



DISCUSSION GUIDE

From Alcatraz to Standing Rock and Beyond: On the Past 50 and Next 50 Years of Indigenous Activism

The purpose of this discussion guide is to facilitate thoughtful discussion around the topics introduced in this Indigenous Forum presentation [video](#). The discussion guide can be adapted for use in the classroom as well as salon-style gatherings.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INFORMATION PAGE	2
KEYWORDS & LINKS	3
INTRODUCTION AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS	4
VIDEO GUIDE	5
TRANSCRIPT	6

This [video](#) is a presentation of the 2019 Indigenous Forum, organized by the Bioneers Indigeneity Program and featured annually at the Bioneers Conference. Indigeneity is a Native-led Program within Bioneers/Collective Heritage Institute that promotes indigenous knowledge and approaches to solve the earth's most pressing environmental and social issues through respectful dialogue. Since 1990, Bioneers has acted as a fertile hub of social and scientific innovators with practical and visionary solutions for the world's most pressing environmental and social challenges.



INFORMATION PAGE

From Alcatraz to Standing Rock and Beyond: On the Past 50 and Next 50 Years of Indigenous Activism



Watch video: bioneers.org/Alcatraz

DESCRIPTION OF VIDEO

2019 commemorated the 50-year anniversary of the 19-month Native American student occupation of Alcatraz. This [video](#) presents Indigenous activists from three generations who were on the frontlines at Alcatraz, Standing Rock, and other Indigenous Rights struggles, as they discuss their visions for the next 50 years of Indigenous activism.

Featuring:

Julian Noisecat (Canim Lake Band Tsq'escen/Lil'Wat Nation of Mount Currie)

LaNada War Jack (Shoshone)

Clayton Thomas Muller (Pukatawagan/Mathias Colomb Cree Nation)

Raz K'Dee (Pomo)



KEYWORDS

BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS (BIA) – The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) is an agency of the federal government of the United States within the U.S. Department of the Interior. It is responsible for the administration and management of 55,700,000 acres (225,000 km²) of land held in trust by the United States for American Indians, Indian Tribes and Alaska Natives.

INDIANS OF ALL TRIBES (IOAT) – A group of mostly young, Native Americans living in the San Francisco Bay Area who led the occupation of Alcatraz island from November 1969 to June 1971 to fight for treaty and human rights for Native Americans.

INDIAN RELOCATION ACT OF 1956 – A United States law intended to encourage American Indians to leave Indian reservations and their traditional lands, and to assimilate into the general population in urban areas.

INDIAN TERMINATION – A series of policies and laws passed by the US Federal government in the 1950s and 1960s meant to abolish tribes and relocate Native Americans from their homelands.

MNÍ WIČHÓNI – Mní Wičhóni means “water is life” in the Lakota language. The phrase was the rallying cry behind the 2016 standoff between over 10,000 water protectors and law enforcement at Standing Rock Reservation in North Dakota over the construction of the Dakota Access pipeline. Since then, the concept of “water is life” has been adopted by water protectors from around the world, to signify that access to clean water should be a basic right for humans, animals, plants, and ecosystems.

ORIGINAL INSTRUCTIONS – A term used by some Native Americans that refers to teachings passed down from generation to generation, often applied to sustainable practices.

SELF-DETERMINATION – The idea that tribes can self-govern and make decisions for themselves issues and matters that affect their own tribal citizens. Self-determination was upheld by (but goes beyond) the 1975 US Indian Self-Determination and Education Act.

SOCIAL MOVEMENT – A group of diffusely organized people or organizations striving toward a common goal relating to human society or social change, or the organized activities of such a group. For example, the push for civil rights was a social movement that peaked in the 1950s and 1960s.

STANDING ROCK – Is probably best known as the social and environmental movement that emerged in 2016 in an attempt to stop the proposed Dakota Access Pipeline.

TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY – Recognition of a tribe’s nationhood as a self-governing entity as defined by the United States Constitution.

