

Summer 2011

# One Nation, Separate Spheres: An Examination of Red Power Activism Between Two Mohawk Communities

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ONE NATION, SEPARATE SPHERES: AN EXAMINATION OF RED POWER ACTIVISM  
BETWEEN TWO MOHAWK COMMUNITIES

by

CARLYN N. PINKINS

(Under the Direction of Alan Downs)

ABSTRACT

Red Power activism in the United States and Canada during the 1940s and 1950s is primarily localized, consisting of several tribes or particular regions of tribes simultaneously, but separately protesting local, state, or federal legislation that threatened aspects of their tribal sovereignty. The occupation of Alcatraz Island in 1969 by a group called Indians of All Tribes marked the beginning of pan-Indian activism, inspiring diverse, indigenous efforts to bring about social change. The localism of native activism before the occupation of Alcatraz also extended to intratribal divisions which is illustrated by two separate activist events in the Mohawk communities of Kahnawake and Akwesasne.

INDEX WORDS: Red power, Twentieth-century activism, American indian history, Mohawk, Haudenosaunee, Mohawk warrior society, Kahnawake, Akwesasne, Seaway international bridge, NCAI, National congress of american indians, NIYC, National indian youth council, SAI, Society of american indians, AIM, American indian movement, Alcatraz occupation, Indians of all tribes

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B.A., Georgia Southern University, 2002

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in Partial

Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

STATESBORO, GEORGIA

2011

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Electronic Version Approved:  
Summer 2011

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all Citizens of Earth of all races, colors, religions, sexual orientations, nationalities, either living or dead who risked and sacrificed their lives and well-beings for the freedom and equality of their people and to make the human race a better one than it was before they joined it.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Firstly, I'd like to give credit to God, the Almighty, who has blessed me throughout my life and surrounded me with loving, positive influences that made reaching this point in my life possible.

Thanks to Dr. Alan Downs and Dr. Heidi Altman for being mentors to me, in education and life, and helping me to see history and the world from a new point of view.

I'd also like to thank Sharon, Reginald, Michael, Eric, and Anthony – the best siblings anybody could be blessed to have – for supporting and encouraging me throughout my creative and educational endeavors. I'd be remiss to forget two very close friends: Doni Dixon and LaHura Larkin for their love, support, spiritual fellowship. Special thanks goes out to my little brother Anthony and my boyfriend Matt Powers for the hospitality of their homes, love, and kindness to shelter me during the most difficult and challenging leg of finishing this project.

I couldn't have written this paper without the invaluable help of Dr. Gerald Reid and Thomas Deer, who gave me their knowledge and steered me in the direction of new discoveries and sources. I'd also like to thank Dan Smoke and Douglas George-Kanentiio for their assistance and input.

Last, but certainly not least, I thank my late parents, Willie James and Cora Ross Pinkins for raising me in a Christian home and for their endless sacrifices, love, inspiration, and encouragement. Thanks for believing in me. I'll love y'all always.

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## LIST OF PRONUNCIATIONS

Haudenosaunee (hoh den noh SHOH nee)

Kahnawake (gah nah WAH gay)

Akwesasne (ahg wah SAHS nay)

Kanehsatake (gah neh sah DAH gay)

Wahta (WAH dah)

Tyendinaga (TIE in dih NAH gah)

Ganienkeh (GUN yun gay)

Rotiskenrakehte (roh tis GAHN rah GEH te)

Deganawidah (day GAH nah WEE dah)

Hiawatha (hee ah WAH dah)

Kaienerekowa (GUY on neh RAYG wah)

Kahnawakeró:non (gah nah wah gay ROH nohn)

Akwesasneró:non (ahg wah SAHS nay ROH nohn)

## Introduction: The Invisible Struggle

For all its significant scientific and political achievements, the varied fights for social and economic change make the 1960s an important decade in American history. Americans that had been denied social and economic opportunity by white, male-dominated society marched in the streets to demand equality under the law. Women refused to simply stay at home as housewives and mothers after proving themselves in the workplace during World War II. Their struggle encompassed issues that included contraception and abortion rights, equality in sports and funding, and greater diversity in job opportunities. Organizations such as the National Organization for Women (NOW) fought and continue to fight for passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the US Constitution which guarantees women equal rights under federal and state laws. Dolores Huerta and César Chávez joined forces and formed the United Farm Workers of America in 1962. The United Farm Workers was one of many organizations fighting for better wages and working conditions for Hispanic migrant workers. Blacks in the Deep South continued their struggle for civil rights and equality, adding marches and voter registration drives to the economic boycotts and lunch counter sit-ins. The vast majority of American history textbooks address all of these campaigns to some degree while omitting another significant struggle.

It should come as no surprise that American Indian activism is left out of the majority of history textbooks during this decade being that American Indians themselves are excluded. Generally portrayed as obstacles to “Manifest Destiny,” many historians do not consider them relevant to American history after Geronimo and the last rebel Apaches surrendered near the

end of the late nineteenth century. Outside of the occasional reference to the American Indian Movement (AIM) during the 1970s, little about native peoples in twentieth-century American history is ever discussed. Even for those with a sizeable knowledge of social activism during the 1960s, the native chapter does not begin until the occupation of Alcatraz of 1969. If activism can be defined as any type of resistance or protest used to pressure governments to alter their policies, then some native peoples can boast activist beginnings as early as the late-nineteenth century. A significant portion of twentieth-century native activism takes place in the 1940s and 1950s, well before the Alcatraz occupation.

To find a monograph that focuses on these incidents of Red Power – a moniker given to native activism in the late 1960s – in a broader sense is a rare because activism during this period is restricted to individual tribes or particular regions in which different tribes are simultaneously affected by local, state or federal legislation. Books and articles exist that address these efforts on a tribal or a regional basis, but do not link them to efforts of other tribes or regions participating in activism at the same time. Though these tribes and regional groups waged battles against different local and state governments or even the federal government simultaneously and separate from each other, the issues for which they all fought fall under the umbrella of tribal sovereignty. That separation of action for the same goals is what makes the 1969 occupation of Alcatraz significant to American Indian history. It is the first major instance of pan-Indian – comprised of native peoples from different tribes – activism in the twentieth century. The occupation also inadvertently achieves what Pontiac and Tecumseh

could not in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively – inspire widespread and sustained pan-Indian unity throughout the United States and Canada.

Examining the evolution of Red Power activism from its localist beginnings around the 1940s to its pan-Indian climax in the late 1960s and early 1970s is the objective of this work, though the length of this project is too small to do the history of this movement in the United States and Canada adequate justice. As opposed to examining activist instances involving two different tribes, this work examines intratribal localism within the Mohawk nation. The conditions surrounding the 1968 Seaway International Bridge blockade in the community of Akwesasne and the development of the Mohawk Warrior Society in Kahnawake, despite their people sharing tribal heritage and even familial ties, challenge commonly held notions of tribes being a unified collective of people.

It would be remiss to ignore the rather obvious connection between Red Power and Black Power. The National Indian Youth Council began using the phrase “Red Power” in 1966, the same year that Willie Ricks and Stokely Carmichael popularized “Black Power” during the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee’s (SNCC) Mississippi marches. According to Alvin Josephy, Jr., the phrase was initially used “tongue in cheek,” but had the same effect on native peoples and whites that “black power” had on disaffected blacks and racist whites.<sup>1</sup> It frightened white supporters of equality and further threatened those that opposed it while galvanizing peoples who were mistreated by the “white power structure.” The emergence of

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<sup>1</sup> Alvin Josephy, *Red Power: The American Indians’ Fight for Freedom*, (New York: American Heritage Press, 1971), 14.

both phrases in 1966 is also not a coincidence. As the new medium of television brought the struggle of blacks for civil rights into the homes of people all over the country and the world, groups fighting similar battles took notice.

By the summer of 1966, many of the younger participants in the Civil Rights movement, particularly members of SNCC and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), lost patience with the non-violent tactics of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Opposition to the peaceful sit-ins, marches, and the Freedom Rides became increasingly violent, involving beatings, shootings and pre-meditated murders. Those responsible for these acts of violence included members of local law enforcement and prominent white citizens that often went unpunished either as a result of rigged investigations or being found not culpable by all-white juries. Resentment grew amongst the movement's younger, more militant members who desired to defend themselves against these acts of violence. From their point of view, persistent non-violence did little to change the attitudes of Southern whites and served to keep protesters in the roles of weak targets. The shooting of James Meredith, the first black student admitted to the University of Mississippi, during a solo walk across Mississippi fueled sentiments regarding self-defense as civil groups poured into the state to complete the march. The groups continued to face violence along their march, and even Dr. King began to doubt that adhering to non-violence tactics would continue to work. He told journalists after an attack in Canton, "The government has got to give me some victories if

I'm gonna keep people nonviolent. I know I'm gonna stay nonviolent no matter what happens. But a lot of people are getting hurt and bitter, and they can't see it that way anymore."<sup>2</sup>

Not unlike the youth of the civil rights movement, Indian youth grew impatient with the tactics of their elders in leadership positions. The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) and other prominent Indian organizations held conferences at which they discussed issues facing native peoples, distanced well away from those they represented, and discussed strategies for fighting these battles through the white legal system. The resulting little to non-existent gains frustrated native youth that effectively mobilized to bring about change on their college campuses. Some, including traditionalist elders, opposed using the white legal system as it meant surrendering their tribal citizenship. The founding members of the NIYC had high hopes for their ability to change the lives of native people through the creation of a national organization that enjoyed the clout of the NCAI, but soon grew disillusioned by what felt to them to be inaction in the face of new laws that threatened indigenous ways of life.

Despite the generational disagreements over how to achieve their goals, activists in both the Black Power and Red Power movements wanted to be free of "colonial rule" – the determination of their social, economic, and social futures by, in this case, the "white power structure" and not themselves. Alvin Josephy uses the phrase in *Red Power* and Stokely Carmichael (now known as Kwame Ture) and Charles V. Hamilton in their book, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*. Ture and Hamilton bring up several points in their work

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<sup>2</sup> Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 210.

that the native community have in common: up until the 1960s, many of the decisions affecting both black and native lives were made by white people in certain positions of power; many people in both communities viewed integration as having to forsake their identities and heritage; and that cultural personality must be preserved.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Ture and Hamilton saw the struggle of Indians as being closely related to that of black people, and the involvement of black celebrities such as comedian Dick Gregory in the Washington State fish-ins affirms that they were not alone in their view.<sup>4</sup> Truthfully, many native people before the mid-1960s did not agree with them.

Many native peoples felt that their struggle was completely different. The ancestors of the vast majority of black people came to the Americas as slaves – property having no rights, land ownership, or status that white people had to respect. American Indians, on the other hand, were sovereign nations, trading partners, and land owners at the time of and since Europeans came to the Western Hemisphere. More importantly, the governments of the United States and Great Britain (acting on behalf of its colony that would later become Canada) recorded evidence of this in various treaties. In their view, black people fought for civil rights and respect that they never had. In the case of American Indians, the federal governments had only to recognize the legally-binding treaties to restore their sovereignty. Many of the people who shared this view felt that adopting the tactics of black people would contradict the attributes of patience and level-headedness that Indians were known for and hurt their chances

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<sup>3</sup> Kwame Ture and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 6, 54, and 55.

<sup>4</sup> Ture and Hamilton, *Black Power*, xix.

of achieving their goals.<sup>5</sup> The national attention on Montgomery bus boycott and other demonstrations proved effective in changing public opinion and gained legislative victories for black people. Four months after the NIYC held meetings to organize protests for Indian rights in Washington State, President John F. Kennedy signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, outlawing major forms of discrimination against blacks and women.

Each of the various social and economic movements has attributes unique to them, but it is the position of this work that the similarities between the Black Power and Red Power activism outnumber their disparities. Yet, failing to examine the Red Power movement on its own merits ignores insight that could improve relations between indigenous and non-native peoples. As legal battles continue to rage between indigenous nations, federal and state governments, understanding the dynamics of Red Power may prove useful in resolving these disputes and reaching compromises that satisfy both sides. Most importantly, it is a missing chapter of American history that deserves due credit as being as important as any other significant socio-economic movement.

The story begins in the first chapter with a background of native activism in the United States and Canada, outlining the conditions that led to the creation of the National Indian Youth Council, the progenitors of nationally-recognized native activism and the phrase “Red Power.” It is also important to understand how its parent organization, the National Congress of American Indians, developed and lost relevance as a result of shifting attitudes among the

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee*, (New York: The New Press, 1996), 37.



federal government and native people in prominent organizations, some of which are addressed. Tribal sovereignty plays a major role in understanding the goals of native activism, and the first chapter briefly examines the major incidences of how it has been attacked since European contact. Also included is the first evidence of localist native activism occurring during the time when the NCAI continued to claim that Indians didn't demonstrate.

As the focus on localism in this work centers on events and developments in Kahnawake and Akwesasne, the second chapter addresses the history of the Mohawk nation and explores how these communities developed their individual identities. Kahnawake and Akwesasne are parts of the Mohawk nation, which is part of the larger Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy along with the Cayuga, Oneida, Onondaga, Seneca, and Tuscarora nations. What unites the Six Nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy is their adherence to the Great Law of Peace. Though the effects of European contact separated the Mohawks from the rest of their Haudenosaunee brethren and each other through the creation of separate communities, continued adherence to the Great Law starts a traditionalist revival that plays a key role in the activism that took place in Kahnawake and Akwesasne in the twentieth century. It is indisputable that European contact had and continues to have a lasting impact on indigenous peoples, but the its effects on social, political, and economic conditions in each tribe regional confederation is different, just as the localism affecting Kahnawake and Akwesasne is unique to them.

The third chapter looks at the Seaway International Bridge Blockade that took place in Akwesasne in 1968, and the community's relationships with different foreign governments over

time as a result of straddling several borders. The fourth deals with the creation of the Mohawk Warrior Society in Kahnawake. It is the position of this work that though these communities are bound to each other through a shared Mohawk heritage, Haudenosaunee nationalism, and familial ties, their separation through the centuries gives them a fierce independence to solve their issues alone without openly requesting assistance of other local Mohawk or Haudenosaunee governments. Familial relationships in these two communities result in Kahnawake residents coming to the aid of those in Akwesasne at the Seaway Bridge, and Akwesasne resident helping the Mohawk Warriors at Moss Lake in the 1970s, but the organization was done by people within the communities themselves, which is what makes these events and developments localized.

The fifth chapter examines how the localized activism of the 1950s and 1960s developed into the pan-Indian activism witnessed at the occupation of Alcatraz and in the American Indian Movement (AIM). Contrary to the hopes of pro-assimilationists who believed that relocating native peoples to cities would make them less “Indian,” many native people learned to adapt to urban life while retaining their indigenous identities and culture. Living in urban environments did not leave many native peoples any better off economically than the family and friends they left behind on reservations. Ultimately, it was a diverse group of indigenous people living in a single area expressing shared grievances that led to the realization of pan-Indian unity. Like the civil rights marches did for blacks in the Deep South, the occupation of Alcatraz and various events organized by AIM captured national attention and, in some cases, sympathy and rallied

hundreds of other native people to their causes. This new found unity gained them victories they could not have achieved as individual tribes or regions.

In attempting to discuss these issues from an ethnohistoric point of view, the author makes a few generalizations. It is impossible to gauge how all Mohawks, or any group of individuals, view their personal identities or feel about certain events happening within their community. Certainly there were indigenous people in all of the communities discussed who benefited from the social and economic status-quo. It is not the intention of this work to categorize the feelings or pinhole the identities of everyone in the Mohawk community. But even in focusing on those involved in these events, this work cannot accurately give insight in their identities and views. There may even be less radical or controversial groups or organizations working towards tribal sovereignty or equality for native peoples in society that are not mentioned.

Readers unfamiliar with American Indian issues may be offended by the term “white” used in different areas throughout this work. It is not intended to be a racial term, but rather a cultural one that delineates a set of values and worldviews different from those espoused by mainstream societies in the United States and Canada. People of various races and colors raised in this particular culture can be considered to be “white” or espouse “white culture.” The work also features the words “native” and “indigenous” or some aspects of them frequently in the understanding that some indigenous peoples of Canada may consider the term “Indian” to be derogatory.

It is important to understand that social and legal landmarks affecting native peoples in United States and Canada occur at different times, but while there are significant differences in these laws or events in some cases, there are also many similarities overall. For instance, the United States grants indigenous people citizenship in 1924 whereas Canada does not do the same until 1960, but their establishments of boarding and residential schools are rather similar, as will be discussed in chapter Five. Where possible or necessary, this work addresses these differences.

## CHAPTER 1

### Indians Don't Demonstrate?: Background to the Red Power Movement

For many scholars of American Indian history, the birth of Red Power occurred at a 1961 convention in Chicago where the future founders of the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC) adopted and strengthened the ideals that changed the face of native activism.<sup>1</sup> While there is no doubt that the NIYC had a profound impact on events that occurred at Alcatraz seven years later as well as upon subsequent activist movements, the socio-economic and political conditions that led to its creation are equally if not more significant. The NIYC is not a singular culmination of these factors, nor are its forays into activism the first for native peoples against a federal or state government. A larger picture of native political issues places the NIYC's role in activism in context as a prominent patch of a large quilt that also consists of smaller, equally significant pieces.

Native activism centers on the issue of tribal sovereignty which is comprised of three major components: the right to self-determination, the recognition of tribal land ownership, and the preservation of traditions and culture. Whether scholars agree on when these first instances of activism occurred, attacks on tribal sovereignty in North America began soon after first contact between Europeans and native peoples. It is important to note that Europeans establishing a foothold in the New World approached relationships with indigenous people

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence Hauptman, *The Iroquois Struggle for Survival: World War II to Red Power*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 214. Troy R. Johnson also mentions the importance of the American Indian Charter Convention of 1961 to the formation of the NIYC in his *Red Power: The Native American Civil Rights Movement*, (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2007),33.

differently. The Spanish quickly moved to convert and subdue native populations while the English, over time, concentrated on expanding their settlements. French relations with indigenous people focused more on trade and respected tribal government and culture, but their mutually lucrative business relationships based on European culture undermined traditional roles of men and women in many tribal societies. The introduction of alcohol and other European trade goods altered multiple aspects of tribal life and also inflicted damage on tribal societies. Troy R. Johnson identifies one of the first attacks on indigenous tribal sovereignty as an incident between the Puritans and Pequots in southern New England. In 1636, the Puritans demanded Pequot land and trade goods along with the suspected Narragansett murderers of an English slave hunter and eight of his companions who were killed two years earlier.<sup>2</sup> The Pequots refused to surrender their land and the two sides ultimately reached another agreement. Later that year, the Pequots' refusal to surrender the Narragansett murderers of an English trader ended in dire consequences. The Massachusetts General Court declared war on the Pequots and surrounded their fort and village on the Mystic River. Seven-hundred men, women, and children were killed when the Puritans set fire to the village.<sup>3</sup>

As clashes between native peoples and whites increased as states expanded their boundaries in the nineteenth century, U.S. courts used any documentation available to justify the seizure of Indian lands and deterioration of tribal sovereignty. The Supreme Court decision

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<sup>2</sup> Troy R. Johnson, *Red Power: The Native American Civil Rights Movement*, Landmark Events in Native American History (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2007), 10.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

*Johnson v. McIntosh* incorporated The Doctrine of Discovery into U.S. law in 1823.<sup>4</sup> Part of a process of possession, coercion, and enslavement used by the Catholic Church, the Doctrine of Discovery was a Spanish royal document that made conversion to Catholicism mandatory for indigenous peoples and blamed the victims' refusal to convert for acts of violence inflicted on them instead of the soldiers or governments who sanctioned it.<sup>5</sup> The case involved a land dispute between Graham Johnson, a white man who received his deed from an Indian tribe, and William McIntosh, another white man who received his deed from the federal government. Chief Justice John Marshall, in ruling against Johnson, declared that "upon discovery" Indians lost "their rights to complete sovereignty, as in independent nations" and only retained a right of "occupancy in their lands."<sup>6</sup> Marshall also declared that the United States became a successor nation to the right of "discovery" and acquired the power of "dominion" from Great Britain upon declaring its independence in 1776. It was the first U.S. Supreme Court decision regarding the nature of indigenous land rights. Despite the Doctrine's addition to U.S. law, the federal government continued its acquisition of land through treaty negotiations, recognizing tribal governments as sovereign entities.

White expansion across the U.S. and Canada furthered conflicts with native peoples as the latter fought to retain their land bases and their way of life. In the mid nineteenth century, the U.S. government launched its greatest assault on tribal sovereignty with the creation of the reservation system. Treaty land cessions restricted tribes to a fraction of their original land

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<sup>4</sup> Johnson, *Red Power*, 14.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

base in return for money and subsidies from the federal government. Reservation life forced traditional hunter-and-gatherers to depend on the government for food and supplies and forbade indigenous religious and cultural practices. Indian agents, white men under the employ of the federal government's Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), controlled life on reservations in the place of tribal leadership and distributed goods and monies from the federal government. Tribal members signed official government rolls to receive their share of benefits. The federal government did not hold up its end of the treaty agreements in full, and the supplies they provided to reservation residents were often sub-standard. The passage of the General Allotment Act of 1887, or the Dawes Act, divided reservation lands into allotments, giving eighty acres to a single adult male and 160 acres to a head of household that would be further divided among the allotment holder's offspring. Policies such as the Dawes Act served a dual purpose. The federal government further reduced native landholdings and added to the original treaty cessions while "westernizing" native peoples. The policy failed miserably for the federal government. While the traditional social structures of native peoples were drastically changed, many Indians lost their land through swindling as government officials mismanaged the reservations.<sup>7</sup> The "civilizing" efforts of whites to "save the man and kill the Indian" through the use of boarding schools and changes to tribal governments suppressed tribal culture and self-determination for generations. Also, the lack of economic opportunity and protections under the law kept reservations in crippling poverty well into the twentieth century. Many natives met these attacks on tribal sovereignty with active resistance.

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<sup>7</sup> Johnson, *Red Power*, 28.



