



“COUNTERCULTURAL INDIANS”: THE COUNTERCULTURE’S INTEREST IN AND INVOLVEMENT OF AMERICAN INDIANS IN THE 1960s AND 1970s

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Blacks, Vietnamese, Indians. From them the young in America have something to learn—and they know it. The young are a *class*, in the neo-Marxian sense—abused, processed, exploited—and they have come to see their common interest. But more important, they are a primitive tribe.

Mitchell Goodman (1970)¹

Indian people have, for more than one hundred years, lacked military power. Being militarily defeated, they found that social, political and economic power were often hard to come by as well. Native people have been keenly aware, however, that in their relations to white Americans they do in fact possess some mysterious well of cultural power [...] the Red Power activists of the late 1960s and early 1970s [...] were not engaging in simply military or revolutionary actions. Above all, they were committing cultural acts in which they sought social and political power through a complicated play of white guilt, nostalgia, and the deeply rooted desire to be Indian and thereby aboriginally true to the spirit of the land. Among American ethnic and racial groups, Indians have occupied a privileged position in national culture, and Native people have often put the power that came with this exceptionalism to political and social ends.

Philip J. Deloria (1998)²

More than any other decade in twentieth century America, the 1960s are often cited as the most turbulent and transformative years, a revolutionary time largely instigated and upheld by the countercultural movement of the era.³ The movement started to form shortly after President Kennedy’s assassination in 1963 and escalated during the Vietnam War and the Civil

¹ Mitchell Goodman, “*What’s happening,*” *The Movement Toward a New America: The Beginnings of a Long Revolution (A Collage) A What?* (Philadelphia, Pilgrim Press/Knopf, 1970), p. vii.

² Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 178-79.

³ “Counterculture is a term used to describe a group whose values and norms of behavior run counter to those of the social mainstream of the day, the cultural equivalent of political opposition. Although distinct countercultural undercurrents exist in all societies, here the term “counterculture” refers to a more significant, visible phenomenon that reaches critical mass and persists for a period of time. A countercultural movement thus expresses the ethos, aspirations, and dreams of a specific population during a certain period of time—a social manifestation of *zeitgeist*,” in http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Counterculture#cite_note-1 (accessed November 16th, 2017).

Rights Movement. Many university students turned to political activism and became the driving force behind both the antiwar and Civil Rights movements. Others, such as the hippies for example, simply “dropped out” and attempted to break free from mainstream culture through their appearance and lifestyle.

The 60s and 70s were also decades when numerous conservative values, norms and lifestyles were beginning to seem outdated and ill-adapted to the younger generation. The countercultural movement was fueled by the desire to offer a societal alternative to the US and to break down the status quo in order to revolutionize the system. It was about creating an actual counter-system and a new identity for the US. It was also nourished by the ideal of creating a better world. One of the counterculture’s main pillars was the hippie movement, which, generally speaking, promoted “peace and love,” defended spirituality, and encouraged a return to simpler lifestyles. These values and ideals behind the movement led many counterculturalists to rediscover and possibly idealize Native American cultures, making Native Americans one of their favorite emblems.

According to Mitchell Goodman (author, teacher and activist), counterculturalists felt they were in the same boat as minorities, such as American Indians, or somehow connected by a similar reality. Counterculturalists also felt that they too were part of a “primitive tribe.” Miriam Hahn, in her doctoral dissertation, explains:

Defining themselves by points of difference from mainstream America and its traditional social and cultural values, counterculturalists often attempted to align themselves with Native Americans in order to express an imagined sense of shared otherness [...] Many of these counterculturalists claimed a sense of shared victimhood with Native Americans and other minority groups because they felt that they, too, existed at the margins of American society.⁴

In 1965, Lyndon B. Johnson intensified American involvement and escalated the conflict in Vietnam. By 1968, the US witnessed massive antiwar marches, protests, sit-ins and student strikes in major cities and on campuses across the country. The American public of the late 60s had already begun comparing the abominations taking place in Southeast Asia to those carried out against Native Americans in North America. Hollywood, being a societal interface, not only reflected but also contributed to the parallelisms drawn up between the Vietnam War and the brutal colonization endured by Native Americans. The cultural critic and historian, Richard Slotkin, describes “the emergence of a new ‘Cult of the Indian,’ represented in movie-mythology by films like *Little Big Man* and *Soldier Blue* (1970), which invoke parallels between My Lai and the Washita and Sand Creek massacre of Indians by

⁴ “Playing Hippies and Indians: Acts of Cultural Colonization in the Theater of the American Counterculture.” Ph.D. dissertation, College of Bowling Green State University, 2014, pp. 3 & 68.

Whites,”⁵ and notes that “at least since 1966, Native Americans and their culture had become important symbols of rebellion in the so-called ‘counterculture’ of college-age White Americans. The connection had been recognized (and propagated) by the mass media.”⁶

It would appear that this “mysterious well of cultural power,” as historian Deloria puts it, this powerful and symbolic grasp American Indians seem to have always had on the American imagination, is something that was not only intensified by America’s favorite dream factory, Hollywood, but also something that may have somehow served or profited counterculturalists. In the media of those days, American Indians were not only portrayed as victims of imperialism, but also as America’s original rebels; innately anti-establishment, thereby naturally countercultural societies. As Jacquelyn Kilpatrick reminds us: “American Indians have [always] been [...] a sort of weathervane of social and political currents [...] the image of the Indian changes with each generation.”⁷ We might also wonder whether the image of the American Indian changes according to the dominant society’s needs, what those needs may have been in those days, and why the dominant society might “need” the image of the American Indian specifically.

In this article, we will examine why and how American Indians became mascots and powerful symbols at the onset of the counterculture in the 1960s and 1970s, and how this may have served the movement or at least some of its members. We will also consider whether American Indians were simply playing a symbolic role in someone else’s battle and, if so, how they responded to this. In those decades, did American Indians themselves ever benefit from this power on the imagination that they seem to hold? Were they actually involved in the counterculture on more than just a symbolic level, and can we speak of an American Indian counterculture?

⁵ The My Lai massacre, in which the US Army killed between 347 and 504 unarmed Vietnamese civilians (including men, women, children and elders), took place on March 16, 1968. The Washita Massacre (November 27, 1968) refers to [Custer’s 7th US Cavalry](#) attack on [Black Kettle’s](#) Southern [Cheyenne](#) camp (Oklahoma) in which an estimated 13 to 150 Cheyennes were killed and 53 women and children captured. The Sand Creek Massacre of November 29, 1864, was when the US Volunteer Cavalry destroyed a village of [Cheyenne](#) and [Arapaho](#) (Colorado), killing an estimated 70–163 [Native Americans](#) (approximately two-thirds of the victims were women and children). The filmic parallelisms drawn up between these different massacres essentially found common ground in their critique of American imperialism and in attacking unarmed groups composed of women, children and elders.

⁶ *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), p. 590.

⁷ *Celluloid Indians: Native Americans and Film* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), p. 178.

