this is Arnold Gemmill, Mickey‘s brother.

from his nose and that the right side of his head was bruised and swollen.[24] The children became frightened as Anne phoned the police and paramedics. An ambulance rushed their father was rushed to the hospital.[25]

When Richard Oakes arrived at the San Francisco General Hospital, reporters had to be pushed out of the way as they scrambled to get photographs of the beaten leader. Doctors informed Anne that Richard's injuries were such that he needed immediate surgery; Oakes suffered from a skull fracture and a blood clot to the brain.[26] They could not assure her that he would make it through the six-hour surgery. Anne was devastated but had to remain strong; she knew that her husband was a fighter. Police began to question her and Louis Mitchell about the events surrounding Oakes' injuries. Richard Oakes made it through the surgery but now faced a long struggle ahead as he lay in a coma in the Intensive Care Unit, his head wrapped in bandages. Anne offered prayers for her husband's recovery.

The days ahead proved a testament to the bond that existed between Anne and Richard Oakes. Anne maintained a constant vigil by his bedside as hundreds of friends, supporters, and members of the community came to the couple's aid. On July 17,

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[24] Anonymous, "Alcatraz Invader Beaten," *San Francisco Examiner*, (June 12, 1970): 3, News Clippings—Alcatraz Takeover, SFSU Archives, San Francisco, CA. See also, "…Mrs. Oakes said she did not act sooner because she understood from the men who brought him home that he was drunk. She realized his condition was serious at 8:15 a.m. when she noted his bloodied nose and black eye and was unable to awaken him." Ibid, Anonymous, "Indian Leader is Badly Beaten," *San Francisco Chronicle*, (June 13, 1970): no page number.

[25] "He was first taken to Alemany Emergency Hospital where spokesman said his injuries, "were apparently serious." Oakes was then taken to Mission Emergency where a spokesman said he was just "beginning to be worked on"… UPI, no title, (June 12, 1970): 1, News Clippings—Alcatraz Takeover, SFSU Archives, San Francisco, CA.

[26] Anonymous, "Oakes in Critical Condition," *San Francisco Chronicle & Examiner*, (June 14, 1970): 17.

detectives arrested Tommy Pritchard, a twenty-eight-year-old Samoan, on assault charges with the intent to commit murder. Apparently, some two months earlier Oakes and Pritchard had been in a brawl at Warren's, when Richard had broken Pritchard's nose. The evening of the assault, Pritchard had been secretly waiting for Oakes to return to the bar to exact his revenge. San Francisco Police feared a race war would ensue as news of the arrest reached both communities. To deter such an outcome the department issued a press statement that the fight was between two individuals and not two communities. Cops in the Mission District worked overtime and increased their forces to prohibit any further retaliation.[27]

The San Francisco Indian community was stunned by the news. The Indian Center rallied, creating a fund to assist Anne and the children with food, financial support, and even a blood drive for Richard Oakes. Indians of All Tribes on Alcatraz also offered their assistance and support to the family.[28] Financial difficulties were

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[27] "Oakes was attacked without warning by Pritchard, who apparently was still bitter about a fight two months earlier. Pritchard dropped Oakes with a single blow to the jaw with a pool cue, then smashed him again on the right side of the head as he lay on the floor…in the first fight, Oakes reportedly broke Pritchard's nose. Oakes was unaware that Pritchard was in the bar at the time of the attack." Anonymous, "Suspect in Attack on Oakes," *San Francisco Examiner*, (June 17, 1970): 9. See also, Anonymous, "Samoan Held for Attack on Oakes at Bar," *San Francisco Examiner*, (June 18, 1970): 7. This article contains a photo of Tommy Pritchard. In the photo he appears physically to be of average build, with short uncombed hair, a faint goatee, looking disheveled, and wearing a trench coat.

[28] "…his wife, Anne, and their six children have been in serious financial difficulties…Sgt. Sol Weiner, the police fund chairman, said it is maintained to aid deserving persons in the community." Anonymous, "Police Donate $100 to Fund for Oakes Family," *San Francisco Examiner*, (June 18, 1970): 7. Richard had previously worked with police to negotiate peace between the Samoan and Native community. "…the families phone had been disconnected…Mrs. Oakes also said the Indian Center is sending over food for her family but a relative said, 'She could use a lot more than she's getting. These kids eat a lot even if Richard isn't around to help.'" Larry Hatfield,

secondhand as Anne weighed the possibility of losing her husband. Reluctantly, she agreed to a rare interview with reporters. Wearing dark sunglasses and seated on a bench outside the hospital, Anne recalled the events of the past few months:

> ―I don‘t think I‘m the only one going through all the tragedy…I think every Indian suffers…Since the death of my daughter…we have never talked about the island." Mrs. Oakes still contends that her daughter didn‘t fall. She believes foul play was involved. ―They hated us," she said, meaning the other Indians occupying Alcatraz…" She continued: ―I told Richard the day before that we should pack up and take the children and leave. I knew something would happen—and it did…I didn‘t like it at first,‘ she said, talking about the leadership role her husband took… ―But Richard saw a cause. He always knew he could help his people I didn‘t want to stop him…I never knew anyone who cares for the Indian people like Richard does…You know we went through a lot…I wish the Indians would stop and think what all this means…‘ Eventually, ―the family was supposed to leave for Sonoma County to visit Mrs. Oakes mother. From there they were scheduled to be back in Shasta County for a big…[meeting on the next strategy [at Pit River… ―We have never talked about the important part of it…He mostly kept everything to himself, unless there was a meeting or something…‘[29]

Both the San Francisco *Chronicle* and *Examiner* followed Oakes condition closely with daily reports to update the community on any improvements. As the days turned into weeks, Oakes was still in a coma, and his body shook from a 106-degree fever. With every little movement of Richard‘s body, Anne continued to hold out hope that he would awake. Doctor‘s treating Oakes were at a stalemate; they too could only observe.

On June 24, 1970, having learned of Richard‘s condition, medicine men Mad Bear Anderson (Tuscarora) and Peter Mitten (Pomo) made their way into the hospital room. Hospital staff and doctors agreed to allow the two healers to work with Richard

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―Hospital Vigil: Annie Oakes Keeps Hope Alive," *San Francisco Examiner & Chronicle*, (June 21, 1970): 25.

[29] Joe Tlumak, ―Every Indian Suffers,‘says Mrs. Oakes," *San Francisco Examiner*, (June 13, 1970): 4.

Oakes. At this point doctors were open to anything that might assist in Oakes‘ recovery. Standing at Richard‘s bedside Mad Bear held onto Oakes‘ hand, becoming misty eyed as he remembered the seventeen-year-old who was so eager to assist Longhouse leaders.[30] Peter Mitten, wearing a tilted cowboy hat, and Anderson retreated to a private room, away from curious doctors to mix the medicine. Doctors and nurses watched as Mitten added a teaspoon of the liquid medicine to Oakes‘ feeding tube. Five minutes later a red spot appeared on Richard Oakes chest just above his heart and began to spread. After an hour his body became relaxed and his temperature started to drop; baffled doctors scratched their heads. The medicine took a dramatic effect. In a couple of days, Richard was able to wiggle his toes and yawn on command.

As Richard struggled to hang onto life, he was haunted by a recurring dream. He saw a human body laid out in front of him broken into pieces. The body was being devoured by hundreds of maggots. As the ―horrific" dream continued, the figure pulled itself back together, shaking off that which sought to consume its flesh—spirit. The body of the person, now complete, struggled to rise from the ground. Walking toward Richard

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[30] ―Doctors at San Francisco General Hospital admit there was a positive response Monday to the Indian Medicine…Mad Bear remembered a young Mohawk in New York years ago. The 17-year-old had tried to join Mad Bear and other Indians in a confrontation with the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. But his elders wouldn‘t let him go along because of his age. That was Richard Oakes in 1958." Jerry Gambill ed., Anonymous, ―Medicine Men Treating Oakes," no source, (June 25, 1970): no page number, reprinted in *Akwesasne Notes*, 2, no.5 (Sep. 1970): 22. ―Five minutes later, they continued, a red spot appeared above his heart and extended across his chest. After a second dose… ―[h]e wiggled his toes and upon command yawned and made other responses." UPI, ―add Oakes…recovery," (no date): 1. News Clippings—Alcatraz Takeover, SFSU Archives, San Francisco, CA. ―Prior to the visit by medicine men, Dr. David Bastine, a hospital resident, had told Mrs. Oakes that her husband‘s condition was worse and that they ―should not hold out hope for recovery." Ibid, untitled, (June 24, 1970): 1.

the figure stopped and said, ―I am an Indian."[31] Struggling for his life and enduring his dreams, Richard Oakes' fight symbolized the idea that freedom for Indian Country would not be without physical harm.

A few days later Richard suffered from paralysis over the left side of his body, but now he was awake, scribbling messages with his right hand to Anne on a notebook. Rocky Oakes stood in the doorway watching from a distance as his hero fought for the simplest of movements. His head was shaved and bore a large scar rising from his ear to the top of his head. Richard noticed his son and with his hand shaking, motioned for Rocky to come closer. Oakes wrote a note to Anna, as he affectionately called her, to buy Rocky some new clothes and a baseball bat. Rocky smiled when his mom read the note, reassured that his dad could overcome his injuries.[32]

By August, Oakes had become restless. He had been confined to a hospital for almost two months. Back in June, Bruce Oakes had made a long trip to San Francisco to visit with his cousin and was overcome when he entered the Florissant hospital room. Bruce stayed by Richard's side constantly, having arrived only a few days after Oakes was admitted to the hospital. With Bruce's assistance, *Chronicle* reporter Mary Crawford interviewed Richard Oakes about the statement President Nixon had made to congress on July 8, 1970, calling for a new era of self-determination. In typical eloquence and symbolism, Oakes challenged Nixon to follow through:

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[31] Tim Findley, ―A Traveling College: Oakes' Hunt for the Past," *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Sep. 21, 1970): 2.
[32] Jerry Gambill ed., Anonymous, ―Richard Oakes family needs aid," *Record-Searchlight*, (July 15, 1970): no page number, reprinted in *Akwesasne Notes*, 2, no.5 (Sep. 1970): 22.

> The policy is discouraging. It is one step toward dust, without much to do about anything. The spirit of today's movement has instilled pride and dignity to every individual with Indian blood. Yet we find an absence of what was a culture, what was a heritage…a denial of the very language that ma[d e [us …so proud. This cannot be tolerated…[t he past and present policies have castrated the American Indian.[33]

Despite his injuries, Richard Oakes was claiming to the media and to Indian Country that he was still as potent a political force as ever. Oakes was eager to launch plans for his Native American Traveling College. He was moved to the Moffitt Hospital at the University of San Francisco, where he went through intense physical therapy to learn to walk again, and to regain his speech and the movement on his left side. While he was in the hospital, a gentleman from Florida, who was familiar with Oakes' intentions to begin a traveling college, donated a bus to the cause. Overwhelmed by the stranger's generosity, he informed Anne that they would travel soon.

On August 19, 1970, Oakes checked himself out of the hospital, against doctors' advice, to make arrangements for the traveling college. Seated in the couple's Gatorville apartment, Oakes told Tim Findley about his plans:

> I'll be learning everything I can…I hope to record and document what I learn and bring it back to teach a real American history. A lot of people had given me up for dead…I'm convinced it was the Indian Medicine men who visited me in the hospital who really pulled me through. I don't know yet what the basic factor of _Indianness' is…I know we're finished with symbols. Now we're looking for positive creative solutions together. We've had enough of coming out with more [word problems. We will go and learn wherever we can, and maybe the result will be that we will return with not just one bus, but with a caravan—an army—of Indian people to reclaim their history and their land with new pride…It is an era,

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[33] Anonymous, ―Oakes Raps Nixon Policy on Indians," *San Francisco Examiner*, August 15, 1970, 3. ―According to Grossman…Oakes expressed hope that Nixon would follow through with action on the new proposals, especially in the area of returning Indian land." Jerry Gambill ed., Anonymous, no title, no source, (July 21, 1970): no page number, reprinted in *Akwesasne Notes*, 2, no.5, (Sep. 1970): 22.

> Oakes concluded, of meaningful slogans—"white is right, black is beautiful. I plan to add one more—Indians are permanent."[34]

On the twenty-second day of September, Richard, his family, and three others embarked on their journey, pulling out of San Francisco State University. With only three hundred dollars for gas and food, the college's survival was dependant on Oakes staying healthy and the kindness of the road. Ultimately, these factors led to a short-lived attempt as Oakes became plagued with severe headaches and was stranded with a bus in need of numerous repairs. Richard Oakes sought to build a college that was an institution rooted in the "experiences" of Indian Country. His ideas would soon turn into a different direction.

Pit River recruited Richard Oakes to return and assist the Tribe in further demonstrations. Despite Oakes' absence, Pit River continued to wage a fierce courtroom battle when they called together an organizational meeting in Santa Rosa, California to plan new actions. At the meeting Richard Oakes learned of previous occupations: the take-over of a PG&E dam, placing the Pit River flag atop Mt. Lassen, and a new $5 billion damage suit against corporations on Pit River lands.[35] During the gathering they decided to occupy PG&E lands in Burney, California. The location was much closer to the court in Redding, helping to curb mounting travel expenses. By late October, Pit River had rented a Quonset hut, a U-shaped structure made of tin, for shelter on the land.

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[34] Tim Findley, "A Traveling College: Oakes' Hunt for the Past," *San Francisco Chronicle*, (Sep. 21, 1970): 2.

[35] See also, Jerry Gambill ed., John Hurst, "Pit River Indians seize PG&E dam," *Record-Searchlight*, (July 11, 1970): no page number, reprinted in *Akwesasne Notes*, 2, no.5 (Sep. 1970): 32, Ibid, "PitRiver Indian flag placed atop Mt. Lassen," *Record-Searchlight*, (no date): no page number, *Akwesasne Notes*, 33, and Ibid, "PitRiver Indians set forest claim," *Record-Searchlight*, (June 29, 1970): no page number, reprinted in *Akwesasne Notes*, 2, no.5 (Sep. 1970): 32.

Locals would later refer to the events that transpired on October 27, 1970 as the ―Battle of the Four Corners." Seventy men, women, and children began the day with meetings in the Quonset hut. That afternoon the children played in the surrounding glades. Richard Oakes talked with Raymond Lego and Mickey Gemmill, while Anne helped prepare breakfast for the settlement. The occupation site, located at the junction of Highway 299E and 89, turned silent at 10:40 that morning. A huge force of seventy sheriff deputies, forest service rangers, and federal officials stopped at the encampment, parking along Highway 89. Nervously chairman Mickey Gemmill made his way over to where the officers had gathered for a parlay with Sheriff John Balma and D.A. Ronald Baker. While listening to their demands, Gemmill cautiously took note of the huge force that was armed with shotguns, riot gear, mace, and clubs. The situation was tense as Balma explained that they were there to evict the settlers and to tear down the Quonset hut. After hearing out both Baker and Balma, Gemmill peered over his shoulder at the determination and commitment apparent in countless faces. Without hesitation, he informed Balma that they were not going to abandon their property.

