

American Indians

Step 1 Read about American Indians' struggle for civil rights in Section 4, and complete the Reading Notes for this group.

Step 2 Read the excerpt below.

Step 3 Complete your Station Notes for this group by doing the following:

- Copy one sentence from the Alcatraz Proclamation that more fully explains what changes American Indians were fighting for. Draw a line connecting this quotation with your "Changes Wanted" notes.
- Sketch and label at least one detail from the photograph of Alcatraz that shows what actions American Indians used to achieve change. Draw a line connecting this sketch to your "How Achieved" notes.

On November 20, 1969, a group of American Indians seized Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay. The group called themselves Indians of All Tribes and claimed the land by right of discovery. When government officials came to remove them, Richard Oakes, a Mohawk Indian, presented the officials with the Alcatraz Proclamation, which begins, "To the Great White Father and All His People."

Excerpt from the Alcatraz Proclamation

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 (24) dollars 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 than 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:

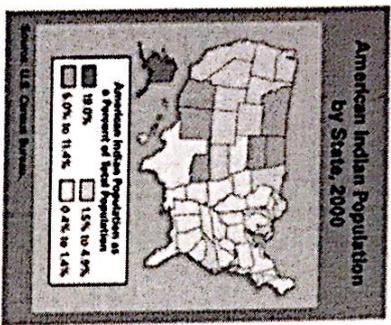
1. It is isolated from modern facilities, and without adequate means of transportation.
2. It has no fresh running water.
3. It has inadequate sanitation facilities.
4. There are no oil or mineral rights.
5. There is no industry and so unemployment is very great.
6. There are no health care facilities.
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 always exceeded the land base.
10. The population has always been held as prisoners and kept dependent upon others.

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

American Indians



American Indian Population by State, 2000



American Indians Seek Justice

In 1968, 10 percent of the population of Minneapolis was American Indian. However, Indians made up 70 percent of the prisoners in the city's jails. Local activists believed that this imbalance reflected police harassment of Indians. To fight for their rights, Indian activists formed the American Indian Movement (AIM). For much of 1968, they monitored police radios and responded to calls that involved Indians, often arriving at the scene before the police. As a result, AIM prevented the unfounded arrests of many Indians. According to AIM, the number of Indians in jail in Minneapolis decreased by 60 percent that year.

Ten Largest American Indian Tribes, 2000

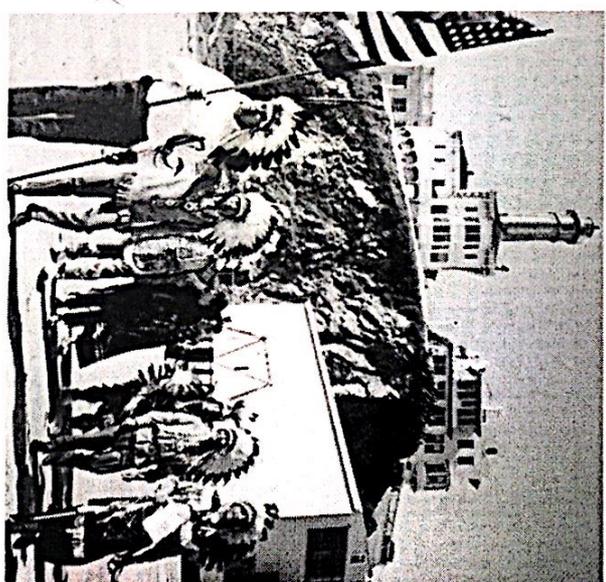
Pueblo	74,085
Navajo	80,872
Blackfoot	65,750
Apache	94,833
Chippewa	148,659
Saco	153,300
Choctaw	158,774
Latin American Indian	180,940
Havas	228,197
Cherokee	729,553

One People, Many Nations

Indians come from many tribes, which they often call nations. In the late 1960s, some Indian activists believed that the Indian nations had much in common, including a shared identity as native peoples. And although they lived in different ways and different places—some on reservations, others dispersed throughout society—they shared many of the same problems. Most American Indians lived in poverty. They suffered greater economic hardship than any other ethnic group in the country. Unemployment was 10 times higher than the national average and was especially high on reservations. The average annual family income was \$1,000 less than for African Americans. Life expectancy was also much lower than the national average. The federal government had tried to help American Indians, but with little success. In 1968, Congress passed the Indian Civil Rights Act. This law was designed to ensure equality for American Indians. It guaranteed Indians protection under the Constitution, while recognizing the authority of tribal laws. It had few concrete effects, though. In practice, American Indians still lacked equal rights and opportunity in American society, and many were losing patience.

Radicals Make the Cause Known

On November 20, 1969, eighty-nine Indians took over Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay, occupying the island's deserted prison. The group called themselves Indians of All Tribes. Their Alcatraz Proclamation declared, "We . . . reclaim the land known as Alcatraz Island in the name of all American Indians by right of discovery." In addition to the land, the group demanded that the government fund cultural and educational centers.



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The U.S. government rejected the demands. But for the Indian rights movement, also called Red Power, the occupation was a success. As one participant said, "We got back our worth, our pride, our dignity, our humanity." The Indians occupied Alcatraz for more than a year and a half. American Indians took other actions in their struggle for equality. In 1972, AIM led an event called the Trail of Broken Treaties. A caravan of protesters left the West Coast and traveled to Washington, D.C., to draw attention to Indian concerns. They brought a 20-point proposal to present to the government. The proposal focused on restoring federal recognition of Indian tribes and Indian control on reservations. It also sought protection for Indian cultures and religions.

When the caravan arrived in Washington, some protesters occupied the offices of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. After six days, they agreed to leave, on the condition that no one be prosecuted and that the federal government agree to respond to the 20 points. After studying the AIM document, however, the Nixon administration rejected its demands. Tensions increased in February 1973, when AIM protesters occupied the town of Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota, the site of an 1890 massacre of American Indians. They called for changes in the governing of reservations. They also demanded that the U.S. government honor the Indian treaties it had signed over the years. After 70 days, the FBI stormed the site. Two Indians were killed, and one federal marshal was seriously injured. In 1978, American Indian activists continued their actions with a five-month protest they called the Longest Walk. The walk started in San Francisco and ended in Washington, D.C. Its purpose was to bring attention to the many times American Indians had been forced off their land.

Courts and Legislation Bring Victories

Although the actions of groups like AIM failed to bring dramatic improvements in the lives of most American Indians, they did draw attention to Indian rights and help promote some reforms. In 1975, Congress passed the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act. The law provided more federal money for Indian education. It gave Indians more control over reservations. It also placed more American Indians in jobs at the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Indian tribes also won some legal victories. The government returned control of Blue Lake in New Mexico to the Taos Pueblo tribe, which considers the site sacred. Congress also passed the Alaska Native Land Claims Settlement Act in 1971. The law turned 40 million acres of land over to Alaska Natives. In 1980, Penobscot and Passamaquoddy Indians in Maine were awarded \$81.5 million in exchange for giving up claims to their land. They used some of the money to buy back 300,000 acres. These victories raised hopes for a better life for American Indians.