

## The Native-American Movement

*Inspired by the African-American civil rights movement, Native Americans organized the “Red Power” movement to seek civil rights in the late 1960s and early 1970s. During the 1950s and 1960s, Native Americans had the lowest income, the worst health, the highest suicide rate, the shortest life expectancy, and the highest unemployment of any minority group in the United States. Native-American activists sought to draw attention to these conditions by suing the federal government for the return of native lands and organizing several demonstrations in which they demanded Indian autonomy and a return of control over lands lost because of broken treaties. In 1969, 78 Indians occupied Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay; in 1972 the militant American Indian Movement (AIM) occupied the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington DC; and in 1973, 200 armed AIM members took control of the village of Wounded Knee in South Dakota, the site of an 1890 massacre of Indians. The following excerpt, from the proclamation “TO THE GREAT WHITE FATHER AND ALL HIS PEOPLE” written by activists who occupied Alcatraz Island, highlights the plight of Native Americans.*

We, The Native Americans, re-claim the land known as Alcatraz Island in the name of all American Indians by right of discovery.... We will purchase said Alcatraz Island for twenty-four dollars [\$24] in glass beads and red cloth, a precedent set by the white man’s purchase of a similar island [Manhattan] about 300 years ago.

... We feel that this so-called Alcatraz Island is more suitable for an Indian Reservation, as determined by the white man’s own standards. By this we mean that this place resembles most Indian reservations in that:

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

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