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Indian Activism, the Great Society, Indian Self-Determination, and the Drive for an Indian College or University, 1964–71

STEVEN J. CRUM

In the 1960s an increasing number of Native Americans began to express the need for an Indian college or university. Three major developments of the decade inspired them. The first was the rise of Indian activism in the 1960s. Although Native people had always been politically assertive, their activism became more frequent and visible. In part, the larger societal protests and the civil rights movement molded Indian activism in the 1960s. Tribal people intensified their already existing grievances against the larger dominant society, and this included their opposition to the American government's age-old assimilationist policies for Native Americans, including the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs' (BIA) 1950s termination policy that dissolved various tribal governments and Indian reservations across the nation.¹ Tribal people wanted cultural pluralism, and one way to express Indian cultural preservation was through an Indian college or university.

The second major development was the socioeconomic reforms of the Great Society, inaugurated by President Lyndon Johnson beginning in 1964. Under the Great Society the federal government provided financial support to help economically disadvantaged people develop programs to improve their quality of life. It was in part Johnson's larger domestic battle against the war on poverty. Native Americans, along with other racial minorities, became the recipients of the various programs and federal funds, especially the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO).² Indian activism and the Great Society—which were two unrelated entities that shared some common goals—thus encouraged increasing numbers of Indians to push for an Indian college or university in the 1960s.³

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The third was the notion of *Indian self-determination*, which surfaced as a concept in the 1960s and became an established policy in the 1970s. Although the term had different meanings to different people, most Native Americans agreed that it meant that Indians needed to take control of their own lives and destinies. Tribal people desired self-determination because they maintained correctly that the Euro-Americans, including the BIA, had controlled the lives of Native people for more than a century. As a case in point, the BIA had determined the direction of formalized schooling of Indian students; this included removing them from family and tribe and placing them in off-reservation boarding schools where they were subjected to an Americanization (assimilation) program and provided a low-level, inferior education. Under self-determination, the tribes desired to retake control of the education of their children.⁴ One way was to create Indian-run schools and colleges.

Tribal people of the 1960s had various examples of earlier generations of Native Americans who had controlled the education of their young people. This included the tribally run Cherokee male and female seminaries that existed from the mid-nineteenth century to the first decade of the twentieth century, and Ho-Chunk tribal educator Henry Roe Cloud's American Indian Institute, which was an all-Indian high school located in Wichita, Kansas, in existence from 1915 to 1939.⁵ Tribal people of the 1960s were also fully aware that the dominant society had never encouraged higher education for the vast majority of Native Americans. As will be pointed out, the BIA encouraged Indians to pursue a lower-level vocational education. In order to carry out self-determination, or manage their own affairs, tribal people desired higher levels of education that included the creation of Native-run colleges and universities. This article looks at the drive for Native-run postsecondary institutions in the 1960s as an effort influenced by Indian activism, the Great Society, and Indian self-determination.

On 8 March 1964, a group of five Lakotas (or Sioux originally from the Great Plains region) from the San Francisco Bay area took a boat to Alcatraz Island, abandoned a year earlier as a federal prison, and took over the island for about three hours. Aware that the federal government had created a presidential commission to determine what should become of the former prison property, the Indians manifested their activism and let the public know that Native Americans had a legal right to claim "abandoned" federal property.⁶

There were other reasons why the Lakota five took over Alcatraz. They wanted the development of an American Indian university or "University of the American Indian." Richard McKenzie, the group leader, stressed that Indians needed their own university because Native students "can't cope with the increasingly higher scholarship standards" created by mainstream schools and colleges.⁷ He had ended up in the Bay Area in 1956 under the BIA's urban relocation program, which was one component of the larger federal Termination policy that sought to amalgamate reservation Indians into the larger population. McKenzie and others expressed resentment toward relocation because the BIA channeled Indian relocatees into the blue-collar job market, including welding and auto mechanics.⁸ Relocated Indians were not encouraged to pursue an academic college or university education in

the 1950s and 1960s. In 1964 McKenzie made it clear that Indians needed a university education.

When the presidential commission held its hearings in the Bay Area in 1964, the urban Lakota attended the sessions to argue for Indian control of Alcatraz. They received the support of a few sympathetic whites who appeared before the hearings to argue for an Indian university. But the Indians fought a lost cause, for the federal government had no intention of giving them Alcatraz. Certainly the commission officials did not favor an Indian university because they viewed the concept as a form of "segregated education." In short, they had taken the civil rights argument of integration in the 1960s and used it against an Indian request. McKenzie and his group did not easily give up, for they filed a legal claim for Alcatraz in late March 1964. Their claim, however, did not end up as an Indian victory.⁹

In August 1964, several months after the Alcatraz incident, Congress passed the Economic Opportunity Act that led to the creation of a new administrative unit, the Office of Economic Opportunity. From an economic standpoint, OEO proved to be highly beneficial for economically disadvantaged peoples, including Native Americans. OEO had several components, some of which dealt specifically with education. The Head Start program introduced formal education to poor children at the prekindergarten level. The Upward Bound program encouraged poor high school students to pursue a higher education after graduating from secondary schools. The Community Action Program (CAP) unit provided funds so that communities could draft feasibility studies to determine the needs of community-based projects and programs.¹⁰ Some CAP/OEO funds led to the development of special schools.

One of the first Indian tribes to secure OEO funds for a feasibility study was the Navajo Nation in Arizona. Some five months before the passage of the opportunity act, Allen Yazzie, chairman of the Navajo Nation's educational committee, met with Arizona officials to discuss the need for a "junior college in the Navajo-Apache county area."¹¹ Supposedly the Navajo government and the state would work jointly to create a future college near Navajo land to serve both Navajos and whites. But with the creation of OEO, the Navajos scrapped the idea and chose to pursue a college run by the Navajo Nation.