Mickey Gemmill returned to the encampment, and the occupiers knew they were in for a fight. The large company of officers began marching slowly toward the camp. Ross Montgomery (Pit River) grabbed a chainsaw and made his way to a nearby tree as others followed, picking up two-by-fours and sticks. Just as Montgomery began to pull the ripcord, deputies moved in fast, bringing the large framed man to his knees. Peter Blue Cloud remembered: ―Then all hell broke loose, as the armed ‗protectors of the law' waded into our people, spraying mace, and breaking heads, swinging clubs and striking even those who already lay unconscious. One of the men, beaten and clubbed

unconscious, was an elder of the Pit River Tribe, a cripple. Women had to push through the police to be sure he wasn't killed."[36] John Hurst, covering the event for the *Record-Searchlight*, was stunned:

> Mace filled the crisp air. Women with tears rolling down their cheeks from Mace and anger cursed the officers as Indians were beaten to the ground and dragged to waiting squad cars. Gordon Montgomery, an elderly and crippled Pit River Indian, was clubbed into semi-consciousness…Women had to push their way past officers to minister to his head wounds…As the officers and workers advanced, women and children moved into the hut and a line of young men stood at the doorway. —You're not wanted here," said Erik Mattila to the officers as he stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Pit River Indian Darryl Wilson and other young men…Matilla went down as a riot stick cracked across his head. Blood gushed down the side of his face. Men and women were handcuffed and dragged to squad cars as forest workmen slammed away the corrugated metal walls of the hut with hammers and crowbars, and then shoved the entire frame of the structure to the ground.[37]

Richard Oakes miraculously emerged from the battle uninjured. He was able to muster enough strength to stand unarmed against the onslaught of lawmen.[38] Anne and the children raced out of the Quonset hut to protect Richard and to insure that he was not brutally attacked. Wearing black sunglasses, dressed in a dark suit and tie, D.A. Robert Baker, observed the chaos with a slight grin. Only five of the occupiers were arrested for

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[36] Peter Blue Cloud ed., *Alcatraz Is Not An Island*, (Berkeley: Wingbow Press, 1972) 93.
[37] Jerry Gambill ed., John Hurst, —Pit River Indian occupation goes on: Indian trial to be moved," *Record-Searchlight*, (October 28, 1970): no page number, reprinted in *Akwesasne Notes*, 3, no.1 (Jan/Feb 1971): 4.
[38] —…Through Richard Oakes, many Indians from across the Nation heard of our plight and came to Pit River Country to unite with us…soon after we occupied, we were surrounded by law enforcement officers that were heavily armed with guns of various makes, billy clubs, police dogs, and the rest…Among our people, shoulder to shoulder, stood Richard Oakes unafraid, and unarmed. Ready and willing to lay down his life if necessary for the women and little children…Can any man offer more than that? He didn't give us a lot of talk about how much he thought of us and what he was trying to do for us…He *showed* us how he felt." Jerry Gambill ed., Anonymous, —An Editorial: He SHOWED US HOW he Felt," *Akwesasne Notes*, 5, no.1 (Early Winter 1973): 34.

assaulting a federal officer and resisting arrest; most, ironically, faced obstruction charges.[39] Meanwhile, Baker made sure that nobody arrested by Balma was charged with trespass.

Outraged, Aubrey Grossman quickly filed another lawsuit against Sheriff Balma and D.A. Baker for brutality and excessive use of force. Anne persuaded Richard to move to Kashaya, fearing further violence and retaliation by local police. The occupations had taken a dramatic and violent turn. The Pit River community regrouped. They sought new action but allowed time to pass in an effort to cool frustrations. Reluctantly, organizers realized they were fortunate. Despite the violence exerted by law enforcement that horrific day, no one had been critically injured or, worse yet, killed.

One month later Richard Oakes organized two more occupations. On November 3, 1970, a dozen activists raided an abandoned CIA listening post near Santa Rosa, California. The occupation ended in the arrest of five of them on trespass charges, but ultimately title to the land was handed over to Pit River. The institution created on the site was the Ya-Ka-Ma American Indian Learning Center. The next day, just twenty miles from Kashaya, protesters moved in on a former Foreign Broadcast Information Service Monitor Station at Healdsburg, California. Sonoma County Sheriff's deputies arrived at the station, arresting four of them on trespass grounds. At Oakes request,

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[39] Dennis Levitt, "Second Pit River occupation fails," *Los Angeles Free Press*, (Dec. 4, 1970): 23. Levitt also provides an account similar to that of Hurst and Blue Cloud. See also, M. Annette Jaimes, "The Pit River Indian Land Claim Disputes In Northern California," *The Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 14, no.4 (Winter 1987): 56.

Aubrey Grossman became the legal representative for the holdouts who remained at the broadcast station.[40]

Riding on the success of these occupations, Richard Oakes organized a roadblock at Kashaya to protest the widening of the road that would take three acres of Kashaya land without compensation. Oakes recalled the occupations he had witnessed growing up at St. Regis. He knew that the California Highway Department did not have the jurisdiction to take Kashaya land without payment. On the evening of November 21, 1970, he led a group of 18 to 25, including his ten-year-old son Rocky, to the junction of Skaggs Springs Road and Tin Barn Road. With flashlights in hand and a lone rifle they placed a felled tree in the road and spray-painted a large plywood sign that read, ―Stop pay toll ahead--$1.00 This is Indian Land." As motorists pulled to halt at the fallen tree, they observed a big man holding a hunting rifle in one hand and a flashlight in the other. Don Richardson, a rancher, was stopped at the tollbooth. He recalled that, ―Oakes politely explained the purpose of the tolls, I said I wouldn't object to paying and he gave me a receipt."[41] Later, a California Highway Patrolman arrived on the scene, and Oakes greeted the officer with a smile, and said, ―What took you so long? You can never find an officer when you need one."[42] Oakes was immediately arrested for armed robbery and related felony charges; his bail set at $6,125. He was later released from jail when he

[40] Troy Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island*, 229.
[41] Donald L. Baker. ―Indian Activists May Be Unified by Slaying" *The Washington Post*, (Nov. 26, 1972): D6.
[42] Warrior and Smith. *Like A Hurricane*. 140.

agreed to pay back his toll fees, but still faced another charge of blocking a public roadway. His trial was scheduled for September 1971.[43]

After waiting only three days, he organized a second roadblock at the same location. Two of Anne‘s cousins, Jon and Thorn Maruffo, accompanied Oakes and twenty more protestors to the road. Most who passed through the roadblock willingly paid the one-dollar toll and received a firsthand lesson in Tribal Sovereignty from Richard Oakes. Larry Castillini was not so gracious as he entered the roadblock. Exiting his car, he explained to Oakes that he simply didn‘t have the dollar to pay. While the two talked, one over-zealous supporter slashed Castillini‘s rear tires. Embarrassed, Richard Oakes quickly helped Castillini change his tire and located another spare for the nervous father. Just as they were changing the second tire, the highway patrol arrived and promptly arrested Richard Oakes for a second time.[44]

Aubrey Grossman once again came to Oakes legal aid, arguing that the trooper was outside his jurisdiction and that Oakes‘ intentions were to protect Kashaya land. The occupations were covered by the local press, the *San Francisco Examiner*, and later featured in *Akwesasne Notes*. Richard Oakes was proving that he was still a key player in

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[43] Anonymous, ―Reservation Road: Oakes in Trouble On $1 Toll Gouge," *San Francisco Examiner & Chronicle*, (Nov. 22, 1970): 21. See also, Jerry Gambill ed., Anonymous, ―Armed Indians Charge Toll on Road," *Press Democrat*, (Nov. 22, 1970): no page number, reprinted in *Akwesasne Notes*,3, no.1 (Jan/Feb. 1971): 19. ―At his trial September 1971…Oakes testified that, ―the $1 toll was to compensate Indians for land robbed from them." Asked by his attorney, Aubrey Grossman of San Francisco, what he hoped to accomplish, Oakes said, ―bring public results. We are taking action because the government has not seen fit to pay for any land they used."…Oakes used the word ―catalyst" to describe his role. Donald L. Baker, ―Indian Activist May Be Unified by Slaying," *The Washington Post*, (Nov. 26, 1972): D1, D6.

[44] Troy Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island*, 230. See also, UPI, (Nov. 28, 1970): 1, News Clippings—*Alcatraz Takeover*, SFSU Archives, San Francisco, CA; Ibid, untitled (Nov. 22, 1970): 1; and Ibid, untitled, (Dec. 13, 1970): 1.

the political processes of defending the tenants of Tribal sovereignty. However, not everyone at Kashaya appreciated Oakes‘ efforts. Chief James Allen scheduled a meeting with the leader and related that the Kashaya council were concerned that Oakes was committing the Tribe too deeply in a political stand they simply could not afford. Oakes listened as Allen cautiously told him that he was violating Tribal law. He explained further that if the Council asked him, he would have no choice but to have Oakes removed from the forty-acre Rancharia.[45]

By December Richard Oakes was now well known among Sheriff officers in the tri-county area and faced another attack on his ability to remain an organizing presence at Kashaya. In a strange twist of events, the Sonoma County Sheriff department issued a warrant for the arrest of Rocky Oakes. The Castillinis believed that Rocky was responsible for the November 25th tire slashing. Both Richard and Anne refused to turn their son over to authorities. The couple knew that the warrant was a billboard for local law enforcement eager to retaliate against Richard‘s increasing activism. As soon as the incident passed, Rocky avoided arrest because of press coverage of the event. The public was outraged that the Sheriff‘s office sought to jail a ten-year-old boy based solely on the testimony of Castillini‘s nine-year-old daughter.[46]

On December 20th Richard Oakes‘ manifesto was printed in the *San Francisco Examiner* and he threatened more blockades. Oakes was convinced that if Kashaya and

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[45] Anonymous, ―Killer of Indian Is Arraigned," *San Francisco Examiner* (Sep. 21, 1972): 6. See also, UPI, untitled (Sep. 21, 1972): 1, *News Clippings—Alcatraz Takeover*, SFSU Archives, San Francisco, CA.

[46] ―[Rocky wasn‘t there. Besides, I won‘t let him use a knife…Why do they want to arrest a 10 year old boy…We can only reciprocate in kind. If they want to hold my kid, maybe we‘ll hold the sheriff…" Anonymous, ―Warrant Out for Oakes‘ 10-Year-Old Son," *San Francisco Examiner & Chronicle*, (Dec. 13, 1970): 26.

Pit River were to become truly sovereign Nations, then they must become self-sufficient and develop an economic infrastructure that could lead to freedom from federal funds. Concurrently, he called for the creation of a security force responsive to the needs of the community and Tribal laws, an end to the current Indian foster care program, and the building of a community center that placed grandparents with grandchildren. Instead of separating the generations, they should be brought together; only then would tradition and pride be imparted. The manifesto also sought to reestablish ancient trade routes by forming an economic confederacy of Indian Nations. Oakes demonstrated that through greenhouse farming and domestication of local deer herds, Tribes could then trade for wool from the Navajo or cattle from the Lakota. Developing these traditional commodities might help to alleviate unemployment and economic dependency. Although many of his proposals were far ahead of their time, Oakes was not shy in his pursuit of liberation.[47]

By New Years Day Richard Oakes had been involved in countless occupations, from Seattle to Round Valley; he had fought to overcome an otherwise debilitating injury; and he was now able to walk again. He was forging a new era for self-determination through the call for sovereignty. Although Oakes had dropped out of his program at San Francisco State, his education continued. He battled severe headaches and double vision to effectively organize mass movements throughout California. On January

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[47] Anonymous, ―Oakes Threatens New Blockade," *San Francisco Examiner* (Dec. 20, 1970): 22. ―He wanted to re-establish herds of deer, buffalo, elk so that the [Native …people could develop an independent economy…a trading confederation across the continent, so that Pacific salmon could be traded for Iroquois corn and Navajo wool for Lakota cattle…He was strong for [Native …sovereignty and culture." Jerry Gambill, ―He Liked His Mohawk Name Ranoies—A Big Man," *Akwesasne Notes*, 4, no.6 (Late Autumn 1972): 6.

29, 1971, eight months after he was beaten at Warren‘s, Richard Oakes went into surgery again. Doctors inserted a metal plate into his skull, hoping that this might ease the agonizing pressures in Oakes‘ head.[48] Before the surgery Oakes learned the shocking news that Hank Adams had been shot at Frank‘s Landing in Washington. Apparently late one evening two men had approached Adams, who was there to prevent the theft of fishing equipment. One of them rammed a shotgun into Adams‘ stomach and pulled the trigger. Fortunately Adams, although he was bleeding profusely, was able to call for help and survived the attempt on his life. The two men were never found and local authorities who opposed Adams‘ politics, proposed that the leader had shot himself in an attempt to gain press attention.[49] Furious, the tiny Washington Native community erupted in protest at the accusation. The blind justice exuded by local authorities had allowed the two assailants to escape, and no one was ever brought up on charges for the crime. News of the attack troubled Richard and Anne, who remembered Adams from his visits to Alcatraz and at Fort Lawton.

It had been almost five years since Richard Oakes had been home to St. Regis. As he was recovering from his surgery, Richard and Anne recalled a letter that St. Regis leaders had sent to them at Alcatraz. They had asked for Oakes to return. Packing up their station wagon, the family said their goodbyes to family and friends and pulled out of Kashaya. Along the way the children stared out of the windows at the changing landscape while they listened to their father who told them stories about his childhood at Akwesasne.

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[48] UPI, untitled, (Jan. 29, 1971): 1. See also, Ibid, UPI, untitled, (Jan. 23, 1971): 1. News Clippings--Alcartraz Takeover, SFSU Archives, San Francisco, CA.
[49] Troy Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island*, 230-231.

Once they arrived at St. Regis, Richard Oakes met up with Jerry Gambill and other members of the White Roots of Peace. The organization asked him to join the Longhouse movement and help spread the message of the great peacemaker. In the midst of his community he was able to share his visions with a larger audience of young people. Jerry Gambill remembered the times fondly: ―Anne…bravely managed to care for the family in our crowded vehicle. Richard had a strong craving for ice cream, and our tiny refrigerator worked overtime keeping him in supply."[50] Oakes involvement with the White Roots of Peace was crucial. His life served as a testament to the very nature of the Great Law of Peace and Iroquois tradition.

During their stay Richard Oakes was able to receive medical aid in Canada, and he made frequent trips to receive free medical treatment. On one occasion Gambill was traveling with the Oakes family when Richard Oakes gunned the station wagon past a Cornwall Island checkpoint. Oakes remained keenly aware of his sovereign rights and he refused to compromise his actions. He was defending his right and that of others at St. Regis to cross the border freely without interference.

As spring approached, Anne and the children felt the pull of Kashaya. They missed their family and friends. Richard Oakes promised to return. At St. Regis he had applied for housing, only to find a long waiting list and a growing debt from a life on the road. Due to his physical condition, he was unable to return to work in high steel.

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[50] Jerry Gambill, ―He liked his Mohawk name, Ranoies――A Big Man,"*Akwesasne Notes*, (Late Autumn, 1972): 6. ―…condition much improved, morale: ―haven't began to fight!" The family is returning to Akwesasne to work with White Roots of Peace…" Jerry Gambill ed., Anonymous, ―Ann and Richard Oakes," *Akwesasne Notes*, 2, no.6 (Oct. 1970): 38. The brief citation also contains a photo of Anne leaning on Richard Oakes shoulder at a community meeting.

Gambill hated to see Oakes leave after such a short stay, and he supplied the couple with a list of contacts for the trip home.

Organizers back at Pit River continued to maintain legal pressure and challenged PG&E and other corporate claims to Tribal land. The ongoing resistance movement at Pit River relied heavily upon the unified support of Tribal citizens. A citizenry who openly defied in any formal acceptance of the federal government‘s final offer of 47 cents an acre. Once Oakes returned to California, he remained in deliberate contact with the Pit River leadership. Over the next few years the movement at Pit River slowly began to buckle under the pressure of federal officials, who intensified their lobbying efforts to secure a settlement offered by the Indian Claims Commission. Oakes return to California was important, as he was widely known for his strategy, leadership, and organizing talents. Once the family had returned to Kashaya, Oakes was called upon again to organize for the El-Em Pomo.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FREEDOM

For the next two years Indian Country exploded in a violent defense of Red Power objectives. Despite all the ―success" that emerged from Alcatraz takeover, it also intensified more conservative radical elements in society in opposition to Red Power. The 1972 Trail of Broken Treaties March on Washington D.C. and the 1973 occupation of Wounded Knee, South Dakota witnessed a dramatic rise of the American Indian Movement as the sole icon of Red Power. Richard Oakes and his family continued to fight for Native rights and earn a living. The events that unfolded from 1971-1973 forever altered the Oakes family and the ideology of Red Power. Most poignantly, the events that unfolded raise questions about the foundations of American justice, democracy, and freedom.

