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## A Failed Vision of Brotherhood: The New Left and the Occupation of Alcatraz

### Cover Page Footnote

I would like to thank Professor Lisa McGirr of Harvard History Department for her immense help for this research. I would also like to thank Aaron Bekemeyer for his comments on the writing.

## **A Failed Vision of Brotherhood: The New Left and the Occupation of Alcatraz**

Yutong Zhan

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“The passage of America through the ‘60s seems in close retrospect too frantic and troubled,” the editor of the *Life* magazine wrote at the beginning of the 1970s, “but out of travail other times have yielded a good world.”<sup>1</sup> The editor’s words captured the sense of turbulence as well as hope that contemporaries associated with the Sixties. The latter half of the 1960s witnessed the radicalization of the New Left, a youth political movement in search of democratic alternatives in contemporary political life.<sup>2</sup> After the interracial cooperation between the Student for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the Student Nonviolence Coordinating Committee (SNCC) dissolved due to the internal debate over the participation of white student activists, the New Left constructed a new coalition of “the movement.”<sup>3</sup> In the same period, the counterculture, a set of youth cultural rebellions against cultural norms and in search of authenticity, also emerged and gained its prominence during the “Summer of Love” in San Francisco.<sup>4</sup> The combination of political and cultural rebellions continues to constitute the popular memory of the Sixties.<sup>5</sup>

Historians have examined the changes of the New Left in the late 1960s in relation to the counterculture to understand the nature and strategies of the New Left’s radicalism. Scholars in earlier decades proposed three major interpretations which historian Doug Rossinow summarized as the “old guard,” the “conservative,” and the “movement.”<sup>6</sup> More recent scholarship has argued for an intersection between the New Left and the counterculture and identified the New Left’s turn toward cultural politics. Historians Howard Brick and Christopher Phelps have pointed out a combination of the cultural and political revolutions in the late 1960s when “left-counterculture syntheses” occurred in various

contexts.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, historian Doug Rossinow has argued that the New Left considered itself a part of the counterculture and took on the countercultural strategy to engender social change, establishing the link between the New Left radicalism and the counterculture.<sup>8</sup> However, these scholars focus mainly on the dynamics between black radical groups and the white New Leftists in the post-SNCC period; they have paid little attention to the New Left's relationship with activists of other racial groups, such as Native Americans. Moreover, these studies did not closely examine how the New Left interacted with its new coalition in the mobilization against the Vietnam War. This neglect makes their analyses of the New Left's radicalism and its relationship with counterculture in its late years less comprehensive.

To address these limitations, this research focuses on the New Leftists' participation in the occupation of Alcatraz by American Indian activists of Indians of All Tribes from 1969 to 1971 and uses the occupation as a case study to address how the New Leftists—the white, college-educated youth activists who advocated for political change—organized their multiracial coalition with American Indian activists after the failure in the interracial cooperation with SNCC, and how this new multiracial coalition sheds light on the relationship between the New Left and the counterculture and on the nature of the New Left's radicalism in the late 1960s and the early 1970s.<sup>9</sup> As the occupation of Alcatraz had received nationwide attention in this period, this paper examines the discourses in nationwide underground newspapers and magazines edited by youth activists, correspondence with Indian activists, and contemporary publications to analyze the New Leftists' reaction to the occupation and the broader intellectual development of New Left radicalism in the late 1960s.

In the occupation of Alcatraz, the New Leftists offered material supplies and actively appealed to government officials, assuming a supplementary role that differed from their direct involvement in SNCC activities. Meanwhile, the New Leftists identified with the rebellious spirit of the Indian activists which reinforced the New Left's commitment to the revolutionary agenda. Differing from the countercultural romanticization of Indian culture, the New Leftists transformed their understanding of Indian activism into flexible political rhetoric to address contemporary political and

social ills. The New Leftists further mobilized the political symbolism of Alcatraz Indians and other “Third World” activists and constructed the new coalition in their anti-war efforts in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Thus, the New Leftists constructed a loosely-linked coalition with American Indians on the common ground of political dissent and maintained a distinct political edge in the post-SNCC period. Lacking ideological and political cohesion, however, the new coalition failed to consolidate a collective New Left political identity, and this fragmentation contributed to the New Left’s decline after the Vietnam War.

