

American-Indian Occupation of Alcatraz

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Individual Website

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Process Paper

As soon as I heard that the National History Day theme was Breaking Barriers in History, I knew that I wanted to research Native Americans, as I'm fascinated by their history. In school I learned briefly about the Trail of Tears, how Native lands were taken from them and how they faced such cruelty, and I wanted to expand my knowledge about the injustice they've faced over the last centuries. A Google search led to a discovery about the Indian Occupation of Alcatraz in 1969, when the Indians fought back. I was drawn to how this one protest was so beneficial for Indians and wanted to learn more, since it had such an immense impact on Indian rights.

I began my research by meeting with my school librarian who gave me a book called *You Are Now on Indian Land: The American Indian Occupation of Alcatraz Island, California, 1969*, written by Margaret J. Goldstein. This book was the basis of my research which I used to get an understanding of the occupation. Additionally, I utilized sources such as the National Park Service, Ilka Hartman Photography, *New York Times*, and another book called, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States for Young People*. As the occupation happened in San Francisco Bay, *The San Francisco Chronicle* was a treasury of images and information that I was unable to find elsewhere. While conducting my research, I learned that the occupation's 50th anniversary was in 2019 which helped me as new articles were published. Furthermore, I used many primary sources including video reports and primary source documents to piece together the story from both the Indians perspective and the government position. To get a deeper understanding of the Indian point of view, I conducted an interview with Madonna Thunder Hawk who was one of the Occupiers on Alcatraz.

I chose to do a website as I enjoy working with technology. I knew that a website would work very well to portray this topic as there were many photos, quotes, and media I wanted to include. When I began building the website, I struggled with cutting back on my words, but over time I learned to rely on the use of primary sources to explain the information. Because a website is interactive, I was able to use audio and video clips to let the occupiers tell their own story, which is so powerful.

My topic fits well with the theme of Breaking Barriers as the indigenous people have faced terrible treatment throughout the United States history. Their Native land and culture was continuously being stripped away from them. Then in 1969, the Indians broke the barrier of oppression and maltreatment they'd been facing by occupying Alcatraz Island to awaken America to the injustice they'd faced and to pave the way for the return of their lands, as well as new laws created to support Native sovereignty. Though they still face many obstacles, the occupation of Alcatraz is often considered the birthplace of American-Indian rights.