

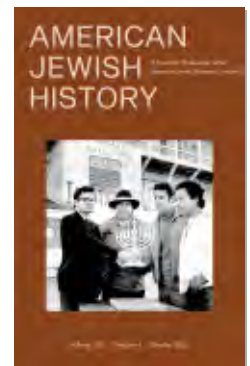


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Mutual Empowerment in the “Power Era”: US Jews and American Indians in the Post–Civil Rights Movement United States¹

Avery Weinman

On December 7, 1969, Joel Brooks and Rabbi Roger E. Herst—two US Jews representing the northern California division of the American Jewish Congress (AJCongress), a major institution of organized Jewish life in the United States—moored the newly rechristened boat *Shalom I* to the crags of Alcatraz Island in the heart of the San Francisco Bay.² Brooks and Herst had sailed to the island to answer a public call for donations and support issued by Indians of All Tribes (IAT), the American Indian activist group who began their occupation of Alcatraz, the notorious former federal penitentiary ominously nicknamed “The Rock,” a month earlier in order to call attention to the United States’ violations of tribes’ treaty rights.³ Over the course of nineteen months, from November 20, 1969 to June 11, 1971, IAT’s Alcatraz occupation electrified a rapt public already thrumming with anti-establishment radicalism.⁴ For American Indians, Alcatraz came to symbolize core tenets of Red Power: full-throated rejection of assimilation, renewed interest in tribal sociocultural and linguistic traditions, and staunch advocacy for American Indian self-determination and legal autonomy on ancestral lands.⁵

1. My thanks to Marc Dollinger, Alma Heckman, Benjamin Madley, David Myers, and Nicholas Rosenthal for carefully reading and improving multiple drafts of this article. Thanks, too, to the archivists and librarians at the San Francisco Public Library and the Bancroft Library at University of California, Berkeley, especially Ruth Haber, for their assistance and enthusiasm. Lastly, generous support from the UCLA Leve Center for Jewish Studies and the UCLA American Indian Studies Center made my archival research possible.

2. “Bill May Ask Indian Alcatraz,” *Oakland Tribune* (December 7, 1969), 9.

3. Tim Findley, “Indians Capture Alcatraz,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (November 21, 1969), 1.

4. Like the rest of the San Francisco Bay Area, Monterey Bay, and lower Salinas Valley, Alcatraz Island is ancestral Ohlone land. Some Ohlone condemned the IAT’s occupation of Alcatraz, denying that the IAT represented them in a series of letters to US President Richard M. Nixon. For the text and citations of these documents, see Troy R. Johnson, “The Occupation of Alcatraz Island, Indian Self-Determination, and the Rise of Indian Activism” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1993), 288–89.

5. For the IAT’s occupation of Alcatraz and its significance, see Kent Blansett, *A Journey to Freedom: Richard Oakes, Alcatraz, and the Red Power Movement* (New

IAT designed the occupation primarily to speak to American Indians, but their activism also resonated with US Jews. The day that Brooks and Herst arrived on Alcatraz was the eighteenth day of the occupation, but it was also the fourth night of Hanukkah, the holiday in which Jews celebrate the reclamation of Jerusalem from Roman forces and the rededication of the Second Temple during the Maccabean Revolt in the second century BCE. For AJCongress members like Brooks and Herst who were sympathetic to IAT's cause, this was a meaningful confluence of liberation. In addition to ten cases packed with much-needed food and blankets for IAT activists living on Alcatraz, Brooks and Herst also brought a plastic *hanukkiyah* to use in a special Hanukkah service that symbolized Jewish and American Indian solidarity.⁶

On the windswept island, Brooks and Herst joined IAT activists for a feast of "Hebrew food" and recited the Hanukkah blessings to mark the "Jewish holiday of national liberation."⁷ Following services, Brooks and Herst explained their support for IAT to the *San Francisco Examiner*, making special mention of parallels in Jewish and American Indian history.⁸ For Brooks, the fact that "Jews know what it means to be dispossessed of their land" meant that they, like American Indians, understood the struggle for self-determination in their ancient ancestral territories. Similarly, Herst connected the Jewish past to the American Indian present in a comment to IAT activist Al Miller (Seminole), remarking that "Hanukkah is our festival of liberation from oppressive forces... We feel Alcatraz will become your symbol of that same struggle."⁹ The sentiments shared by Brooks and Herst echoed the press release that the Northern California division of the AJCongress had published days earlier,

Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv5cgbqj>; Richard DeLuca, "We Hold the Rock!: The Indian Attempt to Reclaim Alcatraz Island," *California History* 62, no. 1 (1983): 2-22, <https://doi.org/10.2307/25158134>; Troy R. Johnson, "The Occupation of Alcatraz: Roots of American Indian Activism," *Wicazo Sa Review* 10, no. 2 (1994): 63-79, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1409133> and Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island: Indian Self-Determination and the Rise of Indian Activism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996); Thomas Kahle, "Breaking Point: The 1969 American Indian Occupation of Alcatraz Island," *Penn History Review* 25, no. 2 (2020): 57-138 (article 4), <https://repository.upenn.edu/phr/vol26/iss2/4>; Casey Ryan Kelly, "The Rhetoric of Red Power and the American Indian Occupation of Alcatraz Island" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2009); and Steve Talbot, "Free Alcatraz: The Culture of Native American Liberation," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 6, no. 3 (1978): 83-96.

6. Lynn Ludlow, "Rites on Rock: Hanukkah Gift To the Indians," *San Francisco Examiner* (December 8, 1969), 3.

7. "Alcatraz Indians Eat Hebrew Food," *Arizona Republic* (December 8, 1969), 31.

8. Ludlow, "Rites," 3.

9. Ludlow, "Rites," 3.

which expressed the organization's hope that the traditional exchange of Hanukkah gifts, "Indian and Jewish folk-dancing," and occasion to "break bread" in celebration of "one of man's first attempts to gain national liberation" would make the joint IAT-AJCongress Hanukkah service powerful for both groups.¹⁰ Before departing the island, Brooks and Herst gathered with Miller and another American Indian IAT activist, Frank Robbins (tribe unknown), for a photograph to mark the event (see figure 1). In front of an old prison sign newly changed from "United States Property" to "United Indian Property," the four posed together, standing side by side in an interwoven pattern, as they the gripped the *hanukkiyah* in solidarity.¹¹

This arresting photograph symbolizes an understudied trend: in the post-civil rights movement "Power Era" in the United States, amid a domestic surge of cultural pluralism and global waves of counterhegemonic radicalism, US Jews and American Indians looked to each other as sources of mutual empowerment. Here, the term "Power Era" refers to the discursive world of the late 1960s and 1970s, which was characterized by activists' enthusiastic embrace of third worldism, internationalism, antiracism, and anti-imperialism. As a term of periodization, "Power Era" refers more to change in activists' self-perception of their identities, tactics, and political goals than it does to substantial change in these areas. American Indians and US Jews did not completely invent their characteristic assertive tactics or radical ideologies in the late 1960s and 1970s. These tactics and ideologies have roots that can be clearly traced back to earlier in the twentieth century, particularly to the growth of minority, civil, and human rights discourses in the postwar United States. What was different in the late 1960s and 1970s was that radical American Indian and US Jewish activists saw themselves as breaking with past traditions. Indeed, they intentionally sought rupture with older generations. In other words, the Power Era demarcates change in style but not necessarily in substance.

In this atmosphere, US Jews and American Indians found shared historical themes in three main categories: survival of extreme oppression (including attempted genocide), preservation of socioreligious and linguistic traditions, and strong connection to ancient ancestral lands. These parallels were meaningful ways to understand themselves, as well as how each other's past was uniquely applicable to their contemporary political needs and their social positions in the United States. It is vital

10. Undated Press Release, BANC MSS 2010/702, carton 2, folder 25, AJC Press Releases 1968-71, American Jewish Congress Northern California Division 1957-88, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, CA.