Sometime in early 1965 the Navajos submitted a proposal and secured OEO funds for a feasibility study to determine the need for a Navajo college. However, the Navajo Nation realized it needed help preparing a study. It turned to a sympathetic white educator, Robert Roessel, who had advocated a Navajo college some five years earlier. Roessel, who had earned his doctorate from Arizona State University (ASU), introduced the tribe to the Bureau of Educational Research and Services of the College of Education at ASU. ASU educators then conducted a survey, "Survey Report, Navajo Community College." The educators, who were all white, suggested a two-year community college that would be patterned after already existing community colleges. The Navajo college would provide community services, occupational study, a regular academic transfer program, and offer courses in general education. The ASU team determined that 51 percent of Navajo high school students interviewed favored a reservation college if established. Therefore

it maintained that “a community college is strongly desired by the Navajo people and that its establishment is legally and financially possible.”¹²

Circulated in February 1965, the OEO report was somewhat of a mixed blessing. On the positive side, it helped the Navajo Nation to publicize the need for its own postsecondary institution. Some Navajos, including Raymond Nakai, who was now chairman of the Navajo Nation, had been suggesting the creation of a reservation-based college since the 1950s. By the early 1960s, the tribal leadership favored a tribal college for the following reasons. First, Navajo college students had “bad experiences” in mainstream colleges. This development was the result of different factors, such as an inadequate academic preparation, financial problems, racism, and feelings of loneliness because students were far removed from Navajoland. Second, the limited tribal scholarships under the Navajo Tribal Scholarship Program, established in 1954, could not provide for all Navajos who longed for a higher education. A reservation-based college could solve these problems. Third, many young Navajos would be graduating from high school in the immediate future, and they needed to think in terms of a college education.¹³ OEO funds now put the Navajo college idea closer to reality. But on the negative side, the proposed college would be a mirror of the typical white American community college. There was no mention of Navajo-oriented courses or other aspects of nativeness.¹⁴

The OEO proposal and the earlier brief Alcatraz takeover, which were two unrelated events, inspired other individuals, both white and Indian, to pursue the establishment of a Indian college or university in the mid-1960s. Jack D. Forbes (Powhatan/Lenape-Delaware), who had advocated an Indian university since 1960, became more vigorous in his promotion. He gave several reasons why Native Americans needed their own university. It would instill pride in Native culture; train future Indian teachers; offer unique Indian-oriented courses such as Indian history, Indian law, and religion because the university would be “geared” to Indian “problems and interests”; and have special programs to develop Indian movies and teach tribal languages.¹⁵ Forbes wrote:

My idea is to foster some sort of “Indian Renaissance” and also to aid Indian higher education by creating an American Indian University. . . . Such a school would not only foster the education of the Indian but would attempt to educate Anglo students for work with the Indian community and for the advancement of American Indian studies in general.¹⁶

From 1964 to 1966 Forbes intensified a letter-writing campaign labeled as an “Inter-Tribal University.” He did not favor an Indian university on a specific reservation, and concerning the Navajo OEO proposal, Forbes wrote that he “attempted to persuade them that the concept should perhaps be expanded in scope.”¹⁷ Instead, he favored an Indian university located in or near an urban area where it could serve students from a number of tribes. Forbes suggested “Stead Air Force Base near Reno, Alcatraz Island near San

Francisco” and other “federal surplus parcels.”¹⁸ He realized that his idea needed financial support and therefore favored OEO, BIA, and other federal sources for its implementation.

Most persons who became aware of Forbes’ idea of an Indian university favored it. Sol Tax, professor of anthropology at the University of Chicago and also the earlier sponsor of the well-known Chicago Indian conference, told Forbes that concerned individuals, including himself, held a meeting in Boulder, Colorado in July 1964 and spoke favorably about an Indian university. Part of their discussion focused on possible campus sites, including closed-down college campuses, vacated veterans facilities, and other possible “federal installations.” Tax suggested the creation of a “national committee” with membership coming from national Indian organizations, including the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) and the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC), who could work together to create an Indian university.¹⁹

Various Indian leaders also supported Forbes’ idea. Mel Thom (Walker River Paiute), director of the NIYC, an activist organization established in 1961 to challenge federal paternalism and fight for Indian treaty rights, also favored Forbes’ idea: “The all-Indian university sounds good,” he asserted, “and I have always advocated such an institution.”²⁰ At the same time Thom indicated that developing an Indian university would involve time and careful thought. Thom favored higher education for Indians because he was a college graduate from Brigham Young University. Some Hopi traditionalists from northern Arizona also liked Forbes’ idea. Thomas Banyacya, who had served as a spokesman for Hopi elders since the late 1940s, noted “the idea of Indian-controlled university or institute created much interest on Hopiland especially by the elders so that we had intended to ask you more questions on it.”²¹

However, not everyone favored an Indian college or university in the mid-1960s. Rupert Costo (Cahuilla), who cofounded the American Indian Historical Society in San Francisco, opposed an Indian university and stressed to Forbes in October 1964: “As to your proposal for an American Indian University, the idea is still being propounded, in spite of ardent Indian disapproval. We are not in sympathy with it.”²² But one month later, Costo softened his position and asserted that “while it is true that most of us do not care much for the idea of an Indian University, the ideas presented in your document piqued our curiosity and interest.”²³ Costo favored the introduction of Indian-oriented courses, especially Indian history, in mainstream colleges and universities.