On Saturday night, May 1, 1971, Oakes and twenty others took over a vacant army radio transmitter base near Middleton, California. The former army receiving station had sat vacant since 1958. The El-Em Pomo had hoped to transform the 640-acre site into a Tribally controlled cultural and spiritual center, thereby increasing their land base. Lake County Sheriff deputies arrived on Sunday and posted a 24-hour roadblock on all roads entering and leaving the site. After a two-day standoff, supplies grew thin; Anne and the children needed food and other provisions. Perhaps it was poor planning or a part of their strategy, because the occupation force had packed only two days worth of provisions. El-Em tribal member Rose Barnes was arrested on Sunday when she tried to deliver much needed food and medical supplies to the occupiers. Only one loaf of bread was reportedly allowed by the sheriff's deputies into the former army post. In addition,

deputies had set up an armed barricade, blocking with chains, the single entrance to the former army post.

Fearing a possible invasion or worse a violent encounter with deputies Oakes had decided that he would make the trip into nearby Middletown, California to get more supplies. He was quickly surrounded by sheriff's deputies and forced to exit his vehicle. Deputies then moved in fast, evicting the rest of the holdouts. Richard Oakes was charged with trespass and unlawful entry of a government facility. He was convicted by an all-white jury, sentenced to ten days in jail, and fined $125.00.[1] Despite the short-lived takeover outside Clear Lake, the occupiers continued to garner more press attention for Indian land claims in northern California. Oakes strategy was critical, for it relied upon three major objectives; changing public opinion and depleting law enforcement and court resources.

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[1]Anonymous, "Oakes Arrested in Lake Co.," *San Francisco Examiner* (May 3, 1971): 18, See also Troy Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island*, 226; *AIPA-American Indian Press Association*, "People In the News,"2, no.232 (1971): 30; FBI file, *Thomas Richard Oakes*, "At Clearlake Highlands, California," 28 August 2001, 38, in author's possession; "...those arrested besides Mrs. Barnes, were Richard Oakes, a Mohawk who lives on the Pomo reservation near the coast; Curly Buffalo, a coastal Pomo; Steven, Anthony and Calvin Brown, all of the El-Em Pomo rancheria near Clear Lake Oaks; and Irvin and Louella Miranda, both of El-Em rancheria."Anonymous, "Eight Indians arrested at former Army center," *Record-Searchlight* (May 3, 1971): 13. See also Indians of All Tribes in Jerry Gambill, Ed., "The Clear Lake Statement," *Akwesasne Notes* (Late Autumn, 1971):26-27. This last article in particular spells out the terms and reasoning behind the takeover of the former Army receiving station in nearby Middletown, California. The statement clearly mirrors the objectives found within Richard Oakes' own manifesto: restoration of Tribal land base, game preserves, Native conservation, bringing orphanages and elders together, economic self-sufficiency and a host of others. The article also states that the occupation, despite arrests, continued as select individuals maintained hidden camps among the 640 acres. The article is attributed to Coyote and Coyote 2, trickster names associated with Indians of All Tribes. It is unclear if this is a pseudonym pen name for Richard Oakes or if this is indeed written by someone else. What is clear, the ideas and ideology presented in the article are absolutely linked to Richard Oakes.

This strategy continued to be central to the liberation theology behind the Pit River land claims. Only two days later, Judge William Gallagher refused Pit River's challenge to move the trial of thirty-five defendants who were arrested during the Burney occupation to the Superior Court. While Judge Gallagher rejected their appeal to try the case in Superior Court, he also informed the Pit River legal defense team to automatically appeal if found guilty of trespass in the lower court. In an article that appeared in the local *Record-Searchlight*, attorney for Pit River, Aubrey Grossman reinforced Pit River's core media strategy when he claimed the court's decision would make it, "incredibly tough on the taxpayers of Shasta County," and estimated the public cost of upwards of $50,000 for the trial.[2] It was a risky move because public and local opinion could easily shift for or against the Pit River objectives.

Only ten days later the Pit River defense team received notice that twelve more defendants were to stand trial on October fifth for charges of assault on federal officers during the Battle of Four Corners. Throughout the rest of May the trials appeared frequently in local newspaper headlines.[3] Building upon the momentum of the failed

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[2] Anonymous, "Judge rejects Indian plea," *Record-Searchlight* (May 5, 1971): 1.
[3] Anonymous, "Indians to be tried Oct. 5 for assault," *Record-Searchlight* (May 13, 2971): 17; Anonymous, "Indian jury to be selected," *Record-Searchlight* (May 17, 1971):13; Anonymous, "Pit-PG&E trespass case to resume," *Record-Searchlight* (May 24, 1971): no page number; and "Eleven large corporations were warned today to stop logging on Pit River Indian ancestral land or the tribe would take action to stop it itself…the corporations warned are…Hearst Corp. 39,000 acres; Fruit Growers Supply Co.—81,000 acres; Diamond International—12,000 acres; U.S. Plywood—33,000 acres; Kimberly-Clark—93,000 acres; Publishers Forest Co.—107,000 acres; Southern Pacific Land Co.—166,000 acres; K.R. Walker 30,000 acres; R.G. Watt and Associates—23,000 acres; Pacific Gas and Electric Co.—53,000 acres. John Hurst, "Ultimatum to corporations: Pit Indians order logging halt," *Record-Searchlight* (May 28, 1971): 1. Once again the press was being used as a sounding board to rally public support and expose corporate trespass and misuse from a Pit River perspective.

army center take over, a new occupation target slowly emerged uniting both Wintu and Pit River nationalists.

The Wintu Tribe of Northern California was historically located adjacent to the Pit River Nation, between the snowy peaks of Mount Shasta and the Cascade Mountains. Originally comprised of nine bands, by the early 1970s, only three bands of Wintu remained: the Nor-El Muk Nation, Winnemem Wintu, and the Wintu Tribe of Northern California. In 1851, the Wintu entered into treaty negotiations with the U.S. government. The provisions of their treaty, which was never ratified, exchanged all Wintu traditional lands for a tiny twenty-five square mile reservation in northern California. By 1941, the Tribe shared a fate similar to that of the Akwesasne encounter with the St. Lawrence Seaway, when their allotted lands were reclaimed under the Central Valley Project—Indian Lands Acquisition Act. It was a history all too familiar for Richard Oakes and local Pit River activists, a shared history that cultivated the seeds for new occupation strategies.[4]

After a short stint in jail, Richard Oakes was reunited with Pit River and Wintu leaders who sought to occupy the former Toyon Job Corps Center near Redding, California. In May of 1969, the sixty-one acre site had been stripped of funding by the Nixon administration and was now under the custodial care of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Officials in the Bureau of Indian Affairs had made preliminary plans to turn the camp over to the Inter-Tribal Council of California, founded in 1965 on the Susanville

[4] Anonymous, "News Release: McCloud River Indians hold WAR DANCE at Shasta Dam," (Sep. 2, 2004) online at: http://winnememwintu.us/news_release_gary.html; see also "Wintu Tribe of Northern California & Toyon-Wintu Center," at: http://www.wintutribe.org/

Reservation. Soon the Inter-Tribal Council in a show of solidarity revoked their claim to Toyon.

The camp itself was rather large and contained over forty cabins, complete with electricity, indoor plumbing, manicured lawns, and other modern conveniences. Coincidentally, during the 1940s, the former Job Corps campground had also served as housing for the many construction workers contracted to build Shasta Dam, a federal project that confiscated and destroyed hundreds of acres of traditional Wintu lands. A dozen or more activists faced little resistance when their caravan pulled into the Toyon campground. Maintenance men making repairs on the cabins thought the group had rented the camp, and willingly offered the occupation force a tour of the facilities. After the tour they gave the occupiers keys to all the cabins and other buildings located on the property. Chris Ryan (Wintu) declared, ―It his land is now occupied by the Wintu Nation and Indians of all tribes…We are occupying this land for all free Indians." Ryan's words and proclamation referenced the ideology and philosophy of the initial Alcatraz occupation. It must have seemed like their lucky day; if only previous occupations had gone so smoothly.[5]

Instead of a large show of force by local law enforcement, occupation leaders met with Sacramento BIA officials, Deputy District Attorney William Lund, and the director of the Shasta County Community Action Project (CAP) behind closed doors. The official policy handed down from the BIA headquarters in Washington to local officials was to

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[5] John Hurst, ―Indians occupying Toyon," *Record-Searchlight* (May 21, 1971); 1. ―Indians of All Tribes, including supporters from Alcatraz and activist Richard Oakes and his family, joined Wintus and Pit River Indians in the occupation of the 61-acre site." Anonymous, ―Free Indians of All Tribes: Indians continue Toyon occupation," *Record-Searchlight*, (May 22, 1971): 1.

cease all negotiations and evict the occupation force upon the legal grounds of trespass. However local authorities refused to carry out their orders from Washington. At a stalemate, the occupiers next attended a meeting at William Emmal's office at the Shasta County Legal Aide Society to negotiate their terms. During the meeting Toyon settlers also met with Wes Barker, Acting Area Director for the BIA, and their organizing took a positive turn. The occupiers were given ninety days to present a proposal and to secure funding for Toyon. Additionally, they had to maintain a permanent residence at Toyon, while adhering to the required upkeep and maintenance for the facility. Richard Oakes was stunned; what was the catch? As it turned out there was no hidden agenda; they had won title to the site. At the end of the meeting Pit River elder Mildred Rhoades approached Wes Barker and extended her hand, "I never thought I'd be shaking the hand of a BIA man."[6] The rapid victory in securing Toyon as Indian land justified and created precedence for previous Pit River occupations. A possible legal victory in the courts seemed all the more plausible.

By June the assault trail from the Burney occupation was well underway, and the Pit River legal defense team organized activists to carry signs and picket the trial. Beneath the somber structure of the Sacramento Court House, the picketers, including Richard Oakes, distributed leaflets to passersby. The leaflets were simply, yet provocatively, entitled, "The Pit River Story: A Century of Genocide," but the Municipal

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[6] Jerry Gambill ed., Greg Lyon, "Indian Territory," no source, no page number, reprinted in *Akwesasne Notes*, 3, no.5 (June 1971): 13. See also, Troy Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island*, 231, M. Annette Jaimes, "The Pit River Indian Land Claim Dispute," 58; and Jerry Gambill, ed., Anonymous, "Indians ask moral support," June 28, 1971, no source, no page number, reprinted in *Akwesasne Notes*, 3, no.8 (Late Autumn, 1971): 28. Greg Lyon, "Negotiations under way in occupation of Toyon," *Record-Searchlight* (May 26, 1971): 1.

Court Judge Michael Virga, appointed by California Governor Ronald Reagan, threatened a mistrial based on the fear that these leaflets might influence a juror. Upon learning of Virga's intent, the picketers immediately discarded all leaflets, and the picket lines continued marching outside the courtroom. Aubrey Grossman began to present his defense, which consisted of the Pit River's historic and legal title over the lands PG&E Corporation presumed to also have title and control. Carefully and quite deliberately, Grossman directed his opening remarks towards Shermer Sibley, the President of PG&E Corporation, who sat in the court pews awaiting his summons to testify before the court. Richard Oakes approached, with confidence, the area where Sibley was sitting with his legal counsel. Oakes held two cardboard signs from the picket line in his hands as he neared the President of PG&E Corporation.[7] While Sibley's legal counsel peered back as if interested in the message, Sibley avoided confrontation and left his seat. Reporters gathered in the courtroom seized upon this opportune moment as camera bulbs flashed. Through this action, Richard Oakes brought the Pit River struggle before the president of a powerful corporation. Symbolically, Oakes' gesture and response resembled the greater struggle. Most importantly, the trial had brought together both the head of PG&E Corporation and the Pit River cause under the same roof. Clearly, PG&E would not be able to ignore the Pit River cause, hoping that in time the Pit River claim might somehow just disappear. The photo also captured the emotion and power behind the Pit River

[7] John Hurst, "Indians warned of contempt action," *Record-Searchlight* (June 2, 1971): 1.

struggle, and the tag line that appeared in the *Redding Record-Searchlight* read, ―Sibley decides to move as Richard Oakes approaches…"[8]

Once Sibley took the stand, his memory and knowledge of PG&E's resources seemed insufficient at best, especially when he asserted he was unaware that PG&E had legal title to the land. Grossman, who saw an opportunity, continued to press Sibley with further questions. Sibley admitted to not knowing the worth of PG&E facilities in the Redding, California area. Sibley went on to add that he had not ordered the arrest of Pit River activists the previous June. Grossman possibly feared that Sibley had been coached by his legal counsel all too well, for the continued plea of ignorance left very little room for Sibley to incriminate himself or PG&E. Using the tactic he had learned during his days as a lawyer for labor interests, Aubrey Grossman asked Sibley if he felt that Pit River had a ―good moral claim." This line of questioning triggered an immediate objection from District Attorney Robert Baker. Judge Virga sustained the objection, and proclaimed that the trial was not about Sibley's mental state. Once PG&E President Sibley made his final remarks on the stand, Grossman called in Pit River elder and tribal councilman Raymond Lego to testify. It is unclear if Shermer Sibley stayed to listen to any further courtroom proceedings. Lego's testimony, however, established the oral tradition and tribal claim over their lands in the official court record and also before the jurors. Beyond the courtroom and trial, tensions began to escalate between the District Attorney's office and Pit River.[9]

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[8] John Hurst, ―PG&E chief says he didn't order Indians arrested," *Redding Record-Searchlight* (June 3, 1971): 1.
[9] John Hurst, ―PG&E chief says he didn't order Indians arrested," *Record-Searchlight* (June 3, 1971): 1.

The very next day District Attorney Robert Baker notified the Pit River Tribal Council they would be charged with criminal trespass if anyone decided to follow through on a Tribal warning issued to logging companies. In the letter, Baker employed stern prose, ―…any actions of trespass and business interference as threatened in your letters…would be prosecuted by this office to the fullest extent of the law." When he was interviewed by reporters about land titles, Baker stated, ―Well, just from general knowledge of the area…I've gone through the assessor maps," and he proceeded to denounce Pit River's claim as well as his firm intent to back corporate interest in the assault case. Inside the courtroom, the D.A. attempted to sway public and juror opinion against the Pit River claim. When cross examining Raymond Lego, Baker attempted to lure Lego into admitting on the stand that the Tribe's intentions were to evict private home owners and corporations from Pit River lands. Lego, the Tribal elder, was both quiet and then shrewd when he replied, ―I don't know of any case where a white man came to us in friendship and was rejected." Eventually Baker continued the same style of questioning when he explained Grace Thorpe and defendants Andy James and Daryl Wilson. Thorpe's wry infectious wit cut Baker short in mid question, ―I am convinced that the Pit River people have no intention of trying to take people's private property, if that's what you're getting at." Daryl Wilson brought silence to the courtroom when he testified about the loss of his own mother and brother who were killed on a bridge by a logging truck, ―Why is it so necessary to have a bridge…And why was it so necessary to have a logging truck?" With each new testimony Pit River defendants were out to win the hearts and minds of the court and the greater public.[10]

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[10] Anonymous, ―DA threatens prosecution on Indians' logging ban," *Record-Searchlight*

A few days later Pit River attorney Aubrey Grossman was juggling three separate federal trials against PG&E, D.A. Baker, and Shasta County Sheriff John Balma. Running between trials, Judge Virga fortunately allowed Aubrey Grossman time to recess and reschedule the trial. When the trial resumed a few days later the last defendant to take the stand was a young Shoshone activist, Colleen Evening Thunder. Evening Thunder was already a veteran of the Alcatraz and Pit River occupations. The young twenty-five-year-old summed up why she put herself on the line for the Pit River cause, ―Our hearts are in the land. Without the land we are nothing." The jury and public were witnessing to a crash course in modern Indian history and self-determination. Grossman used his closing statement to offer hope, imploring the great American mythos. Tactfully recalling his initial conversation with Pit River leaders, Grossman referenced the moment they asked him to be their legal defense: ―I'll guarantee the legal results if you get your story to the people. Because I believe in them. You may not believe in them because of the way you've been treated by whites. But I believe in the people. If I didn't believe in the American people I don't know what I'd believe in…" His closing statement together with Colleen Evening Thunder's powerful testimony, offered much for the jury to debate. [11]

On June 11, 1971, the second day of deliberations for the jury, a crowd of supporters, including defendants Richard and Anne Oakes, gathered in the hallways of

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(June 4, 1971): 1; and John Hurst, ―In Pit Indian trial: Baker presses land title line," *Record-Searchlight* (June 4, 1971): 1; John Hurst, ―Pit Indians accuse DA of leaping to conclusions," Record-Searchlight (June 5, 1971): 1; ―Wilson was sworn in with: ―Do you solemnly affirm on your honor as an Indian that the testimony you give will be the truth…?" Wilson objected to being sworn in with the use of the word ―God" because people use the name too loosely. Interestingly, Judge Virga allowed the change in his court. Anonymous, ―Indian's word," *Record-Searchlight* (June 4, 1971): 1.