11. Names provided in "Alcatraz Ceremony," *Sedalia Democrat* (December 10, 1969), 16B.

have important implications for the groups' respective stakes in politics. US Jews strove to restore lost pride in cultural and ethnic difference that antisemitism and assimilation had suppressed but did not face ongoing or imminent violence in the late 1960s and 1970s, nor did they face the abrogation of their legal rights and territorial sovereignty. American Indians, on the other hand, faced these threats in the late 1960s and 1970s and still face them today. Calling attention to the power differential between these two groups makes clear that there are important distinctions in the way that American Indians and Jews fit into the US political context, particularly in the consequences of the potential successes and failures of their political goals.

Despite the fact that US Jews and American Indians wrote about the idea of their shared pasts as mutually empowering in their own time, there are multiple historiographical gaps in how scholars have represented the relations between US Jews and American Indians in the post-civil rights movement United States. First, there is a relative lack of scholarship on American Indians in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries compared to the colonial period. Pathbreaking works in this vibrant emerging subfield are very recent; most have come out only in the past two decades.¹³ Second, the body of historical scholarship that deals with Jews and American Indians is small, older, and focuses mostly on the colonial period, and the latter two factors especially affect its perpetuation of anti-Indian tropes. Further, studies of US Jewish-American Indian relations in the twentieth-century United States are rare, and studies set after the civil rights movement are even rarer.¹⁴ Third, there is a conceptual haze around Jewish politics in the wake of the civil rights movement. This flavor of US Jewish politics—which eminent scholar of the topic, Marc Dollinger, has called at different times “Jewish-centered activism” or “Jewish particularism”—is what this article theorizes simply

13. Blansett, *Journey*; Daniel M. Cobb, *Native Activism in Cold War America: The Struggle for Sovereignty* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2008); Daniel M. Cobb and Loretta Fowler, *Beyond Red Power: American Indian Politics and Activism Since 1900* (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research, 2007); Douglas K. Miller, *Indians on the Move: Native American Mobility and Urbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019); Nicolas Rosenthal, *Reimagining Indian Country: Native American Migration and Identity in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); and Bradley Glenn Shreve, *Red Power Rising: The National Indian Youth Council and the Origins of Native Activism* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011).

14. David S. Koffman, *The Jew's Indian: Colonialism, Pluralism, and Belonging in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2019), 213–16, <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/71721>.

as “Jewish Power.”¹⁵ Lastly, historians in Jewish studies and American Indian studies have reputations, unfairly earned, for parochialism and methodological exceptionalism despite decades-old traditions of interdisciplinary scholarship that brings together history, anthropology, sociology, and literary studies, among others.

This article therefore analyzes the relationship between American Indians and US Jews in the Power Era—taking IAT’s occupation of Alcatraz as a core case study—in order to contribute new information on an understudied period and intergroup relationship. The most ambitious goal of this article is to argue that the way in which American Indians and US Jews drew mutual empowerment from each other’s pasts is a usable model for historians today, one that encourages them to apply interdisciplinary concepts and shared master themes between American Indian studies and Jewish studies, but this article is limited in its concerted focus on a specific example. The conclusions of this article should not be stretched beyond Alcatraz to other cases of engagement between American Indians and US Jews in the late 1960s and 1970s or in other periods without further historical research. Stated clearly, this article, in terms of genre, is a methodological proof, not a comprehensive history. Its goal is to demonstrate what American Indian studies and Jewish studies historians can gain while leaving many angles unexplored and multiple questions unanswered, hoping that others will take up related lines of inquiry for themselves.

AMERICAN INDIAN AND JEWISH POLITICS IN THE POWER ERA

The IAT-AJCongress Hanukkah service symbolized its specific post-civil rights movement historical context. Unlike the civil rights movement’s emphases on universalism, civil disobedience, and integration, the Power Era normalized a different political paradigm that valued cultural pluralism, particularism, counterhegemonic radicalism, militarism, and anti-assimilationism. Again, it should be noted that this is more of a self-perceived change in style than an unprecedented change in substance. The popular attitudes and forms of activism and protest that animated the myriad Power movements of the period also animated the two powers of relevance to American Indian-Jewish relations: Red Power and what

15. Marc Dollinger, *Black Power, Jewish Politics: Reinventing the Alliance in the 1960s* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2018), 7–15, <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/58619>; and Dollinger, “The Counterculture,” in *California Jews*, ed. Ava Fran Kahn and Marc Dollinger (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2003), 155.

this article terms “Jewish Power.” These movements developed from historical trends that were specific to American Indians and US Jews, as well as from a common discourse.

Red Power emerged in the postwar period in response to two key connected trends: American Indian urbanization and US federal and state attacks on tribal sovereignty. While established patterns of American Indian migration to US cities and urban centers existed throughout the twentieth century, US “termination” and “relocation” policies—codified by the passage of US House Resolution 108 and Public Law 280 in 1953—accelerated the movement of American Indians off of reservations and threatened American Indian self-determination and autonomy.¹⁶ Influenced by Cold War fantasies of colorblind equality under broadly painted Americanism and capitalist values of self-sufficiency, US federal and state governments sought to assimilate American Indians by dissolving treaty rights, seizing reservation lands, halting federal aid and guardianship, and repealing tribal jurisdiction, in the process making American Indians theoretically equal US citizens in rights and representation.¹⁷ During termination and relocation, the United States abrogated the sovereignty of more than one hundred federally recognized tribes, and by 1970 as much as a fourth of the total American Indian population in the United States lived in urban spaces.¹⁸ As recent scholarship has shown, however, it would be a mistake to emplot postwar American Indian migration and urbanization as a tragedy.¹⁹ Community-led social organizations that American Indians created to combat state-abetted social problems such as unemployment, high rates of drug and alcohol abuse, over-policing, and housing discrimination showed American Indian moxie and the survival of American Indian epistemologies even as American Indians physically relocated to urban settings.²⁰ In these new urban settings, American Indian tribes with previously minimal or nonexistent relationships cultivated new intertribal ties without sacrificing tribal difference or their roots in reservations or ancestral lands, demonstrating the overall failure of the assimilationism that drove the

16. Blansett, *Journey*, 51.

17. Blansett, *Journey*, 8–9 and Cobb, *Native Activism*, 18.

18. Kelly, “Rhetoric,” 50–51 and “American Indian Population Trends: US Bureau of the Census, 1960–1990,” in *Red Power: The American Indians’ Fight for Freedom*, ed. Alvin M. Josephy, Jr. (New York: American Heritage Press, 1971), 258.

19. For works that challenge tragic interpretations of postwar American Indian urbanization, see note 12 above and Ned Blackhawk, “I Can Carry On from Here: The Relocation of American Indians to Los Angeles,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 11, no. 2 (1995): 16–30, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1409093>.

20. Blansett, *Journey*, 8–9.

state's termination and relocation policies.²¹ With creative adaptations like these in mind, twentieth-century American Indian migration and urbanization were not uniformly experienced as negative cataclysms, as earlier histories suggested, but examples of continued American Indian resilience.