Besides Costo, the BIA also opposed the establishment of an Indian college or university at this time. Philleo Nash, the BIA’s commissioner, gave his reason why a postsecondary institution could or should not exist on an Indian reservation: reservation populations were too small to maintain a community college, and a reservation-based college, if established, would have difficulty attracting qualified employees. However, Nash did speak favorably about the Navajo Nation’s drive to secure OEO funds to study the possibility of a reservation college in early 1965. If an Indian college did come into existence, Nash maintained, the BIA would not provide any support, although it would support students who applied for individual BIA higher education grants. Nash made the BIA’s position clear when he asserted: “We believe

there is considerable doubt about the feasibility of establishing community colleges on Indian reservations.”²⁴

Ironically, at the same time Nash opposed the creation of reservation-based Indian colleges, the BIA was laying the groundwork to transform Haskell Institute, its largest off-reservation boarding school, founded in 1884, into a full postsecondary institution. It made the decision to phase out the high school division as early as 1962. Haskell held its last high school classes in the academic year 1964–65, and when the seniors left campus the school ended its secondary division, which had existed since 1921, forever. Beginning with the fall of 1965, Haskell became a two-year postsecondary institution with specialized areas in electronics, masonry, and other vocational pursuits.²⁵ The BIA eventually transformed Haskell into a two-year liberal arts college in the early 1970s and finally a four-year university in the late 1990s.

Opposition toward an Indian college also surfaced in the far western region in areas with large Indian populations. After hearing about the Navajo Nation securing OEO money to conduct a college feasibility study, the editors of the *Albuquerque Tribune* wrote unfavorably about this development in December 1965. They referred to a future Navajo college as an example of “segregated” education. If such a college came into existence, the newspaper suggested that the college could become integrated by bussing both white and black students to the “projected Navajo seat of higher education.”²⁶ Similar to what happened at the Alcatraz hearings in 1964, the tribune also used the civil rights argument of integration against the impending Navajo college OEO report.

Regardless of the opposition in the mid-1960s, both Native Americans and whites interested in Native postsecondary institutions went forward with their ideas. One persistent person was Orville Lane (Pawnee). From his home base in Charlotte, North Carolina, Lane initially worked for an Indian university to be located within the Pawnee tribal community in Oklahoma. He eventually scrapped this plan primarily because of the expense involved in planning a campus from nothing.²⁷

Lane next inaugurated a campaign to raise funds to build an Indian college or university elsewhere in the United States. In 1963 he created an organization called the American Indian College Foundation (AICF). The AICF sponsored Indian art exhibits in the Charlottetown Mall in 1964 and 1965 and saved most of the profits to build a future Indian college. Noted Indian artists supported this initiative, including Brummett Echohawk (Pawnee) and Fred Beaver (Seminole). Having generated funds, the AICF next sought a site for a campus in an area with a high Indian population. With Oklahoma out of the picture, the foundation turned to South Dakota and asked the Rosebud Sioux tribe if it would be interested in having a college on its reservation. The AICF favored Rosebud because it already had a campus facility in the form of the old Rosebud boarding school, vacated by the BIA years earlier. The foundation felt that this campus could easily be renovated. This undertaking would involve less money because the facility already had existing dormitories and a gymnasium.²⁸

In late 1965 the Rosebud Sioux tribal council supported the AICF’s proposal of a reservation-based Indian college. Eva Nichols, a tribal member

and also an AICF representative, secured the tribe's support. However, the tribe could not grant the old boarding school to the AICF because the campus still belonged to the BIA. In order for the AICF to secure the campus, the BIA needed to transfer the title to the tribe. But the BIA never took action, perhaps because it did not favor a reservation-based college in 1965 and 1966. Even if the BIA made the transfer, the AICF would not have developed a college, for it backed out of the project in late 1966. The foundation concluded that it would be too expensive to remodel the old school campus. The Rosebud Sioux tribe also backed away because of more immediate concerns involving reservation economic development.²⁹

After ruling out the Rosebud Reservation, the AICF turned to the Crazy Horse Foundation and asked to be part of the effort to develop the University of North American Indians at the developing Crazy Horse monument in South Dakota. But the Ziolkowski family asked for a million-dollar contribution that the AICF could not meet. The foundation thus gave up in its objective to build an Indian college or university even though it kept the idea alive up to 1968.³⁰

There were perhaps a couple of reasons why the AICF faded away in the late 1960s. First, it chose not to secure federal government support to develop an Indian college. Unlike the Navajo Nation, the AICF kept away from OEO funding for college planning. Additionally, the AICF made no effort to involve local Indian people in the planning of its proposed college idea. Rather the foundation wanted to build a postsecondary institution largely on its own, although it did consult with local Indian people. Had the AICF worked with local Indian educators, it might have established an Indian college on a reservation somewhere in the United States.³¹

If Orville Lane failed in his quest to create an Indian college or university, Jack Forbes and other did not. Forbes, who was inspired in part by the rising Indian activism along with the spirit of the Great Society, pursued his drive for a Native postsecondary institution even more. He continued to circulate his earlier proposal, modified slightly, and had it published in various sources, including ASU's *Journal of American Indian Education* and the Intertribal Council of Nevada's *Native Nevadan*.³²

Forbes also continued his letter-writing campaign and included some new ideas. In October 1968 he wrote to Terry Francois, supervisor of the board of supervisors of the city and county of San Francisco, and wanted the officials to consider building a United Nations university. Such an institution could be located somewhere in San Francisco, at "Fort Mason, Alcatraz Island, and, perhaps in the future, portions of the Presidio."³³ The university would include an African American college, an Asian American college, a "largely Spanish-language college," and an American Indian college that would emphasize the "Indian heritage from the entire Americas."³⁴ Unlike his earlier proposals, Forbes was now pushing a college or university that would treat Native people hemispherically. Forbes continued to favor an urban-based Indian college in contrast to Orville Lane and the AICF, which focused on the reservation.

