

# The Rhetoric of American Indian Activism in the 1960s and 1970s<sup>1</sup>

John Sanchez and Mary E. Stuckey

*Political rhetoric in a democracy is, in at least some sense, educative and constitutive even as it is instrumentally persuasive. For members of ethnic, racial, or cultural groups that lie outside of the dominant culture, the educative processes that underlie policy advocacy require attention to specific cultures, traditions, historical experiences, and group interests. Thus, even though all out-groups share many common challenges, they all face unique situations as well. This essay explores these rhetorical challenges and some of the strategies designed to meet them through an examination of the political rhetoric of American Indian activists from the 1972 Trail of Broken Treaties through the 1973 siege at Wounded Knee, South Dakota. Particular attention is paid to the question of audience.*

**KEY CONCEPTS** American Indians, Native Americans, social movements, American Indian Movement.

John Sanchez (M.A., 1989, Ohio State University), is an Assistant Professor in the College of Communications at The Pennsylvania State University. Mary E. Stuckey (Ph.D., 1987, University of Notre Dame), is an Associate Professor of Communication and Political Science at Georgia State University. This paper was originally prepared for presentation at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association, November 1998. The authors thank John A. Courtright, John M. Murphy, and the anonymous reviewers for their assistance in preparing and improving this essay.

Political rhetoric in a democracy is, in at least some sense educative and thus constitutive, even as it is instrumentally persuasive. For those who participate in the dominant culture, the educative component can be based upon a set of widely shared assumptions about how democracy works and what ethical actions can be presumed to include. The challenge is to place the rhetor's political preferences within that context and to explain how those preferences embody the ideals of the dominant culture. For members of ethnic, racial, or cultural groups that lie outside of the dominant culture, however, the educative processes that underlie policy advocacy go much further back, and are far more complicated.

As much of the literature on social movements demonstrates, out-groups must find ways to alter their self-images, which are often imposed upon them from outside, challenge assumptions about themselves that prevail within the larger culture, and then translate these changed perspectives into actual policy (Campbell, 1971, 1972,

1983; Cathcart, 1972; Chesebro, 1972, 1973; Gregg, 1994; Griffin, 1952, 1964; Hammerback & Jensen, 1980, 1985; Tonn, 1996). In achieving these ends, rhetorical strategies range from the militant to the moderate (Simons, 1970; Windt, 1972) and serve both instrumental and consummatory functions (Gregg, 1971; Lake, 1983, 1991; Scott, 1968).

Thus, members of social movements must accommodate themselves—or choose between—a wide set of audiences and must adapt as their own situations change over time (Stewart, 1997). Because of the heightened inventional requirements facing such rhetors, the rhetoric of out-groups can be especially useful for rhetorical criticism and theory (Campbell, 1989).

American Indian nations, for instance, are cultures that occupy unique legal, political, and cultural spaces in the United States.<sup>2</sup> These spaces and their natures are poorly understood by non-American Indian citizens. Thus, American Indian rhetors seeking to influence policy in the national context must, through both form and content, educate non-American Indians about indigenous cultures and traditions, historical experiences, and group interests as prologue to any serious discussion of policy. Further, they must accomplish this in ways that are consistent with those cultures, historical experiences, and group interests, or they risk losing the support of their own people, who comprise an enormously diverse and often factionalized set of audiences.

This essay explores these rhetorical challenges and some of the strategies designed to meet them through an examination of the political rhetoric of American Indian activists from the 1972 Trail of Broken Treaties through the 1973 siege at wounded Knee, South Dakota. Our argument proceeds in three parts. First, we provide a brief history of the events that culminated in the stand-off at Wounded Knee. Next, we examine the rhetoric surrounding those events in terms of how the individual rhetors sought to educate the United States government and the American public through the media, while negotiating the tensions between seeking the support of non-American Indians and remaining faithful to the dictates of their own cultures. We conclude with a discussion of how this case study illuminates the challenges facing rhetors from non-dominant cultures, races, and ethnicities in the United States, and how those rhetors face these challenges.

#### AMERICAN INDIAN PROTEST

American Indian protests of non-American Indian attempts to dominate and control the North American continent date back to the beginning of the colonial period. From the earliest contact, American Indians have been seeking to be treated with the respect due sovereign and culturally distinct nations; they were and are all too frequently denied that respect. As Chief Gieschenatsi of the Shawano (Shawnee) nation said in 1773,

The whites tell us of their enlightened understanding, and the wisdom they have from Heaven, at the same time, they cheat us to their hearts' content. For we are as fools in their eyes, and they say among themselves, the Indians know nothing! The Indians understand nothing! (Bruchac, 1997, p. 24)

Such quotations are still being widely published because many members of American Indian cultures today feel much the same way as Gieschenatsi did in the

eighteenth century, and use many of the same rhetorical tactics in mobilizing their people (Lake, 1991).

