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**The Foundations of Red Power:
The National Indian Youth Council 1968-1975**

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Report

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Abstract

The Foundations of Red Power: The National Indian Youth Council 1968-1975

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The period from 1969 until 1973 represented the height of “Red Power” for American Indians. Pan-tribal activists participated in hundreds of demonstrations and dozens of militant takeovers demanding tribal sovereignty. The National Indian Youth Council (NIYC) was at the forefront of this period of direct action even though it continued to receive funding for educational programs and advocated reform through legal means. Operating under an entirely new leadership, the NIYC of the early 1970s resembled the Youth Council of the mid-1960s by continuing to balance indirect action and legal reform with direct action and militant language. But by the end of 1973, the Youth Council ceased supporting direct action as a legitimate tactic for pressuring social change. By 1973 it became clear that pan-tribal protests could quickly upset the gains that American Indians were making in federal reform.

Wealthy benefactors funded the NIYC throughout the period, but they never overtly pushed the Youth Council into a more moderate direction. Instead, outside

funding increased the NIYC's operational space and allowed it to gain a modicum of power within the federal agency responsible for Indians, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). The NIYC found itself able to pressure the BIA into negotiating on a range of issues, and the NIYC developed allies that shared its goals and ideology within the agency. However, the NIYC's continued ability to negotiate with the federal government was vulnerable to controversy, and the highly confrontational episodes led by the American Indian Movement (AIM) tended to upset the pace of reform within the federal government. AIM's 1972 takeover of the BIA national headquarters and AIM's 71-day occupation of Wounded Knee created setbacks for the NIYC even as the events garnered national attention and support. Moreover, the political climate became receptive to supporting the self-determination of tribal governments, and pan-tribal organizations like the NIYC had to shift their focus in the context of newly empowered tribes. Foundation support allowed the NIYC to help open the way for tribes to negotiate with the U.S. state directly, and this very success made pan-tribal demonstrations increasingly obsolete by the mid-1970s.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1987, Gerald Wilkinson (Cherokee) gave a speech to Indian youth in at the University of New Mexico. He criticized the American Indian Movement's (AIM) confrontational tactics during its height in the early 1970s and lamented that it had become "generally more important to throw [demands] in somebody's face than to get them to act on it."¹ Wilkinson, who had served as director of the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC) since 1969, had the benefit of hindsight. He would never have openly criticized AIM in the early 1970s, a period when the NIYC was often just as confrontational as AIM.

The Youth Council emerged in the 1960s as the first proponent of direct activism among pan-tribal American Indian organizations in the twentieth century. Through fish-ins and mass protests, the NIYC brought attention to Indian fishing rights in the Pacific Northwest and ultimately compelled the governor of Washington to listen to American Indian demands. The group's willingness to employ direct activism inspired other groups to use similar tactics.² This gave rise to a number of highly publicized sit-ins and occupations in the early 1970s, most notably AIM's 71 day standoff against federal agents and troops at Wounded Knee in 1973. Wilkinson rose to leadership in the organization at the same time that the American Indian Movement emerged as a crucial advocate for American Indians. The National Indian Youth Council and AIM supported

¹ *Americans Before Columbus* (Albuquerque, NM), Vol. 17, No. 2, August 1987.

² Daniel M. Cobb, *Native Activism in Cold War America: The Struggle for Sovereignty* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 94-95; see also Bradley Glen Shreve, *Red Power Rising: The National Indian Youth Council and the Origins of Native Activism* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011).

each other and participated in several demonstrations together during the 1970s. Yet, there were importance differences between the two groups. The NIYC, for example, took advantage of not-for-profit funding and forged allies within the federal government that supported radical change. Moreover, NIYC's rapidly growing capacity and political influence did not always benefit from AIM's highly publicized protests. Nevertheless, the two organizations had a great deal in common in the early 1970s.

Many scholars have assumed that the Albuquerque-based Youth Council was less radical than AIM since it tended to attract leaders with college degrees or professional experience.³ But a closer look at the Youth Council's actions in the early 1970s reveals a more complicated picture. The NIYC's militant activities in the 1960s caught the attention of liberal philanthropic organizations like the Field Foundation that gave the group considerably more stability by providing them with a steady stream of general funds. As a result, the Youth Council suddenly had the ability to fight legal battles, run Indian schools, and engage in a host of other activities at precisely the same time that AIM came to represent the frustrations of disaffected American Indians. The funding enabled the National Indian Youth Council to employ sit-ins and protests, but it also helped them obtain audiences with government officials and bureaucrats through indirect action. By the late 1960s, its web of funding grew to rely ever more on government agencies and philanthropic foundations.

³ See especially Paul Chatt Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* (New York: The New Press, 1996), 126. The NIYC created a central headquarters in Albuquerque after it was restructured in 1969.

The NIYC struggled to remain uninfluenced by its benefactors, and in fact the Field Foundation's support offered the group considerable independence. Although the Field Foundation managers required the NIYC to submit reports several times a year, the NIYC was free to develop its own priorities, and the foundation almost never suggested what the Youth Council should do next.

Wealthy benefactors never outwardly co-opted the NIYC, but they still transformed the organization by allowing it greater operational space.⁴ I borrow the term "operational space" from Devin Fergus, who shows how white liberal benefactors reigned in the radical elements of the Black Power movement by providing support. He contends that liberal support of Black Power in the 1970s led activists to focus on non-militant activities such as public welfare projects and university programs. The Field Foundation did nothing to stop the NIYC from becoming involved in militant protests, but regular funding allowed the NIYC to make major gains in political and social areas that could easily be upset by larger changes in the political or financial climate. The rise of the non-profit industry in the 1970s profoundly affected the Youth Council as it adopted managerial techniques from other non-profit organizations. This allowed the Youth Council to make more measurable progress in areas of social improvement for American Indians, but the NIYC's increased operational space led it to be overshadowed by the overtly militant takeovers of other groups, particularly AIM.

⁴ Devin Fergus, *Liberalism, Black Power, and the Making of American Politics 1965-1980* (Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 2009).

The NIYC's success at attracting foundation funding makes it an ideal case study to more closely examine how foundations influenced social justice organizations in the 1970s. Andrea Smith has argued that the emergence of the 501(c)(3) non-profit model served to transform social justice groups from mass movements with many followers into career-based professional organizations. Foundations supported a range of social justice issues in the 1970s, and organizations increasingly replicated other non-profits to attract and retain funding, a phenomenon Smith calls the "non-profit industrial complex."⁵ The Youth Council experienced this kind of transformation in the sense that reform through policy and legal means gradually superseded grassroots organization as the NIYC's primary strategy. Joan Roelefs suggests that the kind of policy changes that foundations supported in the 1970s deradicalized racial justice movements by encouraging them to focus on social reform rather than radical change.⁶ The NIYC's evolution as an organization in the 1970s follows the pattern of many other social justice groups that shifted from radical grassroots strategies to a more professionalized policy-centered approach. Yet foundation funding did not drive this transformation. It was the changing political landscape that opened more opportunities for tribal self-determination—the very goal that the NIYC and most Native organizations were advocating for by the 1970s—that made protest tactics less viable.

Foundation funding influenced the direction of the NIYC, but the NIYC's relationship to foundations was complex and the consequences of that relationship were

⁵ Andrea Smith, "Introduction" in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* ed. Andrea Smith (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007) 2-3.

⁶ Joan Roelefs, *Foundations and Public Policy: The Mask of Pluralism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

far from straightforward. Madonna Thunder Hawk has argued that foundations led to the creation of prestigious jobs in the non-profit sector that convinced many talented Native activists to abandon largely unpaid grassroots organizing and to focus on service and program delivery.⁷ Although social services and programs made up a large portion of Native organizations' activities, including the NIYC's, this was the case long before the emergence of non-profits in the 1970s. The NIYC of the 1960s was funded by the Ford Foundation, which sponsored educational programs and services that allowed the group to operate on a national level. The Field Foundation stepped in and provided support to the Youth Council soon after the Ford Foundation terminated its funding. Ford Foundation Secretary Howard Dressner stated shortly after the foundation pulled its support that

American society is being strained at one extreme by those who would destroy what they oppose or do not understand, and at the other by forces that would repress variety and punish dissent. We are in great need of more—not fewer—instruments for necessary social change under law, for ready, informed response to deep-seated problems without chaos, for accommodation of a variety of views without deafening anarchy.⁸

The Ford Foundation withdrew its support from the NIYC after its activities made the organization appear radical. The Ford Foundation developed an ideology of political reform that left little room for direct action by the late 1960s, and it was not punishing the

⁷ Madonna Thunder Hawk, "Native Organizing Before the Non-Profit Industrial Complex" in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* ed. Andrea Smith (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007).