I. The Counterculture's Interest in American Indians

I. 1. *The Identity of the Counterculture*

“We seem to be living in a society that no one created and that no one wants.”
Charles Reich (1970)⁸

The counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s was mainly made up of white, middle-class, educated baby-boomers. The two main branches of this movement were the New Left and the hippies, both terms often used synonymously with the term “counterculture” coined by the American academic Theodore Roszak in 1968, as what he considered to be “a cultural constellation that radically diverges from values and assumptions that have been in the mainstream of our society.”⁹

Before investing the cultural scene, the counterculture first invested the political one *via* the New Left. The Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), founded in 1960 at the University of Michigan, was the organizational base for the New Left.¹⁰ In 1964, the Free Speech Movement, formed at UC Berkeley, explored a set of tactics ranging from confrontations with military recruiters to draft card burnings, and taking over college buildings to sit-ins. These all inspired what were to become common forms of protest in the years that followed.

The hippie movement was an extension of the Beat movement, and the more cultural branch of the counterculture. Like the members of the New Left, the hippies were also, for the most part, middle-class whites, but without the political impetus of the New Leftists. Rather than politically fight the system they were more in search of ways of escaping it (“Turn on, tune in, drop out”¹¹). Their hallmarks were a particular type of bohemian dress and lifestyle that embraced sexual promiscuity and recreational drugs, psychedelic music, non-violence and, for

⁸ *The Greening of America* (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 10.

⁹ *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), p. xii.

¹⁰ The term “New Left” was coined in the SDS’s 1962 *Port Huron Statement* which called for participatory democracy, more individual freedom and criticized the power of bureaucracy. See Students for a Democratic Society’s Port Huron Statement (June 15, 1962) <https://history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts/111huron.html> (accessed November 16, 2017).

¹¹ In 1967 Leary spoke at the [Human Be-In](#), a gathering of 30, 000 hippies in the [Golden Gate Park](#) (San Francisco) and phrased the famous words “Turn on, tune in, drop out.” It was also the title of his [spoken word album](#) recorded in 1966. He defined these terms as such: “turn on”: heighten your consciousness, through drugs if you wish, “tune in”: interact in harmony with your environment (social or not), “drop out”: detach and learn to be your own person. See [Timothy Leary](#)’s autobiography: *Flashbacks: A Personal and Cultural History of an Era* (Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, 1983), p. 253.

some, life on a commune.¹² Both the New Left and hippie groups received huge media coverage over those two decades.

The counterculture most definitely affected the Civil Rights Movement, which eventually resulted in the overturning of discriminatory practices, and several laws giving minorities and women the same rights as white men, including the equal rights to vote, to an education and to work.¹³ The entire movement was driven by the need for justice, freedom and respect, and for a system in which human beings could be of more value than financial profits. Not only did minorities come together to strengthen the movement, both minorities and the counterculture merged, at times, so as to advocate (more or less symbolically) new socio-political sensibilities in American society. Was it through the Civil Rights Movement that counterculturalists and mainstream America not only regained interest in Native Americans in those days, but also perceived a common meeting ground?

I. 2. America's New Sensibilities: A Renewed Interest in American Indians

The American government of the late 1960s had begun to encourage a shift from tribal termination to self-determination for American Indians, believing that they possessed certain values that were worth preserving. Although they entertained an oversimplified vision of Native viewpoints and traditions, at least certain Native values seemed to be respected, as was the desire to conserve them.

For many protesting youths, Native Americans came to symbolize the natural, mystical, and the wise, and their communities were perceived as ones of “unity” and “harmony.”¹⁴ It is at this point that the “Wise Elder” and “Noble Savage” images were revived and strongly enhanced in popular American culture. The hippie quest for ancient wisdom and spiritual knowledge was accompanied by a wave of fascination for Asian gurus, African sorcerers and, of course, Native American shamans or medicine men. Native Americans seemed somewhat confined to mystical stereotypes by this movement and, for some reason, these images almost always concerned South Western Natives. While the “Wise Chief”

¹² Communes were undoubtedly a means of reconstructing the sense of community and solidarity. “Perhaps the greatest and least visible form of impoverishment caused by the Corporate State is the destruction of community,” Reich, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

¹³ The [Civil Rights Act of 1964](#) banned discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin in employment, in voter registration requirements and prohibited racial segregation in schools, at work and in [public accommodations](#). See *Civil Rights Act of 1964 – CRA – Title VII – Equal Employment Opportunities – 42 US Code Chapter 21*, <https://finduslaw.com/civil-rights-act-1964-cra-title-vii-equal-employment-opportunities-42-us-code-chapter-21> (accessed November 16, 2017).

¹⁴ Kilpatrick, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

image had already existed in the 19th century, it was brought back in force in American popular culture in the 60s and especially the 70s, through both the media and films.

Cinema was both a source and reflection of changing times. American identity and values were put into question, thereby impacting the most “American” genre ever: Western movies. A number of revisionist and apologetic films with regards to American Indians surfaced in the 50s and became quite a trend from the 60s onwards.¹⁵ Many of these “Indian-friendly”—albeit awkward—films drew parallels with the Vietnam War: “Millions of young Whites began, increasingly, as a part of their own resistance, to compare the ongoing carnage in Southeast Asia to that of the Indian wars and to revile the leaders presiding over both processes.”¹⁶

Although a few popular films during those two decades retained serious racial and gender biases with regards to Native Americans, Hollywood essentially rehabilitated the image of Native Americans during the 60s and 70s.¹⁷ Native Americans came to represent the oppressed in general *via* the “Legendary Warrior” and “Noble Savage” stereotypes. Most of these “progressive” films with Native American characters were, without a doubt, notable improvements, however, in attempting to steer clear of old-fashioned clichés and of the status quo, many lapsed into new or recycled “positive” stereotypes and created a bipolar split within white society. Truly meaningful films which portrayed contemporary life-size Native Americans and their actual issues remained very scarce.

Along with the appearance of these positive stereotypes, came the desire for more and more young Americans to “become Indian,” or at least become what they thought was “Indian.” It is interesting to note the constant shifts which exist in American culture, in which negative imagery qualifies Natives as the “Other,” and where positive clichés of the very same people—usually dealing with the environment and spirituality—make Americans want to be associated with such “otherness” or “Indianness.”¹⁸

¹⁵ The most popular being: *Broken Arrow* (Delmer Dave, 1950), *Cheyenne Autumn* (John Ford, 1964), *Tell Them Willie Boy Was Here* (Abraham Polonsky, 1969), *Soldier Blue* (Ralph Nelson, 1970), *Little Big Man* (Arthur Penn, 1970), *Geronimo Jones* (Bert Salzman, 1970), *Ulzana's Raid* (Robert Aldrich, 1972), *Chato's Land* (Michael Winner, 1972), *Journey Through Rosebud* (Tom Gries, 1972), *Rancho Deluxe* (Frank Perry, 1975) and *Winterhawk* (1975).

¹⁶ Ward Churchill, *Fantasies of the Master Race: Literature, Cinema and the Colonization of American Indians* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1998), pp.187-88, and for another interesting analysis on the socio-cultural linkages in the 1970s between Vietnam and the Indian Wars see Richard Drinnon's *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire Building* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980).

¹⁷ Some popular films containing racial and gender biases regarding American Indians in those days: *The Great Massacre* (Sidney Salkow, 1965), *Custer of the West* (Robert Siodmak, 1967), *Flap* (Carol Reed, 1970), *A Man Called Horse* (Elliot Silverstein, 1970), *Wild Women* (1970), *The Deserter* (1970), *The Gatling Gun* (1971) and *Cancel My Reservation* (Bob Hope, 1972).