TREATY RIGHTS – Moral and legal rights to Indigenous peoples when treaties, or agreements, were signed between Indigenous nations and settler societies during colonization.

LINKS

[Bioneers.org/indigeneity](https://bioneers.org/indigeneity) | [Bioneers.org/alcatraz](https://bioneers.org/alcatraz) | drwarjack.com
julianbravenoise.com | lifeinthecityofdirtywater.com | snagmagazine.com



INTRODUCTION AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

From Alcatraz to Standing Rock and Beyond: On the Past 50 and Next 50 Years of Indigenous Activism

2019 marked the 50 year anniversary of the start of the 18-month occupation of Alcatraz Island by the Indians of all Tribes (IOAT), a group of 78 Native American activists who fought for the rights of Native Peoples, and the return of illegally taken lands. Widely recognized as a turning point in the Native American and broader Civil Rights activism movements, the occupation was part of a much longer continuum of Indigenous resistance to colonization and genocide in the United States. Before the Indians of All Tribes occupied Alcatraz, the official policy of the United States towards Indigenous Peoples was to assimilate them, terminate their tribes, and relocate them from their ancestral homelands. After the occupation, this policy shifted towards recognizing the sovereignty of federally recognized tribes and self determination. The occupation of Alcatraz was an enormous moment for Indigenous rights and the history of civil rights in general, but it often gets overlooked in American history. The Standing Rock occupation of 2016-17 and many other recently organized events to protect Indigenous lands and rights in North America are a legacy and a testament to the strategies used by the Indians of All Tribes (IOAT) to gain support to uphold treaties and human rights.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What can young people do to make a difference in the world about the issues they care about?
2. What is activism? What makes “Indigenous activism” different from the broader notion of activism?
3. Should Alcatraz Island have been returned to Native Americans? If so, to whom?



VIDEO GUIDE

This guide provides a roadmap to various ideas, keywords and concepts to support video navigation.

From Alcatraz to Standing Rock and Beyond: On the Past 50 and Next 50 Years of Indigenous Activism

Idea, Keyword or Concept	Time Stamp
Significance of the Alcatraz Occupation	1:35
How the Alcatraz Occupation Began	5:55
Bureau of Indian Affairs Building Takeover	13:49
Outcomes of the Alcatraz Occupation	14:45
Origins of the Native Youth Movement	17:40
Seventh Generation	20:17
Alcatraz Is An Idea	21:59
Matriarchy and Natural Law	23:49
Spirituality and Indigenous Activism	24:23
Standing Rock and Mni Wiconi, Water is Life	25:50





TRANSCRIPT

From Alcatraz to Standing Rock and Beyond: On the Past 50 and Next 50 Years of Indigenous Activism

Featuring Julian Noisecat, LaNada War Jack, Clayton Thomas Muller, and Raz K'Dee

JULIAN: 2019 marks the 50th anniversary of the 1969 occupation of Alcatraz by the Indians of all tribes. Growing up in Oakland, that occupation was an enormous part of the community's history, and my own sort of politicization and education as a young Native person. Every year on Indigenous People's Day, on the day that is Thanksgiving as well, folks gather on Alcatraz for a sunrise ceremony to acknowledge and carry forward the legacy of the 1969 occupation.

1:35

And it's important to remember how important that occupation was. Before the Indians of all tribes occupied Alcatraz, the official policy of the United States towards Native Peoples was one of relocation, assimilation, and termination. And in the time after Alcatraz, the policy shifted to one of self-determination and sovereignty, which remains the paradigm of Native policy in the United States and in many countries actually across the world today. And so that occupation was an enormous moment in Indigenous history, in the history of civil rights and people of color in this country, and in just the history of this country, but it often gets overlooked, forgotten.

2:26

Most people actually who visit Alcatraz—Alcatraz, it's important to note, is the most visited national park in the country. Over 1.4 million people visit Alcatraz every year, but they visit it primarily because of its history as a federal penitentiary. When you think of—When most people think of Alcatraz, they remember the Bird-man and Al Capone, and not people like the late Richard Oakes or LaNada War Jack, who we happen to have sitting here with us and was one of the original leaders of that occupation.