Influenced by the Great Society and Indian self-determination, the Navajo Nation, like the AICF, also pursued its own drive for a reservation-based college. Inspired by the OEO report of 1966, the nation secured more

OEO funds and initiated a second report, "Navajo Community College Proposal," circulated in May 1968. Unlike the first report, the second report had definite Navajo input. The Navajo Nation wanted the proposed college to be temporarily housed in the reservation-based BIA high school at Many Farms until a permanent college campus could be developed. The report also specified that "the Community College first and foremost must be controlled and directed by the Navajo people themselves."³⁵ An all-Navajo board of trustees chosen by the people would govern it. The college would offer courses on Navajo culture. In essence, the Navajos wanted the college to be largely patterned after the recently established Rough Rock Demonstration School. This unique Navajo elementary school, created in 1966 with OEO/BIA monies, was community oriented, offered courses on Navajo culture, and was controlled by an all-Navajo board of directors.³⁶ The proposed college would be the higher education version of Rough Rock.

The Navajo OEO/BIA college report of 1968 served as the basis for the Navajo Community College Conference held on 7 May 1968. The objective was once and for all to determine if the Navajo Nation wanted a postsecondary institution. The conference's response was overwhelmingly affirmative. Raymond Nakai, chairman of the Navajo Nation since 1964, voiced himself clearly when he stressed:

There may be some misunderstanding as to who is really pushing the Navajo Community College. Let me make it perfectly clear. The Navajo Tribe is pushing for the community college. We are the ones that want the college; we are the ones that need the college. This has been our dream of years.³⁷

Finally, on 1 July 1968, after two OEO reports, the Navajo Nation established its Navajo Community College (NCC; renamed Diné College in 1997). NCC became the first Indian-controlled tribal college built on an Indian reservation. In January 1969, classes started in the Many Farms High School near Chinle, Arizona. The college had three major components: a vocational-technical area, a precollege program, and a unique all-Navajo studies program that included Navajo art, history, and music. Much of NCC's financial support in the late 1960s and early 1970s came from OEO. In 1971 alone, OEO provided the bulk of institutional support, or \$655,000 for operational expenses. Support from the tribe was a distant second in the amount of \$250,000.³⁸

Both before and after the establishment of NCC in 1968, Native American people continued to argue for the need of more than one Native postsecondary institution. Their voices of self-determination, partly influenced by the activism of the 1960s, became highly evident in various federal government hearings conducted near the end of the decade. For example, in May 1967, the Senate Subcommittee on Education of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare released a report based on discussions with tribal people. Having listened to Native needs and concerns, the subcommittee made several recommendations, including one that focused entirely on the need

for reservation-based colleges: "Ways should be explored to encourage development of junior or community colleges on or near the larger reservations to facilitate opportunities for larger numbers of Indian children to receive higher education. A central criterion in establishing such a school should be attendance by non-Indian as well as Indian children."³⁹ By making this recommendation, the senate had made a radical shift, for here was the first time it favored the establishment of colleges "on or near" Indian reservations. Even more, the senate went completely against the BIA's position of opposing reservation-based colleges.

The senate followed up this hearing with an even more important hearing conducted by the specially created Senate Special Subcommittee on Indian Education of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare in 1967 and 1968. The senate's purpose was to assess the state of Indian education and then make recommendations as to how the education of Indians could be improved.⁴⁰ The hearings gave several Indian persons the opportunity to voice the need for Indian colleges and universities. William Soza (Soboba Band of Mission Indians in Southern California) wanted the BIA to develop the Sherman Indian School "into a good junior college."⁴¹ Sherman was the BIA's only large off-reservation boarding school located in California. William Penseno (Ponca), a member of the NIYC, wanted some large BIA schools, including Haskell and Chilocco in Oklahoma, to "be made into vocational schools and Junior colleges if not colleges eventually."⁴² But the most assertive individual was Lehman Brightman (Cheyenne River Sioux/Creek) who founded the United Native Americans (UNA) in the San Francisco Bay Area in 1968, an activist organization that pushed for Indian rights. Regarding postsecondary education for Indians, Brightman stressed:

We believe that Haskell Institute and Santa Fe Institute should be turned into colleges or one college for Indians. Both now have limited junior college work offered. . . . Also, there are a few abandoned military bases around the country that could be turned into Indian colleges. Haskell, Santa Fe Institute and abandoned Army bases or Air Force bases could be used to establish an Indian college. . . . We believe that this Indian college should be under the control of the board of Indian trustees elected democratically by a national board of Indian educators which I suggested earlier.⁴³

In addition to the field hearings, the subcommittee also produced a special summary report entitled *Indian Education: A National Tragedy—A National Challenge*. Published in November 1969 and popularly known as the Kennedy Report because Robert Kennedy and later Edward Kennedy chaired the committee, the report painted a bleak picture of Indian education in general. Concerning higher education, its authors wrote:

In an average class of 400 Indian students in Bureau [BIA] high schools, 240 can be expected to graduate from high school. Of those 240, 67 can be expected to attend college. Of these, only 19

will graduate from college. According to October 1966 figures, 2.2 percent of the national population was enrolled in college. Only one percent of the Indian population was in college at the same time.⁴⁴