As we will see in more detail below, these tactics make similar uses of irony. In the 1900s as well as the 1700s, American Indian rhetors are aware of their status among non-Indians as people who "know nothing" and "understand nothing." Accordingly, they endeavored to modify that status through rhetoric designed to alter the understanding of American Indian capacities by indirectly changing audience perspectives.

American Indian political arguments regarding Europeans have varied in tone and intensity as the policies of the colonial and U.S. governments shifted between overt attempts at genocide to removal and assimilation. By the 1950s, the U.S. government's policy preferences were clearly in favor of acculturation and assimilation. Government boarding schools had, since their inception in the late 1800s, sought to turn American Indian children into "cultural soldiers," whose mission was to help destroy their resident cultures from within (Adams, 1995; Morris, 1997). Relocation helped to divide reservation communities (Cornell, 1988; Johnson, 1996), and termination ended the sovereign status of affected American Indian nations while highlighting the threat to those that remained (Deloria, V., 1974; McNickle, 1973).

These policies had at least two unanticipated consequences. First, by bringing together American Indians from a variety of nations in urban centers and boarding schools, they enabled the creation and maintenance of a pan-American Indian identity (Cornell, 1988; Nagel, 1996; Wax, 1973). American Indian peoples did not cease to think of themselves in terms of their tribal communities, but many of them also began to think of themselves as "American Indian," as people who, regardless of tribal differences, had similar group interests and who faced similar challenges and obstacles.

Second, because of their stress on assimilation and overt aim of destroying tribal identities, cultures, and communities, these policies gave American Indians something for which to fight (Cornell, 1988; Fortunate Eagle, 1992; Iverson, 1988; Johnson, Nagel & Champagne, 1997; Nagel, 1996). The threats to their resident cultures, combined with the continued discrimination, poverty, and racism that they faced in the cities fueled anger that had long been present in Indian communities (McNickle, 1973). The depth of that anger and the form that it was likely to take gradually became apparent to those who were paying attention.

In 1960, Vine Deloria, Jr., Clyde Warrior, Mel Thom, Shirley Witt, and Herb Blatchford formed the National Indian Youth Council, an organization explicitly designed to further the interests of American Indian peoples and specifically based upon traditional American Indian values (Smith & Warrior, 1996, p. 42). By 1964, American Indians in the Northwest began to defend their legal and historic treaty rights through "fish-ins," events that often led to confrontations with local citizens, governments, and police forces. And in 1968, Vernon Bellecourt, his brother Clyde, and Dennis Banks incorporated the American Indian Movement (AIM). According to Banks, "AIM is the new warrior class of this century, bound by the bond of the drum, who vote with their bodies instead of their mouths; their business is hope" (Crow Dog, 1994, p. 159). Relatively small and generally small-scale and local, these developments echoed loudly through American Indian communities, but received little national attention.

That changed in November 1969, when a group calling themselves "Indians of All

Tribes" claimed Alcatraz Island and remained there in defiance of the federal government for nineteen months. The occupation of Alcatraz began a series of similar occupations and signaled the beginning of increased media attention concerning American Indian militancy (Johnson, 1996). As scholars of other protests have noted, the rhetoric of confrontation serves both to increase the attention allotted to a particular protest and to serve consummatory ends (Campbell, 1971, 1972; Lake, 1983; Scott & Smith, 1969).

Lake (1983) maintains that this strategy established Indians as agents of change and mobilized both traditional Indians and those who, as a result of relocation, found themselves in urban settings. However, this strategy also signaled the nature of the trap Indian rhetors would experience over and over again: to garner national attention, mobilize traditional Indians, and encourage the participation of urban Indians, Indian rhetors played into stereotypes that have been present among non-Indian audiences since colonization began. Thus every step forward became also a step backward. To force policy changes, American Indians had to change their national image; to obtain the rhetorical leverage to accomplish this, they had to reinforce stereotypes that were, in their understanding, at least partially responsible for the negative policies.

In terms of actual policy, therefore, despite the protests and despite the increased attention given to them, little changed. In February 1972, an American Indian named Raymond Yellow Thunder was kidnaped, tortured, and eventually killed in Gordon, Nebraska, by two white men, Leslie and Melvin Hare. The Hares were arrested and charged only with manslaughter; their associates were arrested for false imprisonment. Resenting the cavalier response to the brutal murder, a group of American Indians led by AIM went to Gordon to protest. Such experiences solidified the communal nature of burgeoning American Indian protest. As AIM spiritual leader Leonard Crow Dog (1994) remarked, "We went to that town not just for Raymond Yellow Thunder, but for all Native Americans in this country. We went there as one big family. We went there with the drum" (p. 166). When the Hare brothers were convicted, AIM felt that they had secured a major victory (Means, 1995, p. 215).