Red Power was a product of these specific American Indian experiences and popular global political discourses, and it gave American Indians an ideological paradigm they could use as they responded to pressing challenges. Popular forms of Red Power activism included rejection of assimilationism and embrace of American Indian pride, protests to defend tribal sovereignty and legal autonomy against ongoing efforts to strip American Indian tribes of their lands, and attempts to reclaim ancestral tribal lands that the United States had already seized in prior decades and centuries.²² Although Red Power resembles the more well-known Black Power movement in name, its goals differed—often significantly—from other power movements because of unique aspects of American Indians' history and relationship to the United States. To understand its nuances, it is worthwhile to consider Indigenous historian Kent Blansett's (Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Shawnee, and Potawatomi) definition of Red Power, which he distinguishes as “an Intertribal movement that emerged from Native Nationalism.”²³ Blansett's definition of Red Power includes key ideas of American Indian pride, self-determination, autonomy, and sovereignty that were present in earlier scholarship, but by grounding Red Power in “Native Nationalism” he calls attention to two central, distinctive aspects of Red Power. First, Red Power was not a step toward a homogenizing pan-Indian politics; rather, it was a federalist framework that preserved and encouraged tribal difference.²⁴ Red Power gave American Indians from different tribes a forum to protest structural injustices that affected them at the shared intertribal level, but they did so as distinct groups rooted in specific concerns and without the intention to merge into a monolithic whole. Second, as a form of native *nationalism*, adherents of Red Power advocated for independence from the United States, not for equality as one of many minority social groups within the United States.²⁵ This is one of the central tensions of contemporary American Indian politics. Representing American Indians as an ethnic minority reflects the reality of US population statistics and American Indians' lived experiences as racialized, discriminated-against

21. Rosenthal, *Reimagining*, 51–52, 65.

22. Blansett, *Journey*, 3–6.

23. Blansett, *Journey*, 4.

24. Blansett, *Journey*, 7–8.

25. Rosenthal, *Reimagining*, 4, 7.

communities, but it does not reflect how American Indians understand themselves as distinct nations under US settler-colonial occupation. This nationalist dimension of Red Power shaped American Indians' occasionally fraught relations with US Blacks during and after the civil rights movement, and it clarifies why Jews, with their lengthy tradition of communal autonomy and aversion to assimilation, offered Red Power a particularly useful political model.²⁶

Despite this, there is scant—if any—mention in the American Indian studies historiography of US Jews' politics or of Jewish Power in the pantheon of post-civil rights movement cultural pluralism. Further, in the American Indian studies historiography on Red Power and IAT's occupation of Alcatraz, scholars never mention Jews as a group that influenced American Indian politics, while they do mention the influence of Black Power, the Chicano movement, Asian-American activism, second-wave feminism, gay liberation and queer movements, and the New Left.²⁷ Yet US Jews did shape a Jewish Power movement of their own, one that drew from the common discourses and atmosphere of the time and place, and which gave US Jews a language to articulate a distinct Jewish identity and a hierarchy of particularist political beliefs and goals. In this Jewish Power deviated from conventional US Jewish political strategies. Unlike the shades of quietism expressed in Jews' support for universalist liberalism from the beginnings of the Enlightenment, German Jews' Reform Judaism, popular early twentieth-century tepidity toward Zionism, or US Jews' postwar assimilationism, in the late 1960s and 1970s US Jews embraced a newly vitalized Jewish particularism that would have scandalized earlier Jewish communities and provoked anxieties over accusations of dual loyalty.²⁸ Additionally, the 1967 Six-Day War, with its imagery of Jewish military might and its messianic tinge, both of which were sharpened by memory of the Holocaust, also galvanized a discourse of Jewish Power.

It should be reiterated that Jewish Power diverged from other power movements in US Jews' relative position of power in the United States and in the stakes of US Jews' politics. Jewish Power was primarily about US Jews embracing the distinctive Jewish characteristics and practices that had been swallowed by assimilationism and intentionally claiming a counterhegemonic "other" status. In prior decades, however, the majority of US Jews had already largely and successfully assimilated and had

26. Rosenthal, *Reimagining*, 4, 7. For an example of fraught American Indian-Black relations, see Vine Deloria, Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, repr. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 168–97 ("The Red and the Black").

27. See note 4 for a list of relevant scholarship.

28. Dollinger, *Black Power*, 2.

come to enjoy the safety and privilege that accompanied their recognition as a “white” racial group. Other Power movements, although not all, did not operate from such a position of relatively low stakes. Black and Red Power, for example, emerged out of the need for defense against active and often violent discrimination and domination. At stake in their politics was not unsuppressed cultural and ethnic expression, as it was for US Jews, but life itself.

Red Power and Jewish Power shared a number of key traits that can be divided into three categories: particularist causes, shifts in community power structures, and the forms of activism. Each of these three categories reflected significant changes from the norms of American Indian and US Jewish politics during and before the civil rights movement.

Cultural pluralism’s celebration of distinct group identities animated both inward-facing and outward-facing American Indian and Jewish particularist causes. In terms of inward-facing activism, the similar feelings of alienation from oneself and deracination from one’s heritage that were caused by American Indians’ migration to urban centers and by US Jews’ ambivalence toward assimilation spurred activism aimed at cultural revival and education. These activities served as public rebuttals to assimilationism and took place at both the individual and communal levels. American Indians and US Jews reconnected with ostensibly traditional cuisine, dress, music, dance, language, and rituals, which they often performed at community gatherings such as weekend pow-wows or youth summer camps.²⁹ At universities, American Indian and Jewish student unions, campus organizations, and area studies departments—including those formally hosted by academic institutions and extrainstitutional “free” universities set up by students, faculty, and community leaders—formed at roughly the same time as part of a larger wave of ethnic studies.³⁰ In the California Bay Area, Jewish students at University of California, Berkeley founded the Radical Jewish Union in the same year—1968—that American Indian students across the San Francisco Bay rallied for the creation of a Native American studies department at San Francisco State College (SFSC, later renamed San Francisco State University).³¹ Among these SFSC American Indian students were several future leaders of IAT, including its charismatic leader Richard Oakes (Mohawk) and Miller, who is pictured in the photograph of IAT-

29. For examples, see Dollinger, *Black Power*, 100; Blansett, *Journey*, 93; and Johnson, “Occupation of Alcatraz: Roots,” 48–55.

30. Dollinger, “Counterculture,” 159–60; Dollinger, *Black Power*, 112–13; and Blansett, *Journey*, 97.

31. Blansett, *Journey*, 197.

AJCongress Hanukkah service.³² Like other groups, American Indians and US Jews created particularist newspapers to inform interested readers about American Indian and Jewish events and lectures, culture, and community concerns. Notable American Indian newspapers that began their runs in the Power Era included *Akwesasne Notes*, *Americans Before Columbus*, *Indian Voice*, and *Warpath*. A significant number of US Jewish newspapers were founded earlier in the twentieth century, but newspapers cast in the mold of Jewish Power began their runs in the late 1960s and 1970s. This included, for instance, the University of California, Santa Cruz's radical Jewish student newspaper *Leviathan Jewish Journal*, which was founded in 1972.³³

In outward-facing activism, unselfconscious power particularism led American Indians and US Jews to agitate for explicitly American Indian and Jewish causes without fear of accusations of disloyalty or jeopardizing the United States' public image. While this stance was obvious for Red Power activists—whose activism in favor of tribal sovereignty, American Indian legal autonomy, and land reclamation was necessarily antagonistic to the state—it challenged conventional Jewish political strategies that relied on quietism and performative loyalty vis-à-vis the state. In the Power Era, Jews' outward-facing activism included efforts to publicize human rights abuses against Ethiopian Jews and Jews in the Middle East and North Africa, the movement to free Soviet Jewry, and support for Israel and Zionism.³⁴ While not explicitly adversarial to the United States, in these causes US Jews disregarded and occasionally contradicted US Cold War geopolitical interests, differentiating the identities and political goals of US Jews from the identity and political goals of the state to a much higher degree than in previous generations.

This loud particularism broke from the quietism of earlier generations of American Indian and Jewish leadership and embodied consequential shifts in American Indian and Jewish communal structures that occurred in the Power Era. Geographically, Red and Jewish Power shifted political power to California, away from respective traditional seats of power on American Indian reservations and East Coast cities.³⁵ These American Indian and US Jewish leaders were younger, more likely to represent lower-to-middle class and stereotypically denigrated socioethnic backgrounds, and came of age during convulsions of racism in the

32. Blansett, *Journey*, 197.

33. *Leviathan Jewish Journal* 1, no. 1 (1972/5733), <https://leviathanjewishjournal.com/2017/05/01/vol-1-no-1-1972/>.