### **New Leftists’ Material and Political Support for the Alcatraz Occupation**

On November 20, 1969, a group of American Indian college students named the Indians of All Tribes, led by Richard Oakes, took over Alcatraz Island, an abandoned federal prison in San Francisco Bay.<sup>10</sup> The Indian occupation of Alcatraz emerged out of the political activism in the civil rights movement and the increasingly militant tactics used by other racial activist groups in the 1960s.<sup>11</sup> Indians of All Tribes issued the “Proclamation to the Great White Father and to All His People,” in which they referred to their treaty rights and demanded the restoration of their land and the preservation of Indian culture.<sup>12</sup> Through this symbolic act, the Indian activists intended to attract national attention to the contemporary social and political concerns of American Indians.<sup>13</sup>

The media coverage of the occupation caught the eye of non-Indians, including the New Leftists.<sup>14</sup> In response to the occupation, the New Leftists provided material supplies to the Indians and appealed to government officials to uphold Indian rights. For instance, as stated in a letter from Sunne Wright McPeak, students of the Indian Project of University of California, Santa Barbara, informed the Alcatraz Indians that they were preparing for a “letter writing campaign” to government officials and a “massive drive” for the collection of material supplies “in support of the return of Alcatraz to the American Indians,” demonstrating the material and moral support of the radical student group to Alcatraz Indian activism.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the Peace and Freedom Party of Sacramento, a New Leftist party, sponsored the collection of items including

blankets and clothes that people would send to the Indian activists at Alcatraz and called for the contribution to the Indian cause.<sup>16</sup> Radicals in the Bay Area also mobilized the local facilities to deliver the supplies to the island as reported in several news articles. The information outlining how to donate money and material supplies was present in most of the articles concerning the Alcatraz Indians in the underground newspapers nationwide, which called for solidarity with Indian activists. Letters and telegrams from New Leftists expressing sympathy and encouragement flooded onto Alcatraz Island, which demonstrated the New Leftists' enthusiasm to assist in the struggle of the Indians.

Besides offering supplies, the New Leftists pressed federal government officials to recognize and enforce Indian rights. For instance, Alexander Pagenstecher, a "white citizen" and likely an activist, wrote to Secretary of Interior Walter J. Hickel, urging the federal government to "give the Indians autonomy (within federal laws) in the governing of the island (and planned university and center)."<sup>17</sup> Additionally, Steven L. Winfield, "one of those white, middle class Americans" from Missouri, wrote to the President of the United States asking for his attention in the "horrible plight of the so-called 'AMERICAN INDIANS'."<sup>18</sup> Winfield also commented that "what [was] really terrible [was] that there should be no need for federal troops to guarantee Americans their freedoms," appealing to the federal government to help the Indians.<sup>19</sup> Winfield copied this letter to the Alcatraz Indians and expressed his great willingness to mobilize the resources in the St. Louis area for their activism.<sup>20</sup> As indicated in these letters, the New Leftists resorted to the political means to contribute to the Alcatraz Indian activism for tribal rights at the same time as they offered practical assistance.