Still, American Indian frustration grew, for despite such victories, the larger issues of discrimination, sovereignty, and treaty rights remained unaddressed. To focus national attention on these larger issues, AIM members and others organized a national protest called the Trail of Broken Treaties, a group of caravans that passed through reservation communities gathering support and ultimately converged in Washington, D.C. on November 3, 1972.

They brought with them a list of Twenty Points, demands that the government recognize the sovereign status of indigenous nations, re-establish treaty relations, and allow an American Indian voice in the formation of public policies concerning American Indians. The Trail of Broken Treaties signaled American Indian determination to persist in the face of public indifference and government hostility.

The Twenty Points combined issues that aroused the passions of both the young, primarily urban American Indians who formed the core of the protests, as well as appealing to the older, reservation-based, traditional American Indians (Crow Dog, 1994; Deloria, V., 1974).<sup>3</sup> The Twenty Points are also important, however, because they are evidence that activists sought to alter both the Indians' self-perception (Lake, 1983) and government policy (Morris & Wander, 1990). As Lake (1991) argues, the success of that rhetoric needs to be judged on both ends of this continuum.

Suitable arrangements had not been made to house the protestors once they arrived in Washington, so they went to the headquarters of the Bureau of Indian Affairs seeking assistance. Acting in accordance with the orders of the Nixon administration, the American Indians were turned away. Angry, some of the protestors refused to leave, and in the confusion, the protestors ended up taking control of the building and holding it for almost a week. The Trail of Broken Treaties thus marked the first serious confrontation between the American Indian Movement and the federal government.

As part of the settlement ending the occupation of the BIA building, the Nixon administration agreed to consider the Twenty Points. Their response was minimal at best, a fact that those present would remember in later negotiations. Instead of responding to American Indian demands at Alcatraz and Washington,

The government, fearful of the quickened pace of Indian discontent, created its own organization, called the National Tribal Chairman's Association. This group was used as a rubber stamp for the government's policies. Their public statements consisted mainly of paranoid reactions to the protests staged by the leading Indian organization of the nation, the American Indian Movement. (Deloria, V., 1974, p. 43)

With the establishment of the NTCA, the rhetorical war between AIM and the government had begun. Moreover, the damage done to the BIA building during the "Trail of Broken Treaties" occupation ensured that the relationship between AIM and law enforcement had been forever changed (Smith & Warrior, 1996, p. 181). Soon, the war would be more than rhetorical.

Following the events in Washington, the protestors returned home to their reservations. A number of the leaders of the Trail of Broken Treaties returned to Pine Ridge, South Dakota, near the site of the massacre of over 300 Minneconjou (Sioux) men, women, and children, by the United States government in 1890. Pine Ridge had long been sharply divided between those favoring assimilation and more traditional American Indians. At Pine Ridge, AIM had many of its strongest allies and most committed opponents.

Also at Pine Ridge, for instance, the Oglala Lakota tribal government, run by tribal president Richard Wilson, a mixed blood, declared itself against AIM, against the American Indians (many of whom hailed from Pine Ridge) who participated in the Trail of Broken Treaties, and fully behind the federal government's attempts to litigate AIM out of existence. When the Pine Ridge traditionals, many of them supporters of AIM and antagonistic to what they perceived as the unfair policies of the Wilson regime, spoke or acted against Wilson, the response was violent, often brutally so (Matthiessen, 1991; Sayer, 1997; Stern, 1994).

After all legal attempts to oust Wilson failed, and after their appeals to the federal government for relief went unheard, the traditionals under the leadership of Pine Ridge resident Pedro Bissonnette, founded the Oglala Sioux Civil Rights Organization (OSCRO). This organization was intended to document the violence perpetrated by Wilson and his private vigilantes, called GOONs (Guardians of the Oglala Nation), who were thought to be responsible for much of the mayhem and murder taking place at Pine Ridge (Matthiessen, 1991).

Wilson was closely allied with the local non-American Indian ranchers who were

benefiting from profitable leasing arrangements with the Oglala. He also had ties to the federal government, which was regarding the rich uranium deposits under the Lakota's sacred Paha Sapa, or Black Hills, with an acquisitive eye. OSCRO represented those who opposed Wilson, the selling of sacred lands, and the violation of treaty rights. Living in constant fear of Wilson and the GOONs, members of OSCRO appealed to the BIA, FBI, and to the U.S. Attorney's office. In response and citing its policy of supporting tribal governments under the requirements of self-determination, the government sent U.S. Marshals to reinforce Wilson (Means, 1995, p. 251; Sayer, 1997).