The report identified some reasons for these figures, including the fact that the BIA schools did not adequately prepare Indians for college and that Indian students were not encouraged to pursue a higher education. But on a positive note, the Kennedy report made numerous recommendations concerning Indian education, including fourteen that dealt specifically with higher education. Four of them focused on the subject of Native postsecondary institutions. Number thirty-three recommended that the BIA's Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) in Santa Fe, New Mexico, become a four-year Indian college specializing in Native American fine arts. The BIA established IAIA in 1961 as a combination high school/two-year postsecondary art school with special curricular emphasis on the fine arts. Indian people in the late 1960s wanted the school to become a four-year degree-granting college. Recommendation thirty-five stressed that the BIA should also build a postsecondary art school in Alaska similar to IAIA. The report included this measure because the BIA had not given substantial attention to the Alaskan Natives.⁴⁵

Number thirty-four recommended that the BIA provide support for the newly established NCC and other community colleges to be established "on or near" reservations. It also recommended that the BIA should conduct a feasibility study to determine the need for more Indian community colleges. Number thirty-seven recommended that Title III of the Higher Education Act of 1965 be made available to newly established postsecondary institutions built "on or near" Indian reservations. Known as "Developing Institutions," Title III was part of the Great Society and created to channel federal support to postsecondary institutions "struggling for survival." However, the title had a serious restriction; only those young institutions that had existed for five or more years were eligible for support. This restriction ruled out NCC and other Indian colleges that might come into existence. The report therefore recommended that the five-year requirement be waived for the newly established NCC and other upcoming Native colleges.⁴⁶

Besides asserting themselves at formal government hearings, Native Americans also voiced themselves informally at the grassroots or community level. One incident took place in May 1969 when a group of Indian university students held an informal party to celebrate surviving the academic year 1968-69 at the University of California, Berkeley (UCB). The students, who included undergraduate Carmen Christy (Pomo) and graduate Dean Chavers (Lumbee), had reasons to celebrate, for they were some of the first Indians to attend one of the largest universities in the United States. Other Indians later joined the party, including Richard Oakes (Mohawk) who ended up in the Bay Area some years earlier under the BIA's relocation program. Oakes had become tired of blue-collar work, into which the BIA had channeled him, and thus enrolled at San Francisco State University (SFSU) in the fall of 1968. He became part of the first group of Indians to attend SFSU. During the

party Oakes asserted that Native Americans should take over Alcatraz Island and make "it into an Indian university."⁴⁷ But no one took his idea seriously at the moment, perhaps because the gathering was to celebrate survival in mainstream universities.

Although Oakes never left behind any record as to why he made his assertion of an Indian university on Alcatraz, three activists without doubt influenced him. One was Jack Forbes who had been living in the Bay Area since early 1967 and was employed as a historical researcher in the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development with headquarters in Berkeley.⁴⁸

Lehman Brightman who founded the UNA a year earlier in the Bay Area also influenced Oakes. Brightman also advocated the creation of an Indian university although he never specified a location. Brightman's UNA organization produced a newspaper called the *Warpath*, and the first issue, released in the summer of 1968, included the following statement: "The federal government heavily subsidizes Howard University, a black-controlled school, each year and has done so for a century. Why not an Indian-controlled university also?"⁴⁹ Moreover, in February 1969, in a public proclamation, Brightman wanted Indians to claim title to UCB because he asserted it was on Indian land and that the Indians rename the university "Tecumseh University" after the well-known Shawnee leader of the early nineteenth century.⁵⁰ UCB officials ignored Brightman, who earned a master's degree from UCB that same year, but the young Indian activists like Richard Oakes came to believe that Indians needed their own university.

Oakes was also influenced by Ernest Benedict, a Chippewa from Cornwall Island in Canada who had been pushing for an Indian college since 1968. Sometime in the late spring or early summer of 1969, Benedict's idea became a reality when he secured funds from the United Methodist Church and other sources. He used the resources to purchase a Volkswagen bus and classroom supplies and then traveled to various US Indian reservations teaching Indian-oriented courses and Euro-American subject matter. Oakes and others became fully aware of this "North American Traveling College" because it was part of the rising tide of Indian activism of 1969.⁵¹

Moved by the Indian activism of the late 1960s, coupled with the general student-protest movement in the Bay Area, seventy-eight Indians, including Richard Oakes and other students from SFSU and UCB, took over Alcatraz Island on 20 November 1969. Their action has since been regarded as one of the major historical Native American events of the twentieth century. The Indian occupants had several reasons for taking over the island. They wanted to publicize the plight of Indians who had been an "invisible" racial minority in the United States for years. It was time to let the public know that Indians still existed. In addition, they took over Alcatraz because the island resembled current reservation conditions: insufficient running water, inadequate sanitation facilities, no health care facilities, and soil that was rocky and unsuitable for farming purposes. Once on the island, the occupants had great plans, including the idea of an Indian university that would offer Indian-oriented courses.⁵²

A good number of Indian occupants desired an Indian university because they were university students and considered higher education a high priority. Some of them gave specific reasons several weeks into the occupation. John Trudell (Lakota), who soon became one of the visible leaders, stated that “the longer an Indian stays in a BIA school, the further behind he becomes in his education, so yes, we are serious about an Indian university.”⁵³ LaNada (Means) Boyer (Shoshone-Bannock), a second-year undergraduate at UCB, who ended up in the Bay Area in the mid-1960s under relocation, stated her view: “What was needed . . . was a university of our own with Indian teachers who understand the problems we’re going through.”⁵⁴

Although the Alcatraz occupants wanted a university and other developments, they did not put their ideas in writing until February 1970 in the proclamation “Planning Grant Proposal to Develop an All Indian University and Cultural Complex on Indian Land, Alcatraz.” The newly established Alcatraz Indian council of the “Indians of All Tribes,” which included university students Al Miller (Seminole) of SFSU and Boyer of UCB, drafted the statement that placed emphasis on higher education and, of course, the university idea. Their lengthy statement read in part:

One of the reasons we took Alcatraz was because the students were having problems in the universities and colleges they were attending. This was the first time that Indian people had ever had the chance to get into a university or college because relocation was all vocation oriented and it was not until 1968 and 1969 that Indians started getting into the universities and colleges. So, when this happened, we all realized that we didn’t want to go through the university machinery coming out white-oriented. . . . We wanted to remain Indians. That’s why native American studies became a prime issue, and when we had a big confrontation with the administration, we could see that we weren’t going to fool ourselves about the university. . . . This was one of the reasons why we wanted our own Indian university, so that they would stop white washing Indians . . . we want to have our own Indian university because we need to develop things from our own culture that are being lost, like our own languages.⁵⁵

Ironically, at the same time of the Alcatraz takeover, some mainstream California colleges and universities, in response to Indian activism, had introduced either Native American Studies (NAS) courses or NAS programs in the academic year 1969–70. This included SFSU, UCB, UCLA, and UC Davis. None of these universities had offered Indian studies courses a year earlier when several Indian students in California first entered higher education.⁵⁶ But in February 1970, the Alcatraz occupants had no idea that the NAS courses or programs would last beyond the current academic year. This was a big reason why they wanted an Indian university that could offer Indian subject matter well into the future. To remain Native was a big concern of the Indians of All Tribes, and an Indian university could help perpetuate nativeness.

In late March 1970, Robert Robertson, a spokesman for the Nixon administration, responded to the Alcatraz proclamation of the previous month. He opposed what the Indians wanted most: he rejected the Indians' claim of owning the island because the federal government already owned it, as the island was a former federal prison. In a roundabout way, he also opposed the establishment of a university on the island for the same reasons the Indians had taken the island (that is, a lack of water, sewage facilities, and other basic utilities). Robertson suggested that if the Indians wanted a university, they could organize a committee and consider planning one elsewhere but not on Alcatraz. The same committee, he noted, could also work with the federal government in developing Alcatraz into a federally run national park that would pay tribute to Native Americans.⁵⁷

After reading the federal government's position, the Indians of All Tribes, in a state of anger, wrote off Robertson's ideas and suggestions. They had no interest in cooperating with the government in developing the island into a national park, even if it meant paying homage to the first Americans. Instead, the Indian occupants hoped for complete ownership of the island to carry out their plans, including the building of a university. They responded to Robertson and stated that the government must once again reply to the proclamation of February. But the government did not write back favorably, and any healthy dialogue between the occupants and the federal sector ended by April.⁵⁸ The occupants remained committed to possessing the island, and the government remained adamant that the island belonged to the federal sector. The situation became a lengthy stalemate with the Indians holding onto the island.

If the idea of an Indian university on Alcatraz remained dormant for several months, it received new life on 20 November 1970 when the Indian occupants, along with other Bay Area Indians, celebrated the one-year anniversary of the takeover. Part of the celebration included the releasing of a plan to establish Thunderbird University on the island. LaNada Boyer, who remained both an occupant and a student at UCB, wrote the Thunderbird proposal. She used the name *Thunderbird* because it was the name of an urban Indian "warrior society" in the Bay Area. It was a close-knit group that included her brother Duane. The university would have four major academic divisions: art, ecology, language, and law, each offering Indian-oriented courses. It would be part of a larger Indian university system with satellites located throughout the Americas, including Canada, Mexico, South America, and, of course, the United States. Boyer and others displayed an architectural plan prepared by the firm of Donald MacDonald. It consisted of a center ceremonial lodge (administrative building and classrooms) surrounded by wigwam-shaped residence halls. The overall plan depicted the campus in a circular arrangement with circular buildings to express the traditionalism of those tribes who emphasized the concept of the circle.⁵⁹ Boyer explained her own tribal worldview by noting that "a square building takes away the power of the medicine."⁶⁰ The campus would accommodate up to three hundred students and cost around five or six million dollars to complete.

However, by the time the occupants celebrated the first anniversary, the Indian excitement over occupying Alcatraz had already been on the

decline. Only a few Indians remained on the island as long-term residents. Enthusiasm waned for several reasons. One was the proliferation of Indian protest activities that surfaced throughout the nation and attracted many former Alcatraz occupants. A second was the government's refusal to give in to the Indians' demands. Despite these developments, some occupants remained committed to their ideas on Alcatraz. In late 1970 and early 1971, LaNada Boyer made various trips off the island to raise funds for Thunderbird University. She enjoyed some success. For example, the Covenant of Service, a group of students and faculty at the United Theological Seminary in Minneapolis-St. Paul, gave the Alcatraz occupants one hundred dollars to help the university proposal.⁶¹ In the same month, Thelma Adair, a high-level official in the Presbyterian Board of National Missions, expressed interest in the Thunderbird proposal and indicated that she would consult with other church officials in "working . . . toward its implementation."⁶²

But Thunderbird University, along with other plans the Indians had for the island, ended on 11 June 1971 when the US Coast Guard moved in and evicted all remaining Indian occupants.⁶³ Because the occupation lasted only a year and a half, some commentators labeled it a failed effort on the part of Indian activists who were idealists and dreamers. Others maintained that the Alcatraz movement, although brief, was somewhat of a success because several of its ideas were carried out, not on the island, but elsewhere, both during and after the occupation. The takeover motivated Indians elsewhere in the country to initiate similar takeovers and gave a boost to those who wanted the establishment of an Indian college or university.⁶⁴

In March 1970, some three months into the Alcatraz takeover, the Indians of the Seattle region carried out their own protest patterned after Alcatraz. On more than one occasion they attempted to take over Fort Lawton, a military installation near Seattle. The military planned to abandon it and have it classified as federal surplus property. Similar to the Alcatraz occupants, the Fort Lawton protestors claimed the site by the "right of discovery" and also by Indian treaty rights. If successful in securing the installation, they had plans to develop a center of ecology, a restaurant, a halfway house, and an "Indian oriented university" or a "great Indian university."⁶⁵ Several of the Alcatraz occupants even traveled to Seattle to participate at Fort Lawton. The Indians, however, were not successful in their effort, and the movement faded away after several weeks of talk and activity.