[11] John Hurst, ―Indian woman's testimony ―Our hearts are in the land,'" *Record-Searchlight* (June 9, 1971): 1.

the court house awaiting any news from the jury. Unfortunately, a different type of news reached the crowd. Supporters learned that the nineteen-month occupation of Alcatraz had come to an abrupt end as U.S. Marshals moved onto the Island with shotguns. Only fifteen people were on the island when the government decided to reclaim Alcatraz. Reporters on the scene at the courthouse rushed to interview Anne Oakes. Shocked and deeply saddened by the news, she left the hallway. It was all too much. Alcatraz was the first place where Anne had felt freedom, and it was the last place where she had seen her late daughter Yvonne alive. Richard Oakes, obviously reeling with emotions upon hearing the news, was separated from Anne and swarmed by a host of newsmen, eager to hear his immediate thoughts. He took a while to gather his words and feelings before he proclaimed, ―Alcatraz is not an island. It's an idea." He went on to label the Federal move as, ―a sissy victory," comparing the US government's action at Alcatraz to its actions in Vietnam, ―…the pressure's been on them to do something in Vietnam. And the only way they could do something was turn it around and use it on Indian people." Pointedly and prophetically, Oakes referenced the Alcatraz occupation as the, ―…door to our future…it will not be closed. We're taking it back." Although the reporters seemed to place literal meaning into Oakes' statement, in reality, his words symbolized that Red Power as a movement could not be confined to one island, or better yet, one occupation. Rather the ―idea" of Alcatraz was spreading, and this idea was about to politically transform both America and Native Nations.[12]

It was a foreshadowing statement by Oakes. Just a few days later joint occupations occurred in both Chicago, Illinois and El Cerrito, California. Led by Chicago

[12] John Hurst, ―Indians vow to return," *Redding Record-Searchlight* (June 12, 1971): 1.

Indian community leader Michael Chosa, Anishinaabe, many of the occupiers identified themselves as ―Alcatraz Indians." The new residents in what was dubbed the ―Chicago Indian Village" were survivors and urban refugees leftover from the failed Bureau of Indian Affairs Relocation Program, which had sought to transplant hundreds of American Indians into various Chicago districts. Initially formed in 1970, the Chicago Indian Village had advocated for lands near the famed Wrigley Field, a major landmark that secured ample press attention. The occupations, shifting to additional sites, continued for over a year and a half, with Village residents frequently moving first to a downtown Chicago church, then a county park, then the federal surplus lands of Argonne National Laboratory and finally to Camp Seager. After the Chicago Housing Authority and the federal department of Housing and Urban Development reached an agreement, they promised the leaders new housing and land. Like Alcatraz, each occupation, from Chicago to El Cerrito, was about land reclamation that targeted federal surplus property—an abandoned Nike missile site in California became the new ―Indian land" for former Alcatraz residents.[13]

In El Cerrito, California, the occupiers were composed of the evicted remnants of Indians of All Tribes who had been forcibly removed from Alcatraz. It appeared that American Indians across the country were carrying forth the ―idea" of Alcatraz. In New York City the police arrested a group of six activists for having spray painted ―Return Alcatraz" beneath a famed statue of Theodore Roosevelt, twenty-sixth President of the United States, located outside the American Museum of Natural History.

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[13] Jerry Gambill, Ed., ―Indian Vows Defense of Nike Site Village," *Akwesasne Notes* (Early Summer, June 1971): 7; Jerry Gambill, Ed., ―Relocation Revisited: A Chicago Odyssey (Part Two)," *Akwesasne Notes* (Early Autumn, Sept. 1971): 16-17.

Just as the trial for the New York Six was about to open, California Judge Virga called the jury into the courtroom and proceeded to inform the jurors that in his legal opinion PG&E held clear title to the land in question. Virga's unprecedented move to sway the jury shocked the Pit River defendants and their attorney Aubrey Grossman. The jury took no less than twenty-four hours before announcing their final verdict. Contrary to Judge Virga's, the jury found that all those arrested on these contested lands were not guilty of trespass. All the defendants arrested on June 6, 1970, were acquitted. (However, the jury ruled that the June 8 and 9 arrests—those who had entered the cabins—found only seven of the defendants guilty.) The cheer that went up throughout the courtroom made its way into the crowded hallways where Pit River supporters had gathered to hear the jury's decision. After the trial, a few of the jurors asked some of the defendants for their autographs. One of the jurors remarked, "We're proud of the Indians." Clearly, the defendants and Grossman had won over the hearts and minds of the jurors. It was a much needed victory. And for Richard and Anne Oakes it proved a double victory. The jury's verdict meant they had avoided having to separate their family. Joy and relief must have consumed their immediate thoughts.[14]

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[14] Jerry Gambill, Ed., "Six Indians Accused of Defacing Theodore Roosevelt Statue Here," *Akwesasne Notes*, (Early Summer, June 1971): 7. Associated Press, "Indians occupy Nike sites," *Redding Record-Searchlight* (June 14, 1971): 1; Anonymous, "Judge rule PG&E own campground," *Redding Record-Searchlight* (June 14, 1971): 1; and John Hurst, "28 Indians freed, seven convicted," *Redding Record-Searchlight* (June 15, 1971): 1. It is not known, besides affiliation, just how connected the Nike site takeovers were with the Pit River occupation. Two days later, on June 16, 1971 a photo appeared in the Redding Record-Searchlight with Mickey Gemmill at the California Nike site occupation. On the wall behind him was painted a map of the Pit River ancestral lands as he conversed with other occupiers. Anonymous, "They're getting comfortable in new home," *Redding Record-Searchlight*, (June 16, 1971): 27.

Continuing their legal strategy, the Pit River Nation filed a civil suit against PG&E Corporation shortly after the verdict was announced in the courtroom. The civil suit intended to force PG&E to return 53,000 acres of land to the Tribe. In addition, the suit requested that all profits procured by the corporation be reinvested in the Tribe. Pit River leaders added that this civil suit was the first of many. Since every corporation operating on Pit River lands, faced litigation, this strategy aimed to drive court costs up for the corporation while securing further exposure in the media. Grossman and Pit River leadership understood that their fight must be unrelenting to secure their desired results. District Attorney Robert Baker, who was interviewed after the trial, dismissed the jury's verdict as pure sympathy and claimed it was outside the law. Baker also told reporters that he would continue to prosecute any Native person who trespassed on PG&E property. [15]

On June 17, 1971, over one hundred Sheriff's Deputies moved in with riot gear to arrest over 85 occupiers at the El Cerrito, California Nike site. Richard Oakes and his family received the news at their new residence at Toyon. Since they had gained official title to the center, Oakes and others had worked diligently on a proposal to turn the facility into an educational and cultural center for local Tribes. On June 18, Richard returned to his cabin after a long day of meetings and facility repairs. Late that Friday evening he awoke, having heard someone struggling to open their front door. Alerted by the noise, both Richard and Anne Oakes quickly went to open the door, but when Richard opened it he was immediately struck over the head. He collapsed to his knees, gripped by

[15] John Hurst, "Indians plan to lay claim to more corporate land," *Redding Record-Searchlight* (June 16, 1971): 1.

pain and adrenaline, both he and Anne struggled to fend off the intruder. The unknown assailant made off into the night. Hearing Oakes call out, Anne quickly ran to her husband‘s aid, helping him to their car. She gathered up the kids, who had been frightened out of their sleep, and piled everyone into their car. She rushed Richard to the nearest hospital. Because of his previous injuries, doctors immediately placed Oakes under observation for the next two days. Anne called the Shasta County Sheriff‘s office to file a burglary and assault charge. Richard had been blindsided and didn‘t get a close look at the assailant. No arrests were made, and considering Oakes history with the Shasta County Sheriff department this was not shocking to the young couple. The attack came as no surprise. Clearly someone wanted to send a message to Oakes, hitting him where they knew it would hurt, at his home.[16]

Fearing for their family‘s safety, they to returned to Akwesasne. Ironically, in an interview conducted with the *Watertown Daily Times,* a New York newspaper, on October 15, 1970, Anne Oakes mentioned, ―that [t his had been the third attack [(in relation to the Warren‘s Bar incident) on Oakes‘ life since he started his fight against the large corporations in the west to regain land which belonged to the Indian people.” Clearly, this recent attack was all that they could take. Arriving in Richard‘s community, they began where they had left off and continued to work with the White Roots of Peace Caravan. Once again, Richard began to look for employment and housing at Akwesasne. The family of eight found shelter with friends and relatives, living out of suitcases and

[16] Jerry Gambill ed., Anonymous, ―Oakes leaves hospital,” June 21, 1971, no source, no page number, reprinted in *Akwesasne Notes*, 3, no.5 (Early Summer, June 1971): 12; Anonymous, ―Richard Oakes hospitalized,” *Redding Record Searchlight*, (June 19, 1971): 1; Anonymous, ―Oakes leaves hospital,” *Redding Record-Searchlight* (June 21, 1971): 15.

sleeping bags. Beyond their immediate financial crisis, Oakes never stopped organizing and recruiting as he frequented community and Longhouse meetings. Newly elected Tadodaho, Leon Shenandoah, took a quick liking to the brawny Oakes. Many an evening the two leaders stayed awake sharing stories and ideas about liberation and sovereignty.[17]

Oakes often returned to Indian bars at Akwesasne to converse and debate with other Mohawks. These times were much different for Richard because he had sworn off drinking since the attack over a year earlier at Warren's.[18] Back at home, Richard was known as "Ranoies," his Mohawk name, meaning "A Big Man." He was learning to speak the Mohawk language, and increasingly becoming an active member of his community. He was surrounded by the support and guidance of the longhouse, but in many ways it was tragic to start all over again for the family of eight.

In August of 1971, a few months after they returned to Akwesasne, Richard and others were asked by traditional leaders at Onondaga to participate in a demonstration. The New York Highway department proposed the widening of Highway 81 that passed through the Onondaga Reservation near Syracuse. The proposed construction would confiscate additional Onondaga lands for an acceleration lane, but without compensation from the state. Construction was about to start when Onondaga leaders sent out a call for support to all Iroquois Nations. Richard Oakes and other Mohawks drove all night to

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[17] Eleanor Dumas, "Richard Oakes Renews Cause In East; Saved by Medicine Men," *Watertown Daily Times* (Oct. 15, 1970): n.p.

[18] "There was not enough hands for all that his mind could produce, and when the winter snows came, so did a feeling of depression. He went from bar to bar…skirting the Mohawk reservation…not drinking, but trying to get everyone to forget the booze and get going on all that needed to be done, but many of his old friends were still on the same road that he had left many years back and they did not listen to him." Jerry Gambill, "He liked his Mohawk name, Ranoies—"A Big Man," *Akwesasne Notes*, 4, no.6 (Late Autumn 1972): 6.

assist in the protest. Over one-hundred Iroquois converged on Highway 81 and soon they began to barricade the road from eager construction crews. Using their bodies as barriers, they sat on the highway blocking traffic for miles and halting all construction on the road. When local authorities arrived on the scene, Tadodaho Leon Shenandoah stood up and said, "the United States ends here."

Tensions escalated further when New York State Troopers tried to serve an injunction against the demonstrators. The state troopers knew they were outnumbered and in questionable jurisdiction. Onondaga leader William Lazore presented a proclamation to authorities, "These people are trespassing…and we demand their removal. Under existing treaties, you are required to remove any unauthorized persons from our territory." After long discussions with Onondaga leaders over strategy the protesters agreed to leave the area, which prevented any arrests. For the next few weeks occupiers continued to barricade and block the highway, even tearing out survey stakes. Eventually the Onondaga won their battle in the courts. Construction resumed but the crews added only a shoulder to the highway. Oakes was reminded of the roadblock back at Kashia and the legality of trespass laws in northern California; in this situation he had witnessed positive results that derived from direct action. The Iroquois Council of Chiefs eventually negotiated a six-point agreement with Governor Nelson Rockefeller over construction along Highway 81.[19]

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[19] Laurence M. Hauptman, *The Iroquois Struggle for Survival*, 221-222. See also, Geoffrey York and Loreen Pindera, *People of the Pines*, (Toronto: Little, Brown & Company Limited, 1992) 172-173; Anonymous, "Indians Protest Upstate Highway," *The New York Times*, (Aug. 22, 1971): 16. Some have claimed that Richard is linked to the controversial Mohawk Warriors who broke away from the Longhouse, but this is erroneous and false. Oakes was affiliated first to Longhouse tradition at Akwesasne, the

Richard Oakes established many friendships while at Akwesasne, but life became increasingly difficult for the Oakes family as he and Anne still sought employment. As a Kashia Pomo, Anne Oakes found employment options more limited. Her husband had accrued years of experience in ironwork and direct action, he had attended Syracuse and San Francisco State College, but, to his misfortune, he had never finished his degree. With his physical condition weakened from the attack at Warren‘s Bar, ironwork was absolutely out of the question. His options were narrow, if not altogether nonexistent. In near desperation, Oakes published a letter in *Akwesasne Notes* seeking a job and shelter for his family. As much as Richard loved being at home, the family had to relocate if they were to survive. Saying goodbye was never easy for Richard Oakes; he often called his friend Jerry Gambill, editor of *Akwesasne Notes*, to talk out the latest issues. The drive back to Kashaya was not without complications. Shortly after leaving St. Regis, their station wagon broke down. After Richard and Anne were able to scrape up enough money for repairs and gas, they drove across the continent to Anne‘s homeland.

By February of 1972, news of Lakota, Raymond Yellow Thunder‘s public lynching had spread across Indian Country. Yellow Thunder‘s beaten body was found in his pickup truck, which had sat for days unnoticed in a used car lot in Gordon, Nebraska. The tiny town of Gordon, located just across the state line from South Dakota and the Pine Ridge Reservation, had long been a notorious border town. It had also earned a reputation for extreme exploitation and racism towards Native Peoples. For years the

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ideals of the White Roots of Peace, and not with the Warriors. Some twenty years would pass before his *cousin* Harold Oakes would work with the Warriors. The assumption by some that Richard Oakes was a supporter of, or played a role in, the Warriors movement is unfounded and circumspect at best.

community profited from liquor sales to Pine Ridge residents, who drove to Gordon because it was illegal to purchase alcohol on the reservation. Just about every reservation community Across America is complemented by the existence of border towns that thrive from the business of providing goods and services not found on the reservation. Yellow Thunder, an Oglala cowboy and military veteran, had been kidnapped, beaten, stripped naked, thrown into a car trunk, and made to dance naked before other veterans at the American Legion Hall; he was beaten and kidnapped again after leaving the Legion; later he found refuge at the local jail. The next day, after he was released, Yellow Thunder passed away from his injuries in his truck sometime that cold February morning. The attorney charged Yellow Thunder‘s murderers with manslaughter and false imprisonment; the attorney stated that the death was a practical joke gone wrong. The entire incident was enough to send an organized caravan consisting of Raymond Yellow Thunder‘s family, local Pine Ridge residents, and the American Indian Movement into Gordon, Nebraska. After a successful economic boycott and protests in Gordon, the city responded by creating a Human Rights Commission and the state ordered an official investigation into the death of Raymond Yellow Thunder. Robert Warrior and Paul Chaat Smith, who summarized these events in their book *Like A Hurricane*, wrote ―Raymond Yellow Thunder‘s story reached out to every Indian person who could see in him not just another Indian drunk, but a brother, a father, an uncle, or a cousin.[20] Just about everyone

[20] Warrior and Smith, *Like A Hurricane*, 112-117; Charles Wilkinson, *Blood Struggle: The Rise of Modern Indian Nations* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2005): 139; and Deloria Jr., *Behind the Trail of Broken Treaties*, 45…For a more detailed account see also, Stew Magnuson, *The Death of Raymond Yellow Thunder: And Other True Stories from the Nebraska-Pine Ridge Border Towns* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press:

in Indian Country was affected by the news of Yellow Thunder's lynching. It is not known just how Richard Oakes responded to this news, but as Warrior and Smith concluded, Yellow Thunder's death struck a solid chord of indignation and protest with all Native Peoples.