Offering material support and employing political appeals, the New Leftists assumed a more supplementary role in the occupation of Alcatraz than that in its interracial cooperation with SNCC in the civil rights movement in response to previous failure in such cooperation. In the mid-1960s, working with African American activists under SNCC, white middle-class college student activists participated in civil rights programs, such as the 1964 Mississippi Summer Project.<sup>21</sup> The white New Leftists worked in the Freedom schools and canvassed for the Mississippi Freedom

Democratic Party, identifying themselves as part of the larger movement and actively working in the community organizing activism with local blacks.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, many white students continued to staff SNCC even after the end of the Mississippi Freedom Summer, directly engaging in a multiracial civil rights activism.<sup>23</sup> In contrast, New Leftists, in providing support to Alcatraz Indians, assumed a more auxiliary role. Partly due to Indian activists' rejection of white interference, the New Leftists did not involve themselves in the occupation as members of the Indians of All Tribes. The New Leftists accepted their secondary role in the occupation of Alcatraz and consciously distinguished the two fronts, the Indians' and the New Leftists', of the movement. As William D McFadden, a student activist, wrote to the Alcatraz Indians to request them to allow five students to get on the island, he articulated that the goal was to "observe and make unbiased conclusion concerning American Indians" and report the information back to his fellow New Leftists.<sup>24</sup> McFadden's use of "observe" reflects his consciousness of non-interference and acceptance of a more supplementary role in Indian activism. Instead of asking to participate in the Indians' activism, McFadden and his fellow students from college indirectly supported it.

Indeed, upon the exclusion of the white New Leftists from SNCC in the late 1960s due to the disillusionment of the integrationist vision within the organization and the rise of black militant activism in the late 1960s, the New Left re-envisioned a interracial coalition that maintained the clear racial boundaries within this coalition.<sup>25</sup> For instance, Jerome Rothenberg pointed out the trend of "deny[ing] the possibility of crossing the boundaries that separate people of different races and cultures" in his article published in the *Nation*, recognizing the racial separatism in contemporary political culture.<sup>26</sup> Following this new understanding of the interracial relationship, Don Jelinek, who later became the attorney for the Alcatraz Indians, asked, "Do I have the right to foist my opinion upon [the Alcatraz Indians], have a vote on [the issues concerning Indians' movement] or criticize the leaders whom I disagree with? ... Of course not."<sup>27</sup> This rhetorical question reflects the contemporary landscape of racial separatism and non-interference in the radical movements. Thus, as indicated in their supplementary role in the occupation of Alcatraz, the New Leftists

rationalized and reorganized a loosely-connected coalition within which racial activist groups maintained an independent course of the political movements without the direct involvement of the white New Leftists. This white-Indian coalition further illustrated the broader context of the New Left's adjustment of the interracial relationship and its role in racial activism after the collapse of previous interracial cooperation in the civil rights movement.

## **New Left's Self-Definition in Relation to Alcatraz Indian Activism**

Having established the white-Indian coalition, the New Leftists identified with Alcatraz Indians' spirit of rebellion and resistance, vindicating their own radical agenda in the late 1960s. For instance, in the poem, "Alcatraz Again," New Leftist author "coyote2" wrote, "Alcatraz, whose singing now is tribal youth, / whose message to an insane world is courage, / whose blood is the ancestor life stream / surging and singing the ocean's tidal pull..."<sup>28</sup> The author praised the defiant spirit of the Alcatraz Indians by highlighting the courageous and rebellious characteristics of the "tribal youth" who fought against the tide of an "insane world," suggesting the author and the New Leftists' identification with Alcatraz Indians' message.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, as the author informed the readers in the article, "The Peace of Submission Is Never Final," Alcatraz was the "prison to isolate and bend to submission those who would not adjust and those who resisted."<sup>30</sup> Contrasting the Indian takeover with Alcatraz's previous use, the author articulated the spirit of resistance of Indian activists. The author also juxtaposed stories of Geronimo and Sitting Bull on the same page and thus contextualized Indians' action with their history of resistance, emphasizing and aligning with the Indians' insubordinate qualities.