The six nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy are a few that resisted attacks against their sovereignty. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, Mohawk communities in Canada, like Kahnawà:ke challenged the Indian Act's band council system of tribal government which replaced traditional councils with those of elected chiefs under complete control of Canada's Governor-General.<sup>8</sup> In the 1920s, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the Oneidas' claim to the last thirty-two acres of land in their aboriginal territory.<sup>9</sup>

Not all Indians believed that resistance to Western culture provided a viable future for native peoples. The progressive founders of the Society of American Indians (SAI) in 1911 endorsed assimilation and acculturation as the answer to native survival. Carlos Montezuma "Wassaja", M.D. (Yavapai), Gertrude Bonnin "Zitkala-Sa" (Yankton Dakota), Charles Eastman "Ohiyesa", M.D. (Wahpeton Dakota) and their colleagues believed that Indians needed the benefits of U.S. citizenship and the right to self-determination to leave the abject poverty and hopelessness of the reservations.<sup>10</sup> Bonnin, Eastman, and Montezuma had extensive experiences living in both the Indian and white worlds, being born amongst their tribe and educated in white schools and universities.<sup>11</sup> Most of SAI's members attended or worked at

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<sup>8</sup> Gerald F. Reid, *Kahnawà:ke: Factionalism, Traditionalism, and Nationalism in a Mohawk Community* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 60

<sup>9</sup> Douglas George-Kanentiio, *Iroquois on Fire: A Voice from Mohawk Nation*, Native America: Yesterday and Today (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2006), 27.

<sup>10</sup> Bradley Glenn Shreve, "Red Power Rising: The National Indian Youth Council and the Origins of Intertribal Activism (Phd diss, University of New Mexico, 2007), 2.

<sup>11</sup> Roseanne Hoefel, "Zitkala-Sa: A Biography," *The Online Archive of Nineteenth-Century U.S. Women's Writings* (Winter 1999), <http://www.facstaff.bucknell.edu/gcarr/19cUSWW/ZS/rh.html> (accessed March 23, 2010); Paula Giese, "Dr. Charles A. Eastman," Native American Indian Resources, <http://www.kstrom.net/isk/stories/authors/eastman.html> (accessed March 23, 2010); Arizona Medical Board, "Dr. Carlos Montezuma," Arizona Medical Board, [http://www.azmd.gov/Physicians Interest/index.asp?profile=carlos\\_montezuma.inc](http://www.azmd.gov/Physicians%20Interest/index.asp?profile=carlos_montezuma.inc) (accessed March 23, 2010).

Richard Henry Pratt's Carlisle Indian Industrial School. For many SAI members, working or living on reservations after earning their degrees influenced their view of the status quo.

Montezuma spent time on several reservations working as a physician for the BIA. He compared them to prisons with the Indian agents acting as wardens. He also described them as "barriers from enlightenment, promoters of idleness, beggars, gamblers, paupers, and ruin."<sup>12</sup> As the physician at the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota at the time of the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890, Eastman witnessed his share of controversies between Indians and the BIA. He observed and spoke out against its corruption and theft of reparations for death, injury and stolen property of Indians.<sup>13</sup> They and other members of the SAI blamed white control and mismanagement for the poverty on reservations and many members believed that the abolition of the BIA was necessary to improve the lives of their people.

Opposing viewpoints on various aspects of native life caused fissures in the group. While extensive time living among whites alienated many SAI members from their indigenous cultures, living and working on reservations reshaped some of their negative opinions. Gertrude Bonnin, who overcame her cultural alienation in her adulthood, championed the preservation of indigenous history and challenged white criticism of native religions in her writing.<sup>14</sup> She and Chief Ignatius believed that native traditions and culture should be

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<sup>12</sup> Shreve, "Red Power Rising," 23.

<sup>13</sup> Giese, "Dr. Charles A. Eastman."

<sup>14</sup> Hoefel, "Zitkala-Sa."

preserved while Montezuma and his supporters disagreed.<sup>15</sup> Montezuma saw indigenous culture as inferior saying, “Indians must be surrounded with that which is highest and best in order to rise above the inherited bad tendencies of the race.”<sup>16</sup> Views regarding the role of the BIA also split the organization. Bonnin and others viewed the bureau as an impediment to native progress and argued for its abolishment while Chief Ignatius and Montezuma believed that the BIA could be used as a vehicle for positive change if Indians served in powerful positions.<sup>17</sup> Ultimately, these divisions inflicted permanent damage, and the SAI held its final conference in 1923. By the time Carlos Montezuma passed away of tuberculosis the same year, his reconnection with the Yavapai changed his opinions of reservations. In the final years of his life, he fought to keep the Yavapai on the Fort McDowell reservation and now lies buried in its cemetery.<sup>18</sup> Congress also passed the Indian Citizenship Act a year later, granting Indians the rights and legal protections that the SAI strongly advocated.

Decades later, native peoples gained an ally in the government bureaucracy that many blamed for destroying their traditional way of life. President Franklin Roosevelt appointed John Collier as commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1933 to continue the reformation of federal Indian policy. Collier, a progressive New York social worker and an admirer of Indian culture, endorsed the maintenance and practice of native traditions and the protection of native land bases.<sup>19</sup> His original attempt at reform, nicknamed the “Collier Bill,”

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<sup>15</sup> Shreve, “Red Power Rising,” 27.

<sup>16</sup> Shreve, “Red Power Rising,” 22.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>18</sup> Arizona Medical Board, “Dr. Carlos Montezuma.”

<sup>19</sup> Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee*, (New York: The New Press, 1996), 6-7.

proposed sweeping changes in four major sections. The first allowed tribes to establish their own governments. The second offered employment of qualified Indians to all branches of the BIA bureaucracy. The third section re-established native ancestral homelands through the abolition of allotment and the return of unsold tribal lands for community ownership. The final section established a national Court of Indian Affairs to hear major criminal cases involving Indians and civil cases regarding individual Indians, tribes, or tribal lands.<sup>20</sup> Despite strong progressive opinions that supported native rights to traditional culture, Collier's proposals faced strong opposition from whites who felt it was too radical. The final bill, edited heavily by legislators, fell far short of Collier's original ideal, but it still increased funding, abolished allotment, endorsed traditional tribal governments, excluded Indians from Civil Service regulations, and allowed tribes to refuse its adoption.<sup>21</sup> Roosevelt signed The Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), into law in June 1934. The "Indian New Deal," like the man responsible for its creation, was a paradox – a law that restored aspects of tribal sovereignty created by the foreign government largely responsible for diminishing it.

After its passage, the IRA found both tremendous support and opposition in native organizations and tribes. The American Indian Foundation (AIF), the successor to the Society of American Indians, denounced the IRA for its "back to the blanket" policies and challenged it throughout the 1940s.<sup>22</sup> Collier also had native support through relationships he forged during his tenure with the BIA. In his first years as commissioner, he hired or promoted young,

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<sup>20</sup> R. David Edmunds, Frederick E. Hoxie, and Neal Salisbury, *The People: A History of Native America*, (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007), 379.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 380-1.

<sup>22</sup> Shreve, "Red Power Rising," 41.

energetic American Indians such as educator Henry Roe Cloud (Winnebago), community leader Wade Crawford (Klamath) and author William D’Arcy McNickle (Salish-Kootenai).<sup>23</sup> In 1939, Collier envisioned the creation of an organization to uphold the policies of the Indian New Deal. Native BIA employees including D’Arcy McNickle and Helen Peterson made Collier’s vision a reality in founding the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) the following decade.<sup>24</sup> Concentrating on the defense of Indian civil rights, the NCAI successfully overturned discriminatory voter registration laws in Arizona and New Mexico that violated the Indian Citizenship Act.<sup>25</sup>

Canadian attitudes towards its indigenous peoples, the First Nations, in the early twentieth century differed from those in the U.S. Most of the Native political organizations that had formed during the 1920s in response to various government actions folded before the Depression, leaving no organized voice to carry their plight to Canadians.<sup>26</sup> The Great Depression hit Canada’s native population harder than it did whites. The unemployment of so many Euro-Canadians made jobs outside the reserves unattainable.<sup>27</sup> Diseases still ravaged the reservations and their residents relied heavily on assistance from an Indian Affairs Branch (IAB) with a severely cut budget. Making matters worse, the Department of Indian Affairs issued an administrative ban on First Nation delegations going to Ottawa to voice their grievances to

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<sup>23</sup> Edmunds, *The People*, 377-8.

<sup>24</sup> Shreve, “Red Power Rising,” 2.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>26</sup> R. Scott Sheffield, *The Red Man’s on the Warpath: The Image of the “Indian” and the Second World War*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 16-7.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

senior officials.<sup>28</sup> The dire straits on the reservations bolstered prevalent stereotypes of Indians as being lazy or drunken criminals. General indifference towards the First Nations combined with the lack of popular social movements to reform their treatment by the Canadian government gave the Indian Affairs Branch complete power to pursue assimilation policies as they saw fit.<sup>29</sup>

Canada's entry into World War II increased government involvement in the lives of First Nations peoples. The Indian Affairs Branch shared their charges with military bureaucracies as native men joined the military. The Department of War Services included natives on the National Registration of all Canadians over the age of 16 beginning in 1940.<sup>30</sup> The Dependant Allowance Board of the National Defence administered payment and allowance money to the dependants of First Nations service personnel. Along with the jurisdiction confusion for the IAB, First Nations inclusion in World War II brought gradual integration to Canada's military. The Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF), despite having a color line, accepted "North American Indians" from the beginning of the war while the Royal Canadian Navy revoked its color line in 1943.<sup>31</sup> Unable to meet the RCAF's enlistment requirements because of poor education and health care offered on the reservations, many First Nations men opted to join the army.

First Nations leaders and communities strongly opposed native participation and conscription in the Canadian military, but the IAB, which chose to avoid involvement in any

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<sup>28</sup> Sheffield, *The Red Man's on the Warpath*, 16-7

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

military affairs, refused to do anything about their eligibility to join.<sup>32</sup> Though organizations like the Native American Brotherhood emerged in the last years of the war in protest, the IAB viewed native enlistment and military service as an effective method of assimilating the “lazy” Indian. R. Scott Sheffield explains in *The Red Man’s on the Warpath* that one of the purposes of army basic training was to break down a recruit’s sense of individualism and replace it with a “group-centered identity and a new set of social norms.”<sup>33</sup> Unlike the boarding schools found throughout the U.S. and Canada, Sheffield argues that the army could be more forceful and wielded greater moral authority in demanding compliance. Also, integration into a predominantly white organization pressured native recruits to conform to a different culture to earn the respect of their fellow soldiers.

The exemplary service of the thousands of native soldiers who fought in World War II convinced whites in both the U.S. and Canada of their willingness to join the dominant society. In the years following the war, federal Indian policy in the U.S. shifted back to assimilation. John Collier left the BIA in 1945 and five years later, President Harry Truman appointed Dillon S. Myer as the new commissioner. As head of the War Relocation Authority during the war, Myer directed the interment of more than 120,000 Japanese Americans to concentration camps.<sup>34</sup> Now the government tasked Myer with the goal of ending its involvement in Indian affairs. The new commissioner responded with policies called termination and relocation.

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<sup>32</sup> Sheffield, *The Red Man’s on the Warpath*, 46.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>34</sup> Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 7.

Relocation encouraged native peoples to leave their impoverished reservations for better lives and economic opportunity available in the country's largest cities. After abandonment, states and counties would absorb reservation land into their jurisdictions and the tribe would lose federal recognition and benefits under termination. For many Indians, it appeared to be a sweet deal. BIA field offices displayed posters of Indians in hardhats building airplanes and going home at night to new homes with modern kitchens with sparkling appliances and television sets.<sup>35</sup> The government also offered a one-way bus ticket, job training and placement, housing and free medical care for a year.

In truth, the policy of termination and relocation was the government's greatest attack on tribal sovereignty ever attempted. Though the reservations forced native peoples to be dependent on the federal government and eroded traditional culture through white education and religious restrictions, they still fostered a strong sense of community and cultural connection. Elders passed on tribal histories and traditions to their children and grandchildren. Some residents spoke their indigenous languages and practiced their religion and rituals out of sight of the BIA agents and missionaries. Relocation threatened that community and cultural connection. Similar to the effects that military service and boarding schools had on its indigenous victims, daily life in racially-diverse cities would force native peoples to conform to a foreign culture. The lack of contact with their own people almost ensured the loss of their cultural identity. Termination ensured that those desiring reconnection with their cultural center would have no place to return. Adding to the assault on tribal culture, Myer and his

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<sup>35</sup> Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 7.



successors strongly encouraged the adoption of Indian children by white parents and rejected attempts to place Indian children with Indian parents.<sup>36</sup> Thus, total eradication of native culture became the ultimate goal of the BIA in the mid-twentieth century.

The termination of tribes and its devastating results began quickly. More than 35,000 Indians moved to BIA-selected urban areas between 1952 and 1960.<sup>37</sup> Instead of finding the economic prosperity promised by the BIA, many found more crushing hardship. Jobs were scarce and hard to keep. Many Indians ended up trading the poverty of the reservations for the poverty of urban ghettos. City life was also lonely for many of its new residents, and nearly a third of those who accepted the BIA bus tickets returned to the reservations.<sup>38</sup>

The NCAI, by now the largest national Indian organization, led the legal and public relations fight against termination and relocation, though it was internally divided on the issue of whether these policies were beneficial to native people.<sup>39</sup> The 1950s witnessed a burgeoning of activism and protest for social change. Blacks in the South challenged Jim Crow segregation with attention-grabbing boycotts, sit-ins, and marches. The victories they achieved through peaceful demonstrations and practices of civil disobedience inspired more groups such as women and Hispanics to use the same measures to gain civil rights for themselves in the coming decade. But national Indian organizations maintained the idea that their patience and level-headedness distinguished them from other groups that resorted to unrest and agitation to achieve their goals. They viewed riots and protests as pointless, choosing to fight their battles

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<sup>36</sup> Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 7.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Shreve, "Red Power Rising", 54.

through legal means and voice their concerns in formal addresses. As late as 1967, during a time when protests and riots were commonplace given the country's volatile political atmosphere, the NCAI flew a large banner that proclaimed "Indians Don't Demonstrate."<sup>40</sup>

The Cold War and the fear it generated influenced its share of policies that attacked tribal sovereignty during the 1950s. As the Soviets made advancements in technology and weaponry, American citizens and legislators pressured their government to keep pace. This competition also included the building of public works. The military gained increasing influence in government affairs and their stamp of approval easily provided funding and support for projects such as the building of dams and the interstate highway system.<sup>41</sup>

Construction of these various building projects in the 1950s threatened the economic and political livelihoods of several native communities in both the U.S. and Canada and prompted some groups to act in protest. In 1957, the building of the Saint Lawrence Seaway prompted 200 Indians led by Francis Johnson, a Mohawk ironworker known as Standing Arrow, to occupy land near Fort Hunter in New York State.<sup>42</sup> Standing Arrow argued that the construction, which greatly affected the Mohawk communities along the river, "blasted them from their homes" and claimed that 2,000 Indians from Quebec reservations were considering his call to resettle their ancestral homeland in the Mohawk Valley.<sup>43</sup> The "Seaway Indians," as they were called by the media, also challenged the validity of a 1789 New York State land

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<sup>40</sup> Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 37.

<sup>41</sup> Lawrence Hauptman, *The Iroquois Struggle for Survival: World War II to Red Power*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 106.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

cession treaty that took fifteen square miles of land from Mohawk possession. The group dispersed after a court order evicted them from the land in March of the following year.

In the same year that Standing Arrow began his occupation of ancestral Mohawk territory, the Power Authority of the State of New York (SPA) stepped up its efforts to get Tuscarora approval to build a water storage reservoir on lands occupied by several of its members. The Tuscarora General Council realized the SPA's intention and refused them the right to carry out their surveying.<sup>44</sup> Undaunted, the head of the SPA, Robert Moses, assured his state government peers that the tribal government could be swayed and encouraged his surveyors to continue their work despite Tuscarora opposition. Political divisions within the General Council made negotiations with the SPA impossible, and the Tuscaroras thwarted every effort made to complete surveying work. Events came to a head on April 16, 1958, when a Tuscarora automobile caravan prevented the efforts of SPA surveyors.<sup>45</sup> The media coverage of the event created an unlikely hero in a young, charismatic merchant seaman by the name of Wallace "Mad Bear" Anderson, who dressed in Plains Indian regalia as part of the protest. The following day, 150 Tuscaroras clashed with sixty-two New York state troopers, Niagara County deputy sheriffs, and plainclothesmen as well as SPA staff, workmen, and surveyors armed with riot equipment consisting of tear gas, side-arms, and submachine guns when they foiled another attempt to survey.<sup>46</sup> Anderson, John Hewitt, and William Rickard, son of Chief Clinton

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<sup>44</sup> Hauptman, *Iroquois Struggle*, 156.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

Rickard, were the only three Indians arrested in a related scuffle. An SPA surveyor was also arrested. The cases were later dismissed due to the national media attention on the protests.

Tuscarora women as well as men played their part in the resistance. Clan mothers organized most of it.<sup>47</sup> They, along with the men, pulled up stakes that marked off condemned land for the reservoir and huddled in front of the sights of surveying equipment in acts of passive resistance. Some blocked or milled around SPA equipment disrupting the survey work and others held signs protesting the theft of Indian lands by Moses and the Power Authority of the State of New York (SPA). When the SPA used high intensity lights to do the work at night that protestors prevented them from accomplishing during the day, residents shot them out.<sup>48</sup> The Tuscarora efforts to save their homes played out in the media, and Robert Moses launched an offensive to turn the tide of public opinion his way. After years of battling in the court and the media, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against the Tuscaroras in a four-to-three decision in March 1960. Justice Charles Whittaker explained in the majority decision that the land chosen for the reservoir was held individually in fee simple title and was not considered part of reservation land.<sup>49</sup>

Other states saw their share of protests in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Construction of the Kinzua Dam on the Allegheny River required the flooding of Seneca lands. Despite hiring an independent consultant to develop alternatives to the plans of the Army Corps of Engineers,

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<sup>47</sup> Hauptman, *Iroquois Struggle*, 166.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 172.

personal grudges and politics pushed the Kinzua Dam project ahead.<sup>50</sup> Starting in 1956, President Cornelius Seneca and his successors protested construction of the dam on the grounds that it violated the Canandaigua Treaty of 1794. They wrote letters to influential politicians and organizations. President Seneca also appeared as “Chief Seneca” on the national TV program “To Tell The Truth” to win support for his cause. In 1960, the Senecas lost their battle and were forced to relocate to New York.<sup>51</sup> The Miccosukee Nation of Florida faced losing 143,000 acres of their lands to the Everglades Reclamation Project.<sup>52</sup> Hoping to gain more support for their cause, the Miccosukees invited Wallace “Mad Bear” Anderson to assist them with protests.<sup>53</sup>

Native student groups worked for change on college campuses and communities throughout the country since the late 1950s, producing future tribal officials and administrators.<sup>54</sup> As part of their goal to better the lives of native peoples, the NCAI wanted to improve the quality of tribal leadership. The future leaders of Native America needed to be knowledgeable about the state of Indian affairs and the government’s role in them. They also needed to endorse the principles of tribal sovereignty. To achieve this, they brought native students together for a series of summer workshops in the 1950s and 1960s: the Southwest

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<sup>50</sup> Hauptman, *Iroquois Struggle*, 110-1.

<sup>51</sup> Johnson, *Red Power*, 30.

<sup>52</sup> Michele Tucker Butts, “Red Power Activism: 1960-1973,” (Masters thesis, Austin Peay State University, 1976), 55.

<sup>53</sup> Johnson, *Red Power*, 30-1.

<sup>54</sup> Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 37.

Regional Indian Youth Council (April 27-29, 1961); the American Indian Charter Convention (June 13-20, 1961); and the Workshop on American Indian Affairs (June 13 – ca July 23, 1961).<sup>55</sup>

The future founders of the National Indian Youth Council crossed paths and forged friendships at these workshops. When many native students and boarding school graduates felt ashamed of their culture and heritage, Clyde Warrior (Ponca) possessed boldness and pride in his culture that many found revolutionary and radical. He was not alone in his views. Other students, such as Mel Thom (Paiute) and Hank Adams shared many of Warrior's opinions. Thom, who earned the nickname "Mao Tse Thom"<sup>56</sup>, was just as radical if not as bold as Warrior.

The most influential of the workshops were held at the American Indian Charter Convention in Chicago in 1961. At least 420 Indians representing sixty-seven tribes attended the conference to voice their opinions and hopes on a number of aspects regarding Indian affairs.<sup>57</sup> Two anthropologists from the University of Chicago, Sol Tax and Nancy Lurie, organized the conference, but it was dominated by the NCAI whose leaders conducted most of the sessions and controlled the debates.<sup>58</sup> A major issue of contention at the conference was U.S citizenship. NCAI leaders encouraged native peoples to embrace their citizenship and use it to their advantage, but not everyone in attendance shared that opinion.

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<sup>55</sup> Sterling Ray Fluharty, "For a Greater Indian America: The Origins of the National Indian Youth Council," (Masters thesis, University of Oklahoma, 2003), 6.

<sup>56</sup> Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 42.

<sup>57</sup> Hauptman, *Iroquois Struggle*, 208-9.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 212-3.

William Rickard had issues with the conference from the beginning. He saw the NCAI as too conservative, too non-traditional and influenced by white politicians and lobbyists.<sup>59</sup> He felt that their control of discussion not only ignored traditionalist viewpoints, but its leaders hijacked the conference from its two organizers and did not include eastern tribes in its strategies. Adoption of U.S. citizenship was his biggest problem. Rickard attacked the NCAI for placing U.S. citizenship above tribal citizenship. Traditionalists did not recognize the U.S. citizenship that they felt was forced on them and had no desire to participate in U.S. government. For Rickard, identifying oneself as a U.S. citizen meant revoking tribal citizenship. Many in attendance agreed that the NCAI, once deemed liberal in the days of the Indian New Deal, turned conservative through its focus on using white law as a mechanism for change and some chose to walk out. Inspired by Rickard's passionate debate and their own desire to affect change, native youth including Clyde Warrior, Mel Thom, Herb Blatchford (Navajo), and Rickard's sister, Karen, met in Gallup, New Mexico, later that summer and founded the National Indian Youth Council.

The NIYC expressed its embodiment of both the fierce cultural pride of William Rickard and the passion of radical revolutionaries through their nationally-distributed publications. Their newspaper, *Americans Before Columbus (ABC)*, was the first militant Red Power newspaper in the country.<sup>60</sup> In his column for *ABC's* inaugural issue, Mel Thom wrote, "We are tired of being pushed down and held down. We are tired of experts making decisions for us . . . We just want to be Indians . . . We want our rights as American's original inhabitants respected

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<sup>59</sup> Hauptman, *Iroquois Struggle*, 213.