⁸ Roelofs, *Foundations and Public Policy*, 127.

NIYC alone. Yet other large foundations existed that continued to support social movements that employed civil disobedience.

After the Ford Foundation stopped supporting the NIYC, the Field Foundation assumed that role by providing opportunities for the NIYC to participate in indirect action without taking a stance on the group's militancy. Although authors like Thunder Hawk cite the Ford Foundation as a leading example of foundations using their influence to suppress extremism, this was more the exception than the rule. Indian activists labeled "militants" who were seeking radical change continued to drive the NIYC's tactics and messaging well into the 1970s, and they still found plenty of support from wealthy benefactors.⁹

Under a new leadership and with new sources of funding, the National Indian Youth Council played a crucial role in the Red Power era of the early 1970s. But that role has been forgotten to some extent. By contrast, the American Indian Movement eventually garnered so much media attention that it has come to symbolize American Indian activism in historical memory. The literature on Native American activism of the early 1970s tends to focus on a few spectacular events led by AIM. Smith and Warrior's *Like a Hurricane* remains the definitive manuscript on this topic. Smith and Warrior describe the takeover of Alcatraz by Indians of All Nations, the takeover of the central Bureau of Indian Affairs Headquarters in 1972, and AIM's 71 day siege at Wounded Knee in 1973. Other texts cover the events of Alcatraz in greater detail, but

⁹ The Field Foundation was formed in 1940 by Chicago investor Marshall Field III. The foundation supported organizations promoting civil rights, civil liberty, and child welfare. The foundation supported groups like the NAACP, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the National Farmworkers Association, and the National Congress of American Indians before supporting the NIYC in 1968.

Like a Hurricane remains the only in depth historical account of AIM outside of several autobiographies by AIM leaders.¹⁰ Smith and Warrior scarcely mention the NIYC's activities in the 1970s, going so far as to declare that the "NIYC was by 1972 all but a dead letter."¹¹ AIM most likely considered NIYC to be "dead" because by 1972 AIM was leading protests that were more confrontational and drew more media attention. The NIYC could hardly have been called a dead organization in 1972, but AIM eventually surpassed the NIYC in its ability to make newspaper headlines. AIM's foray into popular culture has meant that historians of Native America have only recently begun to give the NIYC of the 1970s any attention, and historians of 1970s militant ethnic activism have focused on AIM at the exclusion of the NIYC.¹²

AIM dominates much of the historical literature of 1970s American Indian activism, although some historians have attempted to move beyond organizational activism by stressing tribal efforts to affect change during the 1970s. Charles Wilkinson's *Blood Struggle* follows this trend. Wilkinson argues that positive change occurred for Native people in the United States because American Indians revitalized their communities through grassroots action and local political mobilization. Wilkinson details dozens of individual tribes that struggled to gain control over their territories and achieve

¹⁰ For Alcatraz literature, see Troy Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996); Troy Johnson, Duane Champagne, and Joane Nagel eds. *American Indian Activism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); For autobiographies, see ¹⁰ Dennis Banks, *Ojibwa Warrior: Dennis Banks and the Rise of the American Indian Movement* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004); Russell Means, *Where White Men Fear to Tread: The Autobiography of Russell Means*, (New York: St. Martin Press, 1995); Mary Crow Dog, *Lakota Woman* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1990).

¹¹ Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 137.

¹² For example, Alan Gomez shows how AIM intersected with the Chicano movement during the 1970s, and how many Chicano activists such as Raul Salinas embraced AIM. Alan Gomez, *From Below and to the Left* (Ph.D Diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2006).

greater self-governance. Wilkinson argues that AIM and other predominately urban groups played an ambiguous role in the emergence of Native demands for sovereignty, and he stresses that most tribal leaders distained the broader civil rights movement and cautioned against direct activism.¹³ It is true that pan-tribal organizations had fleeting connections to reservation-based activists and tribal politicians, but Wilkinson overlooks the role that urban organizations had in pressuring U.S. officials to open up spaces for greater tribal self-government.

Pan-tribal activism played an enormous role in alerting U.S. government officials to the need for greater Indian self-determination. The 1970s saw the enactment of numerous federal measures that gave American Indian tribes greater self-determination and delegated funding to tribal governments. Most importantly, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act allowed tribes to administer federal programs for their members.¹⁴ Increased U.S. federal support allowed hundreds of tribes to take greater control of their own governments and begin to make claims over lands and resources. But these instances of local mobilization happened in the context of pan-tribal organizations that continued to lobby the federal government into the 1970s for substantive change across the U.S. The NIYC was one group that continued to pressure for high-level policy reform, and its demands became more sophisticated and complex as it increased its capacity and forged allies within the federal government itself.

¹³ Charles Wilkinson, *Blood Struggle: The Rise of Modern Indian Nations* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2005), 129-130.

¹⁴Taiawagi Helton and Lindsay G. Robertson, “The Foundations of Federal Indian Law and Its Application in the Twentieth Century,” in *Beyond Red Power: American Indian Politics and Activism since 1900* Eds. Daniel M. Cobb and Loretta Fowler, (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2007), 42-46.

In recent years, some historians have paid greater attention to the National Indian Youth Council as they have tried to uncover the roots of Red Power in the early 1960s. Daniel Cobb's *Native Activism* looks at efforts by the NIYC and the Congress of American Indians to halt practices of termination and demand tribal self-determination between 1960 and 1968. Cobb's work shows how the NIYC combined political lobbying with direct activism, and he describes the little known participation of the NIYC in the Poor People's Campaign of 1968. Nevertheless, Cobb makes no significant connection between the NIYC's efforts in the 1960s and the group's militancy of the early 1970s. Moreover, his emphasis on NIYC leaders Mel Thom (Paiute) and Clyde Warrior (Ponca) lead him to imply that the NIYC disintegrated after Clyde Warrior died in 1968 and Thom lost his position as executive director.¹⁵ Cobb suggests that the NIYC faded away after losing the leadership of Warrior and Thom, never to reclaim its former role as a voice of American Indian issues.

Bradley Shreve's *Red Power Rising* covers the same period, but unlike Cobb, Shreve argues that the NIYC revitalized itself and thrived into the 1970s. Shreve's most important intervention is to show how the NIYC pioneered American Indian direct activism in the period between its founding in 1961 and Clyde Warriors death in 1968, advocating tactics of sit-ins and demonstrations that would become the model for the high-profile takeovers of the early 1970s. Shreve acknowledges that an entirely new leadership took hold of the NIYC in 1969, and he argues that the new directors retained the ideology and goals of Warrior and Thom. Shreve dedicates her final chapter to the

¹⁵ Cobb, *Native Activism*, 193, 203.

revitalization of the NIYC under the leadership of Gerald Wilkinson after 1969. *Red Power Rising* credits the NIYC for remaining a viable and respectable organization into the 1970s, but the chapter on Wilkinson downplays his militancy and is silent on the operational funding that the NIYC received from the Field Foundation.¹⁶ Much like the organization of the 1960s, the NIYC under Wilkinson advocated reform through legal means while sponsoring and participating in protests and occupations.

The Youth Council offers a new window into understanding how foundation funding affected the course of pan-tribal direct activism in the early 1970s. By 1970, most of the militant student groups of the 1960s had become deeply factionalized and no longer functioned as organizations, including Students for a Democratic Society and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.¹⁷ By contrast, the NIYC grew exponentially after 1969. Never numbering more than one or two hundred members in the 1960s, the NIYC claimed over 15,000 members by 1972.¹⁸ Moreover, the Field Foundation archives reveal that NIYC leaders never hid their militant activities and rhetoric from their benefactors. Instead, the NIYC's primary supporter from 1969 until 1974 never questioned its leaders' militancy and understood it as crucial to the NIYC's claim as a legitimate voice for Native American youth.

¹⁶ Shreve, *Red Power Rising*, 180-201.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 181-182.

¹⁸ *Americans Before Columbus* (Albuquerque, NM), Vol. 4 Iss. 1, June 1972. Membership lists indicate that this number may have been inflated. The NIYC claimed 5,000 members in 1970 when lists from that period suggest the number was actually less than 1,000. Yet even this numbers mean that the NIYC grew to a larger and more stable organization after its restructuring in 1969. See Shreve, *Red Power Rising*, 242n13.