Some weeks before the coast guard removed the remaining occupants from Alcatraz, several Indians of Minneapolis-St. Paul, led by the American Indian Movement (AIM), occupied the abandoned Twin City Naval Air Station near the international airport for five days. Like those at Alcatraz and Fort Lawton, they claimed the land by Indian treaty rights. Although federal marshals quickly removed them, some Indians, both AIM and non-AIM, continued to fight for the air station into June 1971. What they wanted was the development of an Indian junior college that could eventually become a four-year college. They took their objective seriously and organized a committee called "Higher Education for American Tribes, Inc.," led by Barry Blackhawk, with the goal to establish Indian colleges across the nation. The organization even secured the support of BIA

commissioner Louis Bruce who favored their plans.⁶⁶ But similar to Alcatraz and Fort Lawton, federal officials never gave the land to the Indians.

The creation of Deganawidah-Quetzalcoatl University (D-QU) near Davis, California was also partly influenced by the Alcatraz takeover. On 3 November 1970, around fifty students from nearby UC Davis, including twenty-three Indians, climbed the fence of the Yolo Army Communications Center, took over the 640-acre site, set up a tipi, and let the public know they wanted an Indian-Chicano university. This event even attracted Alcatraz occupants who then participated in the D-QU occupation, including Stella Leach, Douglas Remington, and Joe Bill, a student at SFSU.⁶⁷

More significant than the Alcatraz factor, the Yolo occupants were deeply influenced by professors Jack Forbes and David Risling (Hupa), both new faculty and founders of the NAS program at nearby UC Davis. In the fall of 1969 Forbes left the Far West lab in Berkeley and moved to Davis to lay the groundwork for the Native studies program. Through his effort, UC Davis hired Risling in February 1970. Risling had been an agricultural professor at Modesto Junior College for some twenty years before joining Forbes at UC Davis. The two started working together in 1967 when they helped found the California Indian Education Association (CIEA). In mid-1969 CIEA authorized Risling to identify federal surplus property that California Indians could use for educational purposes. Forbes also became involved in this effort and drafted a statement that identified the Bay Area and the Sacramento Valley as good locations for this educational enterprise. With both individuals in Davis in 1970, they now favored a location near UC Davis.⁶⁸

In July 1970, Forbes, Risling, and others established the Ad Hoc Planning Committee for D-QU. The committee's proposal specified that D-QU would have four colleges: Deganawidah College, which would serve Indians of North America; Quetzalcoatl College, which would serve Chicanos of the United States and Mesoamericans from the south; Tiburco Vasquez College, which would be a "cross-cultural" entity serving all indigenous populations who had an interest in a vocational-oriented education; and the Carlos Montezuma College (named after the Yavapai-Apache who earned his MD degree from the University of Chicago in 1884), a medical school to serve both Indians and Chicanos. The decision to include Chicanos was Forbes', for he used the argument that they too were biological Indians to a large degree. He soon after wrote a book entitled *Aztecas del Norte: Chicanos in the U.S.*⁶⁹

With an Indian-Chicano university existing on paper, the ad hoc committee still did not have a campus in mid-1970. One wonders why the committee did not consider working with the Alcatraz occupants, as both groups had the same objective of an Indian university. Although the committee did not give an answer in 1970, Forbes reminisced years later and pointed out that "Alcatraz was not the best place for a college because of its lack of agricultural land and suitable buildings and its damp climate and inaccessibility. Those of us who were trying to create the university saw the communications facility as offering a much superior location."⁷⁰ Forbes thus made a big shift in 1970, for he completely moved away from his earlier 1966–68 position of having a university on Alcatraz.

What Forbes was referring to was the 640-acre Yolo Army Communications Center. In 1967 the army abandoned the site, and the Office of Surplus Property Utilization (OSPU) under the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) took administrative control of the land. In mid-1970 the OSPU declared the site as federal surplus property and allowed public and private groups to submit proposals to compete for possession of the land. Two entities applied: the ad hoc committee with its D-QU proposal and the University of California (UC) with an incomplete proposal for a primate laboratory. However, the OSPU secretly favored the UC and made plans to transfer the property. But on October 28, Senator George Murphy of California accidentally disclosed in writing the plan to the public. Upon hearing the news from a written press release, the Native Americans of UC Davis took immediate action and occupied the site. Embarrassed by the situation, the UC system withdrew its application on December 3. With D-QU being the only strong competitor, the General Services Administration (GSA), which briefly had jurisdiction over the site, transferred it to HEW, and HEW transferred the deed to D-QU on 2 April 1971. D-QU thus became a reality.⁷¹ Just as important, Professor Forbes, who had been pushing for a university since 1960, witnessed his vision become a reality.

In conclusion, Indian activism, the Great Society, and Indian self-determination became important contributing factors as to why increasing numbers of Native Americans wanted Indian colleges or universities in the 1960s. As a result of these factors, the nation thus witnessed the establishment of two campuses in the late 1960s and early 1970s. NCC came into existence largely because of available OEO funds and D-QU because of Indian activism. NCC is reservation-based and D-QU is somewhat urban-based because it is located near Davis, California. Both came into existence because of the drive and motivation of the founders. NCC was the dream of Navajo leader Raymond Nakai in the 1950s when he served as a radio disc jockey in Flagstaff, Arizona. The college became a reality while he served as chairperson of the Navajo Nation in the late 1960s. D-QU was the dream of Jack Forbes going back to 1960 when he first advanced the idea in southern California. The two colleges, however, would not have come into existence without various Indian supporters. There were visible Native voices that called for the creation of Indian colleges and universities.