34. Dollinger, *Black Power*, 8–15.

35. For the importance of California, see Dollinger, "Counterculture," 159–62 and Blansett, *Journey*, 88–96.

United States and global counterhegemonic radicalism that shaped their understanding of assimilationism as something to reject, not something to pursue. Red Power leaders who grew up during the zenith of urbanization, termination, and relocation, and who honed their political consciousnesses at watershed Red Power events such as the 1956 Workshop on Indian Affairs and the 1961 American Indian Chicago Conference were the first generation of American Indians to attend universities en masse, and—unlike the Progressive Era Indian New Deal cadre of elite American Indian leadership—came largely from lower-to-middle-class backgrounds.³⁶ Similarly, many Jewish Power leaders were middle class and the first-generation children of Yiddish-speaking immigrants from Eastern Europe.³⁷ These young US Jews reformulated Jewishness, turning it from an elective religious identity that fell safely within the mainstream to a counterhegemonic ethnic identity.³⁸ This ethnicization of Jewish identity tied into a larger shift in the impetus for US Jews' involvement in justice activism. As an ethnic group, Jews' obligation to pursue justice was more of a political commitment based on their history as a persecuted people and less exclusively a religious command. Similarly, whereas US Jews often phrased their activism in the civil rights movement in the language of universal rights for all citizens, adherents of Jewish Power stressed Jews' covenantal obligation to pursue justice as located in their specific textual tradition and history of oppression. As a consequence of these major changes in the communal power structures of American Indians and US Jews, young Red and Jewish Power leaders frequently clashed with older generations, imbuing both movements with the spirit of youth rebellion.³⁹ One 1969 headline in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, which read "Hostile Jewish Students Shock Older Generation," represented the uncomfortable growing pains of Red and Jewish Power leaders' struggles against "Uncle Tomahawks" and "Uncle Jakes" as they sought to change the values of American Indian and US Jewish politics in line with the reconstruction of their communities.⁴⁰

36. Rosenthal, *Reimagining*, 112 and Cobb, *Native Activism*, 7, 25, 95.

37. Dollinger, "Counterculture," 160 and Fred Rosenbaum, *Cosmopolitans: A Social and Cultural History of the Jews of the San Francisco Bay Area*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 334.

38. For more on Jewish "ethnicism," see Ronald I. Rubin, "The New Jewish Ethnic," *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 13, no. 3 (1973): 5–15, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23257396> and Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 213.

39. Dollinger, "Counterculture," 160 and Shreve, *Red Power*, 95–94.

40. "Hostile Jewish Students Shock Older Generation," *San Francisco Chronicle* (March 10, 1969), 6, BANC MSS 2010/702, carton 2, folder 19, newsletters and press releases, 1964–82, American Jewish Congress Northern California Division 1957–88,

In addition to revolutionizing the values from the norms of prior generations, American Indian and US Jewish youth of the Power Era relied on dramatically different political tactics and forms of activism and protest. Unlike the standards of respect, legality, and nonviolence that characterized the political mainstream for these groups during the civil rights movement and earlier in the twentieth century, Red and Jewish Power activists delighted in causing offense, welcomed controversy, and sought out confrontation. In this way, they resembled other movements and groups associated with the New Left and reflected the common spirit of youth rebellion. Red and Jewish Power activists consistently employed two popular tactics within these new forms of activism and protest: political satire and militancy. Like the other movements of the day, they used irreverent humor and absurdism to provoke the establishment—often scandalizing older generations in the process—and to throw political issues of the day into sharp relief. For example, the anonymous authors of the “Proclamation to the Great White Father,” published by the IAT at the start of the Alcatraz occupation, sarcastically included an offer to buy the entire island from the city of San Francisco for twenty-four dollars’ worth of glass beads, a tart barb at the price for which European settlers “bought” Manhattan in the seventeenth century.⁴¹ US Jews, especially those in the radical vanguard of the New Left, such as “Yippie” leaders Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, relied on the same political comedy playbook. Lastly, Red and Jewish Power militancy was similarly antagonistic to communal leadership, police, and the state. Activists disrupted public events with provocative stunts, utilized hostile media coverage as a free platform to disseminate their political views, and pursued overt—and sometimes violent—clashes with the forces of the state.

SHARED HISTORICAL THEMES, PRESENT USABLE MODELS

The shared historical themes that resonated with American Indians and US Jews in the Power Era can be sorted into three categories: survival of extreme oppression (including genocide), sociocultural and linguistic

Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, CA. For use of “Uncle Tomahawk,” see Deloria, *Custer*, 181. For “Uncle Jake,” see “Jewish Student Press Seeing Swift Growth,” *New York Times* (March 13, 1971), <https://www.nytimes.com/1971/03/13/archives/jewish-student-press-seeing-swift-growth-jewish-student-press-grows.html>.

41. “Proclamation to the Great White Father and All His People,” *Indians of All Tribes Newsletter* 1, no. 1 (1970): 1.

“tribalism,” and connection to ancestral lands. These categories highlight formative aspects of American Indian and Jewish histories that were muted in their other intergroup relations, leading American Indians and US Jews to regard each other’s pasts as uniquely usable models for their present political needs and goals. This section of the article details these categories—where applicable, with emphasis on American Indians and US Jews who were directly connected to IAT’s Alcatraz occupation—and shows that American Indians and US Jews of the Power Era applied lessons from each other’s histories to better understand themselves.

American Indians and US Jews conceptualized one another as peoples with long histories of oppression, and this framing tied into the Power Era’s general spirit of minorities staging counterhegemonic revolutions against the establishment, as well as into specific features of American Indian and Jewish history. In the political climate of the period, there was a sense that all groups oppressed by the United States, in one way or another, had an obligation to bond together in solidarity. This popular idea influenced how American Indians and US Jews understood each other. For example, Stella Leach (Colville-Sioux), one of IAT’s leaders on Alcatraz and a licensed nurse who ran the free health clinic that IAT set up on the island, included Jews and especially Jewish women in the collective of “other oppressed people” whose donations kept IAT’s Alcatraz operations afloat.⁴² In an interview with fellow IAT leader John Trudell (Santee Dakota) for IAT’s radio program, *Radio Free Alcatraz*, Leach argued that it was the “oppressed background” of the clinic’s volunteer doctors that drove their empathy for and sympathy with IAT’s cause.⁴³ As she pointed out, six of the clinic’s seven doctors were Jews, including David Tepper, Robert Brennan, Richard Fine, Stuart Goldstein, Arthur Ruth, and one Dr. Meyer from Daly City.⁴⁴

Solidarity also motivated US Jews, especially in the Bay Area, who were similarly invested in supporting the IAT. The San Francisco Jewish Community Center (JCC) hosted two events about American Indian life and IAT’s occupation of Alcatraz in January 1970. The first, an evening lecture held on January 14, was titled “Indians and Alcatraz” and featured a frequent Bay Area Jewish speaker named Noel Vaughn and an uncredited American Indian organizer. The hippie-counterculture

42. Bob Ferris, “Recovering Stolen Land,” *NOLA Express* (June 26, 1970), 12–23.

43. “Stella Leach. Interview by John Trudell on Radio Free Alcatraz” in Johnson, “Occupation of Alcatraz Island,” 185.