On January 20, 1973, a Lakota named Wesley Bad Heart Bull was killed. Again, the alleged perpetrators were non-American Indian; again, there was every indication that they would never stand trial for murder; and again, AIM led a protest. This time, however, there was a serious confrontation. In the wake of the resulting melee, several AIM leaders and other American Indians, including Bad Heart Bull's mother, were indicted for inciting a riot. In contrast, Darld Schmitz, who admitted killing Bad Heart Bull, was found not guilty of manslaughter by an all-white jury (Means, 1995, p. 248).

Following the Custer 'riot,' and after exhausting all other avenues, the Pine Ridge traditionals turned to AIM. The decision was made to take a public stand against Wilson and the federal government that supported him. On February 27, a caravan of some 300 American Indians left Pine Ridge and went to Wounded Knee, where they occupied the small village. The U.S. government responded with an unprecedented show of force:

The equipment maintained by the military while in use during the siege included fifteen armored personnel carriers, clothing, rifles, grenade launchers, flares, and 133,000 rounds of ammunition, for a total cost, including the use of maintenance personnel from the national guard of five states and pilots and planes for aerial photographs, of over half a million dollars. (Sayers, 1997, p. 146)

The stand-off that ensued continued for 73 days, comprised hours of negotiations, led to a declaration of independence by the Oglala Nation, and resulted in the deaths of two American Indians, Buddy Lamont and Frank Clearwater. When it was over,

Both sides counted a moral victory. The federal government had been able to contain the protest and had eventually outlasted the Indians, a feat not unfamiliar to a bureaucracy. The Indians had developed a new pride in themselves which transcended tribal loyalties . . . On a deeper, more intellectual level, and of world significance, Wounded Knee marked a watershed in the relations of American Indians and Western European peoples . . . In demanding independence for the Oglala Nation, the people at Wounded Knee sought a return to the days of pre-discovery, when the tribes of the land had political independence and sovereignty. . . . Wounded Knee marked the first sustained modern protest by aboriginal peoples against the Western European interpretation of history. (Deloria, V., 1974, p. 80)

While advocating American Indian sovereignty, the American Indians at Wounded Knee also attempted to educate American Indians and non-American Indians alike, as well as the national government, and to constitute a new sort of

American audience. They thus established a new justification, based on long-standing traditions, for American Indian political activism (see Lake, 1983, 1991).

### THE RHETORIC OF AMERICAN INDIAN ACTIVISTS

American Indian activists in the 1960s and 1970s confronted three main non-American Indian audiences. The primary audience was the United States government, which promised reform yet often acted in ways that were inimical to American Indian tribal interests. The main components of the governmental audience included: an entrenched bureaucracy, whose tentacles extended deep into the lives of American Indian peoples; Congress, whose exercise of plenary power could devastate American Indian communities without warning; and the President, who through his management of the executive bureaucracy, could change the shape and direction of federal American Indian policy. Fittingly enough, activist rhetoric toward this audience was largely deliberative, focusing, as did the Twenty Points, on policy. Because the Indian protestors could not mobilize a significant portion of the non-Indian audience, their persuasive efforts alone did not yield significant policy changes (Castille, 1998; Cornell, 1988; Lake, 1983, 1991; Morris & Stuckey, 1997; Nagel, 1996; Sanchez, Stuckey, & Morris, 1997).

The second important non-American Indian audience was the American people. Without the support of this constituency, the government was unlikely to make any real changes. Moreover, the American people generally had preconceived, stereotypical, romanticized, and/or negative images and ideas concerning what it meant to be "American Indian." Non-American Indians have always seen American Indians through lenses that have more to do with the creation and maintenance of non-American Indian identities than with the realities of American Indian experiences (Bird, 1996; Deloria, P., 1998; Stedman, 1982). On the one hand, this makes the educative task of American Indian rhetors more difficult, for they must first overcome those misperceptions in order to even begin their persuasive task. On the other hand, this need to use "authentic" American Indian experiences has occasionally allowed some American Indians the opportunity to reshape those images (Deloria, P. 1998). As a consequence, the rhetoric geared toward this audience relied on what Kenneth Burke (1954) has called "perspective by incongruity," i.e., the use of language to break down established ideological orientations and replace them with new ones, and thus also a new ideology (see Dow, 1994; Fitch & Mandziuk, 1997; Rosteck & Leff, 1989).

Many of the ideas and images that the activists argued needed changing were derived from the mass media, which constituted the activists' third important non-American Indian audience. Obviously, the media were necessary means of communicating with the larger public. The media also had their own agenda, and the conveyance of an unedited version of the activists' positions was not part of that agenda. Rhetoric aimed at the media audience tended to be confrontational and/or justificatory (Scott, 1968). Such rhetoric served their consummatory ends, while frustrating their instrumental goals (Lake, 1983).

All of these audiences had to be reached, courted, educated, and persuaded, tasks that had to be accomplished in ways that resonated with the American Indians who were the most important audiences of all. Thus, rather than creating discrete messages between the activists and individual audiences, the activists had to combine rhetorical tactics as they communicated with all of the various audiences simultaneously.