<sup>60</sup> Shreve, "Red Power Rising," 5.

and our right to remain a people protected.”<sup>61</sup> The organization’s financial dependence on the NCAI forced it to walk a fine line between youthful militancy and traditional respect in its early years which some of its members supported. Blatchford believed that the student-led organization should show respect for elders by maintaining a working relationship with them. He negotiated a “delicate balance” in which the organization independently worked for change without causing the “rapid change” that elders opposed.<sup>62</sup> Thom worried that the NIYC would lose its independence through its reliance on other groups. Respect for the NCAI’s anti-demonstration principle restricted NIYC action to board meetings, and the frustration of its more passionate members manifested itself through increasingly militant essays and columns in its publications. A chance to put actions to the words they had fiercely talked finally came in 1964.

Starting in 1963, the NIYC decried the passage of laws that severely restricted native fishing rights by the Washington State game department. NIYC members Hank Adams (Assiniboine) and Bruce Wilkie (Makah), both Washington natives, brought attention to the issue and followed its developments.<sup>63</sup> In 1957, Washington State adopted laws based on Public Law 280, part of the federal government’s termination policy which weakened federal barriers and gave state law more power on reservations.<sup>64</sup> Even though the laws passed by Washington State in 1957 specifically exempted fishing rights at the time, Public Law 280, passed in 1953, was a federal law allowing federal enforcement of all state laws (including

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<sup>61</sup> Shreve, “Red Power Rising,” 155.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>64</sup> Gabriel Chrisman, “The Fish-in Protests at Frank’s Landing,” Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project, <http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/fish-ins.htm> (accessed March 26, 2010).



fishing regulations) on Indians and whites equally. The drop in salmon and steelhead fish populations in Washington was mainly the result of hydroelectric damming, water pollution, and industrial fishing by whites, but state officials believed fishing restrictions to save them applied to all citizens of Washington, including its indigenous population. Game wardens arrested on Indians for illegal fishing immediately after the passage of Public Law 280. Robert Satiacum (Puyallup-Yakima) was arrested in 1954 for gillnetting out of season and without a license.<sup>65</sup> In deliberating his case three years later, Washington State's Supreme Court was split over whether the Department of Game had the authority to limit or regulate Indian fishing. By 1964, Washington's indigenous peoples were completely prevented from fishing, affecting their traditional food sources and economic livelihoods.

At a meeting in February 1964, the NIYC decided to break the NCAI's anti-demonstration principle and hold a series of fish-ins in Washington State.<sup>66</sup> Taking direct action in this manner worried Washington tribal elders as well as some NIYC members that the obvious association with Southern blacks would hurt their cause. Leaders like Mel Thom reminded members that the goal of the organization was to challenge white views of Indian behavior, and while he acknowledged that the fish-ins were radical, the NCAI's famous adage of "Indians Don't Demonstrate" was outmoded.<sup>67</sup>

The NIYC was not alone in the fight for native fishing rights in Washington State. The NAACP and the ACLU helped with the legal battles and the Survival of the American Indians

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<sup>65</sup> Shreve, "Red Power Rising," 188.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 192.

Association (SAIA), founded by native residents near the Nisqually Reservation as a result of the first fish-ins, took the reins from NIYC and spearheaded future demonstrations. Hollywood celebrities, Marlon Brando and Dick Gregory, kept the national spotlight on the issue when they were arrested for participating in the fish-ins. After a decade of arrests, violent clashes, and more demonstrations, the U.S. Supreme Court decision, *United States v. Washington*, declared that treaty Indians had the right to catch fifty percent of Washington's harvestable fish in 1974.<sup>68</sup>

The NIYC and its charismatic leaders faded from the spotlight in the late 1960s as they shifted their focus to education as a way to further their ideals, but their influence on native activism after 1964 remained. Though they were not the first group to use direct action to challenge attacks on tribal sovereignty or gain media attention for their cause, they provided the narrative and the example used by Native America's future activists such as Russell Means and Dennis Banks. The NIYC, taking inspiration from the methods used by disenfranchised blacks in the South, gave native peoples another avenue by which to achieve their goals and showed that it could be effective. It also gave a name to the renewed determination of America's indigenous people to preserve their identity and reclaim their rights – Red Power.

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<sup>68</sup> Shreve, *Red Power Rising*, 211.

## CHAPTER 2

### Forged in Unity and Division: A History of the Mohawk Nation

The localist nature of Red Power activism in Mohawk country before the occupation of Alcatraz is not merely a result of the physical distance between its territories. With the exception of Ganienkeh and Kana'tsioharéke, founded in 1984 and 1990 respectively, the unique identities of the Mohawk communities originate from the centuries of cultural and political change that also shaped them. Despite the tremendous impact of Europeans on the lives of North America's indigenous people, the Mohawks and their Haudenosaunee brethren simultaneously adapted to a changing economic, political, and social landscape and maintained a fierce devotion to their traditional culture that exists to this day. This strong desire for permanence amidst facing with unavoidable change ultimately created six individual communities rooted in a common heritage and nationality. Key to understanding the Mohawks' particular localism that defined activism in Kahnawake and Akwesasne in the late 1960s is knowledge of its rich history and culture.

Long before the formation of the powerful Haudenosaunee, or Iroquois, Confederacy, oral history paints a picture of more humble beginnings. Passed down through hundreds of generations, oral history states that the ancestors of the "People of the Longhouse" originated in the arid regions of the North American Southwest.<sup>1</sup> A small band of people began the exodus across the continent through the vast Great Plains before settling for a time on the

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<sup>1</sup>Douglas M. George-Kanentiio, *Iroquois on Fire: A Voice from Mohawk Nation*, (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2006), 1.

western banks of the Mississippi River where it receives the waters of the Missouri and Ohio Rivers. Though they prospered in the region and formed an alliance with a people called “The Wolves,” now known as the Pawnee, the people continued their eastward journey up the Ohio River in canoes. At this point, they split into a number of groups. One went southeast across a ridge of mountains, where they became, in time, the Cherokee.<sup>2</sup> The future Susquehannas and Conestogas continued east. The Tobaccos, Hurons (Wyandot), and Neutrals headed northeast and settled in what is now Ontario. The Erie Nation occupied most of western Pennsylvania while the future Wenro Nation settled east of the Niagara River and west of the Genesee River.

The ancestors of the Haudenosaunee peoples continued across Lake Ontario and down the St. Lawrence River before finally arriving at a place that is now Quebec City.<sup>3</sup> There they endured enslavement for a time by a physically smaller and numerous people called the Adirondacks, or “the bark eaters,” for the way they used tree bark as a food supplement. With the assistance of a great wind overturning the Adirondack boats, they escaped captivity in light, birchbark canoes and resumed their journey across Lake Ontario. They reached shore at the mouth of the Oswego River where they built their villages and spread throughout the region. Anthropologists estimate the arrival of the Haudenosaunee ancestors to the St. Lawrence Valley and present-day New York State around 1700 BCE.<sup>4</sup>

Many generations later, the main band developed into six distinct political entities inhabiting well-defined territories, sharing a common culture and language, with regional and

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<sup>2</sup> George-Kanentiio, *Iroquois on Fire*, 1-2

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Gerald R. Alfred, *Heeding the Voices of Our Ancestors: Kahnawake Mohawk Politics and the Rise of Native Nationalism*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1995), 26.

national dialects. They took their names from the physical features of the areas in which they lived. The Mohawks are the Kanien'kehaka, or "People of the Flint," and are the easternmost of the nations, establishing their territory near rivers and lakes in present-day New York State and western New England.<sup>5</sup> West of the Mohawks in central New York State were the Oneidas, or Onyota`a-ka, the "People of the Standing Stone." The Onondagas, or Ononda-ge, the "People of the Hills" lived west of the Oneidas. Further west, between Lake Owasco and Lake Seneca, lived the Gayohkohnyoh, the "Dwellers of the Swamp Lands" or Cayugas as they are known today. The Onondawahgah, the Senecas, are called "People of the Great Hill" and were the westernmost of five nations. They settled between the Genesee River and Lake Canandaigua. The sixth nation, Ska-ru-re, or "Shirt Wearers," left the region for unexplained reasons and traveled south. The Tuscaroras eventually settled east of the Appalachians in what is now North Carolina.<sup>6</sup>

The ancestors of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy were not the first inhabitants of the lands along Lake Ontario's southern and eastern shores. Archaeology provides evidence of different peoples living in the area periodically for thousands of years before the arrival of the Iroquois.<sup>7</sup> Oral tradition also describes a well-populated continent, but it does not talk about a war to cleanse the land of any other people.<sup>8</sup> Some scholars, such as ethnologist Mary Rowell Carse, argue that the Mohawks were not always warlike; it developed as a necessity to secure

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<sup>5</sup> Nancy Bonvillain, *Native Nations: Cultures and Histories of Native North America*, (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 2001), 67.

<sup>6</sup> George-Kanentiio, *Iroquois on Fire*, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Alfred, *Heeding the Voices*, 26.

<sup>8</sup> George-Kanentiio, *Ibid.*

favorable trade conditions with neighbors.<sup>9</sup> By around 700 C.E., war was an important part of Haudenosaunee culture.<sup>10</sup> The Mohawks gained a reputation of being fearsome, bloodthirsty warriors. Even, the name “Mohawk” is an Algonquin word that means “eater of men.”<sup>11</sup>

In *People of the Pines*, Geoffrey York and Loreen Pinder write that war among the Haudenosaunee most likely developed as a deadly sport for idle men.<sup>12</sup> Their matrilineal society left the responsibility of food cultivation to women while men handled the hunting, warfare and politics. Military conflicts among the Haudenosaunee began as athletic competitions with undisciplined battles and low casualties that, over time, degenerated into a ceaseless series of blood feuds.<sup>13</sup> Groups assembling to avenge the accidental deaths of family members ballooned into war parties fighting in a constant state of war. The Five Nations used these blood feuds for not only taking lives, but replacing them.

The maintenance of population was important to Haudenosaunee societies as it was believed spiritual power, both collective and individual, depended on it. When a person died, the power of his or her lineage, clan, or nation was diminished in proportion to his or her individual spiritual strength.<sup>14</sup> To regain that lost strength, the clans or community passed the name and the duties of the deceased person onto someone else in ceremonies called

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<sup>9</sup> Alfred, *Heeding the Voices*, 26.

<sup>10</sup> Nan A. Rothschild, *Colonial Encounters in a Native American Landscape: The Spanish and Dutch in America*, (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2003), 64.

<sup>11</sup> Geoffrey York and Loreen Pinder, *People of the Pines: The Warriors and the Legacy of Oka*, (Toronto: MacArthur and Company Publishing, Ltd., 1991), 153.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Daniel K. Richter, “War and Culture: The Iroquois Experience,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 40, No. 4. Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, (Oct. 1983), 530.

“requickenings.” In instances in which the deceased was someone of little authority and social standing, the successor of the new identity was usually an adopted war captive.

Haudenosaunee nations used “mourning-wars” as a last resort for dealing with grief, which if left uncontrolled, they believed could plunge survivors into depths of despair and rage that could rob them of their reason and prove harmful to the community and themselves.<sup>15</sup> If other means of dealing with loss proved inadequate, war parties raided enemy villages for captives to sate grieving families. Men, women, and children were subject to captivity whether they were directly responsible for the death of the loved one or not. Often, enemy villages were targets for these raids.

Some prisoners met fates different from adoption. Those who were not apportioned to families after enduring hours of physical abuse faced systematic execution.<sup>16</sup> After burning at the stake from the feet up, the victim received a more expedient death via a slash to the neck by knife or hatchet. The entire village then feasted on a meal that included the cooked flesh of the captive. Archaeology has evidence of cannibalism practiced among the Haudenosaunee between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>17</sup> Captives apportioned to grieving families were not guaranteed long lives. Those who failed in their efforts to assimilate into village society or please their new relatives met quiet and unceremonious deaths.<sup>18</sup>

The seemingly-interminable blood feuds among the Five Nations ended with the coming of the Peacemaker, a man named Deganawidah whose message of strength in unity not

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<sup>15</sup> Richter, “War and Culture,” 531.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 534.

<sup>17</sup> York and Pindera, *People of the Pines*, 145.

<sup>18</sup> Richter, “War and Culture,” 533.

only changed their politics but later influenced the birth of a new nation. Similar to the story of Christ, the many versions of his legend say that Deganawidah was born in a Huron village near the Bay of Quinte to a virgin mother. When he reached manhood, he carved a canoe from a white rock and traveled to the Haudenosaunee nations carrying the Great Law given to him by the Creator.<sup>19</sup> He arrived in their violent and despair-filled lands carrying no weapons and promising that the bloodshed would come to an end by way of the teachings that the Creator had given him. When the skeptics rejected his claim, Deganawidah offered a test of his own powers. He climbed atop a tree near a waterfall on the Mohawk River and asked that it be chopped down. As he plunged into the chasm below, the Haudenosaunee believed him to be dead. Miraculously, they found him the next morning sitting quietly next to his fire in a cornfield.<sup>20</sup>

Later, Deganawidah gained his first disciple, Hiawatha, through a miraculous encounter. Haudenosaunee legends say that Hiawatha lost his wife and children as a result of blood violence and became a feared cannibal. One night, as Hiawatha started a fire under his kettle to cook a human body, Deganawidah peered in on him through the smoke hole of his house. Seeing Deganawidah's reflection in the water, Hiawatha initially thought it was his own and saw the qualities of strength, wisdom, and righteousness looking back at him. He decided then that he would change his ways and abandon cannibalism. For many years afterward, he and Deganawidah traveled throughout the Haudenosaunee lands together, spreading their message of the Great Law to the Five Nations. Impressed by the two travelers and their message, the

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<sup>19</sup> York and Pindera, *People of the Pines*, 146.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*



Mohawks were the first of the Five Nations to accept the Great Law.<sup>21</sup> They adopted Deganawidah and Hiawatha into their nation and founded the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.

The biblical parallels in Deganawidah's story speak more to the Great Law of Peace he established than to himself. Rather than simply being the product of an ordinary man with a brilliant idea, Deganawidah's connection to the Creator makes the Great Law sacred. A system of government envisioned by mortal men can be amended or abandoned for another system perceived to be better, but sacred law is perfect as is. Because it comes from the Creator, adherence to the Great Law of Peace, as it was dictated, is imperative.

Historians believe the first official council meeting of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy convened at Onondaga Lake sometime in either the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries.<sup>22</sup> There, Deganawidah and Hiawatha explained the principles of the Great Law of Peace or *Kaienerekowa*.<sup>23</sup> Not only did the Great Law establish peace among the Five Nations of the Haudenosaunee, but it also defined the structure of government – a government ruled by consensus with a system of checks and balances in which women groomed and appointed the male chiefs and could depose them if they felt that they were incompetent.<sup>24</sup> The Great Law of Peace declared that people were the source of all power and made chiefs merely their representatives. It espoused the principles of equality and individual autonomy. Nobody has the right to rule a Haudenosaunee community by divine right or coercion. The Great Law governed the people and maintained order without the use of police or jails. Unlike the

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<sup>21</sup> York and Pindera, *People of the Pines*, 147.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>23</sup> Alfred, *Heeding the Voices*, 36.

<sup>24</sup> York and Pindera, *People of the Pines*, 148-9.

Christian societies of North America and Europe, the Haudenosaunee have no concept of hierarchy or blind obedience to authority.<sup>25</sup>

The symbol of the Great Law of Peace is a tall, white pine called the Tree of Peace. Its branches symbolize the protection and shelter provided by the alliance of the Confederacy and its roots stretch out in the four sacred directions. An eagle stands guard at the top of the Tree of Peace, prepared to scream the alarm at the approach of danger or evil. One of the most famous images associated with the Great Law of Peace is found in Wampum 57. Symbolizing the unity of the confederacy, it contains an image of five bound arrows, each one representing one of the Five Nations. Because they are bound together, they are so strong that they cannot be broken.<sup>26</sup> Some historians argue that the principles and symbols of the Great Law of Peace impressed Benjamin Franklin and influenced his actions in uniting the colonies against Great Britain. The eagle holding 13 arrows on the back of the US dollar bill may come from the Great Law. Because of the complex philosophy of peace and justice that underlies the Great Law, the Iroquois were sometimes called “the Romans of the New World.”<sup>27</sup>

While the Great Law of Peace’s principle of strength and unity ended conflict within the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, it did not make its members peaceful. In fact, it broadened the scope of warfare by including other nations. The Great Law included proposed expansion of the Confederacy by offering invitations to other nations who chose to accept its principles. If a nation refused the invitation, the Great Law sanctioned that they be conquered by military

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<sup>25</sup> York and Pindera, *People of the Pines*, 148.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

force and pressed to join.<sup>28</sup> United under the Great Law, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy enjoyed tremendous military and economic power over their neighbors. Each nation still exercised the right to act independently of the others, a provision tested by the advent of newcomers to the North American continent.

The arrival of Europeans to the “New World” changed nearly every aspect of life for indigenous peoples and certainly for the people of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Diseases wreaked havoc on most native populations, halving their numbers if not completely destroying them. European goods made tasks such as cooking, hunting, and dressing more efficient and simultaneously destroyed many aspects of traditional culture. For some native communities, even trade negotiations undermined traditional society.

The Mohawks’ position in the Confederacy as “Keepers of the Eastern Door” poised them to be the first in the league to encounter Europeans. Kanienke, the ancestral Mohawk homeland, was a large territory bound by the St. Lawrence River on its northern border from present-day Trois-Rivières to the Oswegatchie River near present-day Prescott, Ontario; to the east, by the Adirondacks west of the Hudson River-Lake Champlain-Lake George waterway all the way from present-day Albany, New York to Sorel on the south shore of the St. Lawrence; and north of the Mohawk River from the Hudson River to Oneida Lake in central New York.<sup>29</sup>

One of the Mohawks’ first encounters with Europeans came in 1535 when French explorer Jacques Cartier reached the Haudenosaunee village of Hochelaga located in present

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<sup>28</sup> York and Pindera, *People of the Pines*, 149-150.

<sup>29</sup> Alfred, *Heeding the Voices*, 26.

day Montreal on his second voyage to North America.<sup>30</sup> When a hard winter that year delayed the expedition's return to France, the Mohawks saved Cartier and the majority of his men by relieving their hunger and curing an outbreak of scurvy.<sup>31</sup> Much later, Samuel de Champlain arrived in North America at a time when the Mohawks warred with their neighbor, the Algonquins. Champlain, allied with the Algonquins, met the Mohawks in battle in 1609 at Ticonderoga, on the western shore of what is today Lake Champlain.<sup>32</sup> The French arquebuses ripped through the wood-bone armor of the Mohawks, killing many warriors and some war chiefs.<sup>33</sup> This confrontation set the stage for Haudenosaunee-French relations for the majority of the seventeenth century. The Five Nations rejected all interaction with the French while the former created partnerships with the Confederacy's less-powerful traditional enemies, causing the two groups to meet regularly in warfare. The military strength of the Confederacy prevailed in most of these meetings.

With their position in the east, the Mohawk were in an ideal location for trade with Europeans. They first encountered the Dutch in North America around 1550 CE.<sup>34</sup> Colonialists from New Amsterdam moved to the junction of the Mohawk and Hudson Rivers to build an outpost – Fort Orange. The Dutch, like most Europeans in the trade business on the continent, sought furs and the Mohawks optimized their location near trading outposts, acting as middlemen between other Indian nations and the Europeans. The Dutch lifted their ban on the

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<sup>30</sup> Alanis Obomsawin, *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*, DVD, (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1993).

<sup>31</sup> Kahnawà:ke Branch of the Mohawk Nation, "History and Culture," <http://www.kahnawakelonghouse.com/index.php?mid=2> (accessed August 22, 2010).

<sup>32</sup> Alfred, *Heeding the Voices*, 29-30.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Rothschild, *Colonial Encounters*, 69.

sale of firearms to Mohawks in the 1640s while the French continued to restrict their sale of guns to native peoples, with the exception of those who were baptized. With their additional military advantage, the Mohawks and the Haudenosaunee intensified their dominance over their neighbors.<sup>35</sup> The Mohawks gained the most of the Five Nations in the fur trade. Their close economic relationship with the Dutch and, later, the English in the latter part of the seventeenth century also gave them political leverage within the Confederacy.

In addition to an expansion of their political influence within the Confederacy, the fur trade introduced the Mohawks and other indigenous people to a variety of goods other than guns. Metal cooking kettles replaced clay pots and were also mined to make projectile points.<sup>36</sup> People chose ready-made paints, which unknown to them contained poisonous metals, instead of traditionally-made paints for body decoration. Heavy woolen cloth called duffel was highly desired as were wampum shell beads.<sup>37</sup> One highly valued trade good with both positive and negative effects for indigenous peoples was alcohol. Over time, alcohol consumption became an important practice in the Haudenosaunee religious system. A complete state of alcoholic inebriation called *Kannontiouaratonseri* was a means of communicating with the spirit world.<sup>38</sup> However, its widespread consumption combined with the effects of drunkenness led to regular bouts of violence.

The alcohol-induced violence was not the only thing to have a devastating effect on Haudenosaunee society. European traders from patriarchal societies only traded with other

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<sup>35</sup> Alfred, *Heeding the Voices*, 30.

<sup>36</sup> Rothschild, *Colonial Encounters*, 194-5.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>38</sup> Alfred, *Heeding the Voices*, 37 and 39.

men, undermining the leadership roles of women. As warfare was an important part of Haudenosaunee culture by the seventeenth century, Europeans regarded the war chiefs as the true leaders of community instead of the peace chiefs, upsetting the balance of power within the political system.<sup>39</sup> Regular warfare and mourning-wars with the Confederacy's traditional enemies brought Christianized Hurons and others into Haudenosaunee communities as adoptees. Sincere in their newfound religious beliefs, these adopted members made Christianity a political issue and put ever-increasing pressure on the Haudenosaunee government to allow Jesuit missionaries into their villages.<sup>40</sup> The issue of Christianity along with tension caused by the Mohawks' dominance in the Confederacy's politics and trade led to other nations of the Confederacy allowing the French into Haudenosaunee territory in the latter half of the seventeenth century in spite of Mohawk opposition.<sup>41</sup> The Senecas, Oneidas, Onondagas, and Cayugas formally made peace with the French on December 13, 1665, forcing the Mohawks to fight the French alone.<sup>42</sup>

Jesuit presence in Haudenosaunee villages ultimately created converts within the Confederacy's members in increasing numbers who incorporated Christian ideals and beliefs with those of the Longhouse. For the converted, Christian ideals did not clash with Haudenosaunee traditional beliefs and Jesuit missionaries were viewed as new and powerful shamans with powers of their own in a traditional sense.<sup>43</sup> Christianity's emphasis on

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<sup>39</sup> York and Pindera, *People of the Pines*, 153.