Over the course of the next six months, Richard Oakes worked diligently on a book manuscript, as well as a greenhouse farm at Kashaya; he also began to construct a new home for Anne and the kids, and he continued to lend his support to other occupations. Anne was happiest at home with her garden, and having their kids back in school. The family now was much larger since they joined Anne's cousins and immediate family for frequent gatherings. Almost two years had gone by since Richard had sat with reporter Tim Findley in their Gatorville apartment at SFSC: ―A lot of people say I would be justified in leaving it all now; after all it's been a hell of a year. But I think the law of averages says I have to get a positive response out of nature sometime, and this time I think I'll find it."[21] Richard Oakes was still seeking to make a difference as he continued to press for Native political and economic independence and, ultimately, freedom.

In August, Oakes and his family were excited by the news that longtime friend Mad Bear Anderson and other Iroquois leaders were scheduled to make an appearance in Big Bend, California. The North American Indian Unity Caravan, led by Mad Bear, hosted the two-day affair to draw continued public support for Indian rights. The event of prayer, dances, and speeches was also about condolence and healing. Pit River Tribal

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2008); and Akim D. Rinehardt, *Ruling Pine Ridge: Oglala Lakot Politics from the IRA to Wounded Knee,* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2007) 126-129.

[21] Tim Findley, ―A Traveling College: Oakes' Hunt for the Past," *San Francisco Chronicle* (Sep. 21, 1970): 2.

Council Chairman Ross Montgomery sponsored the caravan to encourage further Tribal unity at Pit River.[22] Throughout the month of August Richard Oakes continued to lend tactical and physical support to the Pit River occupation at Big Bend. He made frequent trips back and forth from Kashaya to Big Bend. On September 9, 1972, he attended a meeting with the California Indian Land Claims Commission, meeting in Sacramento, California. At this meeting the Pit River Tribe continued to resist the Claims Commission settlement offer of forty-seven cents an acre. Richard Oakes was one of the keynote speakers and got up to address the audience. Ronald Anthony Hodge remembered, "…Oakes got up to make a speech, walked up front to the stage, but tripped and nearly fell in taking the first step up to the stage…It embarrassed him…and he spoke from the floor without going to the stage…He couldn't elevate his body." Hodge also remembered Oakes walking with a prominent limp, as he struggled to overcome the lingering effects of paralysis. [23]

By mid-September 1972, construction crews had resumed work on the widening of Skaggs Springs Road that Oakes had protested two years earlier. Richard Oakes was hosting two teenagers, Billy Lazore and Lloyd Thompson, who had traveled from St. Regis to stay with the famed leader. On September 14, Oakes left the house with Billy Lazore and Little Fawn to find Rocky, who had not come home for dinner. When he approached the Gualala YMCA camp, he let Billy out to see if he could find him on foot. Later, after Oakes returned to the camp, he saw Billy and Robert Myers, 23, arguing in

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[22] Anonymous, "Indian Caravan to visit," *Redding Record-Searchlight* (August 9, 1972): 17.
[23] Gail Hayes, "Indians schedule Oakes Memorial," *Redding Record-Searchlight* (Sept. 23, 1972): 2 and Bony Saludes, "Oakes Death: Defense Scores Interim Victory," *Press Democrat* (Mar. 11, 1973): n.p.

the YMCA parking lot. Myers was holding a rifle. Alarmed, Oakes quickly went over to see if everything was all right. He discovered that the two were arguing over Indian hunting rights versus non-Native property rights. Oakes began debating Myers. Soon the argument became more and more heated as the three men stood in the parking lot. Around this time, thirty-four-year-old Michael Oliver Morgan came storming over from his house, where his family had been entertaining friends. Taking the rifle from Myers, he pointed the gun above Oakes' head, and fired a shot.[24] Stunned, Billy pulled a knife in self-defense. Oakes quickly took the knife away from Lazore and turned his back to Morgan, who was still aiming the rifle at Oakes back. According to four eyewitnesses, when the deputy sheriff arrived, he told Morgan, "Why did you shoot over his head? Why didn't you shoot him? I have an M16 in the car that eats up Indians."[25] Morgan pressed further, asking the deputy if a "white man" could get away with killing Oakes.[26] The deputy merely nodded his head, suggesting to Morgan that the law was on his side.

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[24] "Granted immunity in exchange for his testimony at Morgan's preliminary hearing, Lazore said he had been with Oakes on September 14. He said Morgan called Oakes "a stupid Indian" and threatened "to blow my head off." The boy said Oakes took…his knife after Morgan fired a shot." Donald L. Baker, "Indian Activists May Be Unified by Slaying," *The Washington Post*, (Nov. 26, 1972): D6.

[25] Jerry Gambill ed., "Ann[e Oakes Fights Back," *Akwesasne Notes*, 5, no.1 (Early Winter 1973): 34. In the FBI file four eyewitnesses confirm that the deputy made the derogatory remarks. When the deputy was questioned later by the FBI about the statement, he denied having made the remark. U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigations, FOIA request. *File on Thomas Richard Oakes*, 28 August 2001, Washington, D.C., 24, copy in author's possession.

[26] "During that conversation, [the Deputy told [Morgan, "You should have shot him (Oakes) when he had the knife in his hand." After [this the Deputy said…[Morgan asked him if he thought a white man could get off in a case like that. [The Deputy] said sure, ye[a h, or something in the affirmative…[Morgan said, "I don't want to kill him—I don't want his trouble." U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigations, FOIA request. *File on Thomas Richard Oakes*, 28 August 2001, Unknown subject interviewed in Pennsylvania, Washington, D.C., 44, copy in author's possession.

The morning after the incident, Frank Greer, a visitor to the YMCA camp, which was located ten minutes from the Pomo Reservation, overheard Michael Morgan threaten Oakes life. Greer, who had gone on a hunting trip with Morgan, recalled:

> [I] heard Morgan remark during a conversation on hunting, that it was open season on coons, foxes, and Indians'…Disturbed…[I …pressed further and heard Morgan say that Oakes was a troublemaker, and that the country would be better off without him; that he was half-crazy from being hit over the head with a pool cue and that he might be better off dead.[27]

Later that same day, September 15, Richard and Anne Oakes, with their six children, drove back to the YMCA to smooth things over with Morgan. Unfortunately, the situation again ended in an argument and once more Morgan went back to his house for a gun. Oakes and his family left while the disgruntled Morgan searched his house for a weapon.

Just four days later, another strange event occurred. Billy Lazore and twenty-year-old Lloyd Thompson from Akwesasne, who was staying with Oakes, went to the YMCA to get some horses. Again Michael Morgan appeared. He began chasing Lazore and Thomson, who, he thought, were there to steal horses. Armed with a .9mm handgun and carbine rifle, Morgan and his friend Tom Neville jumped into Neville's car to chase down the two young men.[28]

> He [Morgan] found Billy who was trying to hitch a ride on the county road, forced him into the car at pistol point…Thompson escaped by sliding down a 60-foot embankment to a riverbed…Spotting Thompson, Morgan fired. He [Morgan] said he fired into the air to frighten Thompson

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[27] Jerry Gambill. ed., "Open Season On Indians: Michael Morgan, Killer of Richard Oakes, Set Free," *Akwesasne Notes*, 5, no.3 (Early Summer 1973): 37.
[28] Bony Saludes, "Witness Says Defendant Asked Him To Give Favorable Testimony," *Press Democrat* (Mar. 2, 1973: 2.

> into staying down in the riverbed and to keep him from returning to the reservation for help before the sheriff came for Billy.[29]

Billy had been missing overnight and Thompson finally told Richard Oakes what had happened. By the next day Oakes had dropped Thompson off at the ravine to locate his lost hunting rifle. Apparently, Oakes had sent the two young men to get horses so they could go hunting, which is why Thompson was carrying his hunting rifle.[30] Oakes, who was wearing a brown shirt, proceeded down Skaggs Spring Road on foot to find out exactly what had taken place the previous afternoon.[31] At about 3:45pm, Forestry Captain, Harold A. Rose drove past Richard Oakes on Skaggs Springs Road, he was approximately one and a half miles out from the YMCA Camp. Oakes waved at Rose as he passed by in his truck. He continued walking toward the camp.[32] At 4:30 P.M., Morgan had just finished working at the corral and was walking, armed with a loaded

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[29] Ibid.

[30] This fact is important because if Oakes had wanted to physically confront Morgan, why not take his rifle or any weapon? In each confrontation with Morgan, Oakes was consistently unarmed. It appears this piece of evidence goes unnoticed in many of the documents. Especially given that Morgan always went for a gun.

[31] —…five statements of county road crew workers and the forestry fire chief only indicate that Oakes was seen on September 20, 1972, walking, running, and yelling towards the YMCA camp sometime prior to his death." U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigations, FOIA request. *File on Thomas Richard Oakes*, 28 August 2001, Washington, D.C., 12, copy in author's possession. Anne Oakes in an article later admitted that Richard Oakes also had a meeting scheduled for September 20th with attorney James King. They were to meet on Skaggs Road. Oakes was investigating the title and deed to the YMCA Camp and whether or not the camp was located illegally on Kashia land, see Anonymous, —Anne Oakes' Emotions," *Press Democrat* (Mar. 17, 1973): 2. Clearly the FBI document takes a liberty with testimony as Captain Rose later testified that Oakes seemed in good spirits as he walked down Skaggs Springs road.

[32] Bony Saludes, —Richard Oakes Slaying: Trial Moves Slowly On Physical Aspects of Case," *Press Democrat* (Feb. 28, 1973: 5.

Walther P-38 .99mm handgun, along the Y camp road to his home.[33] Soon Oakes and Morgan crossed paths at the intersection of the two roads. When they were twenty feet from each other Morgan claimed that Oakes jumped from behind a redwood tree confronted Morgan, who dropped his shoeing tools and began to back away when Oakes lunged for him, moving so fast that he couldn't tell if Oakes was armed. Morgan drew his gun, aimed, and fired a single shot penetrating Oakes heart, killing him instantly.[34] Forty-five minutes later, the deputy sheriff arrived. Oakes was pronounced dead on the scene; he was lying on his back when law enforcement arrived at the crime area.

A little over an hour passed before Anne Oakes and a friend were driving back home to Kashia, having just returned from a trip to the grocery store. Nearing the scene, Anne slowed down the car; a large crowd had gathered near the entrance to the YMCA

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[33] Most of the accounts state that Morgan was returning home. Yet, it is unclear where Morgan's home was located. During the confrontation on September 14, in the YMCA camp parking lot, Morgan's home is there on the YMCA property. It is also unclear if Morgan knew ahead of time about Oakes approach towards the camp. Road crews reported having seen Richard Oakes yelling toward the camp. It is highly probable that Morgan was not just returning home but was instead planning to confront and kill Richard Oakes.

[34] Morgan's testimony on the event is conflicting. He gives two different accounts, one to the Sheriff's office and another at the trial. Morgan told the deputy, "…Oakes "jumped" at him "out of a clump of redwoods." At the trial Morgan stated, "…he saw Oakes walking toward him, hands at his sides, from the area of the redwoods…" Based on Morgan's testimony, jumping and walking are two different responses making the claim of self-defense at best questionable. Jerry Gambill. ed., "Open Season On Indians: Michael Morgan, Killer of Richard Oakes, Set Free," *Akwesasne Notes*, 5, no.3 (Early Summer 1973): 37. "…Robert Meyers, a former camp employee, said he ran to the scene when he heard the shot and "clearly saw" Morgan with his legs slightly spread and both hands on the pistol Oakes was a blur for a moment…Meyers denied a suggestion…that [he wanted to plant a knife on Oakes' body…Meyers did say he told two other men, "I wish Richard Oakes had a knife on him, because it looks very bad for Mike Morgan." U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigations, FOIA request. *File on Thomas Richard Oakes*, 28 August 2001, Washington, D.C., 12, copy in author's possession.

camp. A blanket was all that covered Richard Oakes‘ lifeless body on the road. As she passed, she moved her eyes back and forth from the road and then back to the scene, looking for clues as to what had happened. Just as the car had cleared the crowd, her friend who was riding on the passenger side announced, ―No. It‘s Richard. I can tell by his boots.” Anne slammed the car breaks, having recalled Richard‘s cherished pair of cowboy boots; she rushed to exit the car, and quickly ran to the lifeless body on the road. She knelt down and removed the blanket. She refused to believe it, she had to see her husband‘s face…no words can adequately describe the emotion that consumed Anne Oakes at that moment. She reached out tenderly to touch Richard‘s arm, his body was still warm but he was gone. Time stood still as Anne tried to pull herself together and began asking officers at the scene for any information. The deputies informed her that they had apprehended the man who killed Richard Oakes and that was all that they would tell her. Anne in horror, watched as a hearse from the county corners office arrived to transport her beloved husband‘s body to the mortuary. Anne asked that she be allowed to follow the hearse, but was quickly left behind while she tried to turn her car around in the middle of the road. Her ―knight in shining armor” was gone.[35]

Shock waves swept across Indian Country as Native peoples struggled to deal with the overwhelming loss as well as the circumstances of Richard Oakes‘ death. The loss and grief was particularly difficult for Richard Oakes‘ father, Arthur Oakes, who was living in Rooseveltown, New York. Several days after he learned the tragic news, Arthur Oakes pressured Anne Oakes to return Richard‘s body to New York for burial. Perhaps in his anger and sadness it was a way for the elder Oakes to have closure, or maybe his way

[35] Anonymous, ―Anne Oakes‘ Emotions,” *Press Democrat* (Mar. 17, 1973): 1,2.

to say a final goodbye. Whatever Author Oakes initial reasons were, he changed his mind and decided to support Anne‘s wishes.[36]

Upon learning of Richard Oakes‘ assassination, Hank Adams and Ramona Bennett carpooled together from Puyallup to Kashia. Along the way they both tried to sort out their emotions and figure out what could have happened to their friend. Once they crossed the state line into Oregon, Adams stopped at a local gas station and placed a call to Kashia, hoping to learn any new information. When Adams returned to the car, Ramona Bennett, who was carrying her new born child on her lap, asked for the news. Adams grudgingly informed her that Morgan‘s charges had been dropped from first degree murder to involuntary manslaughter. Outraged and heartbroken, they continued pressing on down the road toward Kashia.[37]

On September 26, 1972, Richard Oakes‘ coffin was carried from a Kashia Roundhouse and loaded upon an old flat bed construction truck and carried by multiple pallbearers to his final resting place beside his daughter Yvonne on the Kashaya Pomo Reservation. Hundreds of people gathered from all over Indian Country, including many whose lives he had touched or changed, to pay tribute and their final respects to the assassinated leader, activist, and family man.[38]

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[36] Anonymous, ―Richard Oakes: A Battle over Burial," *Press Democrat* (Sep. 27, 1972): 1, and Anonymous, ―Oakes Burial Dispute Dropped," *Press Democrat* (Oct. 10, 1972): 8. Coincidentally Rooseveltown was where *Akwesasne Notes* was based. It is quite possible that while the Oakes family was in New York they spent much of their time with Richard‘s father, Arthur Oakes.

[37] Hank Adams and Ramona Bennett interviewed by author, Washington (Mar. 20, 2009), interview in authors possession.

[38] Some will claim that Richard Oakes was murdered; however, such an assertion denies that Richard Oakes was ever political. Granted not every murder is an assassination (a person‘s politics determines an assassination), but every assassination is also murder.