44. “Stella Leach. Interview.” For the doctor’s names, see Leach’s interview, the first issue of *Indians of All Tribes Newsletter*, and “Clinic, January 1971,” box 1, folder 3, IAT’s Assorted Contact Information, Alcatraz Indian Occupation Records 1964–71, San Francisco Public Library (SFPL), San Francisco, CA.

newspaper *San Francisco Good Times* neglected to identify the American Indian activist in its summary of the day’s events, but, intuiting the interests of its audience, it did helpfully remind astrologically inclined readers that the moon would enter Taurus at 4:26 pm.⁴⁵ The second event, arranged by the Young Moderns of the JCC, brought “an organizer from the American Indian Center” to the JCC for an event titled “Alcatraz and After” on January 27.⁴⁶ Herst, who is pictured in the photograph of IAT-AJCongress Hanukkah service, confirmed in a February 1970 interview that, even months after the start of the occupation, “helping the Alcatraz Indians” remained one of the central causes for students affiliated with the Hillel (an on-campus Jewish organization in the United States) that he led at SFSC. The humorous title of Herst’s interview also captured the zeitgeist of political satire and comedy; it read “Jewish Students Handle Sex, Drugs Well.”⁴⁷

Within the shared history of oppression that connected American Indians and US Jews, there was a specific, more chilling feature that linked their pasts: genocide. The Holocaust and genocides of numerous American Indian tribes by the United States, Canada, and other imperial powers bonded Jews and American Indians to a shared history of attempted extermination, but also, crucially, to survival, resilience, and rebirth.⁴⁸ The parallels that US Jews and American Indians drew with the Nazis and the United States, respectively, stressed the severity of US termination policies, and functioned as an injunction against extermination of that kind in their or any future time. For example, influential University of Chicago anthropologist Sol Tax—innovator of “action-anthropology,” long-time ally for American Indian autonomy, teacher at the 1956 Workshop on Indian Affairs, and child of Jewish immigrants—once explained that his staunch opposition to US termination policy came from his understanding of the Nazis’ attempted genocide of Jews. For Tax, the Holocaust proved that modern states were capable of promoting brutal policies that could escalate to total eradication, meaning that any US policy with the potential to backslide into a similar evil must be immediately and wholeheartedly rejected.⁴⁹ Adam Fortunate Eagle (Red Lake Chippewa)—a notable figurehead in the Bay Area

45. “Wednesday,” *San Francisco Good Times* 3, no. 2 (January 8, 1970), 20.

46. “Tuesday Meetings,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (January 1, 1970), 27.

47. “Hillel Director Claims Jewish Students Handle Sex, Drugs Well,” *American Jewish World* (February 27, 1970), 9, <https://www.nli.org.il/en/newspapers/am-jwld/1970/02/27/01/article/56/?srpos=1&e=-----en-20-amjwld-1--img-txIN%7ctxTI-handle+sex%2c+drugs+well-----1>.

48. Madley, *American Genocide* and Woolford and Benvenuto, “Canada and Colonial Genocide.”

49. Cobb, *Native Activism*, 24.

American Indian community who was directly involved in IAT's Alcatraz occupation through his role at the San Francisco Indian Center—made a similar observation in his memoir, *Alcatraz! Alcatraz!: The Indian Occupation of 1969–1971*. On US federal termination policy, he wrote that “It all sounded like a twist on the ‘final solution’ idea proposed by another government just a few years earlier.”⁵⁰ American Indian scholar and Red Power titan Vine Deloria, Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux), similarly compared American Indians’ experience in the United States with Jews’ experience in Nazi Europe, with an added analogy drawn between the Bureau of Indian Affairs and infamous high-ranking Nazi official Adolf Eichmann.⁵¹ Deloria’s comparison specified that both peoples survived a particular type of bureaucratized and, to use Hannah Arendt’s iconic phrasing, “banal” evil. Shared oppression between American Indians and Jews, then, was common to the popular ethos of the Power Era but also specific to unique features of American Indian and Jewish pasts.

The second shared theme—sociocultural and linguistic “tribalism”—drew from the Power Era’s emphasis on cultural pluralism and anti-assimilationism. American Indian and US Jewish activists’ use of the term “tribalism” was vague, and it is unclear what they intended it to mean, assuming that there was consensus about its meaning at all. “Tribe” did not appear to be a synonym for “ethnicity” or “nation.” In general, “tribalism” as a term seems to accomplish two key rhetorical moves. First, it differentiates American Indians and US Jews from society at large by leaning into distinctive linguistic precedent in American Indian and Jewish pasts, harking to the popular nomenclature for different American Indian populations and the ancient tribes of Israel, respectively. Second, it conjures notions of unique customs and rituals in a way that is tinged with primordialism and romanticism. Together, these aspects of “tribalism” suggest that it was intended to evoke particularism and pride.

To further understand the tribalism shared by American Indians and US Jews, it is necessary to return to the canonical set of essays in Deloria’s *Custer Died For Your Sins*, in which he wrote at length about resonances between American Indians and Jews. A member of a dynastic family of American Indian scholars and arguably the most important American Indian intellectual of the late twentieth century, Deloria had a major influence on Red Power both through his extensive scholarly and popular output and through his activism in key Red Power organizations,

50. Adam Fortunate Eagle, *Alcatraz! Alcatraz!: The Indian Occupation of 1969–1971* (Berkeley: Heyday, 1992), 20.

51. Deloria, *Custer*, 97.

including the National Council of American Indians and IAT, among others.⁵² *Custer Died for Your Sins*, originally published in 1969, galvanized and shaped Red Power activists, including those in IAT, whose members often brought a copy of the book to press conferences.⁵³ *Custer* reached and influenced a significant number of American Indians, and it is reasonable to assume that Deloria's writings on American Indians and Jews found substantial readership. For Deloria, it was Jews' "long tribal-religious tradition of [their] own" that explained why Jews, unlike others, understood and did not fetishize American Indian history.⁵⁴ His admiration for Jews differed from his often sharp criticism of other groups and their activities, especially US Blacks and Black politics.⁵⁵ The communal structure shared by Jews and American Indians, Deloria argued, grew from precedent first established in the Torah, which he described as the "original cradle of tribalism."⁵⁶ Within the framework of tribalism, Deloria listed the features common to American Indian and Jewish culture, which include pedagogical (rather than punitive) law, community rituals linked to a cyclical seasonal calendar, covenantal selection by the divine, synonymy between religious doctrine and social norms, and sacred language exclusive to the community.⁵⁷ The upshot of Deloria's definition of "tribalism" is that Jews and American Indians alike preserved defining community features that, while distinctive in content, were similar in form. Further, they did so even when those tribal features contradicted the norms of other more populous or powerful communities around them.

For US Jews, tribalism connected to Jewish Power's emphasis on the ethnicization of Jewish identity and the rejection of US assimilationism. A desire to return to the tribal characteristics influenced Jewish Power activism, particularly in inward-facing activities. These included renewed interest in ritual practice and prayer; wearing traditional Jewish clothing such as *kippot*, *tsitsit*, or *tallit*; community events focused on cultural products such as Jewish or Israeli literature, cuisine, and folk dancing; Hebrew and Yiddish classes, with the possibility of Ladino and other

52. Cobb, *Native Activism*, 118–19.

53. See Blansett, *Journey*, 158 for a photograph of IAT activists John Trudell and Grace Thorpe (Sac and Fox) with a copy of *Custer* and Edgar Cahn's *Our Brother's Keeper* during a *Radio Free Alcatraz* broadcast.

54. Deloria, *Custer*, 4.

55. Deloria, *Custer*, 168–96.

56. Deloria, *Custer*, 236.

57. Deloria, *Custer*, 236 and Vine Deloria, Jr., *God is Red: A Native View of Religion* (Golden: Fulcrum, 2003), 214.

Jewish language classes; and the call for political radicalism.⁵⁸ Often, US Jews presented these activities in secular language, as the cultural heritage of Jews, even when they had explicitly religious roots, as was the case for Friday night Shabbat and holiday services.⁵⁹ Each of these activities visibly differentiated US Jews from mainstream in a conscious contradiction of prior generations, who were more ready to jettison uniquely Jewish traits in exchange for acceptance into society. In this anti-assimilationist bent, US Jews regarded American Indians' experiences as meaningful parallels to their own experiences, noting key similarities in their tribal communal structures such as ceremonial dancing and chanting, ritual slaughter, celebrations based on nature and seasonal cycles, and historical antagonism to Christianity.⁶⁰ These features differed from hegemonic practices and values in the United States, preventing—and, disincentivizing—assimilation for US Jews and American Indians alike.