<sup>40</sup> Alfred, *Heeding the Voices*, 36.

<sup>41</sup> Gerald F. Reid, *Kahnawà:ke: Factionalism, Traditionalism, and Nationalism in a Mohawk Community*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 5.

<sup>42</sup> Alfred, *Heeding the Voices*, 31.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

temperance appealed to those whose families and communities were devastated by alcohol-induced violence. Their growing influence made reaching consensus in government impossible when it came to issues of religion. Converts also faced ostracism from the rest of the community. Influenced by encouragement from Jesuit missionaries, many Mohawks and other Haudenosaunee members left their traditional villages to live in new Jesuit settlements within the territory.

Mohawk political isolation turned the tide of Mohawk-French relations. The loss of the Mohawks' military advantage convinced the governor of New France, who once considered abandonment of Montreal because of near bankruptcy and demoralization of its people, to save the colony and launch a devastating military campaign in the heart of Mohawk country.<sup>44</sup> Faced with an onslaught of defeats that threatened to destroy their villages, the Mohawks reached a peace agreement with the French in 1667.<sup>45</sup>

Around the same time, Christianized Mohawks, Haudenosaunees, and Huron adoptees flocked to a French Jesuit settlement called Laprairie on a plain the Mohawks called Kentaké across from Montreal.<sup>46</sup> It was a haven for those persecuted for adopting the new religion and those seeking protection from alcohol-related violence, especially women. Its policy of banning alcohol, though over within a decade, inspired the Iroquois proverb that translates to "I'm off to Laprairie," meaning in effect "I give up drink and polygamy."<sup>47</sup> The population of the village grew past support levels in a relatively short time and nine years later it was relocated to a new

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<sup>44</sup> Alfred, *Heeding the Voices*, 31.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

location further up the Mohawk River called Kahnawake, a word that means “at the rapids.” Relocation of villages was a common occurrence in Haudenosaunee life to support growing populations and prevent soil exhaustion. The settlement changed names and moved twice more before settling at its present-day location on the St. Lawrence River in 1716.<sup>48</sup>

In 1663, four years before the growth of the village of Kentaké, the French government awarded the seigneurie of the island of Montreal to the gentlemen of the seminary of St. Sulpice.<sup>49</sup> The Sulpicians began dispossessing the Mohawks of Hochelaga of their lands immediately, forcing them to move several times. Ultimately, the Mohawks settled at a village within their hunting grounds at the mouth of the Ottawa River. It was called Kanehsatake, or “Lake of Two Mountains.” A written promise from the King of France ensured Mohawk ownership of a nine-square mile area of land at Kanehsatake in 1716, but a year later the Sulpicians took possession of it without the knowledge of the Mohawks. The secret of the betrayal lay undiscovered for well over a century, meanwhile, the Mohawks of Kanehsatake maintained their loyalty to the Catholic Church and the king of France.

The eighteenth century brought more changes to the political landscape of both the Confederacy and the Mohawks. The Tuscaroras returned to the region from North Carolina around 1715 after suffering heavy losses in bloody wars a few years earlier.<sup>50</sup> The Haudenosaunee Confederacy formally adopted them as its sixth member around 1724. Also,

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<sup>48</sup> David S. Blanchard, *Kahnawake: A Historical Sketch*, Historic Kahnawake series 1, (Kahnawake, Quebec: Kanien'kehaka Onkwawen:na Raotitiohkwa Press, 1980), 3-4.

<sup>49</sup> Obomsawin, *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*, DVD.

<sup>50</sup> Lawrence Hauptman, *The Iroquois Struggle for Survival: World War II to Red Power*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 154.



the first of the colonial wars between France and England began near the end of the previous century. The Mohawks were already under regular attack from well-armed Indian allies of the French, angered by the loss of hunting territories and relatives in mourning wars, wreaking havoc on Haudenosaunee villages in revenge during the Beaver Wars. The colonial wars further factionalized Mohawks and other Haudensaunees and split their allegiances between the French and the English. Catholic Mohawks fought alongside and against their non-Christian kin and both sides suffered significant losses. Making matters more difficult, factionalism within New York, lack of aid from England, and the preoccupation of other colonies with their own self-defense prevented the English from making further commitments of manpower and materials to the Confederacy to help them in their wars against the French and their allies.<sup>51</sup> The Grand Settlement of 1701, created through simultaneous negotiations by the Confederacy and other native nations with the French and the English, declared that the Haudenosaunees would remain neutral in future conflicts between the two European nations and settled territory and trading disputes.<sup>52</sup> Towards the end of the French and then British conflict, Confederacy support shifted in favor of the British as a number of families from Kahnawake founded a new French-Catholic community further south where the St. Regis River flows into the St. Lawrence.

Factionalism within Kahnawake and soil exhaustion are possible factors for the creation of the community of Akwesasne, or “where the partridge drums,” but the reason may also be

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<sup>51</sup> Richter, “War and Culture,” 549.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 552-3, and R. David Edmunds, Frederick E. Hoxie, and Neal Salisbury, *The People: A History of Native North America*, (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007), 94.

geopolitical.<sup>53</sup> The formation of a pro-French Haudenosaunee community further to the south extended French control over the St. Lawrence region and may have also been the result of encouragement from the French. Despite this extension of support, the French lost their foothold in the northern half of the continent.

After settling in its final location in 1716, Kahnawake achieved political and economic independence by playing a part of middlemen in a contraband fur trade between Albany and Montreal.<sup>54</sup> Imperial policy forbade trade between France and Britain, but with the help of Mohawks acting as porters, merchants in both locales managed to conduct £12,000 worth of trade in 1720.<sup>55</sup> The Kahnawake Mohawks' assertion of political independence gained them a special status among Indians and Europeans alike and the power to influence colonial policy in their favor. Their part in the lucrative trade relationship also spared them the poverty experienced by their kindred further south. The community's new found autonomy and economic success did not come at the cost of their culture and heritage. Even though they differed with the Confederacy on political issues, the people of Kahnawake still considered themselves to be Mohawks and Haudenosaunee. Despite the influence of Jesuit missionaries, the community retained its warriors and war chiefs.<sup>56</sup> Yet the blend of traditional and Catholic influence within their community resulted in a Mohawk culture that was uniquely their own.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Reid, *Kahnawà:ke*, 12.

<sup>54</sup> York and Pindera, *People of the Pines*, 154.

<sup>55</sup> Alfred, *Heeding the Voices*, 45.

<sup>56</sup> York and Pindera, *People of the Pines*, 157.

<sup>57</sup> Alfred, *Heeding the Voices*, 49.

In addition to its own individual autonomy, Kahnawake took a leadership role in a different alliance. It headquartered the Seven Indian Nations of Canada (also called The Seven Fires), a confederacy of native Christian communities allied with the French.<sup>58</sup> It was divided into Mohawk, Algonquian, and Nipissing delegations and included Kanehsatake, the Onondagas and Cayugas of Oswegatchie, the Hurons of Lorette, and the Abenakis of Odenak.

When the Haudenosaunee Confederacy threw its support behind the Crown during the American Revolution, Kahnawake faced pressure from both the British and the colonists to join their side. British officials urged them to follow the example of Captain Joseph Brant - Thayendeneagea and the Mohawks in the Confederacy by joining them, while the community's colonial adoptees applied internal pressure to join the side of the colonies. Ultimately, Kahnawake officially remained neutral throughout the conflict, although some individual members from the community may have fought for the Americans.<sup>59</sup>

The end of the Revolution found many of the Mohawks of the Mohawk Valley taking refuge in Christianized communities like Kahnawake and Akwesasne and in temporary residence on the American side of the Niagara River with their own lands destroyed by American invasion and war. The Preliminary Articles of Peace, signed in November of 1782, outlined boundaries and agreements between Great Britain and the newly formed United States, but neglected the Indians that participated in the conflict.<sup>60</sup> The Mohawks gave up their lands to fight alongside the British and were determined to "sink or swim" with them, as

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<sup>58</sup> Reid, *Kahnawà:ke*, 12.

<sup>59</sup> Alfred, *Heeding the Voices*, 50.

<sup>60</sup> "Preliminary Articles of Peace," November 30, 1782, *The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy*, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/prel1782.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/prel1782.asp) (accessed September 8, 2010).

Mohawk Chief Captain Joseph Brant – Thayendeneagea proclaimed in one of his speeches.<sup>61</sup>

Even though their closest confederate allies during the war, the Senecas, offered them a tract of land in the Genesee Valley, the Mohawks had no desire to live within the United States.

Upon relinquishing their lands to fight with the British, Sir Guy Carleton, the governor of the province of Quebec, promised the Mohawks that they would be restored after the war at the expense of the British government.<sup>62</sup> When Carleton asked to be relieved of his command upon learning that the colonies would be granted their independence, his successor, General Frederick Haldimand, then Captain General and Commander-in-Chief of Canada, pledged to keep the promise of giving the Mohawks land and protection.

Brant traveled from Niagara to Quebec to see Sir John Johnson, the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, to claim a tract of land situated on the Bay of Quinte, on the north side of Lake Ontario near the mouth of the St. Lawrence River. The Senecas, still concerned about possible conflict with the new American government and its citizens, expressed disappointment that their closest allies were moving so far away from them.<sup>63</sup> Brant returned to Quebec, after a council resolution, to acquire another tract of land outside of the boundaries of the United States, yet close enough to provide fast military aid to the Senecas and ease their concerns. The requested tract entailed “six miles of land on each side of the [Grand] River, from its mouth to its source.”<sup>64</sup> Brant intended it to be a home for all the members of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy who had been displaced by the war. In 1784, Mohawk Chief

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<sup>61</sup> William L. Stone, *The Life of Joseph Brant* Vol II, (1838; repr., New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1969), 238.

<sup>62</sup> Stone, *The Life of Brant*, 239.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

Captain John Deserontyon - Odeserundiye and twenty families (approximately 100 individuals) landed on the shore of the Bay of Quinte and founded the first Mohawk village there.<sup>65</sup> They named it Tyendinaga after Chief Brant who negotiated the land settlement.

The other tract of land, also known as the Haldimand Tract, became the territory of the Six Nations of the Grand River, home to members of all of the Haudenosaunee nations. Brant's efforts to get the remaining Haudenosaunees in New York State to relocate to the new territory failed, resulting in further fissuring of the Confederacy. The groups at Grand River and New York State (Onondaga) became rivals and each created their own Confederacy structures with its own set of condoled chiefs.<sup>66</sup> The split still exists today.

Almost a century after the founding of Tyendinaga and the purchase of the Grand River territory, thirty-two Protestant Mohawk families left the community of Kanehsatake to found the Wahta Mohawk Territory in the Muskoka region of central Ontario.<sup>67</sup> Civil, economic and religious differences caused the families to agree to settle on lands bought from the government in the spring of 1882.<sup>68</sup> The families made the trip in the fall of 1881 and arrived in October before the harsh Canadian winter.

In a way, the Great Law of Peace that united the People of the Longhouse played a part in its political and social divisions. Its need of consensus for effective government combined with its want of expansion paved the way for the creation of new communities separated by

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<sup>65</sup> Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory. <http://www.tyendinaga.net/history> (accessed September 7, 2010).

<sup>66</sup> York and Pindera, *People of the Pines*, 157.

<sup>67</sup> Alexander von Gernet, *The Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples*, s.vv. "aboriginals," "Iroquoians," <http://www.multiculturalcanada.ca/Encyclopedia/A-Z/a6/2> (accessed September 7, 2010).

<sup>68</sup> Wahta Mohawk Territory, <http://wahta.ca/history.html> (accessed September 7, 2010).

religious belief. Taiaiake Alfred writes in *Heeding the Voices of Our Ancestors: Kahnawake Mohawk Politics and the Rise of Native Nationalism* that communities like Kahnawake, Kanehsatake, and Akwesasne would have been created even without the change in Jesuit missionary policy to separate Christian Indians from non-Christians. Political disputes often became polarizing arguments, resulting in the need of fracturing large communities into small, homogeneous units along the lines of agreement.<sup>69</sup> Had Christianity not been a divisive factor in many villages, these settlements may have been created around others.

The localism that exists in historically Christian towns such as Kahnawake and Akwesasne is the result of their social and political separation due to their adaptation of faith. Their familial ties as well as political and social brotherhood provided a shared, but different experience than that experienced by their non-Christianized Mohawk and Haudenosaunee kin. The decline of the fur trade drastically changed the lives of all Mohawk settlements in the nineteenth century and beyond and leveled economic advantage across the board, especially for Kahnawake. Still, their individuality and fierce independence remained, playing a crucial part in their collective fight for tribal sovereignty in the twentieth century.

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<sup>69</sup> Alfred, *Heeding the Voices*, 41-2.

## CHAPTER 3

### The Akwesasne Bridge of “Tries”: The 1968 Seaway International Bridge Blockade

The Seaway International Bridge stretches across the Saint Lawrence Seaway, linking Cornwall, Ontario, to Massena, New York. According to the Seaway International Bridge Corporation, each year it hosts 120,000 commercial and 2.3 million passenger trips across its two bridges and the border that separates the United States from Canada.<sup>1</sup> The major commercial corridor also runs through the Mohawk territory of Akwesasne which also links the two nations.

Akwesasne (“where the partridge drums”), also known as St. Regis, spans a number of borders. In addition to the federal border separating the United States and Canada, the provinces of Ontario and Quebec and the state of New York also meet within its boundaries. Akwesasneró:non (the people of Akwesasne), since its founding in the mid-eighteenth century, continue to maintain their identity as a unified community in spite of the threat of internal divisions and social obstacles created by the federal, provincial, and state jurisdictions that have formed within it throughout the centuries<sup>2</sup>. Simply visiting friends or relatives, going to work, or applying for health benefits in the Akwesasne community involves the hassle of dealing with border patrols or enduring miles of bureaucratic red tape from two or more governments.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Seaway International Bridge Corporation. [http://www.sibc.ca/corporate/corporate\\_e.html](http://www.sibc.ca/corporate/corporate_e.html).

<sup>2</sup> Reid, Gerald F. *Kahnawà:ke: Factionalism, Traditionalism, and Nationalism in a Mohawk Community*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 12.

<sup>3</sup> Allen, Kristina Nilson. “Homeland Insecurity.” *Cultural Quarterly Magazine* 30, no. 3, (Fall 2006), <http://www.akwesasne.ca/news/ASPSP/ASPSPV1A16.html>.

The building of the Seaway International Bridge in the 1950s robbed the Mohawks of Akwesasne of more of their land and destroyed the local fishing industry. In the same decade, one of the first major American Indian protests involved Haudenosaunee Confederacy citizens utilizing militant protests and passive resistance in New York State to fight similar building projects that seized indigenous lands and threatened native livelihood.<sup>4</sup> Unlike their Seneca and Tuscarora brethren, the residents of Akwesasne took passive or ineffective approaches to fight the attack on tribal rights posed by the bridge as many indigenous peoples faced with similar issues did. The opening of the seaway's north and south channel bridges to traffic (in 1962 and 1958 respectively) increased outside influence into the community.<sup>5</sup> Finally, passage of laws that further encroached on their indigenous rights in the late 1960s forced the people of Akwesasne to act.

On a cold December morning in 1968, with a film crew on hand to capture the action, a large group of Akwesasneró:non conducted a blockade of the South Channel Bridge in protest of the custom duties imposed on them by the Canadian government.<sup>6</sup> The leaders of the demonstration argued that these laws not only interrupted everyday life of Akwesasne citizens and exposed them to harassment by federal police, but it also violated treaties that protected their trade and travel across the border since the birth of the United States.

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<sup>4</sup> Johnson, Troy R. *Red Power: The Native American Civil Rights Movement*. Landmark Events in Native American History. (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2007), 30.

<sup>5</sup> The Seaway International Bridge Corporation. [http://www.sibc.ca/info/info\\_e.html](http://www.sibc.ca/info/info_e.html).

<sup>6</sup> George-Kanentiio, Douglas M. *Iroquois on Fire: A Voice from Mohawk Nation*. Native America: Yesterday and Today. (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2006), 33.



After the intertribal and international turmoil that won the United States its independence from Great Britain, officials from both governments assured the Mohawks of Akwesasne that the border drawn through their land would be invisible to them and would have no effect on their way of life. They were told that it was “20 feet above their heads” and only applied to non-Natives.<sup>7</sup> The Treaty of Amity, Commerce, and Navigation between the United States and Great Britain that increased trade between the two nations included the Indians who fought for both sides during the conflict. Also known as The Jay Treaty of 1794, named for its chief American negotiator and then Chief Justice John Jay, its third article guaranteed the right of Indians to freely cross the border and to do so with no duties imposed on their trade with each other. The beginning of its third article states:

No Duty of Entry shall ever be levied by either Party on Peltries brought by Land, or Inland Navigation into the said Territories respectively, nor shall the Indians passing or repassing with their own proper Goods and Effects of whatever nature, pay for the same any Impost or Duty whatever.<sup>8</sup>

As subsequent wars and agreements were drawn up between the two nations, the imaginary border that only existed above their heads initially took on effects that Akwesasne Mohawks could feel everyday of their lives. The War of 1812 brought with it the division of the Akwesasne community along a permanently imposed border that affected tribal governance. For the next century, the Mohawks north of the line retained their traditional government council of 12 chiefs with lifelong appointments (known as “longhairs”), while those to the south

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<sup>7</sup> Bonaparte, Darren. “Border Struggles: Crossing the Line at Akwesasne.” *Native America’s Hemispheric Journal of Indigenous Issues* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 34.

<sup>8</sup> Third Article of the Treaty of Amity, Commerce, and Navigation. The Avalon Project. [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/jay.asp#art3](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/jay.asp#art3).

followed a system that resembled American government and had as their leaders a council composed of three trustees elected by popular ballot for a rotating term of three years.<sup>9</sup> During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Canadian government instituted changes of its own to traditional tribal government with its Indian Acts, created with the goal of achieving cultural assimilation.

The decline of the fur trade in the nineteenth century forced Mohawks as well as other native peoples to find other ways to make a living. The men of Akwesasne and Kahnawà:ke specifically sought jobs in the ironworking industries of the Industrial Revolution. David S. Blanchard writes that the Kahnawà:ke reputation of being the fearless builders of New York's massive skyscrapers and bridges began with their building of the Victoria Bridge of the Grand Trunk Railway and then the high-trestle bridges in Quebec and Ontario for rival Canadian Pacific Railway.<sup>10</sup> Many Mohawks became transient, crossing the federal border regularly to follow the next major building projects that would provide them with work and pay. The migrations of these workers brought the Jay Treaty from the backlogs of federal government to the forefront of politics.

In 1925, Paul K. Diabo, a Kahnawà:ke Mohawk ironworker, was arrested in Philadelphia and charged with being in the country illegally.<sup>11</sup> The United States government attempted to deport Diabo back to Canada, but he fought deportation through the courts using the Jay Treaty in his defense. Two years later, the US Supreme Court ruled, in *United States ex. Rel*

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<sup>9</sup> George-Kanentiio, *Iroquois on Fire*, 22-3.

<sup>10</sup> Blanchard, David S. *Kahnawake: A Historical Sketch*. Historic Kahnawake Series. (Quebec: Kanien'kehaka Onkwawén:na Raotitiohkwa Press, 1980), 21.

<sup>11</sup> Blanchard, *Kahnawake*, 25.

*Diabo v. McCandless*, that Article 3 of the Jay Treaty of 1794 exempted native people from US immigration laws.<sup>12</sup> The ruling also argued that the Mohawk were an “*imperium in imperio*”, a nation within a nation, and are not restricted by the arbitrariness of the Canadian-US border.<sup>13</sup> Though Diabo was Kahnawakeró:non, it was a major victory for the people of Akwesasne who lived in worry of having to cross the border everyday within the boundaries of their own community.

Along with the United States and Canadian governments changing the nature of tribal governance, the Catholic Church, which maintained a strong influence over the lives of the people of Akwesasne, changed its position on indigenous culture. In an effort to acculturate its indigenous population, Canada’s Indian Act of 1876 required all native children to attend schools, many of which were residential schools run by Catholic and Protestant churches. Residential schools taught native children that their own religion and traditions were “demonic” and “pagan.” Residents who chose to adhere to the traditional ways of the Longhouse practiced their native religion and culture outside of the Akwesasne community or in secret. Those who were open about their traditional beliefs often faced ridicule from the Church as well as members of their community.

As a result, many of the people of St. Regis, as Akwesasne was called by both Natives and non-Natives for most of its existence, rejected their language and traditional culture out of a belief that it was necessary to live in a modern world – a belief reiterated by the Jesuits in

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<sup>12</sup> George-Kanentiio, *Iroquois on Fire*, 27.

<sup>13</sup> Blanchard, *Kahnawake*, 26.

churches and schools. Schools throughout Canada taught children, both native and non-native that indigenous culture was primitive and savage and that native religions were nothing more than superstition. That was the status-quo until a Mohawk returned to his Haudenosaunee roots and to St. Regis in 1938.

Ray Fadden (Tehanetorens), put simply, was a nationalist rebel. He grew up in the Adirondacks of Onchiota, New York, keeping the traditions of the Longhouse and the culture of the Mohawk people. He rejected the lies told about Mohawks printed in the history books of non-Natives and believed that his ancestors were complex, sophisticated, and politically enlightened far beyond what was taught in the school texts.<sup>14</sup> More importantly, conceding his beliefs for the promise of being able to live in a modern society that disregarded the rights of native peoples was unconscionable to him.

Fadden came to Akwesasne in 1938 with the objective of repeating what he had done in Tuscarora some years earlier, teaching the Mohawk Nation to have pride in itself through the one institution that had successfully taken it away – the schools.<sup>15</sup> With the use of traditional regalia and artifacts that he collected through the years, he taught Akwesasne fifth-graders the truth about their history and the traditional culture that had been denied them so long by the schools.<sup>16</sup> His students spread what they learned about their culture to others in the community. Fadden also had no qualms about standing up to Jesuit clergy and other members

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<sup>14</sup> George-Kanentiio, *Iroquois on Fire*, 43.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

of the community who challenged his criticisms of Christianity.<sup>17</sup> Within a year of his arrival, Akwesasne Mohawks revived the Longhouse and retained their traditional political structure, language, and essential family based customs important to Haudenosaunee culture.<sup>18</sup> When Fadden retired in 1955, he inspired a new generation of people to take up his mantle and revive the teachings of the community in Haudenosaunee country.