After he had learned of Richard Oakes' assassination, fishing rights activist Hank Adams released the following press statement which would be reprinted in several national newspapers:

> Richard Oakes' presence beyond Alcatraz and his influence upon many Indian people shall continue to live within the body and soul of Indian experience. Born to the American soil, and responding strongly to his peoples' struggle and suffering upon it, the living spirit of Richard Oakes could not die nor cease to be remembered upon American land. [39]

Shortly after attending the funeral, both Adams and Bennett took the long journey back to northwest Washington. Adams, having survived a near fatal attack on his own, searched for an action that might demonstrate the extreme loss, anger, betrayal, and injustice that surrounded Oakes' assassination. He relied on his extensive national connections and began to contact other national organizations. Soon Adams brought together the American Indian Movement (Minnesota), Indians of All Tribes, and Survival of American Indians Association (Seattle) to plan a dramatic course of action. Fueled by the news of Richard Oakes' assassination, leaders of eight national Indian organizations from both the U.S. and Canada all agreed to meet and determine a new course of collective action.[40] Gathering on September 30 in Denver, Colorado, Adams and leaders

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The various accounts of eye witnesses suggest that Morgan was well aware of Oakes' politics, and in overtly derogatory statements Morgan felt that the Native leader would be better off dead. Morgan also had two prior attempts involving an assault with a deadly weapon on September 14th and 15th. It is ironic that a Samoan, Tommy Pritchard, could be charged and sentenced on an attempted murder charge, but Morgan, an Anglo American, was only charged with manslaughter and set free. The ruling was a travesty of justice, which quite overtly underscores the second-class citizenship and prejudice toward Native Peoples in Northern California during this time period.

[39] Jerry Gambill ed., Hank Adams, "Richard Oakes… Alcatraz and more," *Akwesasne Notes*, 4, no.6 (Late Autumn 1972): 7.

[40] "…an unforeseen event provided the needed incident…Richard Oakes, leader of the Alcatraz invasion, was shot to death…Indian Country was aflame with indignation, and

of these groups met at the New Albany Hotel, where they began to organize the ―Trail of Broken Treaties" march on Washington D.C., scheduled for November third through the ninth, 1972. Vine Deloria Jr. (Standing Rock Lakota) recalled, ―…the caravan to begin on the West Coast, pick up Indians as it traveled east, and arrive in Washington, D.C., during the final week of the 1972 Presidential campaign. The idea was to build up both tension and publicity as the caravan proceeded across the nation, and to present a list of demands to both Presidential candidates in the week before the election."[41] On October 6, 1972, three auto caravans started the trek to Washington, D.C., from Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Each caravan converged in Minneapolis, Minnesota where leaders drafted a proclamation, entitled simply *The Twenty Points*. This document became a new call for reform of Constitutional treaty-making authority, a new treaty commission, the resubmission of non-ratified treaties, land reform, repeal of Termination Acts, the abolition of the BIA, the creation of a new office of Federal Indian Relations and Community Reconstruction, and protection of Religious Freedom just to name a few. After the caravan arrived in Washington, D.C., the officials denied participants' ability to

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the planners of the march decided to move." Vine Deloria, Jr., *Behind the Trail of Broken Treaties: An Indian Declaration of Independence*, (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1974): 46. See also, Akwesasne Notes, *B.I.A. I'm Not Your Indian Any More: Trail of Broken Treaties* (Rooseveltown, New York: 1974): 2. This document testifies that the death of Richard Oakes was the catalyst for the march on Washington, the spark that ignited leaders to take appropriate action. ―…Concerns ran high following Oakes' death. At the end of September, just a week after Oakes' death, about 50 Indians gathered at the New Albany Hotel in Denver to add flesh and bones to the concept of the Indian pilgrimage to the Capital" The eight organizations were as follows: The National Indian Brotherhood (of Canada), Native American Rights Fund, American Indian Movement, National Indian Youth Council, National American Indian Council, National Council on Indian Work, National Indian Leadership Training, and American Indian Commission on Alcohol & Drug Abuse.

[41] Deloria, Jr., *Behind the Trail of Broken Treaties,* 46-47.

hold any meetings with President Nixon or any other candidates. This led to the takeover of the BIA building and a six-day occupation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Demonstrators occupied BIA area offices across the country in Everett, Spokane, Seattle, San Francisco, San Diego, Missoula, Pine Ridge, Phoenix, and Omaha, Nebraska. Clearly, the initial objective was to stage a non-violent sit-in to highlight the twenty points treaty.[42]

By the end of the siege, the caravan having outlasted federal agents, GSA employees, and police, Nixon‘s administration brokered a deal with the caravan leadership that provided immunity from prosecution and over $66,000 dollars in cash to cover travel expenses to move the caravan safely out of Washington. The caravan leaders chose legal protection and financial assistance to return home and fight another day. In the end, most of those involved considered the takeover and caravan a success. The media attention alone was explosive. The occupation had been the first Federal Building and Agency ever to be taken over and held hostage for six days. The national media turned AIM leaders into iconic images; one memorable image showed Russell Means carrying a painting of Richard Nixon as a shield. Encouraged by the Nixon administration and the BIA, reporters flocked in to document and photograph the broken ruins of the BIA building. Tribal leaders were also encouraged by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Nixon White House to pay witness and tour the Bureau. Many of the leaders noticed that some of the graffiti was fresh paint, perhaps a smear campaign to discredit the intent of the caravan. Other tribal leaders proudly scoured the painted walls for signs that their

[42] Akwesasne Notes, *B.I.A. I"mNot Your Indian Any More*, 28-29.

nation was represented.[43] Due to fears of invasion, confrontation, and violent eviction, the caravan had used machines, file cabinets, furniture, and anything not tied down to barricade doors, windows, and entrances. The result looked as if a riot had occurred in the heart of the capital. Vine Deloria, Jr., later compared the destruction of the BIA with the Watts Riots. Rather than an urban crisis, the physical destruction and dismantling of the BIA building stood as metaphor for injustice that was bound up in years of failed and destructive federal policies.

On the flip side, one of the major negative effects that emanated from the BIA occupation, was that Native Nations who depended upon federal services such as aid for education, housing, and health services were now held up for months. Additionally, it took months if not years for the BIA to recover from the loss of documents, contracts, machinery, and the flood of paperwork that flooded the agency in a bureaucratic nightmare. As a means of protection, the occupation confiscated thousands of documents to expose corruption in the agency. Unfortunately, some of these documents involved undecided claims and federal recognition. The occupation served also to divide the leadership of those national organizations involved as well as to alienate them increasingly from both Native Nations and the US government. This wedge would later be used by corrupt Tribal leaders to discredit these organizations and their tactics. Finally, the occupation solidified the ―militant Indian" stereotype, an image that would haunt many Native organizations for years to come. The caravan founded in Richard Oakes's honor came to a near violent conclusion, was this standoff to be the sole legacy

[43] Ramona Bennett interview by author, Puyallup Reservation, Washington (Mar. 20, 2009), interview in author's possession.

of Oakes's politics? It is unknown how this "militant Indian" image and label affected the prosecution of Richard Oakes' assassin, Michael Oliver Morgan. The caravan founded in Richard Oakes's honor came to a near violent conclusion,

During the Trail of Broken Treaties caravan to Washington, an arraignment hearing was scheduled for Morgan on October 12, 1972. A crowd of over fifty Native Peoples and supporters, including Anne Oakes and her children, gathered outside the tiny courtroom in Santa Rosa. Fearful of a potential riot, the local sheriff's office kept a tact squad hidden and out of sight. With heavy security, or the threat of a mistrial, no one protested or picketed the proceedings, too much was at risk. [44]

Two days later, Frank Owen Greer provided the courtroom with a startling testimony. He had been staying with a close friend, Robert Myers, who worked at the YMCA camp. Greer stated that five days before the shooting he and Morgan had a conversation about hunting in which Morgan had stated, "There is open season all year long on coons, foxes and Indians…the Indians were problems until Oakes came along and that Oakes was a trouble maker…Oakes was half crazy and that he'd be better off dead." On cross examination Defense attorney Richard Pawson tried to discredit the witness. He asked Greer if he was an antiwar activist and if he had been arrested at antiwar demonstrations in San Francisco. Pawson hoped to show that Greer's liberal ties meant he was sympathetic to Oakes and, hence, not a reliable witness. As the hearing pressed forward Detective Sergeant Irwin "Butch" Carlstedt presented Morgan's three page official statement into the court record. In Morgan's original statement he said that Oakes had jumped out of a clump of Redwoods and startled Morgan. Then Oakes

[44] Bony Saludes, "Oakes Hearing Under Way," *Press Democrat* (Oct. 13, 1972): 6

questioned Morgan about the arrest of young Billy Lazore and after which Oakes stated, ―Deputies can't help you now. I'm going to kill you." Oakes crouched down as if to pull a knife and he told Oakes to stay away but Oakes had jumped at him so fast that he could not tell if Oakes had a weapon or not, and he had fired one shot, dropping Richard Oakes to his knees then backwards onto the road.

The pathologist Dr. Albert Keller testified as to how Richard Oakes died and explained that the bullet was found at an angle 23 feet from Oakes body. The defense showed color photos of the death scene including those taken of Richard Oakes body. The experience had to be horrifying for Anne Oakes to witness. The final witness that day was James Douglas Thompson, a seventeen-year-old youth who had worked in the camp, a summer job, under Morgan's direction. Pawson asked Thompson about the altercation on September 15th at Morgan's house. Thompson stated that Oakes had called Morgan a ―white nigger." Pawson continued to press the young man and asked if Richard Oakes had ever said ―I'm going to smash your head in;" it was as if defense attorney Pawson was putting words into the witness's mouth. Yet District Attorney Edward Krug posted no objection. The hearing was held to determine if there were sufficient evidence for Judge Frank Passalacqua to hold a trail for Morgan on the charge of involuntary manslaughter.[45]

That same day the Oakland chapter of the American Indian Movement announced they would host a memorial powwow in Richard Oakes' honor at the Ya-Ka-Ama lands in Santa Rosa, which Richard Oakes helped reclaim. In their press release the

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[45] Bony Saludes, ―Richard Oakes Slaying: Spectators Jam Court Hearing," *Press Democrat* (Oct. 15, 1972): 3.

organization declared that within the past ten months three Indians had died at the hands of whites. Ironically in every case in Humboldt, Tuolumne, and Sonoma County the assailant was only charged with involuntary manslaughter and not murder. The protest also was to gain national exposure for the deaths of Michael ―Bunky" Ferris (Hoopa), William Smith (Yurok), Albert Serracino (Laguna Pueblo), Raymond Yellow Thunder, Phillip Oelaya (Papago), Luther Little Voice (Omaha-Ponca), and Leroy Shenandoah (Onondaga). The memorial was scheduled for October 28 through the 30th. The AIM chapter, with support from Kashia leaders like Essie Parrish, had hoped to bring more press attention to the trial of Michael Morgan. The rally gathered at Juilliard Park under a large poster image of Richard Oakes and police escort. Anne Oakes spoke at the rally and stated that Richard Oakes was trying to make Indians ―free." A striking assertion, what does freedom mean in Indian Country and can Native Peoples ever be free? Her words struck to the very core of Richard Oakes' lifelong fight.[46]

On October 16, after five-and-half hours of testimonies, Judge Passalacqua ordered Morgan to stand trial for involuntary manslaughter and denied trial on the charge of second degree murder. The final defendants included Billy Lazore, who had been held at gun point by Morgan; had been arrested and faced criminal charges for allegedly stealing horses. Lazore contradicted a signed statement that Oakes ordered the young men to steal the horses. On the stand and under oath Lazore stated that it was not Oakes' idea but that Richard Oakes had mentioned the need for horses and guns to establish a

[46] Anonymous, ―Indian Movement Plans SR Protest," *Press Democrat* (Oct. 15, 1972): 3; Anonymous, ―Indians To March In SR Tomorrow," Press Democrat (Oct. 29, 1972): 1, 6; and Pete Golis, ―Indians Vow To Fight ‗Injustices,'" *Press Democrat* (Oct. 30, 1972): 1. Approximately 200 people attended the rally.

camp. Lazore had been granted immunity by the District Attorney's office for his testimony, as Defense attorney Richard Pawson made very clear to the court.

The final defense witness was Robert Meyers, who was also at the September 14 altercation between Morgan and Oakes, which had led Morgan to fire a shot above Oakes' head. Meyers stated, "Mr. Oakes said he would burn us out and he would be back to get us." He countered his friend Frank Greer's testimony when he asserted that he thought the "open season" comment was a joke like that used against Polish or Italians—"a pun that in my own mind was in bad taste." Meyers also identified himself as a good friend of Morgan, which confirmed Greer's testimony of Morgan's violent comment that Oakes was "better off dead." In an odd twist Richard Pawson called Ann Marie Lopoca to testify as a Native Woman who happened to be a friend of the Morgans. On the stand she confirmed that Michael Morgan was her son's godfather. The defense attorney was desperately trying to prove that Morgan was not a racist because he was friends with one Indian woman.[47]

It appeared that the defense attorney and Morgan's own testimony formed a generic script that emerged from some bad western movie. The Indian had jumped out from a tree with a knife; he wanted to "burn us out." Even the words Morgan and others ascribed to Oakes appeared scripted and biased at best. It was an important fact that Richard Oakes was physically limited in how fast he could move. Yet apparently he jumped, lunged, and "moved so fast" as to warrant Morgan's self-defense. For centuries Americans had been drowned in popular stereotypes and misinformation about Native peoples derived from movies, television, literature, mascots, and a host of other sources.

[47] Anonymous, "Trial Order In Slaying Of Oakes," Press Democrat (Oct. 17, 1972): 1,6.

Popular knowledge about Red Power was now confined to media coverage about the recent BIA takeover in Washington, D.C., an image that often showcased the government as being held hostage by ―militant Indians." It is unknown how these and other stereotypes about Native peoples and activists influenced Judge Passalacqua ruling. Morgan remained free on his original $10,000 bond.

By November 1, District Attorney Ed Krug added a second charge of voluntary manslaughter. Krug's logic was that it doubled Morgan's chances of being found guilty. At the arraignment Morgan was charged with involuntary and voluntary manslaughter and his trial was set for February 21, 1973. [48] After hearing the charges and having attended many of the hearings, Aubrey Grossman was furious: ―…[t he shooting could be the ―cause…to demonstrate whether Indians are fair game for the white man in California."[49]

By November 2, 1972, Grossman had begun working with Anne Oakes on a legal suit against Sea Ranch development or Oceanic Properties, Incorporated. The suit claimed ten miles of coastline property as Kashia land. Sea Ranch had been in the news because private property owners feared that Sea Ranch was developing a Coney Island theme park next to their properties. The exclusive community of Sea Ranch was located north of Kashia in Sonoma County. For years, Sea Ranch had refused to allow traditional Kashia fishing and abalone hunts on its ―private" beaches. After filing the lawsuit Anne

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[48] Ibid and Anonymous, ―New Charge Filed In Oakes Death," *Press Democrat* (Nov. 1, 1972): 1.

[49] Jerry Gambill ed., Anonymous, Untitled, *Akwesasne Notes*, 4, no.6 (Late Autumn 1972): 6. Prosecuting attorney Edward Krug pressed for a Murder in the Second Degree charge, but the Judge turned down the request and instead charged Morgan with manslaughter.

declared, ―…when they killed Richard Oakes they did not kill the idea to which he devoted his life." The lawsuit managed to accrue more press attention and ultimately was used for exposure of the Morgan trial. Between the lawsuit and the trial Anne Oakes would now have to find balance as a widowed mother of six children. Politically astute, Anne Oakes had learned from Alcatraz and subsequent takeovers. In her lawsuit she knew public support was critical and publically vowed not to remove any individual property owners. The *San Francisco Examiner* secured a brief interview with the widowed Anne Oakes: ―I have never been very political or much of an activist…That is why it is important for me to file this suit, to show white men that when they killed Richard, they did not kill the idea to which he sacrificed his life. The idea is even stronger because of his death." [50] In a Santa Rosa *Press Democrat* article both Anne Oakes and Aubrey Grossman asserted that Richard Oakes' death was, ―related to his position as an Indian leader seeking to reclaim Indian lands."[51] Considering that the District Attorney Office lacked training in Federal Indian Law, the Sea Ranch press exposure was a way for Anne Oakes and Grossman to keep press attention on the trial. If all eyes were watching, public outrage and pressure might force a guilty verdict.