The New Leftists' identification with the rebellious spirit of Alcatraz Indians reinforced the New Left's commitment to a broader radical agenda centered on revolution. In the latter half of the 1960s, the New Left was gradually turning toward radical revolution as a means to address political dissents. The Weathermen, one of the most radical branches that disintegrated from the late SDS, pointed out that "[k]ids know that the lines are drawn; revolution is touching all of our lives," indicating the spread of revolutionary sentiments.<sup>31</sup>



The rebellious sentiment and the resistance that Alcatraz Indians took on further reinforced the New Leftists' conviction and commitment to a radical revolution in response to the politics at the end of the 1960s. "You thought you conquered the Indians, but they seized Alcatraz, proving the peace of submission is never," the editor of the underground newspaper, *Rising Up Angry*, said.<sup>32</sup> The editor continued, "No, they will never conquer any of us because the only peace we will have, the only real peace, is the PEACE OF REVOLUTION."<sup>33</sup> The editor substantiated the argument with the example of Alcatraz Indian, thus recognizing and praising the defiance of Indian activists. Shifting the language of "they," mainstream political forces, to "us," the New Leftists and the Indians, the editor incorporated the identification with rebellious Indians into the New Left's radical revolutionary rationale, which strengthened the New Leftists' belief in revolution. Therefore, the New Leftists acclaimed and aligned with the rebellious spirits of the occupation of Alcatraz and this sentiment, in turn, reaffirmed the New Left's radical agenda and contributed to the New Left's commitment to revolutionary radicalism in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

## **The New Left and the Countercultural Strategy**

It should be noted that, while reorganizing a loosely linked coalition with Alcatraz Indians which closely associated with its agenda, the New Left maintained its distinct political edge instead of turning to the countercultural strategies. Historian Sherry Smith has claimed that the counter-culturalists looked to Indians as "symbols of, and even models for, alternative ways of life" that reflected the communal and ecological values and authenticity.<sup>34</sup> By "becoming" Indians, as historian Philip Deloria has argued, the counter-culturalists "move[d] their identities away from Americanness altogether," thus rendering Indian-ness a rich site for countercultural appropriations and emulations.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, it was not just the counter-culturalists but also Alcatraz Indian activists themselves who mobilized the countercultural tropes in the discourse to convey the symbolic meaning of Alcatraz and to appeal to the public. In the article "Alcatraz" published on the newsletter of Native Alliance for Red Power, the Indian activists critiqued the

“pollution by land, air, and water” and contrasted with their lifestyle of looking upon “Mother-Earth as the basis for life.”<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the activists argued, the “Alcatraz community” was a “model structure” that “[redefined] what our society once was.”<sup>37</sup> Tapping into the countercultural tropes of communal values, ecological Indians, and an alternative way of life, the Indian activists strategically utilized the countercultural appeal of Indian-ness to reach their social and political ends.<sup>38</sup>

One could easily assume that the New Leftists, bearing the similar quest for “a meaning in life that is personally authentic” as the counter-culturalists did, would also exploit the cultural Indian-ness to promote social changes.<sup>39</sup> A closer look at the motivations of the New Leftists and their understanding of counterculture, however, indicates that the New Leftists did not turn to the repertoire of countercultural Indian-ness as they constructed and engaged with the white-Indian coalition but consciously maintained the New Left’s political edge. The New Leftists rallied for the American Indians’ right to self-determination instead of the romantic Indian-ness. In the article advertising the rally in San Francisco, the author said that the rally was intended to “show the repressive forces of San Francisco and the Federal government that all people support the Native Americans in their struggle for self-determination,” which articulated the political rationale that motivated their action.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, an article from *Berkeley Tribe* also called for people to rally behind “the Native Americans’ fight for the land and life that is rightfully theirs.”<sup>41</sup> This claim indicates once again the New Leftists’ main concerns about Indians’ political rights in support of the Alcatraz Indians. Admittedly, some New Leftists did rally on the ground of Indian culture. As the Student United in Man, a student organization in Detroit, Michigan, explained, they supported the Alcatraz Indian activists because they desired to help with “the preservation of an honest and valuable Indian culture.”<sup>42</sup> However, this support of Indian culture was based on the basic premise of “Indians know what is best for Indians,” the notion of self-determination that resonated with the broader ideal of participatory democracy in the early 1960s.<sup>43</sup> Thus, the New Leftists’ motivations to support Alcatraz Indian activists remained largely political in nature.