Work by historians that highlight the NIYC of the mid-1960s have served to reinforce the notion that the NIYC had little to no role in the years of frequent American Indian protests and occupations in the early 1970s. In fact the organization remained involved and became associated with many demonstrations, especially those taking place near the NIYC headquarters in New Mexico. Wilkinson's success at retaining support from the Field Foundation and gradually attracting other donors was in part the result of his meticulous reporting and recording keeping. The NIYC records and Field Foundation correspondence offer a window for understanding the widespread American Indian activism of the early 1970s from the perspective of an organization that still maintained widespread support from Native communities.

AT ONCE CONSERVATIVE AND RADICAL IN POSITION

The National Indian Youth Council underwent a dramatic transformation in 1968 and 1969, but it remerged as a very similar organization by 1970. The NIYC lost the Ford Foundation as its main benefactor and almost its entire board of directors; but the new NIYC continued to advocate political reform, to sponsor educational initiatives, to participate in protests, and to receive and rely on foundation funding. The NIYC's participation in the Poor People's Campaign proved the final undoing for the group's original leadership, but it also showed that direct action could allow NIYC members to access federal officials and even potential donors. Although the campaign was disastrous for the Youth Council's finances and the members that participated, it also garnered the organization attention and respect from a range of audiences. The campaign would foreshadow the American Indian takeovers of 1969-1973, which attracted widespread support but often had unintended consequences. The paradoxical result of the Poor People's Campaign was that it almost destroyed the NIYC while it created opportunities for a new leadership to strengthen the organization.

The last action that the original leadership of the National Indian Youth Council took together was to participate in the Poor People's Campaign in May 1968. Scholars have generally ignored the Poor People's Campaign or considered it as a failure. Martin Luther King Jr. had devised this massive march on Washington as a "moral alternative to riots." As head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, King planned the Poor People's Campaign as a series of demonstrations that would ultimately demand the

federal government to adopt an economic bill of rights. Nevertheless, in the wake of King's assassination in April 1968 and the ensuing violence that accompanied it, the campaign seemed inappropriate to many observers.¹⁹ Historians have occasionally reconsidered the Poor People's Campaign as a movement that transcended racial lines. These scholars point to the participation of Reies Tijerina and his Raza Unida Party of *nuevomexicanos* in this predominately African American campaign.²⁰ But most historians have ignored American Indian participation until recently.

Scholarly neglect of the Native American presence in the campaign stems in part from the contemporaneous comments of Vine Deloria Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux), who at the time served as executive director for the National Congress of American Indians. Deloria discouraged the NIYC from marching in the Poor People's Campaign. Afterwards, he argued that the failure of the march proved that "direct action is extrinsic to general understanding and traditional methods of problem solving... the tribes are able to get more for their people because of the insistence on indirect activism." Deloria argued that pan-Indianism threatened the sovereignty of the hundreds of Native nations that negotiated with the United States through U.S. Congress and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Deloria charged that the Poor People's Campaign leadership offered Indian protesters no room for retreat, and he argued that "tribes rarely box themselves into a

¹⁹ Gerald McKnight, *The Last Crusade: Martin Luther King, the FBI, and the Poor Peoples' Campaign* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 141.

²⁰ Richard Gardner, *¡Grito!: Reies Tijerina and the New Mexico Land Grant War of 1967* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1970), 255.

position such as that.”²¹ Deloria later emerged as a leading figure in the academic field of Native Studies, and his thoughts and writings have heavily influenced scholarship on American Indian activism.

Despite Deloria’s condemnation of the Poor People’s Campaign, recent historians have re-evaluated the role of the NIYC in the demonstration. Deloria and others believed that the U.S. government would ignore Native Americans who marched. But U.S. officials listened. NIYC members were given an audience with the Indian Claims Commission, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), the National Park Service, and many other government agencies. Nevertheless, the Youth Council members did have the resources to sustain a protest camp for weeks on end, and the number of Native marchers eventually began to dwindle. One month after the start of the protest, Washington police arrested the demonstrators that remained.²² Mel Thom (Paiute) and several other NIYC leaders spent another thirty days in jail, which served to deepen the growing financial crisis as donors ceased contributing to the Youth Council.

The young lawyer Browning Pipestem (Otoe) successfully convinced Youth Council members to oust almost the entire board of directors, whom Pipestem blamed for the NIYC’s financial troubles. The organization found itself in serious disarray after the Ford Foundation charged the NIYC with using foundation funds for the Poor People’s Campaign. The Ford Foundation stipulated that their support be used for educational projects, and they ceased funding the Youth Council after Thom had trouble accounting

²¹ Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died for your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1969), 218-219.

²² Cobb, *Native Activism*, 187-188, 190-192, 195.

for the group's finances.²³ The Ford Foundation's decision reflected a growing tendency for the foundation to stop supporting organizations that employed direct action from the mid to late-1960s.

The NIYC's pause in activity after the Poor People's Campaign most likely occurred because the Youth Council lost the Ford Foundation as its primary funding source, not because the new leadership had a different ideological focus. Other benefactors began demanding that Mel Thom and Assistant Director Bob Dumont (Assiniboine) leave the organization, blaming them for the NIYC's financial troubles. The Poor People's Campaign represented the last undertaking by the original leadership of the NIYC, but the resulting financial disarray opened the way for Pipestem and others to stage a coup that resulted in an almost entirely new board of directors. Only Samuel English (Ojibwe) remained from the original board. Thom accepted this turn of events and expressed his belief that a change of membership would lead to "a new era."²⁴ The Poor People's Campaign brought the original NIYC leaders together in a setting where they found an audience with U.S. federal officials, but that brief victory soon meant they would have to leave their own organization.

Although the Ford Foundation openly cut off support to groups that it considered militant or radical, other large foundations continued to embrace organizations like the NIYC that pressured reform through both direct and indirect means. Unexpectedly, the NIYC marches on Washington brought the Youth Council to the attention of entirely new

²³ Ibid., 261-262.

²⁴ Bradley Glen Shreve, *Red Power Rising: The National Indian Youth Council and the Origins of Intertribal Activism* (Ph.D Diss., University of New Mexico, 2007),, 260-263.

benefactors. After Pipestem took control of the NIYC, he and Sam English struggled to maintain momentum without any secure source of funding. The two wrote to the Field Foundation in New York, pleading for emergency funds. English told Field Foundation Director Leslie Dunbar that “I cannot stress enough that we are presently a dying organization.”²⁵ Although unsympathetic at first to the NIYC’s cash flow problems, Dunbar asked government officials for more information about the Youth Council. As it turns out, the Poor People’s Campaign had impressed some high-level bureaucrats such as Edgar Cahn, the director of the Office of Economic Opportunity. Cahn told Dunbar that the organization was “structurally very thin,” but it maintained a “good informal network.” Moreover, the NIYC had convinced Cahn that “no other organization has stable credibility among Indian youth.”²⁶ Cahn had become familiar with the NIYC during the Poor People’s Campaign, and now he suggested that it might be a suitable organization for the Field Foundation to fund. Paradoxically, the campaign led some funders to cut off the NIYC even as Youth Council members’ political success dealing with government bureaucrats opened doors for new sources of funding.

Dunbar’s considered supporting the NIYC with a mixture of enthusiasm and hesitation. Dunbar read over the NIYC’s proposal for emergency funds, and he quickly pointed out that “the proposal does not say clearly that most of the fervor within the organization was occasioned by events... growing out of the Indian participation in the

²⁵ Sam English to Leslie Dunbar, 6 Dec 1968, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder 3rd Spring 1970, Dolph Briscoe Centre for American History Library, University of Texas, Austin, TX [Hereafter Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder 3rd Spring 1969, DBCAH Library].

²⁶ Leslie Dunbar, handwritten notes from telephone conversation with Edgar Cahn, 24 Apr 1969, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder 3rd Spring 1970, DBCAH Library.