¹⁸ Deloria notes that D.H. Lawrence, amongst others, have often “intuitively [located] Native people at the very heart of American ambivalence. Whereas Euro-Americans had imprisoned themselves in the logical mind and the social order, Indians represented instinct and freedom [...] Savage Indians served Americans as oppositional

The notions of “Other” and “Self” seem to be an ongoing dialectic in the American psyche. Quite a few Native American scholars have come to the conclusion that “playing Indian” is a persistent tradition in American culture, whether they represent the “good” or the “bad” guy.¹⁹ Perhaps this is because American Indians were the first ethnic groups with which European settlers could compare identities in the New World, thereby leaving an indelible trace in the never-ending quest and question of American identity.

Regarding the counterculture’s interest in American Indians, we may wonder to what extent they saw in American Indians what they wanted and needed to see, or maybe even to be. Were these representations mere idealizations mainly serving as means to symbolically counter the status quo in America? Were American Indians simply being used as “stand-ins” for other people or other people’s ideas, or was there a genuine concern for Native people and active help brought to them by counterculturalists?

I. 3. A Cultural and Symbolic Movement: Creating New Ideals and Reshaping American Identities

The lines of connection between Indian culture and Hippie sub-culture are really very complex. American Indians stand, of course, as an emblem of the simple, a primitive survival on the continent of affluence, and technological sophistication. They also represent the way white outsiders exploited the Native peoples of the American continent. American Indians are therefore one among the several deprived and exploited social groups with whom young people in general, and Hippies in particular, tend to identify [...] The identification is all the easier because the identified—the Indians—are a relatively remote actual presence in American social life.²⁰

In wanting to offer an alternative to mainstream culture (which was perceived as a dehumanizing culture based essentially on capitalism and consumerism), the counterculture wanted an improved system which was more humane and less materialistic, with more freedom and solidarity. Native American communities of the past, or maybe imagined ones, seemed to become a stereotypical ideal for some, at least a utopia that had possibly once existed and could therefore be rebuilt or at least learnt from. While some hippies turned to Eastern philosophies and religions, others turned to Native Americans (in flesh or in concept) for answers.²¹ Through their fascination with spirituality and the exotic “otherness” of different cultures, both

figures against whom one might imagine a civilized national Self. Coded as freedom, however, wild Indianness proved equally attractive, setting up a [...] dialectic of simultaneous desire and repulsion,” *op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹⁹ For example, Ward Churchill, Angela Cavender Wilson, Vine Deloria Jr., Philip J. Deloria, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Laurie Anne Whitt, to name a few.

²⁰ Stuart Hall, “The Hippies—an American Moment” (University of Birmingham, 1968), pp. 11 & 13 <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-artslaw/history/cccs/stencilled-occasional-papers/1to8and11to24and38to48/SOP16.pdf> (accessed November 19, 2017).

²¹ Those decades marked the beginning of sporadic visits to reservations by “spiritual tourists” and “hobbyists,” some simply curious to observe, others interested in vision quests and shamanic healings. According to Deloria: “Many Native people found empowerment in a white-focused, spiritual mediator’s role, and they acted accordingly,” *op. cit.*, p. 168.

the media and the new generation of the late 60s and early 70s thereby transformed and adapted the image of many cultures to their likings. The new (or refurbished) images of American Indians were ones that proclaimed that American Indian cultures were the natural or original American counterculture, the base of the entire movement, and had been so for centuries long.

Through the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, the absolute disgust in America's treatment of people, of the land, and its stale values, it would appear that "Indianness became a potent political meeting ground," and a potent cultural and countercultural ground.²² According to Deloria, counterculturalists of these past few centuries have often turned to Native Americans in times of identity crises. He goes back to the Boston Tea Party, for example, in which certain participants had dressed as Mohawks in order to carry out their protest, and shows the similarities in intent with the counterculturalists of the 60s and 70s:

Those original rebels had used Indianness to shift the location of their identities from Britain to America. Now, countercultural rebels became Indian to move their identities away from Americanness altogether, to leap outside national boundaries, gesture at repudiating the nation, and offer what seemed a clear-eyed political critique.²³

In other words, not only did the counterculturalists of the 60s and 70s actually dress as Indians in much of their fashion attire, but they also "played Indian" to set themselves in contrast with mainstream society and also, ultimately, in an attempt to define themselves.²⁴ "Playing Indian" was possibly a way for them to state that they were "not American" (at least in their contemporary definition and perception of what "American" meant). Deloria notes that "in the years before the American Revolution, colonial crowds often acted out their political and economic discontent in Indian disguise"²⁵ and that after the Revolution "would-be national poets donned Indian garb and read their lyrics to each other around midnight backwood campfires."²⁶ He also states that in the 60s and 70s "a popular series of posters, for example, paid tribute to Sitting Bull, Geronimo, and Red Cloud, imagined forerunners of the contemporary protest movement."²⁷ According to Hahn:

²² *Ibid.*, p. 163.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

²⁴ Among the variety of tie-dye, bohemian, gypsy, Asian and African items that could be found in hippie fashion, a *leitmotiv* was Native American apparel, ranging from beads, turquoise, silver and bone jewelry, to fringed suede, tribal prints, headbands and even feathered headdresses for the most daring.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 159-60. American Indians could also frequently be found on posters for musical events and gatherings, as symbols of the "original rebels" or "original hippies." One of the most popular of these posters was for the Gathering of the Tribes Human Be-In of 1967, which described itself in bold letters as a "POWWOW," and featured a guitar-playing Native American on horseback in the center of the image. "Surrounded by an array of counterculture heroes, the Human Be-In's guitar-playing Indian demonstrated the movement's willingness to paste

Representations of Natives on countercultural stages, however, were frequently steeped in stereotype, and they often depicted Native cultures inaccurately, elided significant tribal differences, and relegated Native identity almost wholly to the past, a practice that was particularly problematic in light of concurrent Native rights movements that were actively engaged in bringing national attention to the contemporary issues and injustices Native Americans faced on a daily basis.²⁸

She further develops on the “countercultural tendency to use stereotyped Native characters as mascots for various—and sometimes competing—causes, such as environmentalism, hallucinogenic drug use, communalism, pacifism, and violent activism,” all while entertaining the disturbing stereotype of the “Vanishing Indian,” “tracing its development into the popular myth of the hippie as reincarnated Native.”²⁹ Indeed, if the American Indian was the original counterculturalist, the modern hippie was naturally made from the same mold, like a cultural “soulmate” of sorts. Along with that came the disturbing idea that the hippie was somehow replacing the vanished (or vanishing) American Indian.

The image of the American Indian in American popular culture in those days was, consequently, a rather confused layering of images. Were they vanishing and victims? Brave warriors? Mystical and wise? Despite some less than positive responses and reactions to what was being done to their cultural identities, as we will see later on, some Natives were nonetheless willing to engage with the hippies when they saw them as potentially useful:

Those Indians most politically active realized having allies was essential for several reasons [...] they simply didn't have the political power to change things without any non-Indian allies. There was also the whole matter of educating Natives about political issues, so they also used non-Indians as conduits into the process of political change. They found people sympathetic to write about Indian issues to help give greater attention to them.³⁰

Native American experience in the late 60s and throughout the 70s had little to do with “peace and love” or “flower power.” In those days, over 42,000 Natives were fighting in Vietnam (90% of whom were volunteers), and many more were fighting to survive back home.³¹ The Civil Rights Movement had seemed to make some people realize that Native Americans were an oppressed minority *on* US territory, however, their image nonetheless remained polarized in America for the decades to come. While many counterculturalists were

together symbols—in this case the rebellion encoded in guitar-based rock and roll and the primitive ‘tribal’ community of the Indian. Real Indian people played guitars, but that was hardly the message,” *Ibid.*, p. 160.