For instance, these activists sought ways of speaking directly to that government.

Often, this meant first setting up some sort of confrontation, designed to bring members of the government to the negotiating table, where the activists would at least have an opportunity to argue their case. The best example of this is the list of "Twenty Points," that was brought to Washington by the Trail of Broken Treaties caravan.

Essentially, the Twenty Points argued for "the restoration of treaty-making authority," which would in turn involve the recognition and practice of indigenous sovereignty (Means, 1995, p. 228-230). In the Twenty Points, Indian rhetors used forms of deliberative argument that would have resonated with their non-Indian audience and content that was of crucial importance to their Indian audience. They sought to alter the political and legal status of American Indians and their governments vis-à-vis the federal government by making implicit claims about the status of American Indians. These claims were based on the long history of constitutional and federal law and required a return to federal recognition of the independent and sovereign status of Indian nations. American Indian activists again asked for recognition as sovereign nations as provided for and recognized by the United States Constitution. The relationship of these nations and the U.S. would be based on past, present, and future treaty agreements. Further, in areas not covered by treaties, the American Indians wanted self-determination and non-interference from Washington. In essence, the activists asked to be accorded the same respect shown to citizens and governments of other sovereign nations.

As part of the negotiations to end the Washington, D.C. occupation of the BIA building, the spokespeople for the federal government promised to consider seriously the Twenty Points. There is no evidence that they ever did so. The government's refusal to take American Indian activists and their demands seriously helped to push those activists toward other audiences and tactics, as required by the movement's internal dynamics (Stewart, 1997).

Strategically, the activists needed to pressure the government to heed their arguments and to win public opinion to their causes. Consequently, they spent enormous energy educating the media and through them, the public. Their educational goals in this arena included two main lines of argument: (1) they tried to explain the historical context in order to illuminate how they understood their activities; and (2) they tried to counter the images of American Indian nations in general and American Indian Movement in particular, that were being propagated elsewhere. The first was largely descriptive; the second relied on more subtle uses of language to provide changed perspective through incongruity.

As Zarefsky et al. (1984) note, definitions are persuasive; "because to choose a definition is to plead a cause" (p. 113), and offering particular definitions can bolster a persuasive case. Not surprisingly, definitions were a crucial component of AIM's rhetorical strategy. AIM leaders spent considerable time and energy trying to define who they were and how they understood their goals, and they were often frustrated in this by the media's insistence on placing them within the context of existing stereotypes of American Indians. They were referred to as "braves," and "warriors," and were generally understood in terms familiar to those in the dominant culture who spent Saturday afternoons watching cowboy and Indian movies on television.

AIM leaders thus saw their task as primarily and overtly educational: "I think one of the major enemies of American Indian people today is ignorance. We have an American society that has been kept ignorant about the facts of history" (Bellecourt, 1976, p. 80). What was required, according to Trudell (1976), was a new understanding



of that history: "We have heard many complaints about the grievances against the white man and against the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and against the state. We have got to understand such things are colonialism" (p. 83-84).

By seeing government policy toward American Indians in the framework of colonialism, the American Indian activists hoped that both the media the consumers of those media would be able to place that policy in a broader context. Given the independence movements throughout Africa that galvanized the world in the 1960s, this particular context was both timely and evocative, potentially helping Americans to reconsider their own national history, in much the same way as Black Power activists did (Campbell, 1971, 1972; Scott & Smith, 1969).

Turner (1998) recently and cogently noted that history is a site of considerable rhetorical contestation. Gronbeck (1998), for instance, has noted the various uses of history for serving the purposes of the present, which involve appropriating the past (p. 54). Thus history posed a trap for Indian activists. Because the actual experience of American Indians is that of colonization, their history is one of having their history rewritten by the colonizers. As a result, American Indian rhetors had first to convince the audience that they had colonized and had thus "stolen" American Indian history as well as American Indian land. The second task of these rhetors was to get that audience to recognize the consequences of that theft and to replace their historical narrative with the American Indian narrative. Dealing with the colonial experience in Africa was one thing; accepting that "we" were colonizers was another thing entirely. In arguing from a historical vantage, then, American Indian activists were asking that their audience rewrite their own history from an alternative point of view.

The leaders of the American Indian Movement attempted to create that new understanding of history by focusing on three main points: the nature of the problems facing American Indian nations, the spiritual aspect of the movement designed to help American Indian cultures overcome those problems, and the significance of its emphasis on traditional American Indian mores.

The nature of the problem was the system of colonialism under which American Indian peoples lived.