3:00

The reason it's important to acknowledge Alcatraz is because it's possible to draw a line I think from that occupation which happened right here in the Bay Area to so many of the native-rights struggles, indigenous-rights struggles, and the activism that is very alive and well across Indian Country and elsewhere today.

3:30

And so on this panel today we have both representatives of the original occupation of Alcatraz as well some wonderful activists who I've had the privilege of knowing from when I was a kid to when I was an adult who are carrying forward in their own ways the legacy of that occupation and the enduring struggle for our rights, our sovereignty, and our freedom as Native Peoples.

So immediately to my left is my dear friend LaNada War Jack, Dr. LaNada War Jack, I should say, of the Shoshone-Bannock in Fort Hall, Idaho, and who was student leader at UC Berkeley way back in 1969, one of the original occupiers of Alcatraz who has gone on to become an educator, a PhD.

Sitting next to her, my big bro, Clayton Thomas-Muller, who's Cree from Pukatawagan, Manitoba, who I had the opportunity to work with for a little while at 350.org, who is in many ways, I would say, a mentor,



a figure to a lot of people doing activism across Indian Country, and at this point actually beyond in many different circles.

Next to him, my good friend who I've known since I was a little guy, Raz K'Dee. Raz is Pomo. He does a lot of cultural organizing—I would describe it as cultural organizing—here in the Bay Area. Raz is an emcee. He created this thing called SNAG Magazine which is an urban-native youth magazine.

So to start, I actually wanted to turn to our elder and sort of mentor, LaNada, and ask how—LaNada, how did you get involved in the occupation of Alcatraz? What's that sort of origin story? And what were—Looking back from 50 years now, on 50 years, what were some of the big outcomes that you've seen in your own life and for Indian Country?

5:55

LANADA: That's a big question. We'll see. Yeah. Unfortunately we don't have all of our people that were there at the time, but I'm still alive and I was still there, and I watched everything happen, and got active in it. I was sent to San Francisco on the Bureau of Indian Affairs Relocation Program when I was 18, and then I got involved in community development in the Mission District where a lot of us lived, and the blacks had a program where they sending their youth to UC Berkeley, so I asked them if they could send me too, and they did. So I was the first Native American student at UC Berkeley.

So, when the idea of Alcatraz came up, and the city of San Francisco was going to turn it over to a millionaire for a casino, then we said, "Wait a minute. This looks like another broken treaty to me!" Because a Lakota landing part went out right after the prison was terminated, and they claimed the island on behalf of their treaty. And of course that was Federal Indian Law as well, that federal-surplus property would return to the native people if they claimed it so—So it was enough of an insult to us to go ahead and get organized and take the island.

All we had to do—We didn't have any cell phones in those days. I don't know how we did anything but—. But we got on the phone and called all of our departments throughout the state of California and all the Native American students came. So we had our—kind of like an instant organization to take over Alcatraz, which we did, and it became a 19-month occupation.

And I keep track of how many months it was because there were 19 Hopis that were imprisoned on Alcatraz during the late 1800s, and that's where they kept all the war leaders from the last Indian Wars in the West. The Apache, the Shoshone Nation were having all their wars, the Paiutes, the Bannocks. And the last Indian War in the Northwest was the Bannock Indian War in 1880, so all of our leaders were taken to Alcatraz as well. So we have a little bit of history from our ancestors there as well. A lot of prayers have been spoken out there because the 19 Hopi leaders were religious leaders, very powerful medicine people that were out there for that time, and they must've really put together a lot of prayers.

When we went out and maintained the occupation, unfortunately the leader we picked, Richard Oakes, his daughter got into an accident and she was killed, so he and his family left the island. They were there for about six weeks. So we were left with the rest of the occupation.