²⁸ *Op.cit.*, p. 3.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³⁰ Sherry L. Smith, “Hippies and Indians: Pathway to the Mainstream,” interview by Adrian Jawort, *Indian Country Today*, August 20, 2012, <https://indiancountrymedianetwork.com/news/hippies-and-indians-pathway-to-the-mainstream/> (accessed November 23, 2017).

³¹ Many Native Americans, “for whom patriotism and military service have been and continue to be highly valued,” were fighting as soldiers in Vietnam, Deloria, *op.cit.*, p. 163. See also Tom Holm, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996).

interested in American Indians mainly on an abstract and symbolic level, essentially in the search of their own identity, and while this may have benefited American Indians to a certain extent, what was happening in the real lives of real American Indians in those decades? Were they involved in the counterculture by default or out of their own free will?

II. An American Indian counterculture?

II. 1. The Rise of Native American Consciousness

The 1960s and 1970s were definitely a time of change for Native Americans. The Civil Rights Movement had a great impact on their everyday lives, notably on legal and social grounds. It also marked a growth in self-awareness. Much attention was turned towards American Indians as they were making a number of headlines that sparked off the general public's interest. In the days of the Civil Rights Movement, Black and Chicano activism proved to be highly influential for American Indians, as they inspired many to generate the indigenous version of these movements.³² The Native rights branch of the Movement had a dual goal: obtaining the civil rights of Native peoples as American citizens and the sovereign rights of Native nations. This is what made the Native rights movement quite unique when compared to other minorities. Native Americans remember the 60s and the 70s as a time of assimilation, forced removal, and coerced sterilization.³³

In the 1960s, widespread poverty and alcoholism had created anomie on Native reservations and in urban centers as well. Native Americans were among the poorest, they had the highest unemployment rates, the highest rates of tuberculosis and alcoholism in the US. In a sense, they were the minority of all minorities in America. The Johnson Administration carried out its "War on Poverty" programs from 1964 to 1968, providing grants to improve the living conditions of the poor in North America. At the same time, the Bureau of Indian Affairs

³² "Solidarity between African Americans and Native Americans grew with the Black Power movement of the 1970s, whose goals were closer to the nationalism espoused by American Indian Movement activists," "The Longest Walk, 1978," Indivisible, http://nmai.si.edu/exhibitions/indivisible/civil_rights.html c.f. (accessed November 23, 2017).

³³ "Little publicity was given to another form of Native American civil rights violations—the abuse of women's reproductive freedom. Thousands of poor women and women of color, including Puerto Ricans, Blacks, and Chicanos, were sterilized in the 1970s, often without full knowledge of the surgical procedure performed on them or its physical and psychological ramifications. Native American women represented a unique class of victims among the larger population that faced sterilization and abuses of reproductive rights. These women were especially accessible victims due to several unique cultural and societal realities setting them apart from other minorities. Tribal dependence on the federal government through the Indian Health Service (IHS), the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW), and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) robbed them of their children and jeopardized their future as sovereign nations," Sally J. Torpy, "American Women and Coerced Sterilization: On the Trail of Tears in the 1970s," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 24:2, (2000): 1-22 <http://uclajournals.org/doi/abs/10.17953/aicr.24.2.7646013460646042?code=ucla-site> (accessed November 18, 2017).

(BIA) and the Indian Health Service (IHS) were established as federal agencies in charge of overseeing health and welfare issues for American Indians, notably those on reservations. The BIA was also involved in negotiating lease agreements—on behalf of Native communities—with energy corporations seeking to extract raw minerals, oil, and gas from reservation lands in exchange for royalty payments to Native governments. Nonetheless, running water, sewer systems, primary health care and better education remained primary concerns within Native communities.

The assimilation process, though on its end, was still at hand in the 70s. Assimilation was a process that had begun as early as with European settlers and which continued to aim at transforming American Indians into more “acceptable” beings by trying to turn them into Whites. This process was at its peak in the 1950s and 60s and was carried out through different forms such as forced removal of Native American children from their homes—leaving them with no traces of their biological parents—or even the creation of “Indian Schools” in white neighborhoods, where American Indian children were supposedly taught more important things which would enable them to forget their less important traditional cultures. The idea was to “kill the Indian, save the man.”³⁴

The BIA had a very similar goal in mind when it began displacing and “re-implanting” Native American families into big cities. The Relocation Program in question—which began in the late 50s and officially ended in 1980—persuaded 30,000 Natives to leave their reservations for cities where, supposedly, they were to obtain more job opportunities, assistance and better living conditions. In reality, the goal was to immerge them into mainstream society in order to slowly erase the remains of any traditional sentiment, and, in the end, relocation created ghettos within many North American cities.

Another element of change for American Indians in the 60s was the introduction of television sets on reservations. With TV, they were given the “opportunity” to see how the dominant society portrayed them on screen—and given the generally negative nature of these representations, as mainly Westerns were rerun on TV in those days (not everyone could afford to go to the cinema), we can easily imagine their displeasure. Growing screen-visioning habits also tended to somewhat distance many Native families from traditional practices.

In response to this, the Emergency School Aid Act was implemented in 1975 by the US Office of Education with the purpose of creating educational TV series and documentaries

³⁴ Captain Richard H. Pratt at an 1892 convention on the education of Native Americans: “A great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one, and that high sanction of his destruction has been an enormous factor in promoting Indian massacres. In a sense, I agree with the sentiment, but only in this: that all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him and save the man.” See *Official Report of the Nineteenth Annual Conference of Charities and Correction* (1892) <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4929/> (accessed December 21, 2017).

about Native communities of the past and present. Knowing that the most sensitive viewers in Native communities were children, this act was devised more specifically for their benefit. In those days, the Federal Communications Commission also issued a long overdue mandate requiring local TV stations to offer broadcasting time to such underserved populations as Native communities.³⁵

Although life in America for Native Americans was generally still very tough, many improvements were beginning to be made. A notable improvement for Natives from the late 60s onwards was the creation of institutions for higher learning on reservations, operated by the communities themselves. By 1970 there were almost 20 of these establishments, and the numbers kept rising afterwards. The 60s and 70s were also times when growing tensions appeared between Native communities and anthropologists. Anthropologists were perceived as having held a great responsibility in distorting the image of Native peoples and cultures, as they firmly (and with scientific credibility) established the idea that American Indians were “Others.”³⁶ The distance that continued to be placed between the observer and the observed was still perceived as objectifying and dehumanizing to Natives, and it seemed as though non-Native perspectives on Native people, history, and cultures continued to be considered as more “credible” than Native perspectives.

Native Americans began to speak out against these “ethnographic descriptions” through which they did not recognize their own selves, and which some described as “comfortable fictions.”³⁷ Not only did they not recognize themselves in these analyses, but they also felt that they were being exploited *via* such “intrusive research.”³⁸ It is therefore not completely by chance that in the 70s Native American Studies became a discipline, and if more and more Natives were becoming authors and teachers. The 70s were a period when Natives were not only speaking out, but also elaborating concrete alternatives to what the

³⁵ Beverly Singer, *Wiping the War Paint Off the Lens: Native American Film and Video* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), Visible Evidence Volume 10, p. 25.