Our enemy is not the United States, our enemy is not the individual white man. Our enemy is the collective white man. If the collective white man sits back and allows this to happen—then he is our enemy. The white man is the one who has to accept this before there can be peace, love and understanding between the races. They have got to understand that he is in the wrong. (Trudell, 1969, p. 84)

American Indian activists were not attempting to force a collective sense of guilt upon non-American Indians, but rather to instill a collective sense of history among all Americans. By using dissociation to separate the individual from the community, and by refusing to blame individuals, American Indian rhetors made it easier for members of the dominant culture to accept collective responsibility, and to support collective change. Individual responsibility was de-emphasized because it was the actions of the government, not the people themselves, that required change.

To help in that understanding, American Indian activists used confrontation, humor, and direct argument; they used "perspective by incongruity," which, as Dow (1994) notes, "contributes to the comic corrective by functioning as a species of

redefinition that reevaluates and gives new meaning to an existing set of circumstances" (p. 229).

One of the best examples of this is the declaration issued by the "Indians of all Tribes" on Alcatraz Island. Addressed to "The Great White Father" and "All His People," this proclamation claimed Alcatraz "by right of discovery," and suggested opening treaty negotiations concerning the island, including an offer to pay "\$24 dollars in glass beads and red cloth," according to the precedent set by the "white man's purchase of a similar island about 300 years ago." The American Indians offered to set up a Bureau of Caucasian Affairs, and to hold land in trust for white Americans. They further promised to "guide the inhabitants in the proper way of living. We will offer them our religion, our education, our life-ways, in order to help them achieve our level of civilization."

By highlighting the process of colonization as they had experienced it, and by bringing that present into the immediate present rather than obscuring it in the distant past, American Indian rhetors were forcing a new perspective on the audience. In using irony to convey the message, they were presenting that perspective in a way that would disarm rather than raise the defenses of the audience.

The second half of the proclamation was an argument for the suitability of Alcatraz as an American Indian homeland. The rhetors compared it to reservations: isolated from modern facilities, lacking fresh running water, possessing inadequate sanitation facilities, having no mineral rights, health care, job opportunities or educational facilities, and containing a population "that has always been held as prisoners and kept dependent on others" (Johnson, 1996, p. 53-54). The humor is bitter, but the point was clear. The Indians of All Tribes were attempting to get Americans, American Indian and non-American Indian, to reconsider their history and present policies and to evaluate what they found there in American Indian terms. They were hoping that this use of perspective by incongruity would help those who were conditioned by their experiences as colonizers to see things from the point of view of the colonized; to experience a loss of religion, of life-ways, of self-determination.

In another attempt to alter the images of AIM "warriors," American Indian activists focused on the importance of spirituality (Lake, 1991). These rhetors claimed that to try and understand the American Indian Movement without understanding its connection to American Indian spiritual tradition was to fail to understand AIM at all. AIM leaders argued that, "AIM is first of all the religious rebirth, a spiritual movement, and then, of course, comes the new Indian pride, the new Indian identity" (Bellecourt, 1976, p. 67). None of the information on AIM available from the federal government emphasized this crucial aspect of the organization, which was nevertheless reasonably well-known (Rose, Smith, Langley & McDonald, 1980; Wax, 1973).

Not only was AIM guided by spiritual leaders such as Wallace Black Elk, Frank Fools Crow, and Leonard Crow Dog; not only did its members practice and in some cases revive rites such as pipe ceremonies, sweat lodge ceremonies, the Sun Dance and the Ghost Dance; but the AIM leaders' emphasis on the traditional governmental practices of American Indian peoples also had their roots in traditional spiritual practices. The point in restoring the one was to restore the other. Grace Black Elk explained the occupation of Wounded Knee this way:

See, in the beginning, we had our own way. But this Tribal Government is a substitute for our way. It's run by white people's laws. And that BIA is just a

puppet. They hold him by the nose and tell him what to do. So he tries to force his authority on Indian people whether they like it or not. And that's how come we're balking now. We don't want that no more. We want to think for ourselves. We got a mind—the Great Spirit gave us a mind. We got our own way too. So we're going back to where we used to be. (*Voices from Wounded Knee*, 1979, p. 57)

Having defined themselves in ways that resonated with both urban and traditional American Indian people, American Indian activists also had to counter the definitions of themselves and their behavior provided by others. When it came to countering government and media-propagated images of activists, AIM's biggest hurdle was the portrayal of them as violent revolutionaries. Vernon Bellecourt (1976) had this to say: "The term 'revolution' which has become stereotyped now leads the people to believe that it is a violent revolution or that it is some type of thing where we are going to assassinate a lot of people. That is not what we are talking about. We are basically talking about a philosophical revolution which is going to free our people " (p. 69).

This philosophical revolution was aimed not just at American Indian people, but was also intended to "confront the conscience of American people. We are going to continue confronting the establishment. We are going to continue working within the system" (Bellecourt, 1976, p. 74). AIM wanted to change governmental policy by reconstituting the American audience via mediated communication.