One such person was Ernest Benedict - Dwalygwonda. Born on the New York side of Akwesasne in 1918, Benedict's activist roots began in protest of the draft applying to native peoples shortly after the US entered the Second World War. He ultimately joined the military and moved into the homestead his grandparents left him on Cornwall Island in Ontario, which was once part of Akwesasne's territory, when he completed his service.<sup>19</sup> Benedict's attempts to raise cattle on his homestead failed as a result of the pollution of the St. Lawrence River. The Reynolds Metal Plant where he worked for eight years dumped fluoride into the water and sent clouds of abrasive clouds of dust into the air.<sup>20</sup> The dust clouds wore down the teeth of his cows and complicated calf births.<sup>21</sup> He joined the band council around the time construction began on the St. Lawrence Seaway.

Not only did Benedict fight the efforts of the Seaway Corporation to alter the St. Lawrence River further, but he advocated for the improvement of education in Akwesasne. To avoid building new schools in Akwesasne, Indian Affairs sent children to white schools in the

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<sup>17</sup> George-Kanentiio, *Iroquois on Fire*, 45.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Kulchyski, Don McCaskill, and David Newhouse, eds., *In The Words of Elders: Aboriginal Cultures in Transition*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 99.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 99 & 100.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

city of Cornwall.<sup>22</sup> Cornwall schools burst at the seams due to crowding as a result of the Seaway construction, and Indian Affairs ultimately had to build new schools in Akwesasne. Until the new schools were completed, Akwesasne children faced the defamation of their culture and history in white schools. Benedict and his colleagues from a government program called the Company of Young Canadians, inspired in part by this knowledge and the story of Charlie Wenjack, an Ojibway boy who died running away from a residential school, created the Native North American Travelling College in 1968.<sup>23</sup> They raised money to fund the college and buy a Volkswagen van outfitted with shelves for books written from the native point of view or about native peoples. A training crew with the National Film Board of Canada, including Noel Star Blanket and Mike Mitchell, loaned the college a projector and other items as well as made suggestions about films that could be copied or borrowed.<sup>24</sup> Benedict and his colleagues traveled throughout Ontario educating people on Haudenosaunee history and revitalizing traditional culture.

Attacks on the basic rights of Akwesasneró:non forced Benedict to put his education projects on the backburner. Twelve years earlier in 1956, the Supreme Court of Canada dismissed the appeal with costs of Louis Francis, an Akwesasne man who was forced to pay customs duties on household appliances he bought in the US and carried to his home on the Canadian side of the border. The Court ruled that Article III of the Jay Treaty did not help

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<sup>22</sup> Kulchyski, McCaskill, and Newhouse, eds., *In the Words of Elders*, 100.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 103 & Salli M. Kawennotakie Benedict, "The History of Akwesasne: A Collaborative Project," in *Preserving Tradition and Understanding the Past: Papers from the Conference on Iroquois Research, 2001-2005*, edited by Christine Sternberg Patrick, *New York State Record 1*, (United States of America: New York State Education Department, 2010), [http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/publications/record/vol\\_01/pdfs/CH07Benedict.pdf](http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/publications/record/vol_01/pdfs/CH07Benedict.pdf). (Accessed December 13, 2010).

<sup>24</sup> Kulchyski, McCaskill, and Newhouse, eds., *In the Words of Elders*, 103.

Francis' case because only legislation could impose or remove customs duties and that Section 87 [sic] of the Indian Act made customs laws applicable to Indians as well.<sup>25</sup> The ruling ensured that life remained especially difficult for Akwesasné:non who crossed the border on a regular basis and the establishment of a border checkpoint and a customs house on Cornwall Island after the completion of the Seaway International Bridges meant that unreasonable searches accompanied possible customs fees. When the Canadian government issued charges on all goods across the border, including food, with a value of more than five dollars in the fall of 1968, Ernest Benedict and the people of Akwesasne decided it was time to act.<sup>26</sup> Taking inspiration from their Tuscarora and Seneca brethren in previous decades and years and the civil disobedience of Southern blacks, they made their own plans to fight back.

Planning the strategy began in early November in Benedict's home.<sup>27</sup> Initially, officials from Akwesasne traveled to Ottawa to voice their grievances to the Canadian government. They threatened to block the Seaway International Bridge if their concerns were not met, but their words fell on deaf ears.<sup>28</sup> The threat turned real in the freezing-cold morning hours of December 18, 1968 when one-hundred Mohawks, mostly women and teenagers, from Akwesasne and Kahnawake blocked all traffic on the Seaway International Bridge at Cornwall

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<sup>25</sup> Francis v. The Queen (June 11, 1956), Judgments of the Supreme Court of Canada, <http://csc.lexum.umontreal.ca/en/1956/1956rcs0-618/1956rcs0-618.html>. (Accessed December 15, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> Lawrence Hauptman, *The Iroquois Struggle for Survival: World War II to Red Power*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 148.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Noel Star Blanket, *You Are On Indian Land*, National Film Board of Canada, 1969.

Island using their bodies and about 25 cars.<sup>29</sup> Along with photographers and journalists, a film crew with the National Film Board of Canada captured the event for the world to see.

Mike Mitchell, one of the blockade organizers, and Noel Star Blanket recorded the morning's events in a film titled *You Are On Indian Land*. Mitchell, wearing a St. Regis Lacrosse letterman's jacket to protect him from the 8 degree weather, tried to affix a sign to the back window of one of the blockading cars as he directed another man to hand out signs to others. The sign read: "NOTICE. THIS IS AN INDIAN RESERVE. Any person who trespasses on an Indian Reserve is guilty of an offense and is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding fifty dollars or to an imprisonment for a term not exceeding one month, or to both fine and imprisonment – Director of Indian Affairs." The protesters argued that according to the Canadian government's own laws that their officials were trespassing on Indian reserve land. As policemen from Cornwall gathered on the scene to force them to move their cars, protesters used the same argument against them.

What started as a peaceful protest escalated with a few arrests, including that of Mike Mitchell. With a lull in the action, Ernest Benedict reiterated the points of the demonstration to the police and asked whether his fellow protesters wanted to continue. The desire to continue with the protest was unanimous, bolstered with speeches from some of the protesters including an attractive female firebrand. The police continued with their arrests. A female protester sings, "We Shall Overcome" with a raised fist in the air. More policemen arrived on the scene and attempted to push a car out of the way. Protesters joined together to

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<sup>29</sup> Hauptman, *Iroquois Struggle*, 148.



push the car back into the blockade. Tempers on both sides of the conflict shortened as car windows were broken and more people were forcibly arrested. Benedict talked the remaining protesters into meeting at the community hall, ending the blockade. When it was over, Canadian police arrested forty-seven people on charges of obstruction.<sup>30</sup> Seven of the protesters faced additional charges of interference and possession of an offensive weapon.<sup>31</sup>

In the days leading up to the protesters' court date on February 21, Akwesasne leaders, including Ernest Benedict, represented the accused in the media. He argued that the Canadian government violated the conditions of the Jay Treaty of 1794 which guaranteed Indians the right to cross the border without having duties charged on their goods. Along with the attention garnered by the protest, the charge against the government sparked a debate on both sides of the border about whether the Indians were justified in their actions.

There were teenage boys from Kahnawà:ke participating in the blockade, though newspaper articles covering the incident identify most of the participants in the bridge blockade were from Akwesasne or Cornwall Island with the exception of two people: Kahentinetha Horn and her brother, Taio Tehane (Frank) Horn also from Kahnawà:ke. While her brother was only charged with obstruction and interference, Kahentinetha Horn was charged with concealing an offensive weapon.<sup>32</sup> During the appearance of the protesters in provincial court, Kahentinetha Horn attempted to read a petition to Judge P. C. Bergeron who ruled that she was out of order and ordered her escorted from the courtroom. Horn's petition

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<sup>30</sup> "Mohawks Court Case Set Feb. 21", *Akwesasne Notes*, April 1969.

<sup>31</sup> Dumas, Eleanor. "Drop Charges for 35 Indians in Bridge Block", *Akwesasne Notes*, April 1969.

<sup>32</sup> "Mohawks Court Case Set Feb. 21", *Akwesasne Notes*, April 1969.

questioned the jurisdiction of the policemen who arrested the protesters, arguing that the annexation of Cornwall Island was done illegally and asked that the court discontinue the trial until the City of Cornwall could “establish the title of the island”.<sup>33</sup> The issue of Cornwall Island’s annexation also added to the national debate in Canada.

The city of Cornwall, Ontario dropped all charges against thirty-five of the protesters involved in the blockade on the grounds that the police officers could not identify every protester arrested two months before.<sup>34</sup> The media coverage that brought national attention to Mohawk grievances turned out to be a double-edged sword in that the only charges that remained were against protesters who could be identified from film and photographs struggling against police. Along with Taio Tehane Horn, Nona Benedict, Agatha Thompson, Mike Mitchell, Gabriel Sharron, and Albert Jocko of Cornwall Island were charged with obstructing specific officers. A non-Native member of the national film board crew, Barry Perles, faced charges of “provoking other persons to disturb the peace” and “attempting to damage auto tires”.<sup>35</sup> The judge remanded the trials of Benedict, Thompson, Mitchell, Sharron, Jocko, Perles and the Horns to future dates.

Of special note, Taylor Vergette, an employee of the land surveys and title section of the Indian Eskimo economic development branch of the Canadian government, testified that Cornwall Island was an “Indian reserve set apart for the use and benefit for the St. Regis

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<sup>33</sup> “Mohawks Court Case Set Feb. 21”, *Akwesasne Notes*, April 1969.

<sup>34</sup> Dumas, “Drop Charges for 35 Indians”, *Akwesasne Notes*, April 1969.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

Indians.”<sup>36</sup> He went on to say that his bureau considered Cornwall Island to be an Indian Reservation and that the Department of Indian Affairs was not aware of the “annexation” until it took place.

Kahentinetha Horn, Kahnawakeró:non and the only protester charged with concealing an offensive weapon, was a central figure of the trial. She made the trial a theatrical event by holding up proceedings to, as her lawyer put it, “change her clothing in the courtroom” though she had only removed her beaded headband and put on a buckskin jacket.<sup>37</sup> She brought the courtroom to laughter as the first charge of the day stated that she was singlehandedly charged with obstructing over ten police officers. Judge Phillip Baker threatened to clear the courtroom over future outbursts as a result. Two witnesses, a photographer and a police sergeant, testified to whether they saw Horn with the knife the day of the incident.

By the time of the blockade, Kahentinetha Horn was no stranger to the media spotlight or challenging government laws that threatened native sovereignty and rights. She was a well-known Native nationalist who attracted media attention wherever she went, regardless of the issue for which she fought. Like a lot of Indians of her day, Horn did not always have feelings of self-pride or Native nationalism. Newspaper articles about Horn make reference to her being “curvaceous,” “attractive,” and “beautiful.” Kahentinetha (“green meadows”) Horn debuted in the public spotlight as a Montreal fashion model.<sup>38</sup> Peter Gzowski, in a May 1964 interview of Horn done for *McLean Magazine*, describes the way she lived most of her life “in the way that

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<sup>36</sup> Dumas, “Drop Charges for 35 Indians”, *Akwesasne Notes*, April 1969.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Gzowski, Peter. “Portrait of a Beautiful Segregationalist.” *Iroquois Women: An Anthology*. (Ohshweken, Ont: Irocrafts), 169.

American Negroes call ‘passing’” and goes on to give a physical description of the Mohawk beauty:<sup>39</sup>

She is tall and fine-boned, with hair as black as a wilderness lake. She has deep brown, wideset eyes that occasionally show flecks of green. Her mouth is wide and full. Her skin is no darker than many a well-tanned blonde’s. With her hair combed back, she could be anything from Polynesian to Spanish.<sup>40</sup>

In her college years attending Sir George Williams University as an art student, the only thing in her life that revealed her racial identity was her address in Kahnawà:ke.<sup>41</sup> She even called herself “Audrey,” a name she chose because of her uncle’s love of Audrey Hepburn.<sup>42</sup> All of her siblings chose non-Native names from their early years spending holidays in Akwesasne, and for most, they used those names more than the Native names with which they were born.<sup>43</sup>

Horn is the second of nine siblings born to a Kahnawà:ke steel worker, which for her meant changing schools frequently. In most of the schools she attended, Indians only made up a small minority of the student populations or Horn and her siblings were the only native students. When she was eleven-years-old, her father was killed in a steel accident in Vermont and her family moved back to Kahnawà:ke. She never lied about her heritage, but, where she could, she hid the truth because of a specific non-Indian attitude toward Indian girls: the idea that Indian girls have loose morals.<sup>44</sup> Her pride and interest in her own roots grew after she returned to Montreal from traveling and working in different countries throughout Europe.

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<sup>39</sup> Gzowski, “How Kahn-Tineta Horn Became an Indian,” 175.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

Spending time in countries where being Indian was not a social barrier deepened her steadily growing pride in her heritage.<sup>45</sup>

The former beauty queen and fashion model decided to use her assets to bring attention to issues affecting native peoples. She also became an entrepreneur, writer, speechwriter, actress, and designer.<sup>46</sup> Her notoriety and her radical separatist ideas earned the resentment of tribal elders, even those of her own native Kahnawà:ke.<sup>47</sup> Gzowski argues, in a separate interview with Horn given earlier in May of 1964:

Because of the flurry of publicity Miss Horn has received, in fact, it is sometimes easy to forget that her purpose is both serious and important, and, furthermore, that it is exactly her ability to attract attention to herself that gives her a fair chance of winning some battles her elders have lost.<sup>48</sup>

He adds that even more important than her speaking or protesting, she makes herself present for Indians as an example of someone who can live in white society without losing their identity as an Indian while avoiding playing a stereotype. Many of her ideas border on racism, such as her belief that “Indian women as a species are superior to white women” and that the early life of the red man was nobler than the selfish, capitalistic greed of white men.<sup>49</sup> In the interview, Horn also supports segregation if it is necessary for Indians to be who they are:

*“...If it’s segregation we have to suffer to keep them[our lands], then we choose segregation. The only kind of integration we can accept is an integration that means freedom to live, breath, move, and develop our culture with the framework of the whole community.”<sup>50</sup>*

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<sup>45</sup> Gzowski, “How Horn Became an Indian,” 180.

<sup>46</sup> Gzowski, “Beautiful Segregationist,” 169

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 169

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 173.

As the national debate in Canada raged on over the Jay Treaty and Cornwall Island, native forces joined together while others split apart. While the traditional longhouse and the elected council came together to get the federal government to address their issues, a division developed between Kahentinetha Horn and the elders and spokesmen of Akwesasne.<sup>51</sup> Horn and St. Regis spokesman Ernest Benedict clashed at every opportunity. She expressed that the St. Regis leadership did not move efficiently enough in their handling of the issues, and Benedict believed that she was leading the people down false paths.<sup>52</sup> In the immediate months following the bridge blockade, the traditional chiefs agreed to cancel a mass demonstration organized by Horn for the weekend following their meeting. An Akwesasne spokesman told reporters that Horn did not have St. Regis support for her demonstration at the bridge.<sup>53</sup>

Both sides did their share to keep the concerns of Akwesasneró:non and other First Nations peoples in the Canadian media. After the courts cleared her and her brother of charges of interfering with police during the blockade, Horn informed the media that she would fly to London to speak to the British Prime Minister and possibly the Queen if the Canadian Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau, and the head of the Ministry of Indian Affairs, Jean Chrétien, would not agree to see her.<sup>54</sup> She made good on that promise the following month, and though she did not get to speak with the prime minister or the Queen personally, she gave her letters to

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<sup>51</sup> "Indian Cause Harmed by Feuding Between Factions," *Akwesasne Notes*, May 1969.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> "St. Regis Indians to Seek UN Aid," *Akwesasne Notes*, May 1969.

<sup>54</sup> "Sister, Brother Freed by Judge in Blockade Case," *Akwesasne Notes*, June 1969.

their secretaries.<sup>55</sup> Her trial concerning the charge of concealing an offensive weapon remained and was scheduled for September 4, 1969.<sup>56</sup>

Eight of the protesters arrested at the bridge blockade were American citizens, forcing the US State Department to look into the legal precedence regarding the Jay Treaty and its relationship to the Mohawks' grievances. Assistant Secretary of State William B. Macomber, Jr. told Rep. Robert C. McEwen (R-NY), whose district was involved in the blockade issue, that the duty-free treatment of Canadian-born Indians entering the United States was allowed to lapse in the 1897 tariff law.<sup>57</sup> The US Court of Customs upheld the action in 1937. Eight years before, the U. S. Supreme Court ruled that the Jay Treaty was terminated by the War of 1812 as it conferred rights that were inconsistent with a state of war.<sup>58</sup> A 1928 decision by the Third Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the 1814 Treaty of Ghent "recognized and restored the Indian status of the Jay Treaty," but the US solicitor general then decided on the basis of intervening legislation not to appeal that ruling. The aforementioned case in 1937 held that the Treaty of Ghent was not "self-executing."<sup>59</sup>

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court of Canada upheld the levying of customs and sales taxes on articles that Indians imported into Canada in the 1956 case *Francis v. The Queen*. Because no treaty is "self-implementing," the laws enabling the Jay Treaty lapsed in 1813.<sup>60</sup> The same court ruling also upheld that the laws of the Indian Act did not apply as Louis Francis' personal

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<sup>55</sup> "Kahn Tineta Gets Further Remand", *Akwesasne Notes*, July 1969.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> "Canadian-U.S. Legal Situation Muddled Concerning Indians," *Akwesasne Notes*, Feb 1969.

<sup>58</sup> "Canadian-U.S. Legal Situation", *Akwesasne Notes*.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

goods were not the goods being taxed.<sup>61</sup> During the trial in which thirty-five Indians were cleared of their obstruction charges, lawyers for the defendants raised the issue of the Rooseveltown Bridge. In 1933, Indians were given tax or toll free access to the bridge.<sup>62</sup> That same 1933 agreement denied free passage to Indians “using his vehicle for hire or for the transport for hire of persons or freight for any purpose of gain.”<sup>63</sup> Much later, it was determined that as the Jay Treaty of 1794 was an agreement between the United States and Great Britain, the independent nation of Canada, granted home rule in 1867, was no longer bound to honor it.<sup>64</sup> Also, though there was no consultation with the people of Akwesasne before February 22, 1956, the date when the city of Cornwall obtained the approval of the Ontario Municipal board to extend its boundaries to include Cornwall Island, Jean Chrétien justified its annexation by stating that St. Regis was not subject to the Ontario Assessment Act and thus its terms were not in conflict with the Indian Act.<sup>65</sup>

In spite of all the attention garnered and the public dialogue sparked, the Seaway International Bridge blockade of December 1968 failed to reinstate duty-free crossing of goods over the federal border for Indians as well as achieve the return of Cornwall Island to Akwesasne Mohawk Territory. What the protesters achieved was still valuable to the cause of American Indian civil rights. Organizers of the blockade created a newspaper bulletin called *Akwesasne Notes*, comprised of cut-and-pasted articles from surrounding newspapers that

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<sup>61</sup> Francis v. The Queen (June 11, 1956), Judgments of the Supreme Court of Canada, <http://csc.lexum.umontreal.ca/en/1956/1956rcs0-618/1956rcs0-618.html>.

<sup>62</sup> “Drop Charges for 35 Indians,” *Akwesasne Notes*.

<sup>63</sup> “Island Was Ceded to City Without Consultation Chretien Tells Commons”, *Akwesasne Notes*, November 1970.

<sup>64</sup> Allen, Kristina Nilson. “Homeland Insecurity.” *Cultural Quarterly Magazine* 30, no.3 (Fall 2006), on the Akwesasne Mohawk Territory website, <http://www.Akwesasne.ca/news/ASPSP/ASPSPV1A16.html>.

<sup>65</sup> “Island Was Ceded,” *Akwesasne Notes*, November 1970.



printed stories of Native resistance and issues.<sup>66</sup> Inspired by the Unity caravans created by Tuscarora leader “Mad Bear” Anderson from William Rickard’s traditionalist movement, they began “The White Roots of Peace,” a mobile teaching group schooled in Native activism that taught community organization in places such as Indian reserves, prisons and urban centers.<sup>67</sup> The White Roots of Peace traveled throughout Canada and the United States reviving interest in traditional cultures and selling literature that spread news of Native activism that came from all over the continent and sometimes South America. Though its membership contained people from various indigenous nations, its overall character was Mohawk.<sup>68</sup> Probably the most significant change in the Mohawk community itself was its name change. Even though the great white pines that earned “The land where the partridge drums” are still absent from its landscape, renewed pride and nationalism encouraged the people of St. Regis, named for the Jesuit priest St. Francis Regis, to readopt the territory’s original name, “Akwasasne,” a year later.<sup>69</sup>

Community leaders, such as Mike Mitchell and Ernest Benedict, used the national spotlight to not only petition the federal government for treaty rights, but also for the right to self-determination. They demanded the disbanding of the band council system that left their leaders helpless and the power to have their own governments freed from the strings of Ottawa, along with their own schools and hospitals.<sup>70</sup> For a time, the people of St. Regis pressed their own police force into duty during one of the subsequent bridge blockades. The

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<sup>66</sup> George-Kanentiio, *Iroquois on Fire*, 33.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>70</sup> “Want Own Schools, Hospitals Meet Told,” *Akwasasne Notes*, April 1969.

police force checked the licenses of passengers across the Seaway International Bridge, wearing construction helmets marked with the letters “MP” and armed with homemade night sticks.<sup>71</sup>

The national attention forced Ottawa to respond to previously disregarded issues. The Indian superintendent, Ralph Whitebean, a Mohawk and the first Native Indian superintendent (agent), took steps to phase out the need for Indian agents on the reserve and give the tribal leadership the authority to administer all government revenue funds.<sup>72</sup> John McGilp, Ontario regional director of the Department of Indian Affairs, was forced to entertain the possibility of allowing St. Regis residents their own police force before outright rejecting it.<sup>73</sup> Former Prime Minister John G. Diefenbaker raised the issue of Indians paying customs and having their rights under the Jay Treaty protected on the floor of the House of Commons in the months after the 1968 Seaway blockade. That same year, he also spoke to the students of Iroquois High School in Iroquois, ON, arguing that the government of Canada had to uphold the rights of Canadian Indians.<sup>74</sup> Not every attempt to appeal to Ottawa was an “almost-win,” but not every fight yielded greatly hoped for victories.