Poor People's Campaign." All the same, Cahn's support of the NIYC convinced Dunbar that the organization had enough credibility among Native Americans that it should be supported. Dunbar believed that if the NIYC proved reliable and if the Field Foundation was interested in Indian Affairs, "we should be working with it." Nevertheless, Dunbar warned his board members that if they "get into an Indian project, do so with low expectations... a fairly small fraction of our program goes in this direction, but the headaches which come from it are many and out of proportion."²⁷ Dunbar stressed that working with pan-tribal groups carried certain risks. He warned that "Indian problems are not only desperate but complicated all out of shape by the existence of tribes. Furthermore, nothing ever moves according to plan, and every program we have been connected with seems to develop its own internal stresses."²⁸ Dunbar noted that pan-Indian organizing was often difficult because each of the hundreds of U.S. tribes had a unique relationship with the United States federal government. Internal disagreements within tribal populations compounded this complexity. All the same, the Field Foundation had helped support the National Congress of American Indians and several smaller pan-tribal groups throughout the 1960s. Dunbar reflected that "they are great people, and I enjoy what little we do."²⁹ The NIYC had proven itself as an organization

²⁷ Leslie Dunbar to Ann Israel, April 24, 1969, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder 3rd Spring 1970, DBCAH Library.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ For a discussion of this complexity, see John Bern and Susan Dodds, "On the Plurality of Interests: Aboriginal Self-government and Land Rights" in *Political Theory and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* eds. Duncan Ivison, Paul Patton, and Will Sanders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 163-182; Quoted in Leslie Dunbar to Ann Israel, April 24, 1969, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder 3rd Spring 1970, DBCAH Library.

with national standing after its month-long protest in Washington, and the Field Foundation was determined to save it.

Roger Nichols, Thom's replacement as executive director, responded to Dunbar's requests by submitting a hastily drawn together proposal. Nichols described a workshop in which a psychiatrist would work with a group of BIA school students to identify problems and solutions to the stresses of off-reservation education. The space to hold the workshop and the salary of the psychologist put the total projected cost of the project at \$36,510.00.³⁰ Although Dunbar desired to assist the NIYC in some way, he balked at the proposal and privately complained that "almost \$40,000 is a lot of money for a psychologist to practice some group dynamics."³¹ Nichols's inability to secure funding for the group proved to be his undoing.

With no general funds to pay a permanent staff the NIYC almost ceased to function under the pressure of its larger commitments. Events such as its BIA-sponsored summer workshop in Washington D.C. strained the organization. The BIA complained that NIYC officers were not fulfilling their duties in Washington in May 1969. A BIA representative charged that "some of the NIYC officers had had succumbed to the blandishments of Washington life, and were so busy being "big Indians in Washington" that they neglected the running of a program which had brought into urban life a number

³⁰ Richard Nichols to Leslie Dunbar, "project proposal," 18 Apr 1969, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder 3rd Spring 1970, DBCAH Library.

³¹ Leslie Dunbar to Ann Israel, April 24, 1969, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder 3rd Spring 1970, DBCAH Library.

of rather unsophisticated young Indians.”³² The board of directors hired Thomas Lentz to stabilize the organization, but Lentz soon balked at the organization’s lack of funds. Before the organization fell apart completely, Browning Pipestem recruited the young Cherokee lawyer Gerald Wilkinson as the new executive director, and the board officially elected him several months later.³³ Wilkinson quickly drafted a new and successful proposal for the Field Foundation that was able to reverse the rapid decline of the organization.

In May 1969, Wilkinson submitted a proposition to the Field Foundation that seemed at once expansive and feasible. Wilkinson declared that the goal of the NIYC would be to end discrimination within the BIA, the federal agency responsible for fulfilling the United States’ trust obligation to American Indian tribes. Wilkinson promised to work closely with newly hired BIA commissioner Louis Bruce (Mohawk) to reform the unfair hiring practices of the BIA, which gave preference to non-Indians. The NIYC would also take advantage of its broad support from BIA school students to end discrimination within the off-reservation Indian school system.³⁴ Wilkinson believed that these goals would result in more far-reaching change. Filling BIA staff positions with Native Americans would facilitate the kinds of changes in high-level policy implementation that the NIYC was demanding in the Poor People’s Campaign. Although

³² Murray L. Wax to Leslie, 3 Jan 1972, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder NIYC Inc., Spring 1971, DBCAH Library.

³³ Shreve, *Red Power Rising*, 186-187.

³⁴ Gerald Wilkinson, “Proposal June 1, 1969- June 1, 1970,” May 1969, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder 3rd Spring 1970, DBCAH Library.

the goals in Wilkinson's proposal were highly focused, reform within the BIA seemed a logical first step to pressure for more substantive transformation of Indian policy.

Board members of the Field Foundation agreed that Wilkinson's proposal for general funds ranked as one of the best proposals they had ever received. One board member told Dunbar that "the NIYC proposal looks great, and I am sure there will be a unanimous decision to fund them."³⁵ The Field Foundation awarded the NIYC \$39,300 for general expenses such as staff, travel, printing, and telephone costs. The NIYC did not rent any office space for this entire period and was left with \$9,825 of "unexpected funds" by June 1970. Handwritten notes on the NIYC financial statements imply that the Field Foundation managers encouraged the Youth Council to rent an office.³⁶ But otherwise, the Field Foundation managers were pleased with how quickly the NIYC rebounded during the second half of 1969. In a letter to Wilkinson accompanied by a check for the NIYC's spring 1970 costs, Dunbar told Wilkinson, "I must say that your report of December 23rd is one of the finest program reports we have had."³⁷ Dunbar appreciated Wilkinson's clearly stated objective of reforming BIA hiring practices and BIA off-reservation schooling. Within less than a year, Wilkinson had revived the NIYC as a stable organization by attracting operational funding from the Field Foundation.

With the NIYC once again financially stable, Wilkinson began to focus on expanding its membership and support network. Field Foundation support allowed NIYC

³⁵ G.L. to Leslie Dunbar, 19 May 1969,

³⁶ NIYC "Financial Statement: June 1969-June 1970," June 1970, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder 3rd Spring 1970, DBCAH Library.

³⁷ Leslie Dunbar to Gerald Wilkinson, 19 Jan 1970, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder 3rd Spring 1970, DBCAH Library.

leaders to resume publishing its *Americans Before Columbus* newsletter that the Youth Council had ceased distributing during the mid-1960s. Wilkinson told his benefactors that the newsletter, together with a direct mailing campaign, would help establish a reliable base of supporters. Wilkinson emphasized that “the key word is participation,” and the success of the NIYC would rely “not in the membership roll but in the number of students who actually participate.” Wilkinson described the revitalized *Americans Before Columbus* as an effort to “find an Indian way of talking about Indian problems. Instead of adopting the language of the New Left, we have tried to create the language of the new Indian.”³⁸ Reviving *Americans Before Columbus* and Wilkinson’s direct mailing strategy both proved successful. By June 1972, the NIYC claimed to have over 15,000 members with 43 chapters in high schools, government boarding schools, college campuses, Indian communities, Indian reservations, and prisons.³⁹ In three years under Wilkinson’s leadership as executive director, the NIYC grew into a large decentralized organization with diverse and independent chapters.

Wilkinson struggled with the contradictions of the National Indian Youth Council. The NIYC represented primarily young urban Indians at a time when the self-governance of tribes was rapidly expanding.⁴⁰ In recognition of the growing power and importance of tribes, Wilkinson admitted that “we are not Indian leaders. We are purely college bred and born students of Indian descent. But from our awareness of what we are

³⁸ Gerald Wilkinson to Leslie Dunbar, 23 Dec 1969, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder 3rd Spring 1970, DBCAH Library.

³⁹ *Americans Before Columbus* (Albuquerque, NM), Vol. 4 Iss. 1, June 1972.

⁴⁰ Helton and Robertson, “The Foundations of Federal Indian Law,” 44.

not – and what the educated system we have been through has done to us, we have begun to define who we are.” Wilkinson argued that the role of young Indians had changed in the wake of 1960s social protest movements, and more Indian youth felt compelled to speak out. At the same time, young Indians maintained a distinct relationship with their elders and communities that distinguished them from non-Indian youth.⁴¹ By dealing with the complexities of the Youth Council’s identity as a national interest groups serving sovereign nations, Wilkinson convinced his benefactors that the NIYC represented and served young Native Americans better than any other organization.