Moreover, some New Leftists even criticized the symbolic appropriation of the American Indian. As Peter Collier, a New Leftist writer, argued in his article, “The Red Man’s Burden” in the *Ramparts*, Indians “continue[d] to be victimized by the white man’s symbolism” which generated the plight of Indians.<sup>44</sup> Writing in the wake of the Alcatraz occupation, Collier further pointed out that “[t]he Indian’s ‘plight’” had never “forced us to digest the implications of a nation and culture conceived in genocide.”<sup>45</sup> Collier’s critiques indicates the New Leftists’ awareness of the negative consequences of romanticizing Indian. His remarks also reveal the New Left’s critical attitude to countercultural symbolism and its different understanding of the white-Indian coalition, which is more pronounced than that of the counter-culturalists in the late 1960s. Similarly, Robert Brustein also mentioned the appropriation of Indian dress of “East Hampton socialities” as part of his broader critique of the melodrama and sentimentality of the counterculture and urged for “an honest, intelligible radical politics” as its title suggested.<sup>46</sup>

In fact, instead of turning to the counterculture and viewing cultural change as “a strategy for achieving social change” as historian Doug Rossinow has argued, the New Leftists remained critical of the counterculture, questioning the effectiveness of a cultural strategy.<sup>47</sup> Lack Jacqua in his letter to the *San Francisco Good Time* asked, “Are we victims of a cultural rip off?”<sup>48</sup> Invoking the suffering of Alcatraz Indians due to the lack of supplies on the island, Jacqua further questioned, “Are [the cultural stars of the Woodstock nation] really part of the peoples revolution...?”<sup>49</sup> Jacqua’s questions reflected the New Leftists’ suspicion toward the counterculture and their awareness of the delineation between the revolutionary New Left and the counterculture. Likewise, independent writer Reese Erlich argued that Alcatraz Indians’ emphasis on culture was not a sufficient step toward liberation because “Democratic politicians [would] add fried bread to their electioneering menus – along with pizza, chow mein, and knishes” without really bringing about changes.<sup>50</sup> Instead, he suggested the Indians take a more militant approach.<sup>51</sup> Erlich’s remarks thus indicated some New Leftists’ doubts about the effectiveness of the cultural politics in relation to American Indian activism and their

insistence on a radical, revolutionary political approach instead of a countercultural one.

## Alcatraz in New Left Political Rhetoric

Being critical to the counterculture, the New Leftists continued to pursue their radical political trajectory and actively mobilized the white-Indian coalition in their activism in the late 1960s. In their political discourses rationalizing the implications of Indian activism, the New Leftists transformed the occupation of Alcatraz into a flexible rhetorical framework and made Alcatraz Indians a critical rhetorical component to address and critique the contemporary social and political ills. For instance, Reese Erlich, a New Leftist author, admitting his ignorance of modern Indian cultural life when observing the Alcatraz Indian pow-wow, listed the problems of unemployment and high infant mortality and communicable disease rates in Indian reservations.<sup>52</sup> Erlich further contended that, “like blacks and chicanos,” the oppression of Indians stemmed from “unemployment, a racist education system, and a paternalistic, undemocratic government,” grouping the Indians’ suffering with other minority groups’ hardship and using them all to critique contemporary social problems.<sup>53</sup> In this way, Reece Erlich transformed the event of the occupation of Alcatraz into a rhetorical framework that drew in critiques of the social and political ills shared by other racial minority groups.