So we continued on with the proposal for Thunderbird University, and I wrote all those proposals. We organized the Bay Area Native American Council which were all the organizations across the Bay, and all the native organizations, and they came and supported us and met with us every time we negotiated with the federal government, so—Because they said we're young and militant, and we didn't the support of the older, adult community, and so we showed them that we did have that support of the older, adult community, and told them we're not militant. We're non-violent, but we are young. That was our only sin, at the time. Anyway, we negotiated with the government throughout that time.

And then Ethel Kennedy introduced me to Edward Bennett Williams, who is some big attorney from the East Coast. He owned the Washington Redskins at the time. Was it Redskins? No, Red Sox. Yeah. And—Otherwise, we would've had something to say about that, but—but he was going to represent us and bring out all



the issues, the injustices, the treaty violations, everything that was going on on our home reservations and in the urban communities. And we just couldn't get that done in time. The day before the students were to come out and support us to get Edward Bennett Williams, then the government took the island back the day before. But we had ongoing plans that we were working on throughout that whole time.

And so here it is, 50 years later. I'm still alive. I can say that, and it was—you know, you just have to take of your life. When you're young, you don't really think about that, but it's really true. You have to do it, so that you can have the health when you get—later on when you get older so you can—I was laughing. I was thinking next year I'm going to be 75, and I'll be saying, I got to get to Alcatraz. I'll be 75 years old trying to get to Alcatraz yet.

12:46

JULIAN: One of the things that also happened with—in the sort of wake of the occupation is that there are obviously are also Native People who are from right here in the Bay Area and California. And, to a certain extent, sort of the many sort of ripples of Alcatraz also extended to Indian Country right here. And Raz', I wanted to—I wanted to turn to you and ask what—You've been doing this work for a long time.

Richard Oakes also married into a Pomo community, and his kids and grandkids live up in Pomo country. I wanted to ask what you've seen in terms of changes in sort of cultural strength, political strength, power, and also recognition of that—of that strength and power in your time doing this work.

13:49

RAZ: You know, our relatives from up north, Sonoma County, after Alcatraz happened, and we had—My grandfather was a—he was a big proponent of—He was a reverend, Reverend Al, Al Elgin. He was the first director of the Friendship House, Intertribal Friendship House in Oakland. And I got to talk to my grandpa. He used to tell stories about Alcatraz, and one day he told me, yeah, I organized the talks between the Indians at Alcatraz and the federal agents. And I was like, "What? Grandpa? You never told me that one." So there's a whole history there of our folks that have--they sacrificed their lives for this, for us to be here. And so—But he told me stories about them taking over the BIA. We're going over to take over the BIA—occupy the BIA offices. So young people, we're looking at you. It's your turn, alright?

14:45

But one of the good—One of the beautiful things that happened out of Alcatraz was the reclaiming of lands all over the country. And we had—It was one of the first movements that got national coverage, right. So we had media coverage. We had coverage—mainstream media coverage. And Native communities, there had been other struggles and other things happening, but they never got in the mainstream news. But it was a transition period where people started to look at Natives in a different way, and they started this like, "oh yeah." You know, kind of the hippie movement, and the beatniks, and all that kind of—They started to think about Native Peoples as like, "Oh, those are human beings, those human beings like us." And they started giving them the media coverage they deserve, and Alcatraz was one of those first—those transition moments. So a lot of people, they heard about Alcatraz, and they—They came from all over the country, came to Alcatraz and became part of it.

But I want to just close by saying Alcatraz was a turning point for the tribes—for our tribes throughout the nation. And all these land spaces, let's go utilize them. We have all these land spaces now that we've reclaimed, and that we work to preserve. Let's go utilize them. Let's come together as a community and put these things together. Oh.



16:15

JULIAN: So, one theme that I've heard in the comments so far is reclaiming, right, and land of course, but another is age, which is another part of this conversation, but age often in terms of generations and the transfer of knowledge from elders to the folks coming up behind. And, one of the people who I think takes on that role in Indian Country and in our activist communities is you, Clay. I've seen you mentoring, and training, and doing a lot of that work to train the next generation of activists, and leaders, and organizers.