An example of how American Indians were a powerful parallel for US Jews of the period is the 1970 Indian Summer Service Project, organized by Young Men's and Young Women's Hebrew Association leader Nathan Kolodney.⁶¹ This program involved US Jewish teenagers living on American Indian reservations and working with American Indian teenagers over the summer. In his report, Kolodney remarked that US Jews experienced in their newly forged ties with American Indians a "reawakening of the desire to experience Jewish traditions." As evidence of the secular character of Jewish tribalism, he added that "No teen suddenly became 'religious' or 'observant,'" although they did become interested in Jewish rituals and deeds as their relationships with American Indians sharpened their perception of their mutual strangeness within US society. He concluded that this phenomenon challenged the "cliches of the assimilationists" by demonstrating that US Jewish youth wanted to embrace their difference.⁶² For Kolodney, as for others, American Indians and Jews shared sociocultural and linguistic tribalism that carried immediate and practicable utility for determining anti-assimilationist US Jewish politics in the present and future.

58. Jewish student newspapers of the period provide copious examples, but for explicit reference, see Dollinger, *Black Power*, 100, 119, 129, 157 and Dollinger, "Counterculture," 159.

59. See, e.g., *Leviathan* 1, no. 1 (1972), 2.

60. "Environmental Theatre' and Jewish Identity," *Jewish Advocate* (May 1, 1969), 14; Deloria, *Custer*, 120; and Ben Gallob, "Learning Jewishness on an Indian Reservation," *Jewish Advocate* (February 5, 1970), page 3, section 2.

61. Gallob, "Learning Jewishness."

62. Gallob, "Learning Jewishness."

American Indians, especially those active in Red Power, reciprocated this interest in the practicable utility of shared historical themes for present goals and needs of both communities. Perhaps no example illustrates this more fully than the following passage from Deloria's book:

Indians often consider the history of the Jews in Egypt. For four hundred years these people were subjected to cultural and economic oppression. They were treated as slaves without rights and property although the original promise of the Pharaoh to Joseph, like the Indian treaties, spelled out Hebrew rights. Like the Great White Father, the Pharaoh turned his back on his former allies and began official oppression and destruction of the rights. Yet the Hebrews survived. America's four-hundred-year period is nearly up. Many Indians see the necessity of a tribal regrouping comparable to the Hebrew revival of old.⁶³

In his re-rendering of Jews' foundational myth of liberation in the book of Exodus into a cipher for modern American Indian history, Deloria wrote with a strong sense of imminent occurrence. Resonance with Jewish history offered lessons that American Indians could achieve in the immediate future. For Deloria, as for other American Indians, the most obvious and urgent of applicable lessons for the Red Power moment of "tribal regrouping" was the movement to defend and reclaim of ancestral lands.

Of the three main categories of shared historical themes, connection to ancestral land is the most complex. On one hand, Jews' perpetual devotion to the land of Israel from antiquity through the present day gave American Indians a way to conceptualize their own relationships to their respective ancestral tribal lands. Jews' achievement of territorial sovereignty in the land of Israel with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 further energized American Indians' pursuit of reclamation and defense of tribal sovereignty, especially in the shadow of US federal termination policies. On the other hand, the relationships of American Indians and US Jews to their ancestral lands involved a number of sticky contradictions. Of foremost relevance to this article, US Jews voiced support for American Indian territorial sovereignty while at the same time benefitting from their status as landed US citizens whose very presence was the result of the displacement and genocide of American Indians. Further, US Jews' connection to their historical ancestral land in the land of Israel, manifested in the late 1960s and 1970s by their strong support for Zionism, was largely symbolic. The majority of Zionist US Jews supported Jewish territorial sovereignty in from afar, never intending to emigrate from the United States. Both of these differences accentuate the different positions of American Indians and US Jews in the power

63. Deloria, *Custer*, 32.

structures of the United States, as well as the different stakes of their politics. While connection to ancestral lands was rhetorical flair for US Jews, it was a dire and pressing concern for American Indian tribes facing imminent destruction of their territorial sovereignty and further degradation of their legal status. Undergirding all of this is the debate over how settler colonialism characterizes Zionism and the degree to which the Israeli-Palestinian dynamic resonates with the US-American Indian dynamic.

A return to primary sources clarifies how the American Indian and Jewish activists of the Power Era grappled with the idea of ancestral land. In *Custer*, Deloria argued that the “Hebrew-Jewish conception of homeland,” with its covenantal mandate and history of foreign occupations, most closely resembled the American Indian conception.⁶⁴ Latent in Deloria’s conception was the expectation of return, which he again explained by invoking Jewish history: “The Jews have managed to sustain themselves in the Diaspora for over two thousand years, but in the expectation of their homeland’s restoration.”⁶⁵ Deloria was not alone in this historical allusion. In an op-ed in the May–June 1972 edition of *Indian Voice*, the editorial board argued: “The Jewish people have been fighting for 2,000 years or longer for their rights to visit Jerusalem, and Indians are expected to give up similar religious shrines without a murmur” as part of a longer program that called for the reclamation of American Indian land across the United States.⁶⁶

Given American Indians’ interest in Jewish history as an aspirational example of restoration to an ancient ancestral homeland, it is not surprising that Red Power activists looked to the State of Israel. In 1972, a six-person group of American Indians traveled to kibbutzim in Israel to study agricultural techniques they could import to reservations.⁶⁷ When asked in an interview if they saw similarities between Jews and American Indians, a spokesperson for the group commented that recent expressions of Red Power activism in the late 1960s and early 1970s showed that “[Indians] are coming back just like the Jews did after 2000 years.”⁶⁸ Another connection to Israel came directly from IAT’s occupation of Alcatraz. In the winter of 1970–71, IAT leadership contemplated applying for foreign aid to fund their continued operations on Alcatraz. Israel was among the states they considered. In an interview with *Los*

64. Deloria, *Custer*, 178.

65. Deloria, *Custer*, 179.

66. *Indian Voice* Staff, “A Plan of Action for the 1970s,” *Indian Voice* 2, no. 3 (1972): 13–14.

67. “American Indians Visiting Israel,” *Jewish Advocate* (July 8, 1971), 1.

68. “American Indians Visiting Israel.”

Angeles Free Press, Buffy Sainte-Marie (Cree), a Canadian First Nations folk musician and Red Power activist who regularly collaborated with IAT during the occupation of Alcatraz, elaborated on this, commenting that "There has been, during the past year, a great deal of cross information and testing out of friendships amongst the different minority groups. We are thinking of applying to Israel for aid...they were in the same kind of position."⁶⁹ It is unclear if IAT reached out to Israeli representatives to discuss foreign aid, but the fact that they considered doing so shows that the historical themes shared by American Indians and US Jews extended beyond allegorical imagination to practicable partnership. However, such rosy statements of warmth and solidarity should not be taken at face value alone. American Indians stood to benefit from real material gains with the potential to sustain American Indian activism or to improve American Indians' daily lives from their economic, diplomatic, and political ties with Israelis. These statements are as shrewdly strategic as they are emotional.

Red Power activists' appeals to a specifically Zionist-Israeli attachment to Jewish ancestral land brings up a major paradox—namely, that the former's appeals to Zionism and the State of Israel occurred in the same period that Palestinian liberation became a *cause célèbre* for the global Left and a unifying Indigenous cause. The archival materials for IAT's occupation of Alcatraz contain no sources that connect the American Indian and Palestinian struggles. This is not to say that no such consciousness existed, and there may be evidence of American Indian and Palestinian solidarity in other cases from the same period. Certainly, in more recent years there is a strong pattern of American Indian and Palestinian solidarity activism—for example, in the 2016–17 struggle against the Dakota Access Pipeline.⁷⁰ The link between Red Power and Zionism and the potential absence of archival material on American Indian and Palestinian solidarity in the late 1960s and 1970 both raise questions that are ripe for further research into the fraught histories of Jews, American Indians, and Palestinians with settler colonialism and liberatory ideologies.