In a conscious attempt to alter ideological perspectives on Indian activism through a mechanism of reversal, AIM leaders also attempted to turn the charges of violence back to where those charges originated, which was also where they felt those charges really belonged.

The real violence in America is committed by the Government against our people. The real violence is the fact that on a reservation our women are taken and raped in the back of these police cars. The real violence is the fact that our children are never able to learn to live in a society that is completely alien to them, and so they suffer tremendous disorientation in their own lives which many times leads to suicide, or drunkenness—which is another form of suicide—or drugs. The real violence is when the Bureau of Indian Affairs, who is supposedly holding our lands in trust for us—because they say we are incompetent to handle our own affairs—reduces our land base by 160 thousand acres or so every year. And it's violence against our people when they build dams and flood our ancestral lands and disturb the graves of our past generations. (*Voices from Wounded Knee*, 1979, p. 62)

This tactic of dissociation attempts to separate the "real" violence (that practiced by the American government) from the apparent violence (that of the activists), and thus highlights their fundamental differences. Further, this tactic separates the American government from the American people; the people are not the government, and Indians have no quarrel with them. Accordingly, granting the American Indian demands will simply stop government violence but not fundamentally alter the lives of the average citizen.

Much of this rhetoric fell on deaf ears; the media projected the existing images of

American Indians, ignoring the complex historical and social lessons the American Indians were attempting to teach. The media focused instead on the drama and conflict that were so much a part of American Indian politics. This focus was often seen as media support for AIM "militants" (Dollar, 1973; Schultz, 1973; Smith, 1973; *Time*, 1973; Wax, 1973), when in fact that "support" was presented in non-American Indian rather than American Indian terms. Thus, it cannot really be seen as "support" at all.

AIM leaders later insisted that the media betrayed them by not showing the real issues at stake. "We tried hard to educate the press inside Wounded Knee about the meaning of the takeover," said Dennis Banks. I told the newsmen, "We don't care if you totally condemn AIM, but please convey the real reasons why we're here." We held briefings every day so the TV people wouldn't just take pictures of the weapons and the bunkers. But a great deal of TV's coverage went to the battle action anyway," lamented Banks. (Dewing, 1995, p. 57)

American Indian activists found themselves in a painful double bind. Without creating drama and conflict, without confrontation, the media were uninterested and the government was free to ignore American Indians' problems and their proposed solutions. Yet, when they forced confrontations, the attention went to the fact of the confrontation and not to its causes or its possible resolutions.

American Indian rhetors tried hard to connect their present struggles with past history and traditional values. More often than not, they found that history romanticized and their traditions trivialized as attention in the national media turned on their "costumes," braided long hair, and the "issue" of whether they could put up a tepee as a 'test' of authenticity (Schultz, 1973; Vizenor, 1983). The real problems and issues of concern to American Indian people, were "practically edited out of existence" (LaCourse, 1973, p. 43).

This is an example of the vicious double bind in which American Indian activists found themselves. Their language choices notwithstanding, adopting what American Indians understood as "traditional" behaviors were seen by the larger culture as enacting the stereotypes that the activists were trying to dispel through perspective by incongruity. Thus, the visual imagery was interpreted in ways that undermined the rhetorical tactics the activists were pursuing.

This was particularly frustrating, because the goals of American Indian activists were not merely to educate non-American Indians and to influence governmental policy directly, but also, "to direct a flow of information to American Indian people and thus to attempt to empower them to make responsible decisions by which their own futures come back into their own hands" (LaCourse, 1973, p. 44). The long-range goals of American Indian activists were to increase political awareness of pan-American Indian issues and a sense of empowerment among American Indians. These goals may have been inconsistent with the requirements of fulfilling their more immediate aims of educating the non-American Indian public and forcing changes in governmental powers and institutions.

From all appearances, the American Indian activists were successful: self-determination is now the explicit policy of the federal government; tribal constitutions are increasingly being reformed to reflect at least some elements of traditional cultures; American Indian voices are more consistently heard on issues of concern to American Indian people; and more American Indians are being employed in the

governmental agencies that have become more responsive to American Indian needs. Much has changed since the 1960s and 1970s, and at least some of it is attributable to the educative efforts of American Indian activists. Much remains to be changed, however, and obstacles to their efforts remain strong.

### IMPLICATIONS

The activism of the late 1960s and early 1970s established the American Indian Movement as a force to be reckoned with (Young Bear & Theisz, 1994), as a "last resort" in the words of one tribal Chair (Dewing, 1995, p. 138). Many AIM members and supporters, as well as other activists, continue to see their activities as largely, if not primarily, educative and thus constitutive.

Still, the legacy of the 1960s and 1970s remains a subject of debate, as the issue of how best to accomplish the necessary education and policy goals remain unresolved. There are those, for example, who believe that routinized forms of deliberative communication are the most productive.