And so I wanted to ask, you know, how do you—what are the lessons that we need to pass on from prior generations to the new generations? How do you do that sort of intergenerational knowledge transfer between organizers and activists, and why is it that, like, so often, whether we're talking about LaNada's generation or you and Raz, that it's often like the young folks who are doing this work? What is the power—I mean in Native communities, obviously we often honor our elders, but there's also I think a power in youth here that's worth sort of thinking about.

17:40

CLAYTON: I started off my career as an organizer in my home city in Winnipeg in Canada. It's about six hours north of Standing Rock just across the US/Canada medicine line. And my older brothers, they started the largest native gang in the country, the Manitoba Warriors, and so I grew up in that inner city gang culture that so many of our young brown and black youth grow up in, who have become urbanized. And, luckily I was able to be introduced back to our culture, and for us back home, that's Sundance.

And I was taken to my first Sundance when I was 18-years old, and it really cracked my heart and my head wide open to a vision of what could be possible, something I could've never imagined in the time I'd spent on the Earth up to that point. And from that point, I started to engage other young people to try and share this beauty that I had discovered in our people's connection to the sacredness of our land, and to try and get all of our young people out of these traps that exist, these cracks in the social safety net that our young people fall into. And there's so many predatorial things that are part of our economic system that prey on our people, especially our young people.

And so at that time in the '90s, a bunch of us young Natives, we got together and we started the Native Youth Movement, and we began to do work across the country, decolonization work, work aimed at helping our young people decolonize their minds to unlock the mind of the—the colonized mind to decolonize our young people and to bring them back to establish that connection to the sacredness of Mother Earth, and ever since then, it's been one hell of a ride.

But what I think is beautiful about our young people, and what I remember from when I was a young person is that people told us we were crazy when we started the Native Youth Movement, that we couldn't do something about the gangs in the inner city. When we started the Tar Sands Campaign and took on every frickin' oil company operating in the Canadian Tar Sands, they told us we were crazy, and that would never be able to keep the Tar Sands land-locked, that they were going to build all the pipelines they wanted to build, and you know what? We've been knocking those pipelines down one after the other.

20:17

You know in our Indian way, we have this way of seeing the world—In Cree way, we talk about the seventh generation, and that when we do things, often people say, oh yeah, the seventh generation. Crees, they think seven generations ahead but actually it's a little bit different than that. It's not quite that simple. When we talk about thinking in terms of seven generations, we're thinking about the past three generations, okay, and the lessons that they've taught us, the sacrifice they made so that we could be here; the generation that we're in right now, the here; and three generations ahead, and that's how we make the decision, and it's a different way of thinking. It's a different way of worldview, of seeing, of thinking about the consequences of the actions that you take in the now.



20:16

And so these young people, the part that they play in it is that they see things that my generation—I'm middle-aged now, I'm 42, and some of our elder generation—we can't see certain things because it's just different. So, these children and these youth, they see things that we can't see so we have to trust them, and we have to resource them, and amplify their voices, and support them, and they're going to make mistakes, and they're going to hurt each other, and do all kinds of things, but we have to trust that they're going to come out of it in a good way, and lift them up.

21:59

JULIAN: Clay, one of the things that you brought up is the visionary capacity I think of young people, and of course I want to harken back to the occupation of Alcatraz. One of the driving ideas behind Alcatraz was I think captured really well in a quote by the late Richard Oakes who said that Alcatraz is not an island, it's an idea. And the idea was that when you came in New York Harbor on the East Coast, you'd encounter the Statue of Liberty, but when you came in the Golden Gate on the West Coast, you'd encounter Alcatraz, a former federal prison reclaimed as a symbol of treaty rights, native sovereignty, and our liberation, our freedom, our persistence. It'd be this counter monument.