Additionally, a more common pattern that occurred in the underground newspapers nationwide was the juxtaposition of the issue of Alcatraz with a broad array of contemporary political activism. By incorporating the occupation of Alcatraz as a rhetorical component, the New Leftists mobilized the political image of this interracial coalition to strengthen their political criticism. For instance, in the article “Maybe, Virginia and Then Again, Maybe Not” on the *Great Speckled Bird*, in the form of a Christmas request, the author said, “if its All you can Manage, then Give the Sioux Alcatraz” at the same time as to “hurry and Bring bulletproof Vests to all Panther Officials” and to help the feminists and Vietnamese.<sup>54</sup> Written as a wish list, this article implicitly criticized the contemporary political stagnation in which the government was not able to effectively address these groups’ demands. The

incorporation of Alcatraz Indian in the New Left's discourses not only reflected profusion of its interracial coalition in the late 1960s but also strengthened the rhetorical power of New Left's criticism of a variety of social and political ills.

## **Mobilization of the New Coalition against the Vietnam War**

Besides mobilizing the rhetorical power of the occupation of Alcatraz to address contemporary problems, the New Leftists incorporated the coalition with Alcatraz Indians into their mobilization against the Vietnam War. The escalation of the Vietnam War in 1965 significantly radicalized the New Left and the anti-war movements, which climaxed in 1969 and 1970.<sup>55</sup> The New Left in this period devoted great energy to radical activism aiming to end the war.<sup>56</sup> Overlapping with the time of the occupation of Alcatraz, the New Left's anti-war movements actively mobilized the white-Indian coalition both in discourse and in protests to make a concerted attack on the government's ineffective action to end the war. The New Leftists incorporated Indian activism into their broader critique of U. S. imperialism, rationalizing the white-Indian coalition in relation to what historians Howard Brick and Christopher Phelps called "'Third World' identification."<sup>57</sup> For instance, "coyote2" drew the parallel between the Vietnam War and the "four score and seven million military massacres ago / where pilgrims and pledges cannibalized a continent" to condemn the "Nixonian nerve-gassed American atrocity."<sup>58</sup> The article "Red Rock" published by the GI press also decried America's oppressive imperial policies through the discussion of Indian activism.<sup>59</sup> The author drew attention to the "racist and expansionist policies in Indo-China" through the analogy to the suffering of Indians under the United States' territorial expansion and identified the GI's anti-war struggle with Alcatraz Indians' cause.<sup>60</sup> Calling to avoid creating "Vietnamese Indians," the author tied the two strands of activism together and strengthened the anti-Vietnam War sentiments.<sup>61</sup> These discourses thus effectively bridged the domestic and international political issues under the umbrella of imperialism and reflected the New Left's conscious rhetorical use of the multiracial coalition with Alcatraz Indian in addressing anti-war sentiments.

Situating their coalition with Alcatraz Indians in the broader context of Third World activism, the New Leftists continued to mobilize the political image of this coalition in the large-scale anti-war protests. The New Leftists sought a way to organize the expanding anti-war effort, and settled on a consensus concerned with broadening the anti-war constituency. For instance, Sidney Peck, a sociology professor, proposed to “[broaden the] constituent base and [expand] its leadership cadre” and to “involve black and third world forces on a leadership level.”<sup>62</sup> Jerry Gordon, a New Leftist author, also argued to take up the trend of the “Third World People” demonstration on the street to organize the mass marches, articulating a new strategy to the peace movement.<sup>63</sup> On the ground, the New Leftists also actively organized marches and mobilized the new multiracial coalition, including the one with Alcatraz Indians, to press for ending the war. Lanada Means, an Alcatraz Indian activist, was present along with members from Black Panthers and the labor council at the “Solidarity Conference on War, Repression, and Racism” of the New Mobe West in San Francisco, the mobilization coalitions against the Vietnam War.<sup>64</sup>

Identifying through communal experiences of oppression, the New Leftists gathered this coalition, which included the Indians, to strengthen the ideological appeal of their call to end the war. In arranging the anti-war demonstration in San Francisco on April 15, 1970, the New Mobe also incorporated the New Left’s coalition to make its anti-war message more powerful.<sup>65</sup> As Leo E. Laurence reported, the New Mobe expected “somebody (unnamed) from the Alcatraz Indians” as one of the speakers for the protest along with other leaders from the white radicals, GI, the labor movement, church, and gay liberation.<sup>66</sup> Drawing the multiracial coalition with Alcatraz Indians into their movement against the war, the New Leftists utilized the powerful connection between Indian activism and the radical anti-imperialist agenda to strengthen the anti-war rallies. In these ways, the New Leftists in their anti-war mobilization employed the political symbolism of the white-Indian coalition to contribute to the New Left’s radical activism.