69. John Carpenter, "Carpenter's Corner: Buffy Ste. Marie on the American Indian Struggle," *Los Angeles Free Press* (January 1, 1971), 34–40.

70. Numerous articles connect the Standing Rock Sioux tribe's struggle against the Dakota Access Pipeline with Palestinian activism; one is Ben Norton, "Palestinians support indigenous Dakota pipeline protests: 'We Stand with Standing Rock,'" *Salon* (November 18, 2016), <https://www.salon.com/2016/11/18/palestinians-support-indigenous-nodapl-protests-we-stand-with-standing-rock/>.

A CASE STUDY FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY CONVERSATION: AUBREY GROSSMAN AND DONALD JELINEK

Another significant, personal point of connection between American Indian and US Jewish activism was the IAT's two officially retained lawyers, Aubrey Grossman and Donald Jelinek, both of whom were Jews. Grossman and Jelinek appear consistently in American Indian studies historiography on Red Power and IAT's Alcatraz occupation as critical players and important allies, but scholars do not explore their Jewishness, nor do they treat their Jewishness as a consequential factor in their relationships with American Indians.⁷¹ Yet analyzing their Jewishness and locating them in twentieth-century US Jewish history yields previously unrealized insights that enrich American Indian studies and Jewish studies historiographies alike.

Grossman and Jelinek worked as IAT's official legal representation before, during, and after IAT's Alcatraz occupation, making them integral and intimate partners in IAT's activities. Both worked with IAT and other Red Power movements over a sustained, multiyear period in private and public matters. Grossman connected with the future leadership of IAT—notably, Oakes—before the occupation and played a role in preparing IAT's political and legal strategies at every stage of its activities.⁷² He acted as an IAT spokesperson alongside Oakes at press conferences, including in IAT's first public proclamation to the General Services Administration on November 20, 1969; drafted and notarized the “By-Laws of the American Indians of All Tribes” and their “Articles of Incorporation” in January 1970; mediated IAT's communication with numerous US agencies during the occupation; and penned IAT's legal claims to Alcatraz based on treaty rights precedent, which he also published in several installments of IAT's periodical, the *Indians of All Tribes Newsletter*.⁷³ After Alcatraz, Grossman reunited with IAT leaders

71. Mentions of Grossman or Jelinek appear in Blansett, *Journey*; Rhiannon Bertraud-Gandar, “Laying Claim: Framing the Occupation of Alcatraz in the Indians of All Tribes Alcatraz Newsletter,” *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 35, no. 1 (2016): 125–42; Dean Chavers, “Alcatraz Is Not an Island,” *World Literature Today* (Autumn 2019), [72. Blansett, *Journey*, 122–26.](https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2019/autumn/alcatraz-not-island-dean-chavers; Kelly, “Rhetoric”; Johnson, “Occupation of Alcatraz: Roots”; Johnson, <i>Occupation of Alcatraz Island</i>; Fortunate Eagle, <i>Alcatraz!</i>; Fortunate Eagle and Tim Findley, <i>Heart of the Rock</i> (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002); and Sherry L. Smith, <i>Hippies, Indians, and the Fight for Red Power</i> (London: Oxford University Press, 2012).</p>
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73. Blansett, *Journey*, 122, 134, 140; Fortunate Eagle and Findley, *Heart*, 111; and IAT Legal Documents (January 15, 1970), box 3, folder 13, “Legal Matters” Alcatraz

Oakes and Dean Chavers (Lumbee) to represent the Northern California Pomo and Pit River tribes in their lawsuit to reclaim their ancestral land from the Pacific Gas and Electric Company in 1970.⁷⁴

Jelinek represented IAT in their day-to-day affairs. He managed IAT's finances and donations; established and maintained negotiations between IAT and local, state, and federal law enforcement and government agencies; and visited the island once weekly for the duration of the nineteen-month-long occupation to strategize with IAT.⁷⁵ In June 1971, Jelinek defended Robbins—pictured in figure 2 on the far right, as well as on the far right in the photograph of IAT-AJCongress Hanukkah service—when Robbins and two other IAT activists were arrested and charged with felony grand theft for selling copper they stripped from abandoned buildings on Alcatraz to pay for IAT's food and other supplies.⁷⁶ The FBI used this charge as the legal pretense to raid and clear the island, marking the end of the occupation on June 11, 1971.⁷⁷

Because of the frequency and importance of their roles with IAT and with other Red Power activists, Jelinek and especially Grossman appear as legendary figures in the historiography on the IAT Alcatraz occupation. In addition to laudatory renditions of their radical politics, scholars portray Grossman and Jelinek as heroic warriors for American Indian rights, often citing memorable examples of their above-and-beyond dedication, such as Jelinek's seventy-five boat trips from the mainland to Alcatraz or the fact that Grossman brought a sleeping bag to the island on the day of IAT's first public statement, prepared to spend several nights at the former penitentiary in the event the police prevented him from leaving after the press conference.⁷⁸ Fortunate Eagle, for example, described Grossman as a "a brilliant legal tactician with years of experience in labor and civil rights struggles," in one of his memoirs, *Heart of the Rock*.⁷⁹ Blansett, who wrote about Grossman at length, described him as a "true friend" to American Indians and sketched him as a socialist who was "known in many circles as a radical. Grossman was a longtime

Indian Occupation Records 1964–71, SFPL. For Grossman's contributions to IAT's newsletter, see "Is the Occupation of Alcatraz by the Indians of All Tribes Legal?," *Indians of All Tribes Newsletter* 3 (1970), 3–4 and "Indianize the BIA!: The Bureau of Indian Affairs on Trial," *Indians of All Tribes Newsletter* 3 (1970), 11, box 3, folder 17, "Newsletter Materials," Alcatraz Indian Occupation Records 1964–71, SFPL.

74. Blansett, *Journey*, 205.

75. Blansett, *Journey*, 123 and "White Man's Justice," *Berkeley Tribe* 6, no. 117 (October 22–28, 1971), 6.

76. "Alcatraz 3," *Berkeley Tribe* 8, no. 133 (March 3–17, 1972), 6.

77. "Alcatraz 3."

78. Fortunate Eagle and Findley, *Heart*, 112.

79. Fortunate Eagle and Findley, *Heart*, 111.



Figure 2. Jelinek (second from left) and Robbins (far right) with the two other defendants, Raymond Cox and John Halloran (not identified; tribes unknown). Photograph in “Alcatraz 3,” *Berkeley Tribe* March 3, 1972. Photographer Uncredited.

labor attorney, a supporter of unions and a defender of civil rights, and as a result, he had been blacklisted during the thirties.”⁸⁰ In his 2019 retrospective essay “Alcatraz is Not an Island,” Chavers, too, highlighted Grossman’s radical resume:

He had the distinction of having attempts to prevent him from passing the bar before he took the bar exam. He had been labeled a communist, a radical, a troublemaker, and a pinko all his adult life. He was a believer in the methods of the Chicago radical organizer Saul Alinsky.⁸¹

None of these three authors, however, nor the other scholars who mention Grossman or Jelinek, considered US Jewish history and Jewish identity and how they shaped the American Indian activism undertaken by Grossman and Jelinek.