NOTES

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2. For sources on the New Frontier and Great Society of the 1960s, see Christopher Riggs, "Indians, Liberalism, and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, 1963–1969" (PhD diss., University of Colorado, Boulder, 1997); Thomas Francis Clarkin, *Federal Indian Policy in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, 1961–1969* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001); George Pierre Castile, *To Show Heart: Native American Self-Determination and Federal Indian Policy, 1960–1975* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998).

3. Jerry A. Davis, "From Termination to Self-Determination: American Indians and Alaskan Natives in Higher Education" (PhD diss., University of New Mexico, 1998), 191–93.

4. Jon Reyhner and Jeanne Eder, *American Indian Education: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 251–89; Vine Deloria Jr. and Daniel R. Wildcat, *Power and Place: Indian Education in America* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Resources, 2001), 123–33.

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7. *Ibid.*; Thompson, *The Rock*, 465.

8. *Ibid.*

9. "The Indians' New School of Thought on Alcatraz," 10; Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island*, 20.

10. Clarkin, "The New Trail and the Great Society: Federal Indian Policy during the Kennedy-Johnson Administrations" (PhD diss., University of Texas, Austin, 1998), 167; Irwin Unger, *The Best of Intentions: The Triumphs and Failures of the Great Society under Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 149.

11. "Yazzie Will Meet Officials for Talk on Junior College," *Navajo Times*, 9 April 1964, 27.

12. "Survey Report, Navajo Community College," Bureau of Educational Research and Services, College of Education, Arizona State University, February 1966, 1–2, 27–28, 61, 66.

13. Navajo Tribe, "Navajo Community College Proposal," May 1968, Diné College Library; Senate Subcommittee on Indian Affairs of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, *Indian Postsecondary Education Assistance Act*, 94th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1976, 214–15.

14. "Survey Report, Navajo Community College Proposal," 27–28, 61–66.

15. Jack D. Forbes, "Proposal for an American Indian University," MS 4806, Box 1, National Anthropological Archives (NAA), Smithsonian Institution (SI).

16. Forbes to Sol Tax, 2 May 1961, MS 4801, Box 1, NAA, SI.

17. Forbes to Tax, 10 January 1966, Jack D. Forbes Papers (JDF), Box 3, F-2, Intertribal university correspondence (ITU), Special Collections (SC), Shields Library, University of California, Davis (UCD).

18. Ibid.
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22. Rupert Costo to Forbes, 22 October 1964, JDF, Box 3, F-2, ITU file, UCD.
23. Costo to Forbes, 30 November 1964, JDF, Box 3, F-2, ITU file, UCD.
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36. Connell Szasz, *Education and the American Indian*, 3rd ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 171.
37. Navajo Tribe, "Navajo Community College Proposal," unnumbered pages.
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42. Ibid., 309.
43. Ibid., 35.
44. Senate Special Report of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *Indian*

Education: A National Tragedy—A National Challenge, 1969, 91st Cong., 1st sess., 124–28 (Serial 12856-1).

45. *Ibid.*, 126–27.

46. *Ibid.*, 127–28.

47. “The Leader of Alcatraz,” *Indian Country Today*, 29 September 1996, A-4.

48. Jack D. Forbes, *Native American Higher Education* (Davis, CA: D-Q University Press, 1985), 16, 18. As already mentioned, Forbes had twice suggested a university on Alcatraz since 1966 and shared his idea openly with both Indians and non-Indians.

49. Untitled article, *Warpath* 1, no. 1 (Summer 1968), 6.

50. “UC Indians Take to Warpath,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1 February 1969, 5; “Regents ‘Lose’ Ownership; Indians Claim UC Grounds,” *Daily Californian*, 4 February 1969, 1.

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53. Quoted in Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island*, 130.

54. *Ibid.*, 12.

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59. LaNada Boyer, “Growing up in E’DA How—One Idaho Girlhood,” in Thomas Thompson, ed., *The Schooling of Native America* (Washington, DC: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education in Collaboration with the Teachers Corps, US Office of Education, 1978), 29–45; “The Indians Unveil Plan for Alcatraz,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 21 November 1970, A4.

60. *Ibid.*

61. David R. Ecker to Alcatraz occupiers, 13 January 1971, Alcatraz Papers, SFPL.

62. Thelma Adair to LaNada Means, 11 January 1971, Alcatraz Papers, SFPL.

63. Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 109–11.

64. Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island*, 217–18, 220. As already noted, several NAS programs came into existence in 1969 and 1970 in several mainstream universities.

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66. “U.S. Commissioner Promises to Help Indians Start College at Air Base,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, 24 June 1971, 3B.

67. "Indians 'Capture' Davis Army Post," David Risling Papers, File: DQ University/News articles, 1971-72, SC, UCD. D-QU was named after two historical figures. Deganawidah was the pre-Columbian hero of the Iroquois people of the Northeast area. Quetzalcoatl was the universal deity of the Mesoamerican Indians of southern Mexico and northern Central America. Because of the religious nature of these historical figures, the committee later decided to use only the initials "D" and "Q."

68. Forbes, *Native American Higher Education*, 19-20.

69. *Ibid.*, 69-73.

70. Forbes, "The Native Struggle for Liberation: Alcatraz," in Johnson, Nagel, and Champagne, *American Indian Activism*, 135.

71. Forbes, *Native American Higher Education*, 21-23.