The New Leftists’ political mobilization of the multiracial coalition with American Indians and other activist groups, however, also revealed the limitation of the New Left as a radical political movement in its late years at the same time it became an important

force in the anti-war activities. As the underground newspaper coverage of the April 24 anti-war march in San Francisco in 1971 reported, there was an unrest happening among different activist groups in the march. The article mentioned that John Trudell, an Alcatraz Indian activist was “complaining about [John] Burton,” San Francisco Assemblyman, and stated Indians’ plan of the march from Alcatraz to Washington D.C.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, during the movement, a “fracas” happened at the stage corner, in which the Indian shouted that “you’ve taken our land now you want to take our culture.”<sup>68</sup> These voices differed largely from the main theme of the march which urged the government to “GET OUT OF SOUTH ASIA NOW” and advocated for “Viet Nam to the Vietnamese.”<sup>69</sup> This discrepancy reflected the distinct radical political agendas maintained by each group within the New Left’s loose coalition against the Vietnam War.

This internal friction illustrated one of the major limitations of the New Left’s radicalism in the late 1960s. As historians Howard Brick and Christopher Phelps argued, the New Left’s radicalism was “an ensemble of causes, partly in concert and partly straining against each other” and “no single thread of theoretical or ideological argument” could cover the profusion of radical activism in the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>70</sup> Though employing the different political symbolism of various coalitions in relation to anti-imperialism, the New Left maintained the internal separatism of its anti-war coalition which made this coalition lack the political cohesion in pursuit of a common radical goal. Moreover, centering its activism on the current situations of the Vietnam War, the New Left failed to propose a coherent radical ideology of its own and a distinct political identity that were sustainable in the long run. The fragmentation of New Left’s coalition and the failure of the New Left to consolidate its radicalism into a coherent, long-term political ideology after the detachment from SNCC made the New Left remain, as historian John Diggins characterized, “a mood in search of a movement.”<sup>71</sup> This fragmentation would eventually contribute to the decline of the New Left after the end of the Vietnam War.

In short, during the Indian occupation of Alcatraz, the New Leftists from San Francisco as well as other regions in the United States constructed a loosely-linked multiracial coalition with Indian activists. Reaffirming the revolutionary agenda in relation to Indian

activism, the New Leftists, instead of resorting to countercultural strategy, employed the political symbols and rhetorical powers of this new coalition to level criticism at a wide array of social and political ills in the late 1960s. The New Leftists' support made Alcatraz an important juncture in American Indian activism even after the occupation's collapse in 1971, which significantly contributed to the climax in Indian activism in the Wounded Knee Siege of 1973.<sup>72</sup> However, the lack of political and ideological cohesion of the New Left's newly constructed coalition and of the New Left as a whole eventually contributed to its decline in the mid-1970s.

The New Left receded to the background of American politics in the 1970s, but, as historians Howard Bricks and Christopher Phelps have stated, the New Left's activism in the 1960s and early 1970s resulted in "much richer radical visions of freedom, equality, and community," deeply influencing the course of American politics in this period.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, the culture of political dissent that the New Left had popularized through its radicalism remained and has continued to influence the youth and American society even until today. Out of the New Left's political radicalism, as James Miller said, "the sense of what politics can mean [would] never be quite the same again."<sup>74</sup>

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> "A Divided Decade: The '60s," *Life*, December 26, 1969, 9, [https://books.google.com/books?id=mlAEAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=true](https://books.google.com/books?id=mlAEAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=true).