Seven men and five women were selected by the defense and prosecution for the jury to determine if Michael Oliver Morgan was guilty of manslaughter, not murder. Anne watched with disdain as the jury was selected. Not one Native person was selected

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[50] Jerry Gambill ed., Anonymous, ―Anne Oakes Fights Back," *Akwesasne Notes*, Early Winter, 1973, 34. SFSU Archives, News Clippings—Alcatraz Takeover, Anonymous, ―Oakes widow sues for Land," *San Francisco Examiner*, Nov. 3, 1972, 44.
[51] Anonymous, ―Sea Ranch Issue To Board Tuesday," *Press Democrat* (Oct. 30, 1972): 2; UPI, ―Mrs. Oakes Sues To Get Indians Sea Ranch Coast," *Press Democrat* (Nov. 3, 1972): 1; Anonymous, ―Mrs. Ann Oakes: She Takes Torch From Slain Husband," Press Democrat (Nov. 5, 1972): 11.

for jury duty. At five foot nine and slightly balding, Morgan appeared at the trial. He was clean shaven, dressed in a button down oxford shirt, a tan jacket, and dress slacks; he kept his eyes on Richard Pawson, as Pawson gave an opening statement to the jury. In a courtroom trial first impressions are priceless, a fact that Morgan had to exploit by not appearing as a killer. Pawson urged the jury to view Morgan as ―presumed innocent," despite his arrest, and to believe that the shooting was the result of a ―sudden quarrel or heat of passion." District Attorney Edward Krug asked for a delay in his opening remarks. He was unprepared and thought the jury selection would have taken longer for such an important trial. Pawson objected but he was overruled by Superior Court Judge John Moskowitz.[52]

The next day District Attorney Edward Krug made his opening statement. He charged that Morgan had a motive for killing Richard Oakes, which was ―racial bias and prejudice." Krug reiterated the fact that the voluntary manslaughter charge is defined as a ―specific intent" to commit a criminal act. Under this definition Krug revealed to the court that before the fatal shooting, Morgan, had inquired of the Sheriff as to how someone might justify the murder of Richard Oakes. After Krug's forty-five minute opening statement, Pawson quickly rose to his feet to declare a mistrial, a swift tactic to strike doubt in the jury's mind. He further objected to Oakes being referred to as a ―political activist in Indian rights." Pawson also wanted to establish reasonable doubt,

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[52] Bony Saludes, ―7 Men, 5 Women To Decide Morgan Case," Press Democrat (Feb. 23, 1973): 2. ―The Jurors: Mrs. Lucille F. Bateman, Petaluma; Mrs. Judith Bunting, Santa Rosa; Carl L. Ipsen, Rohnert Park; Mrs. Alice M. Lee, Santa Rosa; August A. Livenais Jr., Santa Rosa; Jeannette I. Morgan, Santa Rosa; Martin J. Nelson, Petaluma; Edwin R. Skeppstorm, Fetters Springs; Mrs. Betty M. Sisson, Santa Rosa; Gordon Loy, Santa Rosa, and James S. Sparks, Sonoma. Alternates: James O. Wilson, Petaluma, and Mrs. Beverly Ritchey, Petaluma."

and despite having his objections overruled, Pawson began his opening statement before the court. He listed the witnesses that Krug would call to the stand and began to discredit their statements; he changed the phrasing of quotes attributed to Morgan from open season on coons and Indians to animals and Indians; and he used Oakes activism as support for his violent nature. Coincidently the occupation of Wounded Knee by the Oglala Civil Rights Association and American Indian Movement was making national headlines. Television and Newspapers began blanket coverage as the U.S. Army moved two armored patrol carriers towards Wounded Knee, the site of the 1890 massacre of 300 Lakota men women and children by the 7th Calvary. The *Press Democrat* even ran the headline ―Wounded Knee, S.D. 300 Armed Indians Seize Town, Hold 10 Hostages," as their lead story. Clearly Pawson could capitalize on the ―militant Indian" stereotype.[53]

The first witness was Dr. Albert Richard Keller, the pathologist who performed the autopsy on Richard Oakes. Keller testified that while Oakes had suffered previous damage to the right side of his brain, he was not suffering from atrophy or non use of his muscles. Dr. Keller used life-sized mannequins to illustrate the angle the bullet entered Oakes body, which clearly indicated that Morgan was standing on higher ground or that the six foot tall Richard Oakes was bent forward. Dr. Keller's testimony was extremely damaging and Pawson would exploit the testimony to prove that Oakes lunged toward Morgan and that he was physically capable of such a quick move. The next witness that day was Enrest Ohlson Jr., who was the last person to see Richard Oakes alive. He had been driving down Skagg Springs Road about 4:00pm when he saw Richard Oakes, not

[53] Bony Saludes, ―Oakes Slaying Case: Race Bias Called Motive," *Press Democrat* (Feb. 25, 1973): 7.

walking but jogging toward the camp. Oakes thumbed a ride and Ohlson proceeded a short distance down the road and dropped Oakes off. When Richard Oakes exited the car he said ―Thank you, sir." When Ohlson returned after 5:00pm on his way to work in Healdsburg, he saw a body covered by a blanket and two men walking away, and he continued to drive on, not knowing that was Richard Oakes. [54]

The next day the trial endured objection after objection from defense attorney Richard Pawson. District Attorney Krug had called two witnesses, Harold A. Rose, the forestry captain, and Judy Hagel the sheriff's dispatcher, to testify. Krug tried to ask Rose about a previous conversation he had had with Oakes to reveal that Oakes had meant no ill will toward Morgan. Judge Moskowitz sided with the defense and the testimony was not allowed. A reading of the original dispatch record phoned in by Robert Myer was also blocked by Judge Moskowitz, on objection from Pawson. Krug was being hard pressed to make his case. At every turn Pawson relied on stereotypes and misinformation to supplement doubt. When Robert Vollmer testified as a technician for the sheriff's department, he used drawings and full color photographs to demonstrate the distance between Morgan, Oakes, and the redwood tree. Vollmer also was asked about the location of a yellow beaded medicine bag that Oakes wore under his shirt. Pawson tried to imply that the pouch may have contained drugs, using anything to discredit Richard Oakes. Interestingly, Vollmer testified that it was unclear as to the cause of matted grass near the redwood tree in question, but that Oakes was found to have traces of metal, or contact with steel, on the base of his index finger. Since Oakes was unarmed Vollmer was unclear about how to interpret these findings. Had Richard Oakes tried to grab

[54] Ibid, 7.

Morgan's gun? Rather than speculate or face another objection, Krug left the testimony to resonate with the jury. [55]

All the while the Wounded Knee occupation continued to make national headlines as gun fire was exchanged daily. On the third day of the trial, Sheriff Detective Sergeant Irwin "Butch" Carlstedt read the three-page signed statement he took from Morgan on the day of the shooting. He added that when he arrived on the scene he examined the grass behind the redwood and it was matted as if someone had walked over the grass. The murder weapon, a Walther P38 9 millimeter automatic handgun, was also entered into the court as evidence.[56] The state ballistic expert, Harry Johnson, claimed that Morgan was at least, "three feet or further away," from Oakes when the fatal shot was fired. Johnson mentioned that the bullet hole in Oakes' chest was larger than the exit wound on his back, but confirmed that Oakes was shot in the chest not the back as some had speculated. The District Attorney failed to point out that, in a previously encounter with Morgan Oakes had turned his back to Morgan when he had pointed a gun at him. Anne Oakes bore witness to the entire proceedings, everyday reliving the nightmare of that tragic day.[57]

On March 2, 1973, the fourth day into the trial, Robert Myers, who had perjured his testimony during the hearings, took the stand. Myers testified that, "...he ran from the

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[55] Bony Saludes, "Richard Oakes Slaying: Trial Moves Slowly On Physical Aspects of Case," *Press Democrat* (Feb. 28, 1973): 5.

[56] The Walther P38 9 millimeter was an automatic gun similar in design to the German Luger and was manufactured in Nazi Germany. Walther was liquidated and sold off to pay for war reparations at the close of World War II. How did Morgan come to own this rare gun, was it a gift, inherited, or purchased? As a collectible German gun it is likely that the gun lacked any paper trail to follow, an untraceable gun. In the coverage of the trial it appears this line of questioning was a loose end or completely avoided by DA Krug.

[57] Bony Saludes, "Defendant's Version of Why He Killed Oakes," *Press Democrat* (Mar. 1, 1973): 1, 14.

camp corrals to Skagg Springs Road a distance of almost 400 feet, when he heard ―angry, loud voices…As he approached the county road…he saw Morgan…standing facing the road, his legs spread apart and with both hands extended in front of him, holding a gun…Just before he heard the report of a gunshot…he ―thought" he saw a brown ―blur" coming from a clump of bushes to the left of Morgan." While on the stand Myers admitted that the testimony he provided during the hearing was less than truthful. He had concealed the truth about the time between the argument he heard and the time he arrived to witness the shooting. Myers also told the court that Morgan had asked Myers, in his testimony, to shorten the amount of time to reinforce the heat of the moment argument. In his testimony Myers continued to recall the events of September 14 and 15. Myers statements resembled his hearing testimony except for a conversation between Frank Greer and Morgan that he recalled at the trail. During breakfast Greer pressed Morgan for information on hunting seasons in California and Morgan‘s reply was smiling when he stated that ―There‘s open season on coons and Indians." Myers recalled that Greer was in absolute shock and had labeled Oakes as a ―troublemaker," stating that he was better off dead." Robert Myers testimony revealed two key points—Morgan was a racist and Oakes would be better off dead. Clearly Myer‘s testimony provided further evidence that Morgan was first asking others to conceal the truth, and he was also well aware of Richard Oakes‘ politics and reputation as a Native rights advocate and leader.[58]

The next day national attention focused on New Mexico, where the Kiva Club President Larry Casuse and Robert Nakaidinae, both Dine students from the University of

[58] Bony Saludes, ―Richard Oakes Slaying: Witness Says Defendant Asked Him To Give Favorable Testimony," *Press Democrat* (Mar. 2, 1973): 2.

New Mexico (UNM) had kidnapped at gunpoint Gallup Mayor, Emmett Garcia. After an intense escape in which the Mayor jumped through a plate glass while he was shot in the back with a shotgun, local police unleashed a flurry of gunfire on the sporting goods store. In the end, Larry Casuse the once vibrant student leader at UNM, was killed in the gun battle and Robert Nakaidinae taken prisoner. Casuse had tried to lead a student campaign to prevent the appointment of the Mayor to the board of Regents at UNM. The mayor was known by local Navajo in the border town of Gallup for exploiting Native liquor sales. The kidnapping attracted national press attention, the local *Press Democrat* followed suit and ran the headline as, ―New Mexico Mayor Indians in Kidnap." As all Indian activists must be the same, public support and opinion in the Morgan trial had ample conjecture to label Oakes as just another ―militant Indian." [59]

A stunning move by District Attorney Krug put Anne Oakes on the stand to offer testimony about her husband's physical condition prior to the shooting. She mentioned that Richard Oakes had double vision and was unable to walk properly until 1970, and that he had had unsuccessful eye surgery at the University of California Medical Center in San Francisco in June of 1972. Anne Oakes also conveyed to the jury and court that Richard Oakes suffered from incredible physical pain on his left side. That he was incapable of lifting any heavy object before he was murdered. His physical condition was such that he was not able to act as an aggressor. Continuing in a controlled line of questioning, Krug asked her about the medicine bag. She remembered that the necklace was broken when she received it from the coroner, Krug inferred that the bullet upon hitting the beaded strand expanded causing the entry hole of the bullet to be much larger

[59] UPI, ―New Mexico Mayor Indians in Kidnap," *Press Democrat* (Mar. 2, 1973): 11

than the exit hole. It must have taken every ounce of energy for Anne to sit across from her husband's killer. After Anne Oakes stepped down from the stand, Krug called Mrs. Phyllis McMillan, a cook at the YMCA camp, to testify. Mrs. McMillan, who was a witness to the September 14 altercation between Billy Lazore, Richard Oakes, Robert Myers, and Micheal Morgan, said Richard was not in possession of a knife when Morgan aimed the rifle at Oakes. Krug then rested his case against Morgan.[60]

Defense Attorney Richard Pawson put Michael Morgan on the stand. On March 7, 1973, Morgan provided his brief thirty minute testimony of how the events of September 14 and 15 unfolded. Morgan stated that he first met Richard at a Christmas party on the Kashia Reservation in 1971. The next time he saw Richard Oakes was on September 14, when Morgan pulled a rifle on Richard Oakes. Morgan nervously answered Pawson's question, his face fluctuated between pale and flush. Morgan's story had changed very little from his original testimony, and Pawson then relied on secondary witnesses such as Bony Saludes, a *Press Democrat* reporter who was covering the trial, who remembered Richard Oakes from the Kashia roadblock in 1970. The reporter confirmed that Oakes had a unique way of walking, a limp, "he walked slow, deliberately," said Saludes, which clearly attacked the credibility of Morgan's story.[61]

Just one day later, for a second time, Morgan took the stand to recount what had happened the day he shot Richard Oakes. On the stand Morgan changed his testimony considerably from his original statement. Morgan claimed that Oakes had not jumped

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[60] Anonymous, "Oakes Widow: He Wasn't Physically Able to Attack," *Press Democrat* (Mar. 4, 1973): 2.
[61] Bony Saludes, "The Oakes Killing: Defendant Tells How The Animosity Built Up," *Press Democrat* (Mar. 8, 1973): 2.

from behind the Redwood tree, but that he first saw Oakes walking toward him with his hands to his sides. He countered Robert Myer‘s testimony that he stood in a fixed firing stance. Morgan stated that Oakes crouched down then lunged forward taking two to three steps toward Morgan before he fired the gun and Oakes fell to his knees. Krug challenged Morgan‘s testimony when he pointed out that his story was not consistent with how Oakes‘ body was found at the scene. Morgan then changed his mind instead claiming that Richard Oakes had ―squatted” before he fell backwards. As the questioning continued Morgan, relayed how in one motion he drew the gun from his waistband with his right hand, cocked it with his left, aimed and fired the fatal shot in self defense. The timing of his court room statement drastically conflicted with his original testimony, as Krug pointed out to the jury. Morgan denied the racial slurs and said that someone else had made those comments about the open season, ―and I agreed with him.” Morgan also refuted previous witness testimony when he stated that his exact words were, ―some Indians are real trouble makers, like Richard Oakes…This country is better off without people like that.” Morgan‘s closing statement revealed that he shot Richard Oakes, ―out of fear for my life.” [62]

By March 10, Judge Moskowitz had dismissed the involuntary manslaughter charge and informed the jury they would decide only the more serious charge of voluntary manslaughter. The judge agreed with defense attorney Richard Pawson that there was little evidence for a conviction on involuntary manslaughter. Krug opposed the ruling, stating that the Judge‘s decision was meant to influence the jury. Judge

[62] Bony Saludes, ―Richard Oakes Killing: Defendant Changes His Version,” *Press Democrat* (Mar. 9, 1973): 3.