³⁶ See, for example, Ivan Karp & Steven D. Lavine, *Exhibiting Cultures* (Philadelphia: Smithsonian Books, 1991), S. Elizabeth Bird, *Dressing in Feathers: The Construction of the Indian in American Popular Culture* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), Devon A. Mihesuah, *Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing about American Indians* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), Carter Jones Meyer and Diana Royer (eds.), *Selling the Indian: Commercializing & Appropriating American Indian Cultures* (Tucson, The University of Arizona Press, 2001), James A. Clifton, *The Invented Indian: Cultural Fictions & Government Policies* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2004).

³⁷ One may note, for example, that the “ethnological” works of Carlos Castaneda, which were very popular in those days, have only recently been recognized as fictitious—despite a great amount of evidence which already existed—in their renderings of Yaqui Natives. Nonetheless, they remain present to this very day on “ethnics” bookshelves in libraries and stores and are still being studied in anthropological university courses in America. Castaneda is a very good example of the type of “anthropology” Natives were sick of in the 70s.

³⁸ Duane Champagne, *Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing about American Indians* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), pp. 183-84.

dominant society had to offer. It was a progressive period, and since social reforms were being made for some minorities the general feeling was that they had to be made for all. The Civil Rights Movement along with the American public's awkward though growing sympathy towards American Indians thereby fueled American Indians into action.

II. 2. American Indian Activism: The Audiovisual Response

An important symbolic event for Native Americans in the 1970s, which aroused the American public's interest, took place in 1973. That year, the mixed-blood actor Marlon Brando sent Sasheen Little Feather (Marie Louise Cruz) to stand in for him at the Academy Awards, whereupon she rejected his Oscar for Best Actor—in the 1973 film *Last Tango in Paris*—as a sign of protest against how Native Americans continued to be represented in Hollywood. This had never been done before in Hollywood history and, given Brando's popularity, it proved to be a landmark in public awareness.

What was new about the 70s was not American Indian discontent but that, at last, they were given the opportunity to be heard. They protested against Hollywood's lack of sensitivity towards their people, and advocated accuracy when speaking of Natives and their history on the North American continent. They knew that several centuries of stereotyping and cultural distortions would not disappear just like that, but they wanted to bring alternatives to mainstream popular culture, notably through the cinema. Giving Native Americans the opportunity to express sincere, unaltered and uncensored perspectives on film seemed like a very good start.

With all of these concepts in mind, the Native American filmmaking and documentary scene began to grow in the 1960s and 70s, even though it was more of an underground movement in those decades. In 1966, John Adair, an anthropologist, and Sol Worth, a filmmaker, initiated an interesting filmmaking project—the first of its kind—on a Navajo reservation in Pine Springs, Arizona. Their plan was to teach very basic filmmaking skills to a group of young Navajo without the “cultural overlay of ideas about film aesthetics based on Western film practice.”³⁹ Many documentaries, some quite noteworthy even if not easily accessible to mainstream audiences, were released in those days.⁴⁰ By way of encouraging the development of Native filmmaking, Native film institutions

³⁹ Singer, *op.cit.*, pp. 33-34.

⁴⁰ For example: *Charley Squash Goes to Town* (Duke Redbird, 1969), *Pieces of Dreams* (Will Sampson, 1970), *House Made of Dawn* (Richardson Morse, 1972), *Do Indians Shave?* (Chris Spotted Elk, 1974) and *Buffalo, Blood, Salmon and Roots* (George Burdeau, 1976).

and festivals also began to appear in the mid to late 70s. 1975 was the year of the first American Indian Film Festival (of that same name) held in Seattle, and in San Francisco ever since, which was organized by Americans, and founded by a Choctaw called Michael Smith. Smith later began the American Indian Film Institute and *ICE* magazine, which interviewed Native actors and film directors.

In 1979, non-Natives took their cue and organized their first Native American Film and Video Festival, of the same name, in New York City, where over 125 films and videos made by and about Natives were presented over a three-month period. It was a unique and the largest biennial gathering of its kind in America as yet to be organized. It also proved that the profession was beginning to acknowledge the growing and talented Native filmmaking scene.

Between 1977 and 1980, the Native American Broadcasting Consortium also held annual meetings concerned with the development of Native media, notably TV and film projects, in several big cities. Clearly, the late 70s comprised a growing external and independent interest in the development of Native media, and many institutions—which would be established in the years that followed—advocated internal and communitarian help for Native screen-projects, the dual goal being not only development within Native communities but also regaining control over their own identities. Nevertheless, the Native American audio-visual response to Hollywood and mainstream America would only really explode as of the 1980s.

Documentary-making and filmmaking therefore seemed to be artistic countercultural responses and forms of activism for American Indians in those days. American Indians were thereby offering concrete alternatives to the subject of one of their strongest criticisms—Hollywood’s distortion of their identities. Although financial resources remained their biggest handicap, very encouraging films and documentaries were being released, and institutions and film festivals were gathering around to help them develop their talents. This artistic response was, of course, only a part of the much larger American Indian countercultural movement that was developing in those decades.

II. 3. Red Power: The Political Response

Native Americans generally believe they have ample reason to fear the extermination of their people through the perceived carelessness of health care and government officials. They feel that their unique relationship with the government lends itself to neglect, lack of quality health care, and land-based threats. As a result of these fears, Native Americans have struggled to gain recognition as sovereign nations [...]⁴¹

⁴¹ Torpy, *op.cit.*, p. 1-22.

In those days, many Native communities were beginning to revive cultural and ceremonial practices, as well as to find alternatives to improve tribal economies in reaction to the slow-minded and manipulative federal agencies that were in charge of them. A nationwide Native American conference was held in Chicago in June 1961, which led to the drafting of a “Declaration of Indian Purpose,” giving tribal communities the right to maintain and develop themselves with governmental money. Native representatives demanded the right for Native Americans to choose their own way of life. This conference is considered to have kick-started Native American activism throughout the following decades:

Following the conference, many important legal, political and economic organizations were established. They included the National Indian Youth Council, the American Indian Movement [AIM], the National Indian Education Association and the Native American Rights Fund. In addition, dozens of Native American newspapers and magazines were started. The growth of a Native American population in various U.S. cities contributed to the emergence of a national Native American activist movement. This came to be known as the Red Power movement. During the 1960s, Native Americans began uniting to take control of their own future. Native American activists forced the public and the federal government to look at problems confronting reservation tribes.⁴²

Indeed, the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC), created in 1961, gave rise to a whole new generation of leaders who went to court in the attempt to recover tribal lands or at least to protect what was left of them. They challenged several treaty violations and won the first of many battles in land and water rights in 1967.

In 1968, President Johnson signed Executive Order 11399, establishing the National Council on Indian Opportunity (NCIO), saying “the time has come to focus our efforts on the plight of the American Indian,” and that the NCIO would “launch an undivided, Government-wide effort in this area.”⁴³ President Johnson did indeed change government policy toward Native Americans, but many young Natives wanted faster and more widespread change in their lives.

The American Indian Movement (AIM) was initially set up in 1968 to protect Native Americans from police harassment. Native American urban communities (often labeled “Red ghettos,” such as those in Minneapolis) often endured high unemployment levels, daily racism, police harassment, drug abuse and alcoholism, poverty, domestic violence and substandard housing. The AIM’s main goal was to create real economic independence for American Indians, and it helped channel government funds to associations and to American Indians in cities. The

⁴² Newsela, “Native American Activism in the 1960s and 1970s,” <https://newsela.com/read/lib-native-american-activism-1960s-1970s/id/36963/> (accessed November 20, 2017).