The years following the first Seaway International Bridge Blockade and the occupation of Alcatraz gave rise to even greater acts of protest in and outside of Akwesasne. Despite being supported by individual Mohawks, existing organizations of activism and dissent kept AIM from gaining a foothold in Mohawk Nation and Haudenosaunee territory.<sup>75</sup> The blockades of

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<sup>71</sup> “Mohawk Police Lack Status Says McGilp,” *Akwesasne Notes*, April 1969.

<sup>72</sup> “More Authority Granted St. Regis Band Council,” *Akwesasne Notes*, April 1969.

<sup>73</sup> “Indian Police Idea Has Merit,” *Akwesasne Notes*, April 1969.

<sup>74</sup> Coligan, Miriam. “Rt. Hon. John Diefenbaker Addresses Seaway Students,” *Akwesasne Notes*, April 1969.

<sup>75</sup> George-Kanentiio, *Iroquois on Fire*, 34.

the Seaway International Bridge in the twenty-first century and decades past all stem from the original demonstration that occurred near the end of 1968. The participants of that historic event, rendered powerless by federal and provincial restraints, used the methods at their disposal to exact change to provide themselves and their people a better future. While outside help was welcomed in some instances, the radical views and sensationalist tactics brought by Kahentinetha Horn turned off Akwesasne leadership to her participation in their struggle. Ultimately, protest and activism within the boundaries of Akwesasne in the days pre-Alcatraz was primarily realized by Akwesasneró:non.

## CHAPTER 4

### Bearing the Burden of Peacekeeping: The Rebirth of the Mohawk Warriors

As Cornwall Police and Mohawk protesters pushed a car in and out of its place in the blockade of the Seaway International Bridge that cold morning in December, a teenage boy from Kahnawake crouched inside it in the driver's side floorboard. He applied the parking brake before the policemen pushed it out of the blockade and released it so that the protesters could push it back in.<sup>1</sup> Despite demands from the police that the boy get out of the car, fifteen-year-old Paul Delaronde refused to move. Ultimately, the police arrested Delaronde along with several other protesters that morning. It was the teenager's first arrest, but it would not be his last. Like his father and other men in his family and community, Paul Delaronde took up the mantle to preserve the cultural traditions of the Longhouse and protect the Haudenosaunee lands, people, and rights as a member of the Mohawk Warrior Society.

The Mohawk Warriors trace their recent beginnings back to 1968 in the Mohawk Territory of Kahnawake, located across from Montreal on the southern shore of the St. Lawrence River. Their re-emergence, despite the increasingly turbulent relationship between First Nations peoples and the federal government in the 1960s, is more the result of a nationalist movement that had been growing since the last decades of the nineteenth century. The factionalism of the political climate in Kahnawake in the early half of the twentieth century did not facilitate their creation. By the time that other First Nations communities launched

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<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey York and Loreen Pindera, *People of the Pines: the Warriors and the Legacy of Oka*, (Toronto: McArthur and Company Publishing Ltd, 1991), 167.

efforts to oppose Jean Chrétien's "White Paper" in 1969, members of the Mohawk Warriors were already seasoned activists.

Tribal sovereignty for Kahnawake and other First Nation communities fell under attack in the late nineteenth century. Canada, having received its independence from Great Britain in 1867, passed the Enfranchisement Act of 1869 that replaced traditional tribal governments with the band council system. The new system gave the Governor General of Canada the power to impose elective forms of governments on First Nation bands and remove anyone from elected office anyone it deemed unfit or unqualified.<sup>2</sup> For the people of Kahnawake, this meant that their leadership would be decided in elections held every three years instead of by the traditional clan system which selected a council of seven chiefs that served for the remainder of their lives. The number of chiefs, later called councilors, increased to six in 1880 – one from Kahnawake's six districts – and were elected for one-year terms. The band council system also removed sovereign power from the new elected government, requiring permission from the Canadian Superintendent of Indian Affairs to pass laws on anything outside of minor municipal matters.<sup>3</sup> Upon its initial passage, the new system of governance went into effect on reserves whose tribal bands applied for it.

The Kahnawake of 1869 was a far cry from the seat of political power it had been before the American Revolution. It was even a drastically different place than it had been twenty years earlier. Construction of the Lake St. Louis and Province Line railway in August 1852 thrust

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<sup>2</sup> Gerald F. Reid, *Kahnawà:ke: Factionalism, Traditionalism, and Nationalism in a Mohawk Community*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 60.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

Kahnawake out of isolation to the margins of North American industrial society.<sup>4</sup> With the railway and its passengers came other construction projects that essentially transformed part of the village into a free trade and traffic zone.<sup>5</sup> The reserve's land base shrunk considerably when the British government expropriated their land for the construction of the railway. In 1875, four of Kahnawake's seven council chiefs, representing a little over half the community's population, tried to profit by selling all of the reserve's land to the Canadian government for twenty-five dollars an acre.<sup>6</sup> Issues of race and blood already factionalized the village for its white and mixed-blood, or Métis, residents owned the vast majority of its resources, and ultimately in 1885, the seven council chiefs commissioned the Walbank Survey in an effort to strip Kahnawake's privileged residents of their land and resources to keep in pure-blood hands.<sup>7</sup>

Those residents of Kahnawake who stood to lose land, resources, and wealth after the Walbank survey saw in the band council system a way to hold onto their wealth and gain the governing power from which they were excluded in the past. They, along with a number of Kahnawake residents, petitioned the Indian Department to "elect" new chiefs in February 1875.<sup>8</sup> In their petition, the residents requested that the number of chiefs be reduced from seven to three and claimed that the sitting chiefs were up for re-election. The following year, Canada passed its first Indian Act, drawing opposition from First Nations bands throughout

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<sup>4</sup> Gerald R. Alfred, *Heeding the Voices of Our Ancestors: Kahnawake Mohawk Politics and the Rise of Native Nationalism*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1995), 52.

<sup>5</sup> Alfred, *Heeding the Voices*, 52.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>7</sup> Reid, *Kahnawà:ke*, 40.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

Canada, including those who supported the band council system. Particularly in Kahnawake, many supporters of the band council system did not want to return to traditional government, but were adamant about maintaining their tribal sovereignty. After the passage of the Indian Act of 1876, the two main political factions in Kahnawake defined themselves politically. The younger, more assimilated entrepreneurs and large landowners who supported the Indian Act and the end of traditional government called themselves the Reformers.<sup>9</sup> They were also more open to whites living on the reserve. Members of the larger of the two factions, the Conservatives, usually owned little to no land or resources and disapproved of whites living in the community. They supported traditional government and opposed the Indian Act.

Opposition to the Indian Act of 1876 encouraged the Mohawk communities of Tyendinaga and Akwesasne to renew their council fires with the Six Nations Confederacy in 1887 and 1888 respectively.<sup>10</sup> With Akwesasne's adoption of the band council system that same year, elected chiefs governed both communities. Representatives from Kahnawake met with other Mohawk communities at Tyendinaga in August 1890 to reaffirm Haudenosaunee sovereignty, and later that December, over a hundred residents of Kahnawake, including sixty-four percent of the original signers, petitioned Canada's Governor General to reinstate their traditional, Iroquois-style government with hereditary chiefs.<sup>11</sup> Their efforts failed, but the seeds of nationalism were firmly planted in Mohawk country.

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<sup>9</sup> Reid, *Kahnawà:ke*, 69.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

With the band council system firmly in place, the last vestiges of Longhouse power at Kahnawake faded away. Gerald F. Reid defines the Longhouse as a reference to “a political and religious group that is based on the Haudenosaunee clan system, is engaged in traditional Haudenosaunee spiritual beliefs and practices and maintains ties with “Longhouse” groups in other Haudenosaunee communities.”<sup>12</sup> The religious aspect of the Longhouse started its decline with the increased influence of the Roman Catholic Church. The Jesuit policy of probablism so predominate in the early relationship between native peoples and the Catholic Church gave way to labeling traditional beliefs as superstition. The Canadian federal government viewed attempts to revive the political aspect of the Longhouse as a challenge to its authority and a hindrance to cultural assimilation. Around the beginning of the twentieth century, the danger of federal raids by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and federal Indian agents drove the Longhouse movement underground.<sup>13</sup>

In the 1910s, the Canadian federal government focused its attacks on the remaining aspects of Mohawk self-rule. The Indian Department made the decision to fire and replace the native-born lay teachers in Kahnawake’s schools with nuns of the Sisters of Ste. Anne in 1915. In the ten years since the first Kahnawakeró:non (people of Kahnawake) educators were hired to work in the schools, school enrollment increased to seventy-one percent from about thirty percent while daily school attendance rose above 50 percent.<sup>14</sup> Despite the successes of teaching native children in their first language and the massive opposition to the first attempt

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<sup>12</sup> Reid, *Kahnawà:ke*, 135.

<sup>13</sup> York and Pindera, *People of the Pines*, 120-1.

<sup>14</sup> Reid, *Kahnawà:ke*, 108-9.



to install an order of nuns as teachers in 1902, the Indian Department, under the head of new and aggressive leadership, put the Sisters of Ste. Anne in charge of Kahnawake's schools. Along with denying the community's people the right of choosing their educators, the Indian Department also promised the Sisters specially built housing on the Kahnawake land. Opposition to government's interference remained as fierce as it had been thirteen years earlier. Owners of the land parcels selected for the nuns' new dwelling refused to sell to the government, and even the most devoutly Catholic of Kahnawake's people opposed the Church's interference in secular affairs.<sup>15</sup> The people of Kahnawake failed to remove the Sisters of Ste. Anne from their schools, but they were able to keep them from owning a permanent residence within the village for another five years.

Coexisting with the fight to remove the Sisters of Ste. Anne was the emergence and popularity of the Thunderwater Movement at Kahnawake. It centered on a pan-Indian movement called the Council of Tribes created in 1913 to address the concerns of Indian people in the United States and Canada as they related to federal Indian policies and to do so through coordinated political action.<sup>16</sup> Founded by Chief Thunderwater in Cleveland, Ohio, The Council of Tribes advocated educational advancement, resistance to the sale of tribal lands, temperance, and it provided legal assistance to native people with grievances against the government. It was headed by a central governing council that was linked to smaller local councils on the reservations. The Council used native practices and symbolism in its various proceedings which appealed to native peoples in both countries. Also appealing was the

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<sup>15</sup> Reid, *Kahnawà:ke*, 117.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 118-9.

requirement for members to have native ancestry and knowledge of one's tribal and clan affiliations. At its height around 1917 or 1918, it boasted 26,000 members, earning it the name "The Thunderwater Movement" because of its sudden, widespread popularity.<sup>17</sup> The movement was so popular in Kahnawake that it became a major base of operations for The Council of Tribes in Canada. In fact, more Kahnawakeró:non participated in the Thunderwater council elections than the band council elections in 1916. The movement's supporters turned its attentions back to the band council elections the following year and elected its members to all six seats. As Thunderwater supporters won elections to band councils in other Mohawk communities, the Indian Department felt their authority was threatened once again and set out to destroy him. In 1920, an investigation determined that Chief Thunderwater was actually a black man who worked as a traveling salesman. Chief Thunderwater left the country soon after his discovery along with \$20,000 of Council funds.<sup>18</sup> Despite Thunderwater opponents using this information in their campaigns for election in 1921, his supporters still won their seats. The Thunderwater Movement was over, but through it the traditionalists of the Mohawk people discovered a way, for a time, to use the band council system to their advantage.

In addition to interference in Kahnawake's schools and government, the regular presence of foreign law enforcement within the territory served as a potent symbol of the Canadian governments' disrespect of Mohawk and Haudenosaunee sovereignty. The RCMP was the primary police force on all of Canada's native reserves, and Mohawks found themselves in constant conflict with them. As the Canadian government added new

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<sup>17</sup> Reid, *Kahnawà:ke*, 120.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

amendments and created new versions of its Indian Act throughout the decades of the twentieth century, the RCMP assisted them with imposing the laws on its defiant targets. Mohawk traditionalists and Longhouse supporters were subject to harassment and intimidation of the federal police.

The political atmosphere in the United States and Canada further galvanized the efforts of Haudenosaunee nationalism in the 1920s. The Canadian government amended the Indian Act in 1920 to include the forced enfranchisement of native peoples, usually those more assimilated, it deemed qualified for citizenship. Despite the uproar from the First Nations earning a repeal of the amendment in 1922, it was reinstated almost ten years later to expedite the pace of assimilation and enfranchisement.<sup>19</sup> The Tuscarora statesman Deskaheh (Levi General) traveled to Europe in 1923 with Attorney George P. Decker to Geneva, Switzerland, to make the case for Haudenosaunee sovereignty before the League of Nations, making friends in England and Scotland along the way.<sup>20</sup> The Haudenosaunee also opposed the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 in the United States which automatically made all of its indigenous peoples United States citizens, affecting its members in Akwesasne. The two main political factions in Kahnawake fought these new changes and continued to fight for the reinstatement of their traditional government, but did this through the Indian Act system. A third faction, one devoted to adhering to Haudenosaunee tradition, developed outside of the government

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<sup>19</sup> Reid, *Kahnawà:ke*, 124.

<sup>20</sup> Chief Clinton Rickard, *Fighting Tuscarora: The Autobiography of Chief Clinton Rickard*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1973), 61.

system in the early years of the 1920s and laid down the foundation for the revival of the Longhouse.<sup>21</sup>

Efforts to revive the Longhouse in Kahnawake had been underway since 1923 but received its biggest boost in 1926 after the US Supreme Court case of local son Paul K. Diabo. The Haudenosaunee community supported Diabo overwhelmingly, including the both the Grand Councils at Onondaga and Six Nations. At the time, Kahnawake was still politically independent as it had been for over 250 years.<sup>22</sup> The strength and significance of a Haudenosaunee effort made a deep impression on the people of Kahnawake as well as those in other communities, melting away the political issues that separated Mohawk communities for well over a century. After Diabo's monumental victory, the Grand Council of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy chose Kahnawake as the site for its next meeting. The Jesuit pastor denied them the use of the church hall. As a result, the Mohawks of Kahnawake built a longhouse on the reserve to house the Grand Council. The presence of the structure not only meant the official emergence of the Longhouse religion out of the shadows, but, as Taiaiake Alfred writes in *Heeding the Voices of Our Ancestors: Kahnawake Mohawk Politics and the Rise of Native Nationalism*, it "allowed the partial realignment with traditional Iroquois political institutions."<sup>23</sup>

It could only be a partial realignment because even though the Longhouse revival drew in new converts, the community of Kahnawake was still majority Catholic. Few residents spoke

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<sup>21</sup> Reid, *Kahnawà:ke.*, 135.

<sup>22</sup> Alfred, *Heeding the Voices*, 58.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

Kanien'keha – the Mohawk language – and many Kahnawakeró:non (people of Kahnawake) moved out of the community for jobs in urban areas and returned only for vacation and special events. Many Longhouse followers feared that their future of their people would be lost to cultural assimilation. The Canadian government's continued encroachment on Mohawk sovereignty, such as the forced conscription of native peoples during World War II imposed by the RCMP, attracted a few more people to the Longhouse ranks.

In the 1950s, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy began hosting bi-annual events called Six Nations Sings. At these events, singing societies from across the Six Nations performed their renditions of Women's Dance.<sup>24</sup> Singing Societies were not merely cultural performing groups; throughout the year, the members of these groups dedicated themselves to giving assistance in their communities where it was needed. They raised funds, collected food and supplies, and performed tasks for community members in need. Kahnawake did not have a Singing Society during this period, but the Six Nations Sings, taking place at Easter and Thanksgiving, provided opportunities for Kahnawakeró:non to commune with other Haudenosaunees and learn more about their collective culture.

The expropriation of more Kahnawake lands, this time by the Canadian government, to expand the St. Lawrence Seaway, provoked more ire amongst the people of Kahnawake. While many were upset by it, their factional divisions prevented them from mounting an effective resistance. Only a few tried to fight against the loss of over 1200 acres of Kahnawake land –

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<sup>24</sup> Thomas Deer, email message to author, August 26, 2009.

dozens lost their homes.<sup>25</sup> The further reduction of Kahnawake's land base made more people distrustful of government and, brought them, if not into the folds of the Longhouse, into a desire for a traditional, independent government. The fight to end the elected band council system in Haudenosaunee territory never ended. On March 5, 1959, 1,300 Haudenosaunees calling themselves the Mohawk Warriors marched to the council house at Grand River and seized it from the elected councilors.<sup>26</sup>

After seizing the council house, the Warriors called a community meeting where 5,000 people – made up of both Christians and Longhouse followers – listened to speeches.<sup>27</sup> The proclamation drafted after its conclusion restored the Longhouse council, abolished the elected council, and replaced the RCMP with a Haudenosaunee police force. This declaration did not stop the intrusion of the RCMP and later the Sûreté du Québec (SQ), Québec's provincial police force, from patrolling the reserve and harassing residents. The police force created by the elected band council ten years later, despite having government funding and won awards for its service, lacked the power to handle serious crimes.<sup>28</sup>

By the time Paul Delaronde reached his teens, he was part of a new generation of Mohawks that grew up learning the traditions and history of the Mohawk and Haudenosaunee people. He challenged his teachers regarding Mohawk history and refused to cut his hair or wear the school uniform, getting him sent home repeatedly.<sup>29</sup> Delaronde's grandfather, Eddie,

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<sup>25</sup> York and Pindera, *People of the Pines*, 121.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 123-4.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

was a Longhouse chief and patriarch of a family of Mohawk activists and militants. Most of Paul Delaronde's uncles, aunts, and cousins were prominent in Kahnawake's warrior movement – two of his uncles were war chiefs at Kahnawake Longhouse.<sup>30</sup> In 1957, Delaronde's family participated in Standing Arrow's attempt to repossess Mohawk land in New York State. The Mohawk dances he witnessed during the occupation of the Mohawk Valley inspired Paul Delaronde and others to learn the dances of Kahnawake.

In 1968, the same year of his first arrest at the Seaway International Bridge blockade at Akwesasne, Delaronde and his family founded a Mohawk Singing Society in Kahnawake. Learning the songs recorded from an Onondaga elder in New York State, Paul and his brother became lead singers. But like the other Haudenosaunee singing societies, Delaronde envisioned using the one at Kahnawake to, according to Geoffrey York and Linda Pindera, "rebuild the fighting spirit of the Mohawk nation and bring back its former glory."<sup>31</sup>

Some of the Mohawk Singing Society's younger members referred to themselves as *rotiskenrakehte* whose literal meaning is "the men who carry the burden of peace" but is usually translated as "warriors."<sup>32</sup> Their role is referenced in a passage of the Great Law of Peace, first written down in 1885:

"When the men of the Five Nations, now called forth to be warriors, are ready to battle with an obstinate opposing nation that has refused to accept the Great Peace, then one

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 168-9.

<sup>31</sup> York and Pindera, *People of the Pines*, 171.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 171.

of the War Chiefs shall be chosen by the warriors of the Five Nations to lead the army into battle.”<sup>33</sup>

A different translation of the Great Law, uses the term *rotiskenrakehte* to refer to the warriors in the war song that the chosen war chief is required to sing before leading the men into battle:

*“Onenhonkenenrenne* Now I am greatly surprised  
*Nekati enkatieratakwe* And therefore I shall use it,  
*Tsiniwakerennotenne* The power of my War Song.  
*Wiskniwakonwentsiake* I am of the Five Nations,  
*Ehtokatienker ihwaneke* And I shall make an appeal  
*Raonhane Rohshatstenserewane* To the Might[y] Creator.  
*Nerakwawi, nekati neakitiokwa* He has furnished this army.  
*Rotiskenrakete, nekati ese* My warriors shall be mighty in the strength of the Creator  
  
*Sashatstenserowane* Between him and my song they are,  
*Tiokenshen, nishonne* For it was he who gave the song,  
*Ne kati ne takwawi* This war song that I sing.  
*Ne karenna enkaterennoten.”*<sup>34</sup>

The turbulent social and political times of the decade called for a change of name. At some point in the early 1970s, the Mohawk Singing Society became the Mohawk Warrior Society.

The new, fierce-sounding moniker was easier to pronounce than *rotiskenrakehte* and it offered

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<sup>33</sup> “Gayanashogowa: The Great Binding Law,” <http://www.indigenouspeople.net/iroqcon.htm> (Accessed June 18, 2011).

<sup>34</sup> The Republic of Lakotah, “Kaienerekowa Hotinonsionne – The Great Law of Peace of the Longhouse People,” <http://www.republicoflakotah.com/2009/kaienerekowa-hotinonsionne-the-great-law-of-peace-of-the-longhouse-people/> (Accessed June 18, 2011).



what York and Pindera believed to be a “psychological edge” as it “created a frightening image” and hid the size and weaknesses of their membership.<sup>35</sup>

Paul Delaronde and other Warriors assisted Mike Mitchell and the people of Akwesasne with the takeovers of Stanley and Loon Islands in 1970. With their reputation quickly rising, Paul and the warriors answered the call of Onondagas in New York State to stop the state government from expanding an interstate highway route that passed through their territory south of Syracuse. Paul’s grandfather, Eddie, and Richard Oakes, made the trip to New York to lend their support. The protesters blocked construction and stood their ground against the state troopers that came to remove them without the use of weapons. After the state troopers left the scene, the warriors assisted in occupying the construction site for several weeks until both sides reached an agreement.

It is important to note that even though the Mohawk Warrior Society assisted their Haudenosaunee brethren wherever they were needed, the Warrior Society at the time only existed in Kahnawake. What is also important is that while protests they joined at this time almost always involved clashes with law enforcement of some level, the early days of the warrior activism were peaceful. Guns were present at the protest of the expansion of Highway 81 in New York State, but they remained in vehicles, out of sight with no intention of being used.<sup>36</sup> Both situations changed as the 1970s went on – other Mohawk communities developed warrior societies of their own and the warriors militarized themselves to defend

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<sup>35</sup> York and Pindera, *People of the Pines*, 171.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

their sovereignty against Canadian provincial and federal law enforcement routinely used violence and weaponry to enforce their laws.

The Mohawk Warrior Society became an officially sanctioned society of the Longhouse in 1972 with a thirty-man membership largely made up of teenagers and young adults from the Longhouse.<sup>37</sup> The Longhouse itself enjoyed a prominence in the community that it had not experienced for centuries. It drew new members with every attempt by provincial or federal governments to subdue tribal sovereignty. By the mid-1970s, a majority of Kahnawakeró:non endorsed the Longhouse and many left the Catholic Church to join. Overwhelming public support of the Longhouse in Kahnawake meant the same for its brazen defiance of the elected band council and the Indian Act that it supported. Further distrust of the government made even those residents who gained politically or economically from the elected council see them as nothing more as a tool to rob them of their traditions and independence. That defiance combined with the trend of civil disobedience and protest sweeping through Canada as well as the United States provoked severer responses from provincial and federal governments to efforts to flout their authority.