<sup>2</sup> "The Port Huron Statement," cited in James Miller, *Democracy Is in The Streets: From Port Huron to The Siege of Chicago* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 331; Howard Brick and Christopher Phelps, *Radicals in America: The U.S. Left since The Second World War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 125.

<sup>3</sup> Grace Elizabeth Hale, *A Nation of Outsiders: How the White Middle Class Fell in Love with Rebellion in Postwar America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 206.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas C. Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia University, 1998), 249; Brick and Phelps, *Radicals in America*, 148.



<sup>5</sup> Douglas C. Rossinow, "The New Left and the Counterculture: Hypotheses and Evidence," *Radical History Review*, no.67(January 1997): 79, <https://doi-org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1215/01636545-1997-67-79>.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>7</sup> Brick and Phelps, *Radicals in America*, 148.

<sup>8</sup> Rossinow, *Politics of Authenticity*, 247, 251.

<sup>9</sup> Partly responding to Rossinow's argument, in this research I adopt his definition of the New Left as "a white youth movement against racism and imperialism and for radical democracy that flourished at U.S. colleges and universities in the 1960s." I thus define New Leftists as white, college-educated youth activists. See Douglas C. Rossinow, "The New Left and the Counterculture: Hypotheses and Evidence," *Radical History Review*, no.67(January 1997): 79, <https://doi-org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1215/01636545-1997-67-79>.

<sup>10</sup> Collin G. Calloway, *First Peoples: A Documentary Survey of American Indian History* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2016), 470.

<sup>11</sup> Sherry L. Smith, *Hippies, Indians and the Fight for Red Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 85.

<sup>12</sup> Indians of All Tribes, "Proclamation to The Great White Father and All His People," *The Seed*, November 15, 1969, <http://voices.revealdigital.com.proxy.wm.edu/cgi-bin/independentvoices?a=d&d=BHGFDEC19691115.1.17&srpos=20&e=-----196-en-20--1--txt-txIN-Alcatraz----1969-----1>.

<sup>13</sup> Smith, *Hippies, Indians and the Fight for Red Power*, 85.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>15</sup> Sunne Wright McPeak to Dean Chavers, January 18, 1970, folder 15, box 4, Alcatraz Indian Occupation Records (SFH 11), San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library (hereafter ARSFPL).

<sup>16</sup> "Help Our Indian Brothers," *Spaced Sentinel*, January 11, 1971, <http://voices.revealdigital.com.proxy.wm.edu/cgi-bin/independentvoices?a=d&d=BBEDAEBF19710111.1.5&srpos=65&e=-----197-en-20--61--txt-txIN-Alcatraz----1971-----1#>.

<sup>17</sup> Alexander Pagenstenger to Walter J. Hickel, November 30, 1969, folder 13, box 1, ARSFPL.

<sup>18</sup> Steven L. Winfield to President of the United States, November 11, 1970, folder 13, box 1, ARSFPL.

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

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

<sup>21</sup> Hale, *Nation of Outsiders*, 189.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 201, 194.

<sup>23</sup> Brick and Phelps, *Radicals in America*, 133.

<sup>24</sup> William D. McFadden to Alcatraz Island Internal Affairs, February 3, 1970, folder 15, box 4, ARSFPL.

<sup>25</sup> Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*, (Oxford University on Demand, 2000), 169.

<sup>26</sup> Jerome Rothenberg, "Reality at White Heat," *The Nation*, October 27, 1969, 444, <http://ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=n0h&AN=13234312&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

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<sup>30</sup> "The Peace of Submission is Never Final," *Rising Up Angry*, Mid-Winter 1970, <http://voices.revealdigital.com.proxy.wm.edu/cgi-bin/independentvoices?a=d&d=BHGHCFFH19700201.1.10&srpos=38&e=-----197-en-20--21--txt-txIN-Alcatraz---1970-----1#>.

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<sup>39</sup> "The Port Huron Statement," cited in Miller, *Democracy is in the Streets*, 332.

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