For both men, Jewishness shaped their experience and understanding of world they lived in. Coming of age in the bloom of Jewish socialism and Communism in San Francisco and the East Bay in the 1930s, Gross-

80. Blansett, *Journey*, 122.

81. Chavers, “Alcatraz.”

man typified the California Jewish radicals of the twentieth century.⁸² Among many other Leftist and labor credentials, Grossman was a regular attendee at physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer's Berkeley "Marxist salon" while he was a law student at the University of California, Berkeley.⁸³ Throughout his legal career, Grossman earned a reputation as one of the Bay Area's most passionate and idealistic defenders of labor rights and human rights. His near-blacklisting and near-banning from the bar never tempered his anti-establishment irreverence and commitment to Leftist causes.⁸⁴ In addition to reflecting the Jewish historical context in which he lived, being a Jew shaped Grossman's drive for justice. For instance, in one of the essays he published for the *Indians of All Tribes Newsletter*, Grossman harked to the shared historical theme of surviving attempted genocide when he described the Nazis' genocide of Jews, the United States' genocide of American Indians, and Brazil's genocide of Indigenous peoples for rubber as resonant expressions of state violence that demanded moral opposition.⁸⁵

Jelinek, too, reflected patterns in US Jewish history and was shaped by his Jewish identity. A generation younger than Grossman, Jelinek was the son of Eastern European Jewish immigrants, and he began his legal career with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in Mississippi as one of the many Jews who joined the civil rights movement.⁸⁶ As he explained in his memoir, his decision to leave the ACLU and Mississippi connected to the shifting landscape of US Jewish politics in the Power Era. Building on Jewish Power emphasis on political assertiveness and support for Israel and Zionism, a disquieted Jelinek left the South after the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's (SNCC) denunciation of Israel following the 1967 Six-Day War.⁸⁷ Unable to reconcile the SNCC's condemnation of "Zionist imperialism" with what was in his eyes a justified and praiseworthy show of Jewish strength, Jelinek resigned and moved to California.⁸⁸

82. "Obituary: Aubrey Grossman," *SFGATE* (December 10, 1999), <https://www.sfgate.com/news/article/Aubrey-Grossman-2891336.php>.

83. Rosenbaum, *Cosmopolitans*, 289–90.

84. "Obituary: Aubrey Grossman."

85. Aubrey Grossman, "Brazil: Atrocities and Genocide," *Indians of All Tribes Newsletter* 3 (1970), box 3, folder 17, "Newsletter Materials," Alcatraz Indian Occupation Records 1964–71, SFPL.

86. Donald A. Jelinek, *White Lawyer, Black Power: A Memoir of Civil Rights Activism in the Deep South* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2020), <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/78774>.

87. Jelinek, *White Lawyer*, 244–45.

88. Jelinek, *White Lawyer*, 244–45.

Analyzing actors like Grossman and Jelinek with reference to US Jewish history enhances the contextual depth of American Indian studies historiography on IAT's Alcatraz occupation, and it also changes the implications of primary source materials. When scholars treat Grossman and Jelinek as Jews rather than simply as "white," new themes and research questions emerge that are mutually generative for American Indian and Jewish studies. Take, for example, this illustrative, unsigned hate-filled 1969 letter to IAT activists on Alcatraz, in which the author taunted, "[if] it hadn't been for the white man, you all would have liquidated each other long ago in your nomadic wanderings across the country, warring on different tribes."⁸⁹ After the author of the hate letter pouted that minorities took advantage of white people's hard work and tax dollars, they concluded, "WE SAY, SINK ALCATRAZ! IF YOU NEED MORE MONEY, GET IT FROM AUBREY GROSSMAN, YOUR LOUD MOUTH MOUTHPIECE."⁹⁰ When Grossman's identity is not historicized, this whine reads as the mere end of a temper tantrum. However, when Grossman is analyzed *as a Jew* and situated in the Jewish context, this letter sounds an antisemitic dog whistle and prompts consideration of conspiracies surrounding Jewish wealth and political manipulation. For Jewish studies scholars, this connection highlights antisemitic tropes in a recent chapter of US history and expands the prototypical Jewish-Black dynamic at the heart of miscegenation and immigration conspiracies to a different intergroup relationship. For American Indian studies scholars, the author's vitriol clarifies the way in which opposition to Red Power in US society connected to broader currents of racist backlash against myriad power movements and speaks to the *de facto* ethnicization of American Indians as a minority group. These questions that arise from reevaluating Grossman and Jelinek illustrate the kind of new insights and pathways that can come from conversation between American Indian and Jewish studies.

Grossman and Jelinek are only two among scores of other US Jews who were involved in IAT's Alcatraz occupation. While it is not possible to cover more Jewish involvement in this article, these two examples show that US Jews were connected to Alcatraz in all manner of ways—from volunteer doctors, to hippie supporters, to fundraising artists and musicians, to dozens of journalists—yet, within an already small body of scholarship, American Indian studies scholars rarely analyze them as

89. Anonymous letter, box 1, folder 12, "Incoming Correspondence: Nutmail, February 1970–February 1971," Alcatraz Indian Occupation Records 1964–71, SFPL.

90. Anonymous letter, capitalization in original.

distinct from the “Anglo” US mainstream.⁹¹ Further, US Jews involved in IAT’s Alcatraz occupation are but a sliver of the US Jews involved in Red Power. A robust analysis of the long Power Era that incorporates both American Indian studies and Jewish studies must stretch back at least as early as the immediate postwar roots of Red Power through the peak of Red Power militancy in the late 1970s and incorporate a larger still collection of allied Jewish anthropologists, historians, lawyers, artists, and activists.⁹² This article is simply a preface to the still-needed volumes of scholarship on twentieth-century American Indian-Jewish relations.

CONCLUSION

In the late 1960s and 1970s, during the Power Era, American Indians and US Jews developed shared historical themes as usable models for their respective presents. The relationship between these two communities was a product of its particular time and historical context, shaped by cultural pluralism’s emphasis on diversity and counterhegemony. Within these shared historical themes, three categories—survival of extreme oppression (including attempted genocide), sociocultural and linguistic tribalism, and connection to ancestral lands—offered American Indians and US Jews resonances that were absent in their other intergroup relations. This led each to treat insights from the other’s past as uniquely meaningful and practicable ways to realize contemporary goals of autonomy and anti-assimilationism. American Indian and US Jewish historical actors of the period—including those involved in IAT’s Alcatraz occupation, like Vine Deloria, Jr., or Joel Brooks and Rabbi Roger Herst, who are pictured in the photograph of IAT-AJCongress Hanukkah service which opened this article—recognized this in their own time and sought to nurture bonds between their communities that would continue to empower coming generations. Recognition of such mutually empowering bonds would advantage contemporary historians, too. In a profound sense, American Indian and Jewish studies share big-picture concepts that define the essence of the fields and their reasons for

91. While it is not possible to provide citations for the multitudes of involved Jews, the point is illustrated by the description of Jewish New Left supporters of Red Power activism as mere “middle-class Anglo kids” in Sherry L. Smith, “Indians, the Counterculture, and the New Left,” in *Beyond Red Power: American Indian Politics and Activism Since 1900*, ed. Daniel M. Cobb and Loretta Fowler (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research, 2007), 155.

92. The last two chapters of Koffman, *Jews’ Indian* break ground on this larger collection of historical subjects by analyzing the ways in which Jewish anthropologists undertook research on American Indians with the dual goals of progressive advocacy for American Indians and political security for US Jews.

existence. The Jewish studies principle to write against “the lachrymose conception of Jewish history” and the American Indian studies principle to center survival and resilience are, at their cores, like concepts in different terms.⁹³ Both fields will benefit when their scholars agree that, to quote Herst’s declaration, the histories that they write are a “symbol of the same struggle.”⁹⁴

93. Salo W. Baron, “Ghetto and Emancipation: Shall We Revise the Traditional View?,” *Menorah Journal* 14, no. 6 (1928): 515–26 and Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 18 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952). For an introduction to foundational American Indian Studies concepts, see Ned Blackhawk, “American Indians and the Study of US History,” in *American History Now*, ed. Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 376–400.

94. Ludlow, “Rites,” 3.