⁴³ Lyndon B. Johnson, 113 - Special Message to the Congress on the Problems of the American Indian: “The Forgotten American,” speech delivered on March 6, 1968, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=28709> (accessed November 27, 2017).

AIM often confronted the government or government representatives publicly and this sometimes resulted in violence.

Media attention was brought to two noteworthy protests in 1970: the occupation of Mount Rushmore by members of the United Native Americans, with support from the AIM (their goal was to reclaim the land that had been promised to the Great Sioux Nation in the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie in perpetuity), and the occupation of Plymouth Rock by the AIM, who seized the replica of the *Mayflower* in Boston to commemorate the 350th anniversary of the Pilgrims' landing at Plymouth Rock. Both were symbolic occupations, the latter “a day of remembrance and spiritual connection as well as a protest of the racism and oppression which Native Americans continue to experience.”⁴⁴ Native Americans felt that their rights needed more enforcement and protection, and so they protested in various manners, inspired by other movements of the times:⁴⁵

Before AIM, Indians were dispirited, defeated and culturally dissolving. People were ashamed to be Indian. You didn't see the young people wearing braids or chokers or ribbon shirts in those days. Hell, I didn't wear 'em. People didn't Sun Dance, they didn't Sweat, they were losing their languages. Then there was that spark at Alcatraz, and we took off. We put Indians and Indian rights smack dab in the middle of the public consciousness for the first time since the so-called Indian Wars... [AIM] laid the groundwork for the next stage in regaining our sovereignty and self-determination as nation [...]⁴⁶

Indeed, one of the most prominent examples of Native activism took place from November 20, 1969 to June 11, 1971, with the revolutionary occupation of Alcatraz Island—in the San Francisco bay—by a group that called itself “Indians of all tribes” just like their hippie counterparts of 1967. Their goal was to build a cultural center on the island. After having landed on “The Rock,” a fleet of wooden sailboats holding 89 Native Americans claimed the island by the “right of discovery” as Europeans had done centuries before and asked the US government for money to turn Alcatraz into a Native American cultural center and university.⁴⁷ Over the next 19 months, the group negotiated with the federal government. Although these negotiations did not result in anything concrete the occupation inspired and greatly increased American Indian activism throughout the country. Whereas most occupations did not last long and did not always necessarily yield concrete or immediate results, they became a tactic and a

⁴⁴ Read the full speech at *United American Indians of New England*, “National Day of Mourning,” November 23, 2017,

Coles Hill Plymouth, MA www.uaine.org/suppressed-speech (accessed November 27, 2017).

⁴⁵ “Red Power drew ideological weight from the far more visible Black Power movement,” Deloria, *op.cit.*, p. 164.

⁴⁶ Russell Means, one of the prominent leaders of AIM, in the PBS/KQED documentary *Alcatraz is not an Island*. Directed by James M. Fortier (2001).

⁴⁷ “We will offer them our religion, our education, our life-ways, in order to help them achieve our level of civilization and thus raise them and all their white brothers up from their savage and unhappy state.” See full “Alcatraz Proclamation” at *History is a Weapon*, <http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/alcatrazproclamationandletter.html> (accessed November 16, 2017).

means to draw public attention to the problems and demands of American Indians. Dr. LaNada Boyer, a leader of the Alcatraz occupation, states that they “were able to raise, not only the consciousness of other American people, but our own people as well, to reestablish our identity as Indian people, as a culture, as political entities.”⁴⁸ The Alcatraz Occupation did lead the US government (directly or indirectly) to adopt Native American self-determination as official US policy in the years that followed.

In 1972, the AIM started their own community schools in the Minneapolis area, as an alter to public and BIA schools with high dropout rates. Known as “Survival Schools” for their focus on basic learning and living skills, the schools strongly promoted Native cultural identities. Native Americans wanted their children to be taught the languages and traditions of their individual tribes. In that same year, the AIM also organized the Trail of Broken Treaties: a demonstration in Washington D.C. which culminated in the takeover of the BIA building for a week, in order to show their frustration with bureaucracy, third-world living conditions on reservations, poor education, persistent disregard of treaty rights and the manipulation of tribal governments by the BIA.⁴⁹ Many Native Americans felt that the BIA was controlling Native American land solely to the government’s benefit.

Another headline-making protest took place on February 27, 1973 at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, when the AIM provoked an armed challenge against the government. The 10-week-long siege came to be known as “Wounded Knee II,” named after the Wounded Knee massacre of 1890.⁵⁰ The militant stand-off at Wounded Knee was the climax of their frustration facing all of these issues which were left undealt with. The AIM also protested against the Pine Ridge events of the mid-70s, during which the FBI abusively repressed activists and other community members. It is at that moment that the Oglala Sioux Nation was formed. The standoff finally ended when an agreement was reached and both sides withdrew.

Following Wounded Knee II, the AIM brought together thousands of Native representatives in a gathering that founded the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) and in 1975 the Council received United Nations recognition. That same year American Indians obtained more control in their children’s education with the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act. In 1977, at the International Conference on Discrimination Against Indigenous Populations in the Americas, sponsored by the United Nations in Geneva, Native

⁴⁸ PBS/KQED documentary *Alcatraz is not an Island*, directed by James M. Fortier (2001).

⁴⁹ Named after the Trail of Tears (1831-1838).

⁵⁰ “In that first conflict, Native Americans had been protesting their treatment by the U.S. government at Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge reservation. The U.S. Army killed 146 Sioux during a standoff,” *Newsela*, “Native American Activism in the 1960s and 1970s,” <https://newsela.com/read/lib-native-american-activism-1960s-1970s/id/36963/>

American activists asked for Columbus Day to be replaced with celebrations such as “Native American Day,” “American Indian Day” or “Indigenous People’s Day.” Although their propositions were not accepted then, approximately 40 years later several American states such as Vermont, South Dakota and Alaska, and many American cities have now indeed enacted this.⁵¹

The last major event of the Red Power era in the 70s ended on July 15, 1978, as hundreds of Native Americans marched into Washington, D.C. at the end of a protest known as “The Longest Walk.” The peaceful protest march had begun five months prior in San Francisco and symbolized their forced removal from their lands. That same year, Congress passed the American Indian Religious Freedom Act.

During the 1970s, Native activists fought against dispossession, racism, poverty, and violence, but they also focused on protecting treaty rights and keeping Native tribes distinct—marking the fact that they were a diverse group, with hundreds of tribes each having their own unique identities and traditions. Many tribes went to federal and state courts to claim land and demand that water rights be enforced. Such rights had been guaranteed by treaties but had been stripped away during the 19th century. As we have seen, they had many reasons to protest in the 70s, and the growing AIM held a number of rallies throughout the country, which helped attract international media attention to Native American issues. They gained a more respected view in society and were guaranteed a series of civil rights.