Longhouse members and traditionalists maintained a policy of intratribal ownership of land within Kahnawake territory. In 1973, a white family began building a house on a quarter-acre plot of land they obtained on Kahnawake land. The courts could not clarify the family's legal ownership of the property, and it also angered many residents that outsiders lived within their territory when a shortage of housing prevented younger Kahnawakeró:non from living

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<sup>37</sup> York and Pindera, *People of the Pines*, 173.

there.<sup>38</sup> With Longhouse support, the Mohawk Warrior Society issued notices in September of the same year, giving all non-native residents on the reserve two weeks to move away. The notices warned that the warriors would take “physical action” against those who failed to comply.<sup>39</sup> Assisting with the eviction campaign were six members of the American Indian Movement (AIM) as well as non-warrior members of the community.

The majority of Kahnawake’s non-native residents complied, but one white resident refused to leave his home. The following month, a dozen warriors, including Paul Delaronde, went to the offender’s house and occupied it, forcing him to leave. The SQ arrived on the scene to handle the situation, but a brawl ensued in arresting the warriors for breaking-and-entering upon their agreement to leave. The SQ ultimately apprehended the warriors in a police station on the reserve. Their refusal to release the dozen warriors triggered riots in the streets. Hundreds of angry Mohawks injured police officers and destroyed police cars.<sup>40</sup> Efforts to disperse the rioting crowd failed, forcing the police to flee the scene. Meanwhile, a dozen more warriors prepared for the next police wave at the Longhouse. They created a military-style defense made up of foxholes and bunkers and armed themselves with hunting rifles. For a week, the conflict disturbed the lives of Kahnawake’s residents as the SQ patrolled the streets to search vehicles for weapons. The siege ended on October 23, 1973, when the SQ agreed to withdraw from Kahnawake on the condition that the six AIM members, blamed for starting the street riots, left the territory.

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<sup>38</sup> York and Pindera, *People of the Pines*, 174.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 175.

The incident gained the Mohawk Warriors mainstream media exposure. The traffic stops and intrusive searches pushed even more converts into the Longhouse fold. Officials in Montreal and Ottawa received a clear, strong message from the Mohawk Warrior Society during the week-long siege. The days of simple civil disobedience were gone. Tribal sovereignty was a right for which the Mohawk warriors would fight and die. Meanwhile, the Mohawk Warrior Society, outmanned and outgunned, had successfully defended its territory against a police force that harassed its people for decades. The impact of their monumental achievement opened a world of possibilities. If the warriors could defend a small area of land from the SQ, could they not also defend a larger area?

The Mohawk Warriors set their sights on regaining ancestral Mohawk territory in the US during the weeks after the siege. The Longhouse approved their plans, and four warriors, including Paul Delaronde, traveled to Vermont and New York to scout for the perfect site. They chose an abandoned girls' camp in the Adirondack Mountains of upper New York State called Moss Lake. The mountainous 613-acre property lacked modern conveniences such as telephone or electricity, but from a military standpoint, it was the perfect defensible spot. Another important advantage was that it was also a recent state government purchase. Having learned from the clashes with farmers during Standing Arrow's occupation in the Mohawk Valley in 1957, the warriors knew that private landowners would be every bit as determined to

defend their land as they had been in defending Kahnawake. Government policy reduced their ancestral territory and threatened the sovereignty they retained, not private landowners.<sup>41</sup>

Spiritual signs received after a tobacco-burning ceremony confirmed that the warriors had chosen the right site for plans and, in the spring of 1974, the first shipments of food and supplies arrived in Akwesasne in preparation for the takeover. On the night of May 13, about forty carloads of Mohawks made the trip from Kahnawake to Moss Lake via Akwesasne followed by a school bus carrying their children.<sup>42</sup> The first settlers at Moss Lake, numbering 80 people, issued a manifesto declaring that they were repossessing part of their ancestral homeland which would be called Ganienkeh, meaning of “Land of the Flint” and would start a cooperative farming economy to support themselves. It also asserted the right of the Mohawk people to govern their own territory “with no interference from any foreign nation or government.”<sup>43</sup> While the state was slow to take action against the squatters, local residents feared the possibility of the Mohawk occupation spreading to their land. For months, the settlers passively endured sporadic gunfire from motorists passing by and then on October 28, the Mohawks fired back, injuring two whites – one of them a nine-year-old girl.<sup>44</sup>

An armed standoff ensued when the Mohawk settlers refused to allow police officials to investigate the shootings and hundreds of Indians, including some who were present at the siege of Wounded Knee, slipped by police roadblocks with bearing weapons of their own to come to the Mohawks’ aid. The Mohawk warriors were in a position to repel any invasion of

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<sup>41</sup> York and Pindera, *People of the Pines*, 176.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

their camp, and the police knew it. Some weeks later, a district attorney obtained a search warrant that authorized police to enter the camp, but chose not to carry out when he learned that it would take 300 officers to break through the Mohawk defenses. No one was ever charged for the shootings.

Local residents and officials made several attempts over the next three years to end the occupation so close to their front doors through the legal system, but the courts continuously ruled in the Mohawks' favor. Since neither the legal system nor police force could remove the Mohawks from Moss Lake, in 1977 the state offered them a compromise – a new location for Ganienkeh – which the Mohawks accepted. The new land was located in Clinton County, New York, just south of the Canadian border. The land was not mountainous, and therefore, not as defensible as Moss Lake was, but it offered other advantages. It was relatively close to both Kahnawake and Akwesasne, allowing them to receive food and supplies quickly in the case of a crisis. The more arable land provided better farming yields than the rocky soil of Moss Lake. Despite these improvements, life on the new settlement was still hard. There was no electricity and many of the men kept their jobs as ironworkers to make a living for their families.

The Mohawk Warrior Society that left Moss Lake in 1977 was a different group than the one that arrived four years earlier. Semi-automatic weapons replaced their shotguns and hunting rifles and the men had military training thanks to an AIM member and Vietnam veteran known as Cartoon. He advised the warriors on digging military bunkers at the Longhouse in 1973, and at Moss Lake, he offered tactical advice and organized a security force to protect the

camp.<sup>45</sup> Using his combat experience, an asset that Mohawk war veterans lacked, Cartoon trained the warriors how to disguise their numbers, strip and put together guns, how to create bunkers and dig foxholes, as well as how to conduct a military patrol. Cartoon's knowledge and training made him a valuable asset to the warriors, and he was named unofficial war chief of Moss Lake.<sup>46</sup>

The Mohawk Warrior Society's successes in the 1970s encouraged Longhouse militants in other Mohawk communities to start their own warrior societies. Particularly in Akwesasne, these militants participated in activism on Stanley and Loon Islands and helped in the standoff at Moss Lake. They began the warrior society at Akwesasne during a time when support of the Longhouse grew significantly there. Its most well-known exploits would not occur until the 1990s

*Rotiskenrakehte*, in its simplest form, means "the men." It is the responsibility of all able-bodied Haudensaunee men to answer the call to arms against any threat to the Great Peace – to Mohawk and Haudenosaunee sovereignty. The Mohawk Warrior Society is essentially a militia, ready to defend and serve the people at a moment's notice and are every bit as formidable as their ancestors were.

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<sup>45</sup> York and Pindera, *People of the Pines*, 178.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 178-9.

## CHAPTER 5

### The Unintended Consequence: The Evolution to Pan-Indian Activism

As mentioned in chapter one, BIA Commissioner Dillon S. Myer carried out the termination and relocation policies of the mid-twentieth century with the goal of ending the United States government's wardship of the recognized tribes within its borders. Myer was somewhat successful in his mission. Between 1945 and 1960, the government processed 109 cases of termination affecting 1,369,000 acres of native land and an estimated 12,000 native people.<sup>1</sup> For assimilation proponents in both the United States and Canada, there was an added benefit to relocating native peoples to urban cities. Many scholars and government officials in both countries still believed that the dissolution of traditional communities and integration into white society was the only way for Indians to survive in an increasingly modern world. While separation from their traditional communities caused many native people to return to reservations, those that remained in cities made efforts to retain their culture and formed intertribal relationships with other indigenous people. Ultimately, their unified efforts to redress their shared grievances in the cities, particularly in Minneapolis in 1968 and San Francisco in 1969, ushered in a new era in native activism which encouraged pan-Indian efforts all over North America.

Pan-Indian communities began before the Termination and Relocation policies of the mid-twentieth century. Nineteenth-century U.S. and Canadian Indian policy required that

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<sup>1</sup> Donald L. Fixico, *Termination and Relocation: Federal Indian Policy, 1945-1960*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986), 183.



native children be educated in schools in an effort to assimilate them into white culture. Native children spent their formative years learning English, Christianity, and various trades. The Canadian Department of Indian Affairs determined that native children should attend these schools for a period of ten years, from the ages of six to sixteen.<sup>2</sup> The age range for these students in the United States was roughly the same as the day schools taught the primary-grade level education and boarding schools that taught higher-grade education.<sup>3</sup>

A major obstacle to inducting new American or Canadian citizens from the indigenous population was the regressive properties of their home environment. Day schools and boarding schools located on or near a reservation either allowed children to return home at the end of the school day or were close enough for worried or angry parents to take them home. Graduates from these schools often returned to the reservation where they forgot the new language and trade skills they acquired. In *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879 to 1986*, John S. Milloy writes that this cultural backsliding is what worried the Canadian government and church educators most regarding graduates of these schools. They believed “the connection between parent, community, and child once broken should never be re-established.”<sup>4</sup>

Canada’s solution to this issue was the establishment of off-reservation “industrial schools” inspired by schools that existed in the United States but not modeled after them.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John S. Milloy, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879 to 1986*, (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1999), 40.

<sup>3</sup> Scott Riney, *The Rapid City Indian School: 1893-1933*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 21.

<sup>4</sup> Milloy, *A National Crime*, 40.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

Building these schools near cities, it was believed, gave students a constant example of civilization as well as provided them with opportunities to use the trades acquired through their education. Most importantly, government officials and church educators believed that the constant exposure to “civilized” life in these cities would deter graduates from returning to reservation life and the customs of the past.<sup>6</sup> As a result of the creation of new schools and changes in federal policies toward Indian education, many children of different indigenous nations were either recruited or ultimately forced to attend distant industrial schools or on-reservation boarding schools. In both the United States and Canada, the students encountered hunger, disease, hard work, squalid conditions and severe punishment. Many of these boarding schools in both countries operated into the late twentieth century, having devastating effects on native communities and cultures.

Not surprisingly, many products of Indian boarding-school education adopted the belief that living in white society was the only way that native people could survive. Despite this endorsement of white culture, some graduates never lost a desire to preserve and teach what they salvaged of their own culture. Charles Eastman “Ohiyesa”, member of the Society of American Indians, was the first “head chief” of a fraternal pan-Indian organization called the Tepee Order.<sup>7</sup> The Tepee Order was founded in New York City in 1915 by Red Fox St. James. It began as a secret organization for native-born Protestant males aged fifteen to thirty with the

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<sup>6</sup> Milloy, *ANational Crime*, 13.

<sup>7</sup> Hazel Hertzberg, *The Search for an American Indian Identity: Modern Pan-Indian Movements*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1971), 213.

purpose of “studying the history of the natives of North America, its languages, customs, and to put into practice the activities of Indian outdoor life.”<sup>8</sup>

Before and during the BIA’s efforts to relocate native peoples to urban areas, many people left the reservation on their own to take advantage of opportunities in the cities and prospered. Lured by World War II defense jobs and other reasons, Alvin M. Josephy estimates that perhaps more than half a million native people lived in the major cities of the United States by the end of the 1960s.<sup>9</sup> Adam Nordwall, a Red Lake Chippewa, moved to the San Francisco Bay Area from a reservation in Minnesota in 1951 to spend time a short time with his mother who lived there.<sup>10</sup> He chose to stay, ultimately becoming a successful business owner and lived in suburban San Leandro with his wife and children. Nordwall and other successful American Indian Bay Area residents created many of the programs and organizations that helped the BIA’s new urban recruits to San Francisco transition from reservation life to urban living. The United Bay Area Council of American Indian Affairs, Incorporated, created by Nordwall and others, included social clubs of various indigenous nations that offered traditional singing, dancing, and opportunities for people to speak or learn their tribal language.<sup>11</sup>

The United Bay Area Council membership was more than a hodge-podge of indigenous cultures; it was also a mixture of American social and professional life. Doctors, lawyers, entrepreneurs, students mingled with housewives, cashiers, and plumbers. Each used their

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<sup>8</sup> Hertzberg, *American Indian Identity*, 213.

<sup>9</sup> Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., *Red Power: The American Indians’ Fight for Freedom*, (New York: American Heritage Press, 1971), 197.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee*, (New York: The New Press, 1996), 9.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

available knowledge and resources to create better professional, legal and social opportunities for indigenous peoples in the Bay Area community. It was in the local pan-Indian environment of San Francisco that the first major pan-Indian activism emerged.

When the federal government decided to close the federal government prison on San Francisco's Alcatraz Island in 1962 with no plan to repurpose it, members of the United Bay Area Council discussed reclaiming the island in the name for the nation's native population.<sup>12</sup> Two years later, in 1964, Nordwall along with forty members of the Sioux nations landed on the island. Allen Cotter, a Sioux housepainter, read a proclamation for the media assembled there, offering to sell the island to the federal government for forty cents per acre.<sup>13</sup> Though the move was purely symbolic, Nordwall and other United Bay Area Council members intended to use the island as a community center for the native peoples of the Bay Area.

The summer of 1969 saw the federal prison on Alcatraz Island still abandoned with no agreed-upon use for it, though there was no shortage of proposals. Nordwall and the United Bay Area Council still had designs on the island but they faced stiff competition. When a fire destroyed the San Francisco Indian Center in October of the same year, the Bay Area's native community needed a community center more than ever. Nordwall and his associates had only a limited amount of time to make the case to the people of San Francisco that the island should be awarded to its native constituents.

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<sup>12</sup> Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 10.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

Nordwall teamed up with San Francisco State College student activist, Richard Oakes, to come up with a plan to establish their claim to Alcatraz Island. Oakes was a Mohawk from the New York side of Akwesasne where, like many Mohawk men, he worked as an ironworker.<sup>14</sup> On a whim, he decided to move to California and ultimately found himself in San Francisco working as a bartender in the Mission District. In 1969, he enrolled in San Francisco State College where he rallied his fellow students to creating education programs relevant to Native Americans.<sup>15</sup> He also shared Nordwall's desire to reclaim Alcatraz Island for native people.

The two men met with Timothy D. Finley, a reporter working for the San Francisco Chronicle, and discussed their plan for another symbolic re-conquest of the island with him and other members of the local media. The morning of November 9, 1969, the date of the planned invasion, arrived with horrible results for the two activists. The five charter boats hired to carry Nordwall, Oakes and a small crowd of Indians to the island were no where to be found, while boats carrying the media who waited to record the event were already waiting near the island.<sup>16</sup> As Nordwall, dressed in powwow clothes, stalled for time by reading a statement about their intentions for the media on shore, others scrambled to find a way to the island. Hours passed, patience grew thin, and those convinced the event wasn't going to happen left. Finally, the Canadian captain of a boat called *The Monte Cristo*, agreed to carry the group out to sea, but only agreed to circle the island.<sup>17</sup> While Nordwall accepted that their planned landing would only be a symbolic one, Oakes decided to follow the plan through to the end. Against

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<sup>14</sup> Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 5.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 15.

the *Monte Cristo's* captain's wishes, Oakes jumped into the icy water and swam toward the island. Others followed suit, and within the hour, the coast guard returned them to Fisherman's Wharf on the mainland. Oakes and thirteen other people returned to Alcatraz that same night and left the following the morning, vowing to return.<sup>18</sup> Oakes revised his invasion plan and, on November 20, 1969, he and forty Indians landed the island with the intent to occupy it.

The new residents of Alcatraz appropriately called themselves Indians of All Tribes, and at the start of the occupation support was widespread. Donations of food, clothing, and money poured into a temporary Indian Center, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors talked of passing legislation on their behalf, and the cast of the musical *Hair* passed around a hat to collect money for them<sup>19</sup>. For the local newspapers, the occupation was a welcomed distraction from the horrors of the Vietnam War, and Richard Oakes proved a handsome, charismatic leader of the movement. Eventually, the story spread from the newspapers of San Francisco to those throughout the nation and the globe.

In contrast to the heroism and inspiration of the occupation depicted in the newspapers, the reality of life on Alcatraz was a lot less glamorous. Some settlers chose to live in the cold, dank cells of the prison's main cellblock while others, particularly those in the movement's leadership, moved into the prison staff apartments on the island.<sup>20</sup> Some settlers, including Richard Oakes, came with spouses and children. No electricity meant that there was

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<sup>18</sup> Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 16.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

no light on the island after sundown or heat on the cold, rainy nights. A lack of running water made showers and clean clothes a luxury that only those who returned to the mainland regularly could enjoy. Injuries of various kinds were common in the dilapidated buildings of the prison and the steep, rocky terrain that comprised the dangerous environment of the island. Despite this, spirits of the settlers were high going into Thanksgiving of 1969. The Indians of All Tribes extended an open invitation to television cameras and reporters as well as members of the non-Indian community to the island for the occasion and a local restaurant volunteered to cater the event.<sup>21</sup> Native peoples from various parts of the country made pilgrimages to participate in the occupation, turning the occupation from a local pan-Indian event to a national one.

For the leaders of the occupation, the important work was on the mainland, speaking to supporters and raising awareness about their efforts to acquire the prison as a community center. Many activists used the occupation as a vehicle to discuss other concerns of native peoples in general. Coverage of the occupation made Richard Oakes a celebrity and, he made frequent trips off the island to speak at fundraisers and give interviews. Adam Nordwall, who did not move onto the island, also spoke at various fundraisers and events for the occupation.

Referring to the leadership of pan-Indian movements in Canada, Menno Boldt writes that “pan-Indian leaders operate at a considerable social distance from the ‘grass roots’ constituency they are supposed to represent” and instead have “their primary affiliation with

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<sup>21</sup> Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 22.

other Indian leaders.”<sup>22</sup> The beginning of that social distance in which Boldt refers manifested itself on Alcatraz Island within a year of the occupation. Oakes spent less time on the island as he traveled the mainland handling his fundraising and speech engagements. The occupiers he left behind had little to no personal contact with him and received their information regarding the movement’s strategies and planning from newspapers brought to them by people with regular contact with the mainland. Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, in discussing the occupation of Alcatraz in *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee*, describe an environment in which rumors and distrust surrounding Oakes abounded. There were always quarrels over money, but rumors spread that Oakes kept some donations for himself. Smith and Warrior wrote that the secretary of Indians of All Tribes, Luwana Quitiquit (Pomo) testified at a council meeting that letters addressed to Richard Oakes “went straight to Richard, unopened” at his insistence to be personally picked up by him while those “addressed to Indians of All Tribes were opened, the checks collected and deposited.”<sup>23</sup> The council ousted Oakes from his leadership position in his absence as a result.

Aside from the conflict among the movement’s leadership, the environment on the island deteriorated. The occupation’s publicity attracted troublemakers and winos to the island who simply wanted a carefree environment away from the hassles of police and social workers.<sup>24</sup> They partied in the cellblocks, and often, fights broke out adding more injuries to the several that occurred regularly. The island’s clinic had limited resources to treat injuries or

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<sup>22</sup> Menno Boldt, *Surviving as Indians: The Challenge of Self-Government*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 86.

<sup>23</sup> Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 63.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.



illnesses. The Coast Guard clippers, acting as ambulances, made frequent trips to the island to ferry the injured and seriously sick to San Francisco area hospitals for treatment. Tragically, Richard Oakes' daughter, Yvonne Oakes, fell three stories down a stairwell on January 3, 1970 and died five days later from her injuries.<sup>25</sup> Timothy Findley, the reporter that helped Adam Nordwall and Richard Oakes publicize the first attempt at invasion, included the death of Yvonne Oakes' death among several accounts that depicted the chaotic and dangerous life that occupiers on Alcatraz Island lived. Findley's account also changed the perception of the movement for many non-Indians, and support for it waned. Richard Oakes and his family left the island after the death of his daughter, and by the start of the next school term, many of the original occupants – area college students - also returned to the mainland to take new classes.

The task of dealing with the occupiers first fell to Thomas Hannon, the West Coast regional administrator for the General Services Administration, the government entity responsible for maintenance federal properties in transition. Hannon's boss, Robert Kunzig, gave the occupiers until noon on November 21, to leave the island or the U.S. marshal service would be sent in to remove them, by force if necessary.<sup>26</sup> Desiring to avoid a veritable bloodbath of unarmed college students during a time of general disapproval of Vietnam War, Hannon chose look for alternatives to excessive fire power. An hour before the deadline, Hannon learned that the White House had assumed control of the Alcatraz situation.

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<sup>25</sup> Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 65.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

Seeing an opportunity to improve the lives of Indians in urban areas, the Nixon White House sent Robert Robertson, executive director of the National Council on Indian Opportunity to negotiate with the occupiers. Robertson witnessed the dire living conditions first hand during visits to the island, and his negotiations centered on improving health and safety issues for those occupying the island. The Indians of All Tribes, however, were only interested in gaining title to the island and ultimately refused. LaNada Means, one of the new leaders of Indian of All Tribes to emerge after the ouster of Richard Oakes, presented proposals to the government which were turned down. Robertson presented the government's final and best offer to the Indians of All Tribes during a meeting on the island in March of 1970. It called for building a museum and a cultural center staffed largely by native peoples, but not the university that some of the occupiers also requested.<sup>27</sup> The proposal was essentially a plan crafted before the occupation began and offered things that the U.S. Park Service already wanted. The Indians of All Tribes turned down this proposal as well.

In May 1970, the transition of Alcatraz Island to the Department of the Interior and the National Park System began. The number of occupiers increased dramatically as a result – even Richard Oakes returned for one final visit – but the additional destruction they caused did not stop the transition. The termination of the few services occupiers were able to have on the island forced more and more people to leave as the year went on. On June 11, 1971, a large government force removed the last fifteen people from the island.

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<sup>27</sup> Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 78.