Indian input into the legislative process is necessary but not sufficient for enacting bills they favor. In issues they [American Indians] oppose . . . it may not even be necessary to the final outcome. It matters most when it is solicited, and it is solicited on legislative and administrative items that pose no major threat to non-Indian constituencies or in efforts to get Indians to go along with schemes to cut non-Indians anticipated losses. (Bee, 1982, p. 170)

In other words, American Indian voices are most likely to be heard when they matter least, and yet being part of the system is preferable to standing in opposition to it.

In 1993, reflecting on the 1960s and 1970s, Vine Deloria, Jr. said that, "This era will probably always be dominated by the images and slogans of the AIM people. The real accomplishments in land restoration, however, were made by quiet, determined tribal leaders. . . . In reviewing the period we should understand the frenzy of the time and link it to the definite accomplishments made by tribal governments" (cited in Johnson, Champagne, & Nagel, 1997, p. 30). Other scholars argue that the mere fact of American Indian activism robs attention and good will that would otherwise be dedicated to American Indian causes within the administrative apparatus and was thus counterproductive (Castile, 1998; Dollar, 1973; Roos, Smith, Langley, & McDonald, 1980). Yet no one, not even those who criticize the activists most harshly, denies that the activities and rhetoric of the American Indian protestors and AIM especially, provided enormous inspiration to American Indians of all ages and that this, in turn, affected the tone and nature of American Indian leadership (Dewing, 1995, p. 134; Lyman, 1991, p. xii; Smith & Warrior, 1996, p. 274-277).

The experiences of the American Indian activists and the varying responses to and analyses of the activism, reflect in many ways mainstream responses to all of those who speak from the margins. Specifically, the question of whether those whose interests may lie outside of the dominant culture are better served by working inside or outside of the systems mandated by that dominant culture is one that recurs throughout our national political history. The question is unanswered and may well be unanswerable.

This question does, however, point to certain theoretical implications of this study. One of the most important involves the nature of equality in a multicultural

democracy. While the United States, for example, is comprised of an extraordinarily diverse set of cultures, all cultures in the U.S. are not regarded equally. Those who fit most securely within the framework of the dominant culture are those who are most likely to be heard, and once heard, are those most likely to be understood.

Campbell (1971) argued that rhetorical and communication scholars need to discover ways to articulate theories that include the fact of such marginalization, as well as marginalized perspectives on our communal life. The need for that effort is with us still. One option is to be more overtly comparative in our work, making our particular perspective a part of the analytic context. We may need to derive more of that theory from the experiences of marginalized peoples by listening more closely to those experiences and to those who tell of them. This would also mean broadening our perspectives on what "counts" as academic discourse, and how such discourse "ought" to be presented.

One implication of this is that we need to look closely at what marginalized groups have in common. One such element seems to be the attempt to alter vocabularies through language or perspective by incongruity. All out-groups share the need to change labels, to shift perspectives. Yet when the analytical emphasis is on changes in vocabulary or the consummatory purpose of such changes, we may miss the very real deliberative efforts to make change understood as policy. While it is difficult to parse out causality, the influence of language in affecting change in the material conditions of marginalized groups is significant.

Second, we need to attend closely to what differentiates marginalized groups from one another. All social movements are not created the same; the effectiveness of a given tactic has a good deal to do with situation. American Indians, for example, have standing as sovereign nations, a standing that is protected by the Constitution, judicial decisions, and federal law. This standing literalizes the metaphor of colonization for American Indians in ways that are impossible for members of other groups.

American Indian history has been appropriated; any uses of that history by American Indians is therefore fraught with difficulty, for any effort to challenge the dominant ideology also risks reinforcing the perspective of that ideology. Thus, Indians find themselves trapped in a double bind. They cannot attempt to alter perspectives about their history without reinforcing the perspectives of the colonizers. Other groups also have unique situations, advantages, and problems, and research on these groups must take care to examine both the similarities and the differences among and between them.

Finally, we may need to think more carefully about the ends, as well as the means of such communication. Although the American Indian Movement may or may not have accomplished their short term policy goals, there is little doubt that they exert a powerful influence over at least three generations of American Indians and American Indian leaders. Accounting for and explaining this long-term impact remains an important aspiration.

#### NOTES

1. We intend "Indian activists" to refer to those who operated outside of tribal and federal governmental structures. There were also important efforts made by those who worked within those structures, but they fall outside the scope of this paper.
2. American Indians are members of over 550 federally recognized nations, speak over 300 distinct languages, and represent a wide range of traditions, religions, and perspectives.

3. One of the most difficult conflicts among American Indians is between those who see themselves as "traditionals," defenders of the historic traditions, cultures, and spiritual beliefs of their people, and those who call themselves "progressives," who believe in a significantly higher degree of assimilation.

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