According to Deloria, even though American Indian activism was worlds apart from the hippie movement in its incentive and results, it was nonetheless very real in its existence and in the advances made. From symbolic to concrete actions, American Indians too were countering the establishment in America, but unlike counterculturalists they were not attempting to break away from their ancestors, their traditions or cultures in order to define themselves, but rather rediscovering those very traditions and cultures, and re-affirming those very identities and their long-lost sovereignty:

Red Power [...], which sought to refocus Indianness on larger audiences, came eventually to matter more to Indian people than to non-Indians. In building the political movement, young Indians looked to elders and traditionals, fundamentally altering the ways subsequent Native people would construct their identities.⁵²

⁵¹ Among the many cities, one could cite: Phoenix, Boulder, Denver, Ann Harbor, Lincoln, Santa Fe, Spokane. “Today, a growing number of cities across the United States have moved to repeal Columbus Day and replace it with a holiday honoring indigenous and Native people. The largest, so far, is Los Angeles, California, which in August voted to ‘dismantle a state-sponsored celebration of genocide of indigenous peoples’,” Cecily Hilleary, “Some Cities, Native American Activists Reject Columbus Day,” *Voanews*, September 27, 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/a/native-americans-columbus-day-/4046601.html> (accessed November 29, 2017).

⁵² *Op.cit.*, p. 166.

Native American issues in the 1960s and especially in the 70s were undeniably complex. Natives were indeed at times used more as symbols by the counterculture, with both negative and positive repercussions, but they did nevertheless have an active part in the counterculture itself, with their own branch of Red Power. Native American activists fiercely paved the way on socio-political grounds for the generations to come and, maybe more importantly, re-ignited the desire to preserve their cultural identities. Has this trend continued throughout the decades, and are Native Americans any more in charge of their identities and stories nowadays? Does the Red Power movement, or at least an American Indian counterculture, still exist in contemporary America?

III. Post-1970s Epilogue

This past century has been one in which American Indian people have had to learn how to both adapt and survive at the same time. Lagging behind in every socio-economic category from educational attainment to per capita income, Indian people have lived on the margins of American consciousness, typically neglected while others are attended to, normally forgotten in the litany of America's successes and failures. In the midst of invisibility, though, the twentieth century also saw a remarkable resilience among American Indian people. Asserting their humanity in the face of a world blinded to the problems modernity has brought to the Indian world and asserting a continued belief in Native sovereignty as the best way of bringing American Indian solutions to American Indian problems, Indian people have managed to come into this new century and millennium having defeated the notion of the idea of their inevitable vanishing.⁵³

The 1980s marked a definite change in climate compared to the 70s. After having acquired significant social and legal advancements, Reagan's government devised devastating policies with regards to Native communities, including the use of Native lands to extract uranium, government exploitation of tribal lands and economic recession.⁵⁴ This socio-economic context encouraged many Native communities in the direction of autonomous development and to establish gaming industries on their reservations, which gave rise to the "Casino Indian" or "rich tribesman who still rakes in the taxpayer's money" stereotypes.⁵⁵ In the 1980s, Native Americans also somewhat disappeared from mass media and cinema—the few films they appeared in showed them as invisible or mute presences, when not

⁵³ Robert Warrior, foreword to Singer, *op. cit.*, p. ix.

⁵⁴ For example, "termination by accountants" whereby Reagan acknowledged the initial standing of American Indian communities as "sovereign nations," while using methods of assuring that tribal governments were "responsive and accountable" by cutting as many federal funds as he could. Reservations were already poverty-stricken and these cutbacks devastated native communities across the continent, Kilpatrick, *op. cit.*, p.101.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.103.

supernatural beings all together.⁵⁶ As the public grew less interested in them, they were unsurprisingly portrayed as rather inexistent or unreal on screen.

Nevertheless, a new phenomenon saw the day, as more and more people in America seemed eager to claim Native American heritage. Whether this implies a regain of pride in Native American heritage for actual Natives, or whether it is the reflection of the still growing “Indian wanna-be” trend is very hard to tell, since all one has to do is to claim such heritage to be counted. Either way, the “Indian wanna-be” trend has definitely escalated over these past four decades.⁵⁷

The 80s were a very important period for American filmmakers and videographers, as it was a time in which individual Natives first attempted to produce their own works. This period also saw an unprecedented rise in print journalism for Native communities. The growing underground Native American scene provided a solid alternative to Hollywood’s “Indian films,” and an artistic counterculture in itself. And indeed, Native-made films and documentaries in the 80s were clearly more serious and profound attempts at exploring Native issues in contemporary American society than anything Hollywood had ever produced.⁵⁸ By the late 80s, there were hundreds of Native novelists, poets and playwrights. Although they were not making many headlines any more, the AIM also pursued its activism through its “Survival Schools” and private patrols.

The appropriation and distortion of American Indian identities continued in the post-70s decades, notably as of the 1990s, which marked yet another renewed interest in American Indians. This was the decade of the Columbus Quincentennial (1992) and of the Year of the Indigenous Peoples (1993). Similarly to what had happened in the 1970s, the presence of Native American activism on TV and in the press literally escalated throughout the 1990s thanks to the revisiting of Wounded Knee in 1990, the National Coalition of Racism in Sports and Media (NCRSM) in 1992⁵⁹, Leonard Peltier’s bid for a new trial in 1993 and AIM’s split into two factions that same year. American Indians once again became metaphors for the

⁵⁶ “As the yuppies replaced the hippies, the cyclical American fascination with the Indian waned,” Kilpatrick, *op.cit.*, p. 104.

⁵⁷ There is a nickname for this phenomenon: “Cherokee Grandmother Syndrome.” It refers to people who claim to have a distant ancestor who was a Native American. These people are not necessarily always lying about having indigenous ancestry, but all one needs to do is to claim the heritage. This surge could also be attributed to a newly found pride in Native American ancestry. Finally, another reason could be the increase in the number of Latin American immigrants in the US with indigenous ancestry. Apparently Latinos are increasingly choosing to identify as Native Americans. Yet, “Indian wanna-bes” or “reclaimers are perceived as preying upon the current trendiness of Nativeness as well as perhaps embracing this heritage for economic, or perceived economic, gain,” Kathleen J. Fitzgerald, *Beyond White Ethnicity: Developing a Sociological Understanding of Native American Identity Reclamation* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007), p. 186.

⁵⁸ A great number of documentaries and notable films such as *Return of the Country* (Bob Hick, 1982), *The Great Spirit Within the Hole* (Chris Spotted Eagle, 1983), *Harold of Orange* (Richard Weise, 1984).

⁵⁹ The NCRSM was established in order to fight the use of American Indian images and names for logos, symbols or mascots in professional and college sports, marketing and in the media.

oppressed or the discriminated, the modern warriors, the natural ecologists, symbols of mysticism and spirituality, but also wealthy casino owners living off the tax-payer, the disempowered, alcoholics, the uneducated, the disease-ridden, and many, many more.⁶⁰ There was such an intense layering of images that the result was, quite similarly to that of the 70s, a generally confused image of Native Americans. The fascination with Native spiritualities, which had begun in the 70s and somewhat subsided in the 80s, reappeared with even more intensity in the 90s. This was mainly due to the strengthening of the New Age movement and it continues to this day.

Once again, Native cultures found themselves commodified into the objects of white consumption. This movement notably brought about a literary cult that tends to appropriate Native identity, commonly referred to as “white shamanism” or “cultural colonization.”⁶¹ The trend in question is still thriving in American popular culture and in many parts of the Western world, much to the concern of Native communities, and is finding more and more echoes not only on screen but also as an actual “cultural and spiritual market.” On June 10, 1993, an international gathering of US and Canadian Lakota, Dakota and Nakota Nations, with approximately 500 representatives from 40 different tribes, was held under the name of the Lakota Summit V. The representatives unanimously passed a “Declaration of War Against Exploiters of Lakota Spirituality,” targeting not only Hollywood’s but also the New Age Movement’s commercialization of their cultures.⁶²

Many American Indian scholars and activists, such as Ward Churchill, Pam Colorado, and Vine Deloria Jr., to name just a few, continue to study and denounce this growing phenomenon within their own works, clearly referring to the “Indian films” of mainstream cinema and the New Age “Indian market” as instruments in “cultural genocide,” and one of the most critical issues with which Natives have been faced since the 90s. From the 1990s to this day, American Indians have also continued responding through the audio-visual channel, stating that “Native Americans do not need any more Kevin Costners, Billy Jacks, and John

⁶⁰ Kilpatrick, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

⁶¹ Renato Rosaldo calls this type of New Age white ideology “imperialist nostalgia,” and explains it in the following manner: “Someone deliberately alters a form of life, and then regrets that things have not remained as they were prior to their intervention. At one remove, people destroy their environment, and then they worship nature. In any of its versions, imperialist nostalgia uses a pose of “innocent yearning” both to capture people’s imaginations and to conceal its complicity with often brutal domination,” Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), p. 70.

⁶² Here is an extract: “WHEREAS the television and film industry continues to saturate the entertainment media with vulgar, sensationalist and grossly distorted representations of Lakota spirituality and culture which reinforce the public’s negative stereotyping of Indian people and which gravely impair the self-esteem of our children”. See “Declaration of War Against Exploiters of Lakota Spirituality,” AICS, <http://www.aics.org/war.html> (accessed December 1, 2017).

Waynes... the need for the Indian [white male] expert is over”.⁶³ Not surprisingly, the Sundance Film Festival created the “Native American Program Category” in 1994.

21st century US popular culture maintains the images and trends set in the early 90s, and Hollywood continues to produce generally positive stereotypes and revisionist type films regarding Native Americans. The representation of American Indians in mainstream America remains something that will seemingly always be adapted to the dominant culture’s needs and desire for self-definition and remains firmly in the grip of Hollywood and mass media, as well as within the New Age movement. The 21st century has also witnessed a still very active American Indian counterculture, with the 2004 Coalition to “Protect the Peaks” and the march to Alcatraz Island in support of Leonard Peltier, the 2007 “Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” adopted by the United Nations General Assembly⁶⁴, the Longest Walk 2 of 2008 and the highly mediatized 2016 Standing Rock Protest of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL).⁶⁵

The Standing Rock Protest was striking insofar that it attracted protestors of all “tribes”—self-proclaimed “water protectors” of all ages, backgrounds, and countries. Through this protest, the world got to witness sometimes violent standoffs between water protectors and law enforcement representatives. Even more interesting is how the Native communities involved in the Standing Rock Protest used the Internet to serve their cause, much to the surprise of those who believed Native Americans as “technologically backwards”:

Native American culture is cyberculture [...] you can find that American cyberculture is strongly tied to tribal values [...] Just because someone is protesting one type of technological intrusion doesn’t mean that their embrace of other technologies is somehow ironic. It’s a sign of technological sophistication, not a fruitless protest against modernity, as I think is sometimes shown in the media [...] All of this cultural history is coming to bear on the pipeline protests, as water protectors bring together a mix of ancestral practices and tech know-how, in order to develop their identity, stay in touch with each other and communicate a message to the wider world.⁶⁶

While the Obama Administration did not grant the permit for the DAPL to drill under the Missouri river, within only a few days in office, on January 24, 2017, Trump signed executive orders not only reviving the construction of the two controversial oil pipelines but also accelerating both projects. The Standing Rock Sioux tribe responded immediately saying

⁶³ Ruth Denny, “Open Letter to Ted Turner,” *Circle: News from a Native Perspective* (Minneapolis, March 1993), p. 6, quoted in Singer, *op. cit.*, pp.10-11.

⁶⁴ The Declaration announces rights of Indigenous Peoples, such as rights to self-determination, traditional lands and territories, traditional languages and customs, natural resources and sacred sites. See *The International Indian Treaty Council*, http://web.archive.org/web/20071021193647/http://www.treatycouncil.org/PDFs/IITCPR_DRIP091607FINALcWEB.pdf (accessed December 2, 2017).

⁶⁵ This protest movement was directed against Energy Transfer Partners and their project to build a controversial four-state oil pipeline from North Dakota to Indiana.

⁶⁶ Andrew Kirk, a history professor at the University of Nevada, quoted in Paul Spencer’s “Native Americans Are Resisting the Dakota Pipeline With Tech and Media Savvy,” *Motherboard*, October 29, 2016 https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/78kmw4/tech-behind-the-dakota-access-pipeline-protests (accessed December 2, 2017).

it would take legal action against the executive order, accusing Trump of disregarding treaty rights and violating the law through his executive order on DAPL. However, as executive orders allow presidents to bypass Congress, and as the US Supreme Court is unlikely to favor treaty rights over an executive order, it seems that the Standing Rock Protest will most likely not have been able to stop the DAPL construction on their sacred lands.

Similarly, on December 4, 2017, President Trump announced he would sharply reduce the size of two national monuments in Utah (Bears Ears National Monument and Grand Staircase-Escalante). The Navajo Nation, Hopi Tribe, Zuni Tribe, Ute Indian Tribe and Ute Mountain Ute Indian Tribe consider these monuments (notably Bears Ears) to be religiously and historically valuable and have engaged a federal lawsuit against President Trump. US courts have never ruled on whether a president actually has the power to reduce national monuments, therefore the upcoming legal battle should have far-reaching implications and could alter the course of American land conservation.

These recent protests have served not only to rally together communities in the defense of natural spaces, but also in the defense of Native lands and rights. They continue to draw international attention to these causes. American Indian activists have not lost faith and continue their struggle through actions such as the Thanksgiving 2017 Alcatraz Indigenous People's Sunrise Gathering, or the elaborate hoax on December 13th, 2017, whereby Native activists parodied websites and made the Internet believe for a few hours that the Washington Redskins had finally changed their offensive team name to the Washington Redhawks.⁶⁷

Ultimately, even if to a certain degree American Indians have played and continue to play a symbolic role in other people's battles, or on other people's cultural and spiritual markets, and even if their cultural identities continue to be distorted as such, they are certainly still here, fighting. While American Indians continue to face severe socio-economic problems, and engage in seemingly uphill legal and political battles, they have decisively shown that they will not abandon their identities and cultures that easily, nor will they fit the stereotypes of being a vanishing group or somehow ill-adapted to the modern world. There is not only a definite American Indian counterculture in 21st century America but, more importantly, there are definite real American Indian cultures and identities. To a certain extent, as intuited by the hippies, an American Indian counterculture has always existed, at least, starting from the day colonization in the New World began. The difference is that since the 1960s this counterculture has found ways to be heard, seen, and to attain socio-economic goals. "The twenty first

⁶⁷ See "Fake websites that say Redskins changed name make rounds," *The Washington Times*, December 13, 2017, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/dec/13/fake-websites-say-redskins-changed-name-make-round/> (accessed December 18, 2017).

century will be a very interesting time in the nation's Native American story. As a plaque in the National Museum of the American Indian in New York City says, 'We are still here'.⁶⁸

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⁶⁸ Kilpatrick, *op. cit.*, p.176.

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