As a result of poverty on Indian reservations and both social and legal discrimination, prisons in both the United States and Canada are also enclaves of pan-Indian communities. According to a 2006 report from Correctional Service Canada, American Indians of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit ancestry made up 18.5 percent of offenders serving federal sentences though American Indians only comprise 2.7 of the adult Canadian population.<sup>28</sup> The United States Bureau of Justice Statistics reported that 2.4 percent of the 69,900 offenders entering Federal Prison in fiscal year 2001 were American Indians.<sup>29</sup>

The winds of change that blew through native communities across the United States affected the native prison populations as well. In 1962, two Ojibway inmates of Minnesota's Stillwater State Prison, Clyde Bellecourt and Eddie Benton Banai, organized native prisoners and offered them, according to Bellecourt, "education about being Indians, instead of just rotting in prison making license plates."<sup>30</sup> Bellecourt and Benton Banai believed that native peoples had to become self-sufficient and solve their own issues if they were to survive instead of depending on the federal government whose supervision, they felt, was destroying their people.<sup>31</sup> Two years later, Bellecourt, a parolee, was out of prison with the mission of organizing the urban native community of Minneapolis. At first, Bellecourt and his colleagues worked to help native peoples understand and take advantage of their civil rights as United States citizens. Ultimately he realized that the American legal and social system did not value

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<sup>28</sup> "Backgrounder: Aboriginal Inmates," Office of the Correctional Investigator, <http://www.oci-bec.gc.ca/rpt/annrpt/annrpt20052006info-eng.aspx> (Accessed May 29, 2011).

<sup>29</sup> Steven W. Perry, *American Indians and Crime: A BJS Statistical Profile, 1992-2002*. Bureau of Justice Statistics, December 2004. <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/aic02.pdf> (Accessed May 29, 2011).

<sup>30</sup> Peter Matthiessen, *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 34.

<sup>31</sup> Matthiessen, *Spirit of Crazy Horse*, 34.

the rights of Indian citizens, leading him to change his approach to bettering the lives of Minneapolis' native population. In July 1968, Clyde Bellecourt, Benton Banai, George Mitchell, and Dennis Banks, all Ojibwe, founded "Concerned Indians of America" but discovered that its acronym presented a conflict of interest.<sup>32</sup> The men changed the name of their organization to the American Indian Movement, or AIM.

Though inspired by the fishing protests in Washington State and the land protests in New York, AIM concentrated on housing, jobs, and education during its first year.<sup>33</sup> Bellecourt also set up a street patrol to protect Indians from police brutality and abuse and advised those who were arrested regarding their legal rights. In 1970, they started a "survival school" with the goal of helping native students adjust to white society without losing their traditional culture, values, and language. Students of the school also learned American history that challenged the perceptions and roles of American Indians taught in school textbooks for decades. At an AIM meeting at Cass Lake, the fundamental principle of tribal sovereignty was endorsed and the American flag, flown upside down, was formally adopted as the organization's symbol.<sup>34</sup> They chose the upside-down American flag as the international distress signal for people in trouble rather than a sign of disrespect to the United States. Though it offended many AIM members at first, many of whom were veterans, they all agreed that native peoples were in period of distress.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 127.

<sup>33</sup> Matthiessen, *Spirit of Crazy Horse*, 35.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>35</sup> Matthiessen, *Crazy Horse*, 36.

AIM's growing notoriety attracted membership outside the Minneapolis/Ojibwe community. The organization within a year of its formation also included protests in its order of business. AIM members and organizers participated in protests all over the United States, including John Trudell, a Santee Sioux, who joined AIM in 1970 and became a national voice of the Alcatraz occupation through his radio show, "Radio Free Alcatraz."<sup>36</sup> AIM actively recruited Russell Means the same year after meeting him after meeting him at a conference in San Francisco in 1969<sup>37</sup>. With the addition of members like Trudell and Means, the latter creating an AIM chapter in Cleveland, OH, the majority Chippewa outfit became both a pan-Indian and a national organization.

Born on the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota and raised in Oakland, CA, where he trained as an accountant, the handsome and charismatic Means was no stranger to demonstrations.<sup>38</sup> Six years before he joined AIM, he accompanied his father Walter Means and the group of Sioux men who symbolically reclaimed Alcatraz Island a year after it was closed.<sup>39</sup> He and Dennis Banks ultimately became the faces of AIM and were as much symbols for the organization as its stylized arrow logo and the upside-down flag.

Means led a Thanksgiving Day protest at Plymouth Rock that garnered AIM national attention and a demonstration at Mount Rushmore in 1970. By 1972, the organization established itself among the major American Indian advocate organization in the United States. Smith and Warrior write, "[the] NCAI was hopelessly out of touch with its own reservation

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<sup>36</sup> Matthiessen, *Spirit of Crazy Horse*, 38 and Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 71.

<sup>37</sup> Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 133.

<sup>38</sup> Matthiessen, *Spirit of Crazy Horse*, 38.

<sup>39</sup> Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*,

constituencies. NIYC was by 1972 all but a dead letter. The numerous local urban groups that shared AIM's love of protest had never been able to come close to AIM's national constituency."<sup>40</sup> Regardless of all the fame that AIM earned amongst urban Indians, they still had to gain the respect of the traditional people living on the reservations. Bellecourt and the other founders sought the help of native religious leaders. One of their first religious endorsements was Leonard Crow Dog, the great-grandson of Crow Dog and a leader of the Native American Church.<sup>41</sup> Crow Dog became AIM's spiritual advisor, and by giving the organization the spiritual foundation that its founders desired, it also offered future members and followers spiritual direction.

AIM earned enemies among local and state governments by aiding native people beaten, harassed or imprisoned by local police forces. The federal government officially became an enemy in the fall of 1972. The Trail of Broken Treaties – the result of a collaboration between several American Indian advocacy groups in both the United States and Canada, including AIM – was created to send a message to the United States federal government regarding the needs of its indigenous peoples.<sup>42</sup> Inspired in part by the murder of Richard Oakes in September 1972 and the release of his non-native killer on the charge of self-defense, the Trail would involve three caravans leaving the cities of Seattle, San Francisco and Los Angeles traveling through major reservations and protesting where necessary en route to St. Paul. The caravans would then merge into one, heading for their final destination of

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<sup>40</sup> Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 137.

<sup>41</sup> Matthiessen, *Crazy Horse*, 40.

<sup>42</sup> Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 142.

Washington, DC to present a statement of grievances directly to the President of the United States.<sup>43</sup> Thousands joined the caravans and the Trail of Broken Treaties looked to be a success as the vehicles left St. Paul headed to Washington, DC. The accommodations to support the numerous travelers never materialized and the caravan's arrival in the nation's capital occurred a week before National Election Day, leaving the city empty of all its influential, government residents including President Richard Nixon.

When the one local church that agreed to host the caravan at the last time grew overcrowded, leaders moved the travelers into the Bureau of Indian Affairs building until the group accomplished their collective goal. While the Interior Department's Harrison Loesch met with Dennis Banks and other Trail leaders about arranging accommodations in another building, local and federal law enforcement squads assembled in the nearby Interior Department building and prepared to remove the Indians from the building by force.<sup>44</sup> Miscommunication between the federal government and the law enforcement groups resulted in a failed raid by law enforcement and the occupation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs building by the Trail members. Occupiers ransacked and vandalized offices as they positioned office equipment and furniture in strategic places in preparation for another raid of the building. Mistrust of the federal government deepened when a locked door at the Labor Department building, stocked with food, cots and showers, prevented people from going inside.<sup>45</sup> Ultimately, the original demands of Trail members gave way to amnesty and financial assistance to get people home.

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<sup>43</sup> Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 142.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

The occupation ended on November 8, 1972, when the federal government gave Trail leadership \$66,650 to help with getting its members home.<sup>46</sup>

The estimates of the vandalism in the BIA building, defamation as terrorists by Bob Richardson of the NCIO, and the rumors of bombs and weaponry during the occupation scarred the image of AIM in the eyes of natives and non-natives alike. Its members and supporters refocused their momentum of resistance to the border towns of Nebraska and South Dakota to challenge the mistreatment and harassment of native peoples that had become commonplace over the decades. Earlier in the same year, AIM members successfully launched a campaign against the residents of Gordon, Nebraska. Local police found an Oglala man named Raymond Yellow Thunder dead in his pickup truck in February 20 as a result of, according to the coroner, exposure and head injuries.<sup>47</sup> When the local authorities refused to do a full investigation into Yellow Thunder's death, his relatives reached out to AIM for assistance. Hundreds of Indians converged on the small town, and after three days of economically and politically crippling boycotts and demonstrations, AIM pressured state and federal authorities to conduct the investigation they requested. Sheridan County attorney Michael Smith charged Yellow Thunder's white assailants with manslaughter and arranged for their release on bonds of \$6,250 each.<sup>48</sup> It was not the justice that AIM and the family of Raymond Thunder wanted, but their actions sent a message to white racist border-town residents throughout the region – harassment of native peoples was no longer tolerated.

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<sup>46</sup> Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane.*, 164.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.



After the Trail of Broken Treaties, Pine Ridge, South Dakota, was the new focus of AIM's efforts. Richard "Dick" Wilson, the new president of the Pine Ridge Tribal Council, was not only corrupt, but he was also fiercely anti-AIM. Peter Mathiessen, author of *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse*, writes that "no sooner was [Wilson] in office than he handed out fat Tribal Council salaries to his wife, brother, cousin, sons, and nephew...as well as to as many of his supporters (about nine hundred) as could be piled onto the government payroll."<sup>49</sup> Wilson banned all AIM activities in Pine Ridge and commenced open war against everyone that supported the organization.<sup>50</sup> Though the people of Pine Ridge had threatened him with impeachment for his various illegal activities, Wilson enjoyed the support of the BIA and the FBI who gladly endorsed his efforts to silence the thorns in their sides known as "AIM."

Wilson faced bigger problems when it came to holding onto power on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Russell Means planned a return to the reservation when he grew tired of the city life and sought to get Wilson's job. AIM's rapport with reservation traditionalists combined with an ever increasing dislike of Wilson and his activities, threatened to wrest power from Wilson and his anti-traditional, mixed-blood cohorts. BIA officers arrested both Russell Means and Dennis Banks when they arrived on the reservation. Wilson also created an armed private police force made up mostly of his supporters to use alongside BIA forces to enforce his rule over the people of Pine Ridge. This "goon squad," which he called "Guardians Of the Oglala Nation" was known for its brutality, and Wilson had the blessing of the federal government to

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<sup>49</sup> Mathiessen, *Crazy Horse*, 60.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

use it against any and all of his enemies how he saw fit as long as he went after AIM.<sup>51</sup> Many of Wilson's opponents came up missing, severely beaten or dead. Carrying arms was common and necessary for survival of residents that openly supported AIM or opposed Wilson's administration.

The murder of Wesley Bad Heart Bull in January 1973 brought AIM to the Pine Ridge Reservation to seek justice against his white murderer on behalf of the victim's mother, Sarah Bad Heart Bull. A meeting between the state authorities and AIM at the old courthouse in Custer on February 6 resulted in a riot when hundreds of Indian people were denied entry to proceedings. When Sarah Bad Heart Bull attempted to enter the courthouse, two police officers seized and beat her on the courthouse steps.<sup>52</sup> Those who intervened on her behalf met similar fates and the battles between Indians and the police spread inside the courthouse as well. The aftermath included two burned and overturned police cars, arson in an abandoned Chamber of Commerce building, and an extremely frightened white population.<sup>53</sup> Tensions increased between Dick Wilson's administration backed by the federal government and the traditional residents of Pine Ridge who saw the political atmosphere after the Custer courthouse riot as a reason to challenge the presence of the U.S. marshals on the reservation. They found their access to the BIA and tribal offices blocked by machine guns and sandbag fortifications. Not willing to give up the fight for fair government, the people decided to fight fire with fire. On February 26, the Oglala chiefs, with Frank Fools Crow as their spokesman,

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<sup>51</sup> Matthiessen, *Crazy Horse*, 61, 64.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

asked AIM for further help against their armed invaders and a meeting was called for February 27 at Calico Hall, a community log house west of Pine Ridge village.<sup>54</sup> There, they planned a symbolic protest in the village Wounded Knee, site of the famous 1890 massacre, for February 28, 1973. Approximately 200 supporters accompanied AIM leaders to the village.<sup>55</sup> No one who attended expected business there to last more than a few days.

In conjunction with the Oglala Sioux Civil Rights Organization (OSCRO), AIM leaders issued a public statement the first day of the protest demanding an investigation of the BIA and hearing on the treaty regarding ownership of the Black Hills. They gave the U.S. government two options: they either wipe out all the men, women, and children, or they negotiate their demands.<sup>56</sup> The next day, the protesters found the entire village surrounded by the FBI, the BIA, the U.S. marshals, and Dick Wilson's "goon squad." The protesters settled in, taking advantage of the few supplies left over at the village trading post, museum, gas station, and churches and prepared to defend their positions with the insufficient, weapons they carried for personal protection. They also took hostages, consisting mostly of elderly white residents of Wounded Knee.<sup>57</sup> South Dakota senators James Abourezk and George McGovern entered the village to negotiate the release of the hostages. According to Smith and Warrior, these "hostages," supporters of the Indians' cause, stayed voluntarily and maintained that they were

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<sup>54</sup> Matthiessen, *Crazy Horse*, 64.

<sup>55</sup> James G. Abourezk, "Wounded Knee, 1973 Series," I. D. Weeks Library Archives and Special Collections, University of South Dakota, <http://www.usd.edu/library/upload/AbourezkWoundedKnee.pdf> (Accessed June 8, 2011.)

<sup>56</sup> Matthiessen, *Crazy Horse*, 66.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

free to come and go as they wished.<sup>58</sup> Some believed that their presence prevented a second massacre of Indians at the site by the federal government.

The stand-off lasted for seventy-one days, characterized by gunfire exchanges, blockaded roads, and rejected deals. The end of April witnessed the deaths of Frank Clearwater and Lawrence Lamont as well as the injury of U.S. Marshal Lloyd Grimm whose wound left him paralyzed from the waist down.<sup>59</sup> Both sides agreed to disarm on May 5, 1973. Senator Abourezk, in his papers describing the event, attributes a “lack of food, electrical power, and medical supplies” for AIM’s decision to disarm as well as waning morale and public support.<sup>60</sup> Though the stand-off at Wounded Knee was over, clashes between AIM and the federal government on the Pine Ridge Reservation were just beginning. The number of murders on the reservation rose to alarming rates as people died either at the hands of Dick Wilson’s “goon squad” or in shootouts with federal forces. Leonard Peltier became a prominent member of AIM when federal courts sentenced him to two life terms for the deaths of two FBI agents in a 1975 shootout at Oglala on Pine Ridge. Despite sufficient evidence of his guilt, Peltier remains in federal prison to this day.

While Indians of All Tribes and AIM fell from public prominence after their respective national demonstrations, the impact that both groups made on native activism continues to the present day. Indigenous people of specific tribes and regions recognized that they shared collective grievances against white society and the federal government, regardless of their

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<sup>58</sup> Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 208.

<sup>59</sup> Abourezk, “Wounded Knee, 1973 Series,” <http://www.usd.edu/library/upload/AbourezkWoundedKnee.pdf>. (Accessed June 8, 2011), iv.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

cultural differences, and worked together to address them. The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) and the Freedom of Religion Acts of 1978 and 1994 are examples of federal laws enacted to address collective concerns of varied indigenous peoples of the United States. The native studies programs that students like Richard Oakes fought for on college campuses in the 1960s are common in many universities in both the United States and Canada today. While many do not focus on a specific people or culture, these programs tend to address similarities between different cultures or discuss differences between cultures regarding certain social or religious subjects. The demonstrations of both of these groups in the 1960s and 1970s gave non-native Americans an awareness of native issues that they had never before experienced, making it likely that future native causes will be addressed from a pan-Indian point of view, rather than from an individual tribal one.

## CONCLUSION

In her book, *American Indians: Stereotypes & Realities*, Devon A. Mihesuah addresses the question of why the Indians did not use their population advantage against the European invaders to alter the future.<sup>1</sup> Her answer is “that tribes were too different culturally and lived too far apart to fight together as a cohesive unit.” She briefly creates a scenario in which all of the indigenous inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere meet on the island of San Salvador in 1492 for the purpose of defeating Columbus and Company and addresses the language barriers, leadership problems, and the logistics of having millions of people on a small island for any given amount of time. Mihesuah also uses the rare historical instances of native confederations and pan-Indian alliances to argue her point. While she mentions the economic, religious, political, social and linguistic differences between native peoples, she is unable to go into a deeper analysis of how these factors served as a barrier to unification. By the time of Red Power’s beginnings in the 1940s, newspapers, telephones, and radio allowed people all over the United States and Canada to get the same information regardless of the distance between them. Also, the devastating effects of boarding schools united several native populations, albeit unwillingly, under common languages. Surely, language and distance could not be barriers to pan-Indian alliances in the twentieth century that they had been in the days of Columbus, Pontiac, or Tecumseh.

The issue of identity – how one sees themselves, especially in comparison to others – was a huge factor and continues to be an issue for many native peoples today. After subduing

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<sup>1</sup> Devon A. Mihesuah, *American Indians: Stereotypes & Realities*, (Atlanta, GA: Clarity Press, Inc., 1996), 34.

certain tribes or confederations of tribes to dispossess them of their lands, non-natives comfortably placed them in a collective category of “Indians,” disregarding any and all differences that existed within this larger group. The tactics used by the United States to dispossess the Cherokees and Creeks of their lands in Georgia and Alabama were different than those used to do the same to the Lakotas in the Great Plains. All three groups have unique cultural differences and ways of understanding the world. They speak different languages and, at the time, had drastically different relationships with neighboring political entities, including the federal and state governments. Knowledge and understanding of these differences was important for agents of the US and state governments to conquer their indigenous adversaries, however, once the goal was achieved, this information lost its relevance to non-natives in general. As a result, many non-natives do not distinguish between Hopi or Navajo; or Cherokee or Cree – they are lumped together by their indigeneity as an “other” called “Indians.”

Disregarded, too, is how these differences caused those included in this group of “others” called “Indians” to view themselves. Cultural differences between groups – issues such as how the dead are viewed or foods included in traditional diets – created groups of “others” within the indigenous population. Political rifts or old grudges, some stretching back before recorded history, also prevented certain peoples from seeing each other as allies. Whereas Russell Means’ highly controversial criticism of Chippewas as being “hang-around-the-fort Indians” while being a member of Chippewa-founded AIM in 1972 may seem odd or even

irrational to non-natives who see both groups as simply “Indians,” his sentiment may have been one commonly shared amongst the Chippewas’ traditional enemies.<sup>2</sup>

The effect of such political rifts on identity is evident in the activism within the Mohawk community before the occupation of Alcatraz. Kahnawake separated from both the Haudenosaunee Confederacy as well as other Mohawks as a politically-independent entity in 1716. In truth, both Kahnawake’s and Akwesasne’s Christian heritages had already culturally separated them, in a way, from their Haudenosaunee and Mohawk fellows. Throughout subsequent centuries, Kahnawake and Akwesasne, as well as the other four Mohawk communities, developed strong local identities while maintaining bonds through familial ties and their collective Mohawk heritage and language. Over time, shared grievances against the Canadian and United States governments’ strengthened or maybe even revived their connection to the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. According to Teyowisonte (Thomas Deer), Mohawk historian and member of the Kahnawake Mohawk Society, the first members of the Mohawk Warrior Society may have seen themselves as Haudenosaunees and Mohawks interchangeably, seeing Haudenosaunee as their nationality and Mohawk as their heritage.<sup>3</sup> That “combined identity” may have been something that many Kahnawakeró:non did not share, and one that many non-traditional ancestors of the founding members of the Mohawk Warrior Society, due to the influence of the Catholic Church, may not have been able to enjoy.<sup>4</sup> While it would be unfair and incorrect to assume that European contact affected all indigenous

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<sup>2</sup> Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 136.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Deer, email message to author, September 1, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*



nations in the same way, it is hard to deny that its many aspects played a key role in altering the identities of many people within indigenous nations and affected internal politics. The advent of European contact affects the internal politics of indigenous nations still.

The emergence of Indians of All Tribes and AIM's expansion beyond of Minneapolis helped many native people, blinded by political and cultural differences as well as geographical distance, realize that they shared similar grievances and could join forces to bring about the change that they could not do as smaller, separate groups. Native peoples could also interchangeably identify themselves as part of a large, collective group of "Indians" while retaining individual tribal or band identities. Radical Red Power activism in the United States ended after the siege of Wounded Knee in 1973 and AIM's popularity and influence faded soon after. The impact of pan-Indian native activism during the four years between 1969 and 1973 forever changed how American Indians confront collective issues, particularly those involving the federal government.

The Mohawk Warrior Society continues to exist today. They are most known for their involvement in the 1990 Oka Crisis in which they held a 78-day standoff with Quebec police and the Canadian Army. The crisis started in the town of Oka, situated northwest of Montreal, when its mayor, Jean Ouellette, announced plans in 1989 to expand a private golf course and build luxury housing on a Mohawk burial ground. The Mohawks of Kanehsatake and armed Mohawk Warriors from Akwesasne, Kahnawake, and Kanehsatake responded by barricading the targeted land. In July 1990, the Sûreté du Québec (SQ), at the request of Mayor Ouellette, raided the barricades with tear gas and flash-bang grenades only to be repelled by the

Mohawks. It is not known who fired the first shots, but ensuing gun fire claimed the life of a policeman and forced the SQ to retreat. Native peoples from the United States and Canada journeyed to Oka to help the Mohawks through donations of food and supplies as well as blockading the Mercier Bridge, which had a greater effect on Oka and Châteauguay residents. As the standoff continued into the following month, the mayor enlisted the help of the Canadian Army which also failed to control the situation. The Mohawks and the Canadian government reached agreements to end the blockades of Mercier Bridge, but the standoff in Oka between the Canadian Army and the Mohawk Warriors continued until late September. Ouellette abandoned plans to expand the golf course after the crisis. It is important to note that the Mohawk Warrior Society, despite the pan-Indian support its causes attracts, is not a pan-Indian organization.

In the decades since Red Power activism, native peoples in both the United States and Canada have made significant strides in regaining aspects of tribal sovereignty, particularly in the area of cultural preservation and self-governance. Efforts to preserve or recover traditional land bases and laws concerning means of increasing tribal revenues are continual sources of conflict with federal, state, and provincial governments. Understanding the dynamics of Red Power activism and the people who participated in it is essential to reducing these conflicts and improving relations between non-native and tribal governments. It is also a most important next step to making the nations of United States and Canada better places for people of all cultures.

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