The Poor People’s Campaign had resulted in a financial meltdown for the NIYC, so one might have expected Wilkinson to avoid direct action after Field Foundation funds revitalized the organization. Yet the NIYC quickly resumed its protests. In October 1969, NIYC officers arranged a demonstration at Albuquerque’s BIA data center, where operators complained that non-Indians with little experience were promoted ahead of more qualified Indian employees. A series of NIYC-sponsored sit-ins induced the BIA to issue between 150 and 200 “panic promotions” to various Indian employees, and the NIYC vowed to bring on more promotions. Also in October, NIYC leaders travelled to North Dakota, where they held a mass demonstration on the Fort Totten Sioux Reservation. NIYC members accused the tribal council of holding a fraudulent election that brought Lewis Goodhouse to power, a supporter of “white interests.”⁴² In December, the NIYC organized a two-day “protest powwow” at the BIA area office in Devil’s Lake,

⁴¹ *Americans Before Columbus* (Albuquerque, NM), Vol. 1, No. 1, October 1969.

⁴² *Americans Before Columbus* (Albuquerque, NM), Vol. 1, No. 1, August 1973; Shreve, *Red Power Rising*, 266; “panic promotions” quoted in Gerald Wilkinson to Leslie Dunbar, “Activities December 1969-March 1969,” Apr 1969, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder 3rd Spring 1970, DBCAH Library.

North Dakota. Over 600 Indians came to demand reform of BIA hiring practices.⁴³

Almost as quickly as Wilkinson assumed the directorship of the NIYC, he oversaw several of the major sit-ins that began to sweep across Indian Country in 1969.

Wilkinson revived the NIYC from financial disarray in the wake of the Poor Peoples Campaign, and the organization re-emerged ready to participate in the rise of Red Power swept the United States in 1969. Historians often point to the occupation of Alcatraz by Indians of All Nations as triggering a new surge of American Indian militant action. But NIYC's surge of direct activism began more than a month before the occupiers arrived on Alcatraz on November 30. This resurgence in militant Native American activities arose partially as a result of philanthropic funding. Without the Field Foundation's general support, Wilkinson and other NIYC officers would have been unable to coordinate several mass protests in quick succession. The Poor People's Campaign would not be the last time that the NIYC became involved in direct action. The NIYC participated in many of the hundreds of protests that took place in the early 1970s to call attention to Native American issues while the American Indian occupation of Alcatraz served as a symbol for pan-Indian activism. During this period, the Field Foundation rather than the Ford Foundation became the NIYC's primary benefactor, but foundation funding seemed to have little direct influence over whether the Youth Council employed militant tactics. The NIYC was as militant as ever.

⁴³ NIYC Press Release, 22 Dec 1969, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder 3rd Spring 1970, DBCAH Library.

THE NATIONAL INDIAN YOUTH COUNCIL AND THE RISE OF RED POWER

The Pan-Indian activism that had been simmering since the early 1960s seemed to explode in November 1969 with the occupation of Alcatraz by Indians of All Red Tribes. Richard Oakes (Mohawk), the group's spokesperson, announced that the occupation was "an attempt to bring about Indian unity across the country—Alcatraz can do this—so we can come to a common understanding of our goals and ideals."⁴⁴ In the years that followed, American Indian organizations seized and occupied more than fifty lands and buildings, making the early 1970s the height of Native American direct action.⁴⁵ The Occupations of Alcatraz, the national BIA headquarters, and Wounded Knee happened in the context of hundreds of American Indian protests; and the National Indian Youth Council was among those at the forefront.

During the height of Red Power, the NIYC grew as an organization and gained influence within the federal government. This was largely made possible by foundation funding, which created the operating space for the NIYC to participate in a range of activities that pressured reform in Indian education, BIA hiring practices, and tribal self-determination. But the NIYC's newfound role as a force within the BIA meant that the confrontational tactics of the period sometimes resulted in setbacks for the organization. NIYC leaders saw many of the more localized protests as helping to spur positive change,

⁴⁴ Troy Johnson, *Red Power and Self-Determination: The American Indian Occupation of Alcatraz Island* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 178.

⁴⁵ Steven Cornell, *The Return of the Native: American Indian Political Resurgence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 190.

but AIM's occupations of the BIA headquarters in 1972 and Wounded Knee in 1973 had consequences for the Youth Council that led it to eventually abandon direct action.

AIM's rise to the national stage resulted more from connections with the NIYC than from any overt relationship with the Alcatraz occupiers. During late 1969, as the NIYC began to expand from its base in Albuquerque, New Mexico, the American Indian Movement grew from an urban Indian group in Minneapolis to a national organization. AIM members communicated with the occupiers of Alcatraz such as John Trudell (Santee Sioux) and former NIYC member Hank Adams (Assiniboine), but some scholars have overdrawn the relationship between the Alcatraz occupation and the string of AIM takeovers that captured the media's attention in the early 1970s.⁴⁶ At the annual National Congress of American Indians conference in November, before the Alcatraz occupation began, AIM leader Clyde Bellecourt sought out NIYC officers to form an alliance. This resulted in AIM and the NIYC joining together with the National Congress of American Indians to create a task-force. On November 10, AIM and NIYC agreed to cooperate in protests that would demand greater American Indian involvement in federal agencies and decision making.⁴⁷ In March, AIM and the Youth Council organized a demonstration together that quickly turned into a takeover.

Wilkinson's proposal to the Field Foundation had focused on pressuring the BIA to end discrimination within its human resources, and the NIYC was not afraid to use direct action to accomplish this. Although BIA commissioner Louis Bruce had overseen

⁴⁶ For such an interpretation, see especially Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 99-100.

⁴⁷ Shreve, *Red Power Rising* (PhD Dissertation), 275.

the hiring of more Native American BIA employees, members of AIM and the National Indian Youth Council believed that Louis Bruce had failed in his promise to promote American Indians. AIM and the NIYC lodged a joint complaint with Edward E. Shelton, the head of the Office of Equal Opportunity. The complaint stated that the BIA had no Indian employees in higher income brackets, and that non-Indians invariably filled favored positions.⁴⁸ After receiving no response from Shelton or top BIA officials, AIM and the NIYC organized picketers to protest at the BIA Plant Management Engineering Center in Littleton, Colorado.

On March 16, 1970, over one hundred protesters marched to the BIA plant. They wore armbands and berets, and they carried signs demanding an end to “BIA discrimination.”⁴⁹ The demonstrators returned the next day and fully occupied the BIA building. Meanwhile, a number of spontaneous Indian-led sit-ins erupted in major cities like Chicago, Albuquerque, and Minneapolis. A reporter asked one of the Littleton occupiers, who was the man standing in the background wearing a business suit and top coat? The protester replied that it was Gerald Wilkinson, “a man who works a lot with this on the national level, to make sure these things get started right.”⁵⁰ Funding from the Field Foundation freed Wilkinson to travel and assist in organizing the Littleton protest and other incidents of American Indian direct activism.

⁴⁸ *Denver Post* (Denver, CO), 13 Mar 1970.

⁴⁹ *Arapahoe Harold*, (Littleton, CO), 17 Mar 1970.

⁵⁰ Quoted in *Arapahoe Harold*, (Littleton, CO), 23 Mar 1970; NIYC Press Release, 26 Mar 1970, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder 3rd Spring 1970, DBCAH Library.

The Littleton demonstration was a mixed-success. Three days into the occupation, BIA commissioner Bruce agreed to sign eight of the eleven demands stipulated by AIM and the NIYC. These included the suspension of top officials, a wide range of promotions, and guarantees that top BIA positions be filled by Indian employees. Bruce told the protesters that “as commissioner of Indian Affairs and foremost as an Indian myself, I am aware that discrimination against Indians does exist in the Bureau of Indian Affairs,” and Bruce vowed to do all possible to correct these abuses.⁵¹ Nevertheless, local police arrived to arrest the demonstrators, and nine American Indians peacefully went to jail.

Bruce was unable to prevent the arrests because Harrison Loesch, Secretary of the Interior, became involved in the incident. Loesch ordered Bruce not to negotiate with the protestors and ordered the apprehensions.⁵² Nevertheless, Bruce successfully implemented many of the demands, and he gave fifteen former members of AIM and the NIYC top level jobs within the BIA, including Browning Pipestem. All the same, NIYC leaders recognized that the direct activism would do little to reform the BIA as long as the agency remained embedded in the Department of the Interior. As a result, the NIYC took advantage of the operational space provided by Field Foundation funds and looked increasingly to legal action as a way to affect change.

⁵¹ Ibid.; Statement signed by Louis Bruce, 21 Mar 1970, , Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder 3rd Spring 1970, DBCAH Library.

⁵² *Gallup Independent* (Gallup, NM), 23 Mar 1970; NIYC Press Release, 26 Mar 1970, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder 3rd Spring 1970, DBCAH Library; *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), 23 Sep 1971.

The NIYC continued to engage in direct activism, even as the organization increased its capacity to advocate reform through lobbying and lawsuits. In early August 1970, AIM and NIYC members collaborated to take over Bergsaker Dormitory at Augustana College in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Both organizations sent delegations to a meeting of the American Lutheran church, where they watched as the church rescinded on its promise to create an all-Indian board with a \$750,000 budget for Indian projects. After a “blue chip meeting,” Indians from both AIM and the NIYC took over the conference and renamed Bergsaker Dormitory “Iyolwepi,” a Lakota word meaning “religion.” After several days, the board members for the Lutheran church agreed to negotiate with protesters.⁵³ Direct action remained a viable tactic to pressure negotiation even in situations where the target of the action was a funder that would not fulfill an earlier promise.

A year later, AIM and the NIYC together stormed the BIA headquarters in Washington D.C. in response to hiring issues within the BIA. BIA deputy commissioner John Crow had demoted Pipestem and several other Indian BIA officials that Louis Bruce had hired following the Littleton occupation. Crow defended the demotions, claiming that many of Bruce’s hires were “militants” in the Indian community. Outraged, several dozen AIM and NIYC members stormed the BIA building to make a citizen’s arrest on Crow. Crow was nowhere to be found, and several fistfights soon broke out between Indian protesters and recently arrived police officers. Law enforcement officials dragged three

⁵³ NIYC Press Release, 4 Aug 1970, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder 3rd Spring 1970, DBCAH Library.

demonstrators to a police van waiting outside, and twenty-six more protesters surrendered and were arrested. The Following day, Bruce brought all of the protesters into his office and apologized for their treatment by the police. Bruce also assured his audience that “I think I can work with Crow. I think he is going to be in my corner.”⁵⁴ The NIYC still participated in militant activities that met with relative success after years of support from the Field Foundation.

The citizen’s arrest of Crow emboldened the NIYC to expand into a host of new activities. Wilkinson referred the event as the “famous Battle of the Bureau,” and he declared that the “NIYC was a leader and proved itself capable of marshalling tribal support.” Wilkinson could rightfully claim that the success of Crow’s arrest firmly established the Youth Council had some considerable influence within the BIA itself. At the same time, the NIYC’s national headquarters began to broadcast television and radio shows in Albuquerque. Moreover, the organization filed petitions with the Federal Communications Commission against several Albuquerque TV and radio stations. The petitions accused the stations of broadcasting misleading and inaccurate information about Indians. The organization also used a grant from the Native American Rights Fund to assist Indians running for public office in the New Mexico counties with Indian majority populations, such as San Juan and McKinley.⁵⁵ Finally, the NIYC created an “anti-defamation committee” to issue complaints and write petitions against New Mexico newspapers that frequently misrepresented American Indians, such as the Gallup

⁵⁴ *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), 23 Sep 1971.

⁵⁵ Gerald Wilkinson to Leslie Dunbar, “Report on period July 1- December 1, 1971,” 20 Jan 1972, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder NIYC Inc., Spring 1971, DBCAH Library.

Independent.⁵⁶ Outside support allowed the Youth Council to become increasingly caught up with regional media and politics.

⁵⁶ NIYC Press Release, 24 Mar 1972, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder NIYC Inc., Spring 1971, DBCAH Library.

EDUCATION

The NIYC also became involved in several education-related struggles outside of New Mexico. The NIYC sponsored a class-action lawsuit against Intermountain School, a Navajo boarding school in northern Utah. The NIYC supported secondary school students that wanted to see Intermountain School abolished. With the help of the Native American Legal Defense and Education Fund, Wilkinson and other NIYC leaders developed a legal case for closing down the school. First, the suit argued that Intermountain School violated the 1868 treaty between the Navajo Nation and the United States, which stipulated that the U.S. government would provide education on Navajo territory. The NIYC argued that Intermountain violated the treaty because it was built more than 500 miles from the Navajo reservation. Second, the NIYC argued that the vocational emphasis of Intermountain doomed its students' chances of ever going to college. Finally, the NIYC presented a long list of civil rights violations against the Navajo students at the school.⁵⁷ As the Youth Council began to support the reform of BIA schools, the organization began to develop connections with communities outside of New Mexico.

The NIYC's court battle with Intermountain School became the most high profile of the Youth Council's lawsuits against BIA boarding schools. The NIYC's case was thrown out three times until the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to hear the case in 1974. Throughout the appeals, NIYC lawyers exploited the political rhetoric of the Nixon

⁵⁷ Gerald Wilkinson to Leslie Dunbar, "Activities of 1970/1971 Second Funding period," 19 May 1971, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder NIYC Inc., Spring 1971, DBCAH Library.

administration. The NIYC argued that in light of Richard Nixon's opposition to the "busing of white children a few miles, it is highly hypocritical to assert that busing Navajo children hundreds of miles is a matter of relative insignificance." In the end, the BIA voluntarily elected to close Intermountain School, and NIYC successfully fought to sit on a review board for the school's closure.⁵⁸

As the NIYC pressured the BIA to shut down its boarding schools, Edward Kennedy and other congressmen drafted and eventually passed the Indian Education Act of 1972. This act allowed tribal governments to accept federal grants and administer schools outside of the BIA's control. Ironically, the NIYC and many tribal chairmen opposed the Indian Education Act, fearing that it would ultimately relieve the BIA of its obligation to provide Native students with education, particularly urban Indians. The NIYC found itself embedded in BIA politics even as it struggled "to be above tribal politics and out of the reach of government influence."⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the resources provided by the Field Foundation and other donors allowed the Youth Council to engage in methods of advocacy that at times left the NIYC in more complicated positions than when it participated in militant confrontation.

In a similar case to Intermountain School, what began as an NIYC sit-in turned into a drawn out legal battle against Chilocco Indian School in Oklahoma. In October 1971, a guidance council at Chilocco assaulted two teenage Native female students with a

⁵⁸ Gerald Wilkinson to Leslie Dunbar, 29 Apr 1974, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder Fall '73 74-20, DBCAH Library; Plaintiff's Memorandum, NC-21-71, District Court of Utah, 13 Mar 1972, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2R391, Folder NIYC Court Cases, DBCAH Library.

⁵⁹ Helton and Robertson, "The Foundations of Federal Indian Law," 43; Quoted in Gerald Wilkinson to Leslie Dunbar, "Activities of 1970/1971 Second Funding period," Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder NIYC Inc., Spring 1971, DBCAH Library.

flashlight. One girl survived with a bad concussion, while the other spent several days in the hospital recovering from multiple fractured bones. Despite the presence of several witnesses, the Chilocco school board expelled the two female students and exonerated the guidance counselor from any consequences. The BIA sent law officials to investigate, but they left after one day and declared the case closed. As a result, NIYC members organized a protest and a sit-in. As the protests at the school continued to escalate, the school board suspended the guidance counselor.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, the incident revealed a number of glaring problems with Chilocco Indian School, and the NIYC became deeply involved over the next year.

NIYC efforts at Chilocco ultimately helped reform the guidelines of BIA schools more generally. In addition to the two girls, Chilocco expelled hundreds of Indian students during the fall semester of 1971. The student body of around 600 students had been reduced to about 400 during the first two months of the school year. NIYC officers conducted their own investigation and met with Chilocco Superintendent Daniel Sahmaunt. Sahmaunt admitted that he expelled students without providing them or their parents any procedure to challenge the decision. Students were given no written notice of the reasons for expulsion, and they had no time to prepare a defense.⁶¹ NIYC leaders considered their options for addressing the situation, and they ultimately decided to draft a student bill of rights for BIA schools. The student bill of rights addressed issues for which the BIA had no official guidelines, such as providing safeguards against arbitrary

⁶⁰ Gerald Wilkinson to Leslie Dunbar, "Report on period July 1- December 1, 1971," 20 Jan 1972, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder NIYC Inc., Spring 1971, DBCAH Library.

⁶¹ "Affidavit of Cornell Tahdooahnipa," U.S. District Court for the Western District of Oklahoma, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2R391, Folder NIYC Court Cases, DBCAH Library.

expulsion. The NIYC and several other groups presented the student bill of rights to the Senate Appropriations Committee, and Congress enacted the bill into law in September 1972.⁶² Efforts by the NIYC reformed BIA policies towards Indian students across the board in less than a year. The Youth Council had the resources to make long-lasting changes within the BIA by drafting the bill and presenting it to Congress rather than demanding change through direct protest.

The Field Foundation lauded the NIYC's efforts to affect change through legal mechanisms, but the situation on the ground sometimes differed from the NIYC's increasingly mainstream image. As students and outside organizations like the NIYC and AIM made Chilocco increasingly unstable, the BIA finally ordered armed security guards to patrol the school. When students asked why the security guards had arrived, school officials told them "they were afraid A.I.M. was going to come and start trouble." Most of the students felt differently, and they circulated a petition demanding that the security guards leave.⁶³ The NIYC was by this time working through relatively mainstream methods to reform Chilocco, but school officials believed that the NIYC and AIM might provoke a militant action. When it participated in local incidents, NIYC remained closely associated with AIM and still had a reputation for militancy.

The prolonged militant atmosphere at Chilocco attracted considerably more attention than the NIYC's earlier protests. The National Indian Youth Council had

⁶² "Student Bill of Rights," Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder NIYC 72-121 June 1972, DBCAH Library; "Statement to Senate Appropriations Committee," 11 Apr 1972, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder NIYC 72-121 June 1972, DBCAH Library; *Americans Before Columbus* (Albuquerque, NM), Vol. 4 Iss. 1, June 1972.

⁶³ Jeanie Norman, Chilocco Indian School Petition, 24 Jan 1972, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2R391, Folder NIYC Court Cases, DBCAH Library.

engaged in demonstrations for the first two and a half years of Field Foundation funding without provoking any significant opposition. But that was about to change. In March of 1972, Wilkinson received a copy of a letter from Cherokee Chief W.W. Keeler to Secretary of the Interior Harrison Loesch. Keeler had mailed Loesch to find out if the Field Foundation was helping to fund any of the militant groups involved at Chilocco, particularly the NIYC. In response, Loesch admitted that there was “a considerable amount of militant activity associated with government programs... including those administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.” Loesch recalled that the press had mentioned foundation support, “but to my recollection none by the Field Foundation.” Loesch told Keeler that if Keeler could find any specific information on Field Foundation funding to militant groups, “we would like to know” so that the department could undertake an investigation.⁶⁴ Such an inquiry would have jeopardized the NIYC’s influence within the BIA and its access to BIA funding for educational projects.

Keeler had personal reasons to try to expose Wilkinson for running a militant organization using foundation and BIA funding. Wilkinson, himself a Cherokee, opposed Keeler’s government because he believed that Keeler represented outside interests. The NIYC closely followed the Cherokee elections and used Youth Council press releases to criticize Keeler. Likewise, Keeler disapproved of the NIYC for its willingness to use militant tactics.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Harrison Loesch to W.W. Keeler, 28 Feb 1972, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder NIYC Inc., Spring 1971, DBCAH Library; “Gerald Wilkinson of NIYC Telephoned,” handwritten note, 28 Mar 1972, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder NIYC Inc., Spring 1971, DBCAH Library.

⁶⁵ NIYC Press Release: “NIYC board meeting scheduled,” 17 Feb 1972, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder NIYC Inc., Spring 1971, DBCAH Library.

Nevertheless, Wilkinson must have reevaluated his course of action after a friend working in the BIA provided him with a copy of Secretary Loesch's letter. Wilkinson had watched the NIYC grow from a fringe organization with some popularity among Indian youth to a group that could profoundly influence BIA policies. His relationship to Louis Bruce and several other sympathetic BIA higher-ups would mean little if Loesch used his position to deny resources to the Youth Council. Wilkinson phoned the Field Foundation and told Leslie Dunbar about Loesch's letter. Wilkinson also informed Dunbar that he believed he could obtain the letter from Keeler. Dunbar listened to Wilkinson without much comment, only stating that he would study any letter received.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, that moment marked the end of Wilkinson's direct confrontation with BIA institutions. From then on, he would restrict himself primarily to legal avenues as a way to affect change. The Field Foundation opened up tremendous possibilities for the NIYC to use indirect action, and fears of backlash convinced Wilkinson to distance the Youth Council from the growing militancy of Native American politics.

The NIYC had forged close ties with Commissioner Bruce and other BIA top officials, giving the organization considerable influence within the BIA. Secretary Loesch could override any decision made by the BIA, but the Youth Council began see BIA area officers as a more immediate threat. Area offices maintained considerable autonomy from the central headquarters in Washington. They made most decisions regarding individual BIA schools, and they were responsible for hiring most BIA employees. The NIYC and

⁶⁶ "Gerald Wilkinson of NIYC Telephoned," handwritten note, 28 Mar 1972, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder NIYC Inc., Spring 1971, DBCAH Library.

AIM had compelled the BIA to hire several top level Indian employees at the national office, but many area offices disapproved of Commissioner Bruce and accused him of sanctioning militant Indian activism. Consequently, Wilkinson believed that the area offices were responsible for the continuing discrimination within the BIA.⁶⁷

In January 1972, Wilkinson testified before the Oklahoma Committee of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission on the situation at Chilocco. Wilkinson used this as an opportunity to attack the power structure of the Oklahoma area office. Wilkinson singled out Kenneth Black, a Chilocco school board member whom Wilkinson believed was “symbolic of the misplaced emphasis at Chilocco.” Wilkinson emphasized that Black had no qualifications for his job other than his position as tribal chairman for the Otoe-Missouria Tribe of Indians. Moreover, his position as tribal chairman conflicted with his duties as a BIA employee. Just prior to the hearing, Black had signed a resolution with other tribes demanding that Commissioner Bruce be removed from office. In his testimony, Wilkinson declared that “the Oklahoma BIA must have a weird interpretation of the Hatch Act.” Wilkinson stated that “if that’s not direct insubordination and a conflict of loyalties to the head of the federal agency for which he works, I would not know what is.” Wilkinson blamed the Oklahoma area office for authorizing Black’s employment despite a clear conflict of interest.⁶⁸

Wilkinson accused Oklahoma Area Director Sid Carney of hiring Black so that Carney could manipulate him. Wilkinson charged that Director Sidney could easily sway

⁶⁷ *Americans Before Columbus* (Albuquerque, NM), Vol. 4 Iss. 1, June 1972.

⁶⁸ Testimony by Wilkinson on behalf of NIYC before Ok committee on U.S. Civil Rights commission, Jan 21, 1972, reproduced in *Americans Before Columbus* (Albuquerque, NM), Vol. 4 Iss. 1, June 1972.

Black to use his influence as tribal chairman to threaten Commissioner Bruce. Such a situation, Wilkinson contended, blurred “the difference between the BIA and tribal governments. Self-determination for Indians is thwarted when the BIA can exert that kind of pressure.” Wilkinson called for the immediate removal of Carney from office.⁶⁹ Although no action was taken, Wilkinson would go on to insist that the national BIA office should reign in the powers of the area offices. Wilkinson’s relationship with Commissioner Bruce led Wilkinson to support greater centralized authority within the BIA, at least until the American Indian Movement inadvertently upset the entire BIA bureaucracy.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

THE TRAIL OF BROKEN TREATIES

In October 1972, AIM and the NIYC began another joint effort of direct activism, but this one was meticulously planned and would have unexpected consequences. The two groups organized a march from California to Washington D.C. called the “Trail of Broken Treaties.” Former NIYC member Hank Adams drew up “twenty points” to be presented to Washington law-makers at the end of the march. This list of demands called for the creation of several federal committees and commissions to ensure that each Indian nation’s sovereignty and treaty rights were affirmed.⁷⁰

The Youth Council had many reasons to believe that the Trail of Broken Treaties would result in a relatively insignificant demonstration. The NIYC probably wanted to avoid any militant protests in light of recent scrutiny by the BIA. Nevertheless, it probably seemed unlikely that the Trail of Broken Treaties would attract much attention. The Marchers had chosen to arrive in Washington on November 1, 1972. With national elections just around the corner, President Nixon and most Washington lawmakers were away campaigning. Moreover, the sheer scale of the anti-war demonstrations that had been taking place would have made most American Indian protests seem small in comparison.⁷¹ NIYC members must have reasoned that a comparatively small demonstration at a time when Washington would be a virtual ghost town would probably have little more than symbolic significance. They were wrong.

⁷⁰ “The Twenty Point Proposal of Native Americans on the Trail of Broken Treaties,” in *Red Power: The American Indians’ Fight for Freedom* eds. Alvin M. Josephy Jr., Joane Nagel, and Troy Johnson (Norman: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 44-47.

⁷¹ Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 145.

The Trail of Broken Treaties proved to be powerfully symbolic but not in the way that NIYC members anticipated. AIM supported itself primarily with church funding, and AIM had secured lodging for its members at various churches throughout Washington. As AIM's caravan arrived, however, it quickly became clear that only one church was available. With no place for over 700 American Indians to lodge, AIM leaders spontaneously announced that everyone should go to the BIA headquarters. As Hundreds of AIM members streamed to the national BIA office, Secretary Loesch quickly arranged for the group to stay at the Labor Department Auditorium. But it was too late. Police in riot gear told the crowd of anxious Indians to leave the BIA immediately.

A fight broke out, and AIM members stormed the building, which they occupied for six days.⁷² Word eventually spread that the BIA would refuse to hear any of AIM's demands, and that police planned to remove the protesters from the building. In response, frustrated AIM members violently destroyed much of the interior in the building, including BIA records housed in file cabinets. The NIYC issued no condemnation of the protest but quietly disappeared in the wake of massive media coverage of the event.⁷³ NIYC leaders realized that participating in the occupation threatened to jeopardize the group's funding sources as well as its influential connections to the BIA.

The Youth Council successfully avoided implication in the BIA takeover, but the episode still had consequences for the NIYC. On the third day of the demonstration, Commissioner Bruce joined in the occupation against orders from his boss, Secretary

⁷² Ibid., 152-157

⁷³ Shreve, *Red Power Rising* (PhD Dissertation), 277.

Loesch. White House officials found themselves embarrassed by Bruce's overt sympathy for the demonstration. Chief Domestic Advisor John Ehrlichman called Bruce over the telephone and convinced him to leave.⁷⁴ Even though Bruce complied and left the BIA headquarters, the Department of the Interior dismissed Bruce for his role in the takeover, costing the NIYC its most powerful ally in the BIA.⁷⁵

The power of the BIA area offices dramatically increased because the destruction of the national BIA records left the national office practically non-operational for several years. In dismay, Wilkinson complained that "area offices have debilitated and emasculated generations of tribal leadership by using red tape to manipulate tribal chairmen or by debilitating them to get them removed." To Wilkinson, AIM's devastation of BIA records exacerbated problems that the NIYC was trying to fix. Wilkinson bemoaned that "what we have now is chaos in Washington and reentrenchment of the area offices."⁷⁶ AIM targeted the national headquarters as representing the paternal control of the agency over Indian affairs, but the Youth Council supported greater centralization of the BIA as a tactic to increase tribal independence from the BIA bureaucracy. As a result, Wilkinson witnessed how the BIA takeover empowered BIA area offices to once again meddle in tribal governance.

The BIA takeover had unexpectedly brought welcomed media coverage to AIM and established AIM as the definitive militant Indian organization of the 1970s. By

⁷⁴ Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 259.

⁷⁵ *New York Times* (New York, NY), 24 May 1989

⁷⁶ Gerald Wilkinson to Leslie Dunbar, 29 Oct 1973, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder Fall '73 74-20, DBCAH Library.

contrast, the NIYC's many activities outside of direct activism had helped the Youth Council forge a unique relationship with the BIA, and the destruction of the BIA headquarters undid much of this progress. It did not become clear until the takeover that the NIYC's abilities to maintain steady funding and to forge allies in government had sent the Youth Council on a decidedly different course than AIM. Federal policies were increasingly allowing and encouraging American Indians to administer their own affairs. The NIYC embraced this new relationship between tribes and the U.S. state, while AIM continued to demand more radical change.

In the months following the BIA takeover, the NIYC found many of the gains it had made within the federal bureaucracy reversed. Alaska Native Morris Thompson was appointed as the new BIA commissioner, and he overturned many of Bruce's policies. Wilkinson complained that "the new commissioner is resurrecting all the old bureaucrats that Louis Bruce displaced."⁷⁷ Only two months before AIM stormed the BIA, the Youth Council had prepared a legal case against discriminatory hiring practices within the BIA. The NIYC argued that the BIA's hiring practices violated the Reorganization Act of 1934, which stipulated that "such qualified Indians shall hereafter have preference to appoint to vacancies to any such positions."⁷⁸ The NIYC also assembled statistical data to demonstrate the continuing discrimination within the BIA. The U.S. Supreme Court would eventually rule in favor of the NIYC's position in the 1974 *Morton v. Mancari* decision. The court sanctioned Indian preference in BIA hiring and it ruled that Indian

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ NIYC Press Release, 16 Aug 1972, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder May 21, 1973 News Releases, DBCAH Library.

status was a political, not a racial, classification.⁷⁹ But although the NIYC continued to influence BIA practices through long legal battles, the NIYC's role within the agency was drastically curtailed.

Some recent scholarship on the Youth Council suggests that the BIA takeover severed the alliance between the Youth Council and AIM, but this is not entirely true.⁸⁰ The following February, AIM began its infamous occupation of Wounded Knee, South Dakota. On the night of February 27, 1973, several hundred armed American Indians entered the hamlet of Wounded Knee and declared it the "Independent Oglala Nation" to protest Pine Ridge Reservation's tribal chairman, Dick Wilson. Many self-identified full-blood Lakota people on Pine Ridge accused Dick Wilson of harassing and oppressing "full-bloods" with the help of an armed force that Wilson called "GOONs" (Guardians of the Oglala Nation). Immediately after AIM leaders occupied Wounded Knee on February 27, 1973, the FBI mobilized a military force to suppress the protest. The arrival of armored carriers, phantom jets, and military personnel led news reporters to give Wounded Knee greater news coverage than had been given to any previous Indian activist occupation.⁸¹ Moreover, Wounded Knee's signified the site of the 1890 massacre of unarmed Lakota people by the U.S. cavalry. AIM's 71 day siege against the U.S. government inspired American Indians across the United States, who saw it as emblematic of Indian struggles generally rather than a local affair.

⁷⁹ Helton and Robertson, "The Foundations of Federal Indian Law," 44.

⁸⁰ See Shreve, 277

⁸¹ Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 196, 205-207.

NIYC members were not immune to the inspiration of AIM's siege in Wounded Knee. Although the NIYC had largely given up direct activism by 1973, the Wounded Knee occupation stimulated the Youth Council to produce startlingly militant rhetoric. The NIYC declared that it "unequivocally supports the people of Wounded Knee, South Dakota in their actions." Although the NIYC had forged ever closer ties with federal agencies with the help of philanthropic funds, Wounded Knee forced the organization to admit that "we have become nauseated with these unmeaningful rhetorics." Indeed, Wounded Knee aroused the Youth Council to deliver its most confrontational diatribe since Gerald Wilkinson had become executive director. The NIYC proclaimed that

Whiteys in government hold the determination of our lives in their hands... but whitey does not want to let go! Whitey hangs on tenaciously to what we should have for ourselves... Young Indians throughout this nation are rapidly becoming frustrated... the only way for "apples" and whitey to get it on is a hard kick in the posterior right where the legs meet. The actions of our more activist brothers (AIM) is spurring this kind of action. Any self-respecting Indian ought to realize that.⁸²

During the siege, the NIYC seemingly confirmed its commitment to pan-tribal organizing by viciously lashing out at "apples" who supported non-Indian interests. The NIYC also revealed its increasingly international perspective by making a connection between Native America and the Viet Nam War. NIYC leaders complained that "It may be that

⁸² NIYC Press Release, 2 Mar 1973, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder May 21, 1973 News Releases, DBCAH Library.

the only way for Indians to get adequate funds is to declare war on the United State so we may become eligible for billions of financial aid as Hanoi became eligible.”⁸³ The NIYC maintained a militant pan-Indian consciousness up to and during the Wounded Knee incident. In the midst of the excitement, NIYC officers supported Wounded Knee, oblivious to the controversy it might generate.

The NIYC had no direct involvement with Wounded Knee, but the Youth Council did help organize other militant protests that took place closer to the NIYC’s headquarters in New Mexico. Although they did not receive the same level of national attention as Wounded Knee, the New Mexico protests saw participation on the same scale as the AIM-led occupation.

As the Wounded Knee episode began to unfold in South Dakota, in New Mexico Larry Casuse (Navajo) and Robert Nakaidinae (Navajo) abducted Gallup Mayor Emmet Garcia, whom many Navajo people believed was prejudiced against Indians. Casuse and Nakaidinae together ran the University of New Mexico’s Kiva