Moskowitz imposed tight restrictions on Krug‘s rebuttal witnesses, at times sending the jury out of the court room. Deputy Sheriff David M. Carver, was the first on the scene during the September 14 incident, when Morgan had supposedly asked if he could go free for killing Oakes. Carver, possibly fearful of a civil suit or of being implicated with Morgan, claimed he could not remember the conversation. Carver claimed he had told Morgan that he had the right to protect himself. Interestingly, the deputy sheriff mentioned that Oakes did not wave a knife at Morgan. Anne Oakes was called to the stand to confirm that her husband spent Christmas eve on Alcatraz in 1970 and in New York the following year. Morgan‘s credibility and testimony was at issue, but because Judge Moskowitz had thrown out the involuntary charge he ruled that some testimonies were inadmissible. Krug had also called Ronald Anthony Hodge from California Indian Legal Services to testify about Oakes‘ physical condition at the time of the shooting. Parson quickly challenged the testimony and claimed Hodge was biased because he had represented the Oakes family in the past.[63]

As the jury began deliberations on March 13, a group of picketers began to march in front of the courthouse. Rocky Oakes was photographed holding a sign that read ―Morgan killed my Daddy!!! Murdered!!!" while other banners asserted, ―Is there open season on Indians?" Soon the crowd dispersed under threat of arrest for jury tampering. In his closing statement Krug announced, ―Oakes was not looking for a fight…Oakes had no knife or gun…He only took with him his spoken word and he carries that in his heart…That is all Richard Oakes had –his spoken word. That was his weapon…the angle

[63] Bony Saludes, ―Oakes Death: Defense Scores Interim Victory," *Press Democrat* (Mar. 11, 1973): n.p.

of shot…was proof that Oakes was not facing Morgan but that his left side was closest to the defendant...a damn good shot for a man in fear for his life." Pawson referred to Krug's prosecution as fiction, good storytelling, and he continued to discredit Krug's lead witnesses.[64]

The jury appeared deadlocked during three days of deliberations. Finally, at 3:35pm on the third day the jury gave their verdict to Judge Lincoln F. Mahan, a substitute for the absent Judge Moskowitz. Silence gripped the court room as Morgan scanned the faces of the jury for any positive signs. Anne Oakes waited with anticipation, standing near the back of the courtroom, unable to sit down. The judge handed the decision to court clerk Katheryn Plover to announce. The verdict not guilty fell upon the courtroom like a lead weight, no one moved for several seconds until Nancy Morgan, wife of Michael Morgan started to cry. Morgan himself sat motionless, possibly stunned by the verdict. Anne ran up to District Attorney Krug and crying in disbelief called out, "This is white man's justice…this isn't justice he murdered my husband!" Judge Mahan ordered officers to take Anne Oakes into custody, and she was quickly escorted out of the courtroom. Upon the judge's orders, the officer released Oakes as soon as they were outside the courtroom. In her anger Anne Oakes continued to vocalize her pain, "Indians are free to kill! That's all you want…" She was quickly comforted by supporters and escorted out of the building. Anne Oakes continued talking with reporters, "In a case like this if an Indian had shot a white man, do you think they would have come out with the same verdict?...I'm not bitter, I'm hurt…[Richard wouldn't hurt anybody…His fight was

[64] Bony Saludes, "Jury Begins Deliberations In Oakes Killing Trial," *Press Democrat* (Mar. 14, 1973): 1, 18.

with the government…Not the ranchers or private property owners. He thought if he was killed, it would be a federal agent who would kill him." She felt wronged by Krug because he had prevented her from revealing the real reason why Richard Oakes was on the road. She stated that her husband had scheduled a meeting with attorney James King…Oakes was looking into the YMCA land titles to see if the property was on Kashia lands. [65]

The prosecution had pointed out that Oakes suffered from debilitating injuries, well known to Morgan, and that his claim of attack was highly unlikely. They similarly argued that if the 230-pound, six-foot Oakes had lunged for Morgan, he should have fallen forward from the single shot, rather than backward. Moreover, Oakes was unarmed. Given Oakes' impaired physical condition, Morgan could have easily escaped any assault. Most importantly, the act of carrying a loaded weapon should have been rendered or interpreted by a just court as premeditated murder. Additionally, District Attorney John Hawkes suggested that the:

> investigation overlooked evidence showing Morgan ~~h~~ad developed a reputation in the community indicating strong feelings of prejudice against Indians," CILS [California Indian Legal Services attorneys charged. They also point out that failure to charge first degree murder is part of a Northern California pattern in which there have been three killings of Indians by whites in the last nine months – all with charges which they call ~~i~~nadequate." [66]

Despite all of the many loopholes and Morgan's shaky testimony, he was set free.

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[65] Bony Saludes, ~~O~~akes Case—Not Guilty," *Press Democrat* (Mar. 17, 1973): 1, 2, and Anonymous, ~~A~~nne Oakes' Emotions," *Press Democrat* (Mar. 17, 1973): 1,2.
[66] Jerry Gambill ed., ~~H~~e liked his Mohawk name, Ranoies-~~A~~ Big Man," 6.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps the most dramatic legacy of Richard Oakes lay with the Trail of Broken Treaties. But more importantly, his life served as a model for Red Power from his early childhood until his assassination. Oakes involvement was rooted in Mohawk nationalism that planted the intellectual seeds for Red Power. As a prominent member of the first class of Indian students at UC Berkeley and San Francisco State College in 1969, Oakes and other Native students promoted the advent of Native American Studies. Oakes also proved prominent in the move to occupy Alcatraz, in pressuring for land claims for Pit River and Clear Lake, in assisting in the Fort Lawton takeover, and in training new leaders in White Roots of Peace. He helped establish the first wave of organizational leadership for the Red Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Oakes‘ life cannot be identified solely with the occupation of Alcatraz, even though it was one of the major events in his brief but powerful career. The trial of Richard Oakes‘ assassin, Michael Oliver Morgan, in many ways symbolized a larger trial and conflict underway in Indian Country, a struggle for freedom. From a young age and throughout his life, Richard Oakes struggled to ignite a generation that would maintain the independent and sovereign status of Native Nations.

The legacy of Richard Oakes is also found in the 26 pieces of Self-determination legislation that have led to a Nation to Nation status as official federal Indian policy. While President Nixon repealed Termination in 1970, his administration supported and passed groundbreaking legislation such as the Indian Financing Act of 1974, Indian Self-Determination and Educational Assistance Act (1975), and Native American Religious

Freedom Act (1978), just to name a few. As Nixon established his Presidency to be the ―Indian Presidency," Taos Pueblo regained Blue Lake (1970) and by 1978 the Menominee Nation, through a concerted Red Power campaign employed by Tribal leader Ada Deer, reversed the Termination status of the Menominee. By President William Jefferson Clinton‘s administration, some thirty years later Native peoples were proclaimed to enjoy a Nation to Nation status with the federal government and Ada Deer became the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. It is impossible to provide Oakes with sole credit for all of this change, yet without Richard Oakes‘ leadership one would now have to speculate how much worse conditions might be for Native Nations and peoples throughout the United States.

Native American Studies departments and programs have continued to prosper and grow; today approximately seventy-nine in the United States and nine programs in Canada. About twenty of these programs, also award master‘s and doctoral degrees. Native student enrollment at major universities and Tribal colleges continues to accelerate as students learn their Native language, history, dances, and customs and study Indian law. As a major institution of the Indian City, American Indian Studies departments continue to add diversity, complexity, and Intertribal populations into many Indian Cities. Sizeable numbers of Native peoples continue to reside or commute to major American cities. [1]

The once vibrant Mohawk City of Oakes‘ youth was transformed by new highways and faster speed limits that have drastically reduced the commute from

[1] Clara Sue Kidwell and Alan Velie, *Native American Studies*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 133.

Brooklyn to Akwesasne and Kahnawake. Despite a depopulated Brooklyn, Mohawks still remain one of the prominent populations within the ironworking trade in New York. Iroquois leaders continue to push for recognition in the United Nations and recently the Iroquois Nationals Lacrosse team relied on media and political pressure on the U.S. State Department to protect their treaty right to travel internationally with Haudenosaunee passports. The International Bridge, Seaway Project, and reclamation of treaty lands remain a constant struggle at Kahnawake and Akwesasne. The late 1980s Oka Crisis, in which members of the Mohawk warriors society took up arms against the Provincial Police and Canadian military, was another legacy of Red Power. In the crisis at Oka the Mohawk protected Native lands from a lucrative company that sought to expand its golf course onto reservation land. Years later the President of the Wisconsin Oneida protested a screening of director James Fortier‘s *Alcatraz is Not an Island* at Syracuse University. The Tribal Chairman argued that Richard Oakes was a member of the Warriors and represented values antithetical to the long house and traditional Iroquois teachings. The plethora of misinformation and the lack of a historical biography of Richard Oakes prevents young Akwesasne and Kahnawake, in addition to other young Native peoples, from knowing of Oakes‘ struggle and leadership.

At Pit River, more occupations continued despite Richard Oakes‘ assassination. PG&E and other multinational corporations feared they might lose the battle as Pit River lawsuits reached higher and more liberal courts. Coincidently, a rumor spread through the Pit River Nation to the effect that members could cash their Claims Commission Settlement checks, and that this action would not deter current lawsuits. The BIA supported the rumor, and that assurance pressured many Pit River residents to cash their

Claims Settlement checks. In a scandalous move, the Federal government argued that the outright acceptance of these payments was a vote in favor of settlement. Pit River, through corruption and trickery, had found the political rug had been pulled out from beneath their feet, but they were not about to give in to questionable tactics.[2]

On May 26, 1973, the title to Toyon Job Corps Center, which Richard Oakes had fought to acquire, was officially granted to the Pit River Nation. After relentless battles with the federal government and surrounding corporations, the Pit River Nation found itself crippled by debt. The high cost of maintaining legal pressure and direct action campaigns had taken their toll on the Tribe. When Tribal Chairman Mickey Gemmill accepted title to Toyon, he had to reassess Pit River's future. Eventually Gemmill made a controversial decision to end further action against the government and the corporations. The bold declaration split the Tribe into council supporters and holdouts. The opposing faction, led by Raymond Lego, continued to occupy lands claimed by PG&E. They also added Kimberley-Clark lands near Big Bend, California, to their agenda. Lego maintained a permanent residence on these lands and continued legal pressure on these companies until his untimely death in 1980.[3] Mickey Gimmell resumed his service to Pit River, he remained a board member on the International Indian Treaty Council, and he aided in the promotion of the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978; he also remained a steady promoter for protection of Native sacred sites until his unfortunate passing in 2006.

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[2] M. Annette Jaimes, ―The Pit River Indian Land Claim Disputes In Northern California," *The Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 14, n.4 (Winter 1987) 58.
[3] Ibid, 59.

Richard Oakes' memory continues into the present day. In October of 1996, Tom Sullivan (Mohawk) opened the doors to the Richard Oakes American Indian Center in Syracuse, New York. The center supports job training and educational programs for low-income residents throughout Syracuse. Sullivan reflected on Oakes legacy, "…Oakes dream was for Indians from all over to build an educational and cultural center. Twenty-five years later those ideas are coming back to communities, and some are becoming real…"[4]

By March 22, 2001, San Francisco State University had dedicated their new multicultural center in memory of Richard Oakes during a grand convocation lasting for days. At the ceremony, the university honored members of the leader's family and invited them to speak publicly about Richard Oakes. Dr. Lanada Boyer (Means) and Mickey Gemmill reunited their voices to remember their friend and companion. Near the closing of the festivities, traditional dancers gathered close to the drum, dancing with the memory of Richard Oakes. Honor songs once again reclaimed the campus of San Francisco State University. Students and community members collectively witnessed the continuation of Richard Oakes' journey—a journey to freedom.[5]

During the last several years many of the veterans from this time period and movement have begun to pass away. With every passing they take with them historical

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[4] Randell Roberts, "Eastwood's Tom Sullivan Works for Justice for Native Americans," *Scotsman*, no date, 3, News Clippings—*Alcatraz Takeover*, SFSU Archive, San Francisco, CA, and Ibid, "Job Opportunity Center Opens on Northside," *Scotsman*, October 7-13, 1996, 1.

[5] "Richard Oakes, through his actions and voice, promoted the fundamental idea that Native peoples have a right to sovereignty, self-determination, justice, respect, and control over their own destinies. His legacy reflects the struggles of Native people to maintain their land, identity, and lifeways." Anonymous, "Dedication of the Richard Oakes Multicultural Center," 22 March 2001, SFSU Archives, San Francisco, CA.

knowledge and stories that can expand our historical understanding of Red Power. Mickey Gimmell, who had served the Pitt River Nation, passed in 2006. Two years later famed environmental activist Grace Thorpe, daughter of famed athlete Jim Thorpe, passed away. Before she joined the Alcatraz occupation, she had served patriotically in World War II in the Women‘s Army Corp under Douglas McArthur in Tokyo, Japan. Last year Indian Country and the Cherokee Nation lost beloved woman and former Principal Chief, Wilma Mankiller, who was profoundly influenced by Alcatraz. Countless stories are lost as an entire generation of Red Power veterans are called home.

In 2009, the city of San Francisco witnessed the 40th Anniversary of the Alcatraz takeover. Celebrations and talks commemorating the anniversary took place across the city at San Francisco State University, Berkeley, and on Alcatraz Island. Anne Oakes witnessed as the Mayor Gavin Newsom of San Francisco proclaimed November 20 as ―Richard Oakes Day” for the entire city of San Francisco. On August 1, 2010, Anne Oakes, after a long battle with cancer, passed on into the spirit world. After forty years, she was reunited with her husband Richard, daughter Yvonne, and son Rocky Oakes. In 1977, Rocky was struck and killed by a car as he walked across California highway 101. Despite all the trauma and loss she had experienced, Anne had maintained a quiet life in Santa Rosa, California. She had enjoyed gardening and reading, and always talked about her late husband. Her son Leonard remembered when his mother received the mayor‘s proclamation as a joyous day, knowing that Richard Oakes had finally been recognized. On August 9, 2010, Anne was laid to rest next to Richard Oakes.[6]

[6] "As Long As The Grass Shall Grow!" On this day, August 1, 2010, Anna Oakes, late wife of Richard Oakes, passed away peacefully at home surrounded by her family and

I made my first trip to San Francisco, during the summer of 2001, supported by a research grant from the University of New Mexico‘s History Department, for my Master‘s thesis on Richard Oakes. My tiny hotel room was located only a stone‘s throw away from Fisherman‘s Wharf and Alcatraz Island. I alternated between visits to the San Francisco Public Library and San Francisco State University. The day had finally come. I was going to Alcatraz. I boarded a large boat, one-by-one, with hundreds of other tourists, amid the sounds of sea lions and sea gulls. As the ferry pulled away from the pier, the winds picked up and we bounced along the choppy bay waters. Standing near the bow, looking down at the water below, I tried to picture Oakes‘ swim some thirty years ago.

Pulling up to the Island, I smiled, having noticed the welcome sign. The paint, now a little faded, was still crimson and read ―Indians Welcome…Indian Land." I then realized the irony of the sign. It was the first welcome sign I had ever seen in this country for Native Peoples. Walking between the cellblocks and old structures, I could envision the haunts that Richard Oakes and other occupiers called home. I looked around with other tourists, wondering if those strangers surrounding me shared the same feeling of excitement. Most seemed preoccupied with their headsets that recounted the former

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close friends. Now she is with her soul mate, Richard, her "Knight in Shining Armor", who was her friend, protector, and the love of her life! She never stopped loving him, thinking of him, nor stopped talking of him. Blessings to the family and friends in this transition Anna has made in joining Richard in this long wait for them being together, and the completion of her journey and in leaving their special gifts to all who will carry on in their cherished memory." Anonymous, ―Anna Oakes Obituary," *The Press Democrat* (Aug. 4, 2010), n.p.; Sam Scott, ―Anna Oakes," *The Press Democrat* (Aug. 4, 2010), n.p..

prison days, when America‘s toughest criminals lived on the Island. I laughed when I realized that I was there for a similar reason, when America‘s toughest Indians had occupied the Island. As the evening grew dark and children on the tour fell asleep in their parents‘ arms, I sat on an empty railing staring back at the city lights on the mainland. I was reassured that Richard Oakes‘ memory continues to live on, that Alcatraz had become a sacred space, a memorial to Red Power. On the boat ride back to the mainland, I felt proud even as the Island now faded from my sight. The occupation of Alcatraz had been a success. Today the Island is a living monument and museum to Oakes and to ―Indians of All Tribes.” The vision of Indians of All Tribes and the idea of Alcatraz continues to inspire future Native leaders and Indian policy.

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