22:50

Another part of it that I kind of want to draw out is the emphasis I think, and also the forms of activism that happen in Indigenous communities and Indian Country, right. The Alcatraz occupation was an occupation. It was about reclaiming land, right. It was about our treaty rights. And so I think we've touched on a little bit here the climate strikes and other forms of—or I guess broader movements that go beyond Native communities obviously, but I want to ask to all of our panelists actually, what is distinctive in your mind about the forms of organizing and activism that happen in Indigenous communities? Why are we calling this panel a panel on Indigenous activism rather than just a panel on activism? Like what is it that makes the organizing and social movements that come out of a Native context different?

23:49

LANADA: We lived in the natural world called the matriarchy where we lived it in the natural laws and the universe, and our tribal government was not these IRA tribal governments we have today, but they were the natural geographical ecosystem, everything in that circle of life – the plants, the animals. We took up the symbols, the medicines. So we lived in that natural world where we followed that.

24:23

And in maintaining those natural laws comes our prayers because our prayers are powerful. It comes from your heart and your soul, through your mouth, and out into the air, and sound travels on light, and it impacts the plants, the animals, and the people. So, the water, everything- so that's why we have to always maintain our prayers, and our dances is—It gives that something more because you're dancing with Mother Earth and the heartbeat of Mother Earth, the drums. So, that's why it's all our responsibility to maintain those prayers, and those songs, and those ceremonies, because it helps balance all land and life, and without that, we don't have anything. And then we experience all these problems like we're going through now.

25:28

CLAYTON: And so the spirituality piece is a fundamental piece that comes with indigenous activism because there's a spiritual dimension to all of this work that Westerners have a hard time comprehending. And that's





where the songs come in; that's where the prayers come in, offering tobacco, or the corn pollen, or whatever—whatever it is, but that connection.

25:50

And I want to bring up Standing Rock. That was a global teaching moment to teach about the difference about indigenous activism and conventional, Western activism because Standing Rock was the largest gathering of Indigenous People since pre-colonialism. Okay, there has never been—it became literally the fifth biggest city in the state of North Dakota, was the Standing Rock occupation, okay. And it was interesting watching it happen, and watching the stories coming out of there.

And I think the biggest, most powerful and profound story was very simple. It was a simple Native teaching with huge implications, and that teaching was Mni Wiconi, water is life.

26:38

And so there's a spiritual dimension that comes with native activism that I think humanity needs if we're going to solve the global climate crisis. And that is fundamentally a connection to the sacredness to the place where you live.

26:57

And in Canada where I live, there has not been a major environmental victory against extractivism in the last 50 years without First Nations People at the helm because we're your big brothers and sisters, and no matter what you think, all you non-natives, that's always going to be the case. And we represent the first jurisdiction of law, and it's the original instructions that my auntie's talking about, and we are bound to enforce those, and we all have different ways of doing. There's no pan-indigenous thing. We're as diverse as Chinese to Polish. We have some shared cosmology in terms of connection to Mother Earth and to the universe, but very different too.

27:47

As the big brothers and big sisters, and everything in between, of settlers here in our homelands—and you're all welcome, you always have been—we have to impose a much more intersectional, and kind of intergenerational, and multidimensional—in terms of time—way of thinking, and strategizing, and rooting ourselves in history, and talking to our ancestors, and seeing the ones that are coming, and like taking action, and that includes getting arrested. So—everybody's like, whoa. Whoa there, Native brother.

28:37

JULIAN: I just want to underscore the last point that my brother Clay made which is that if Alcatraz, Standing Rock, indigenous activism, these things mattered for our communities for the last 50 years, but for the next 50 especially, and for all time moving forward, I think they're going to matter to all people. That's why it's important to know about them in the context of the climate crisis, in the context of some pretty apocalyptic shit, to be honest with you. We are post-apocalyptic people, but we actually have and hold knowledge for how to have a more just relationship between people and the Earth, the land that we're upon, and I think that that's important to keep in mind that Alcatraz, Standing Rock, indigenous activism, it's going to matter not just to our people. It already matters to our people, but it needs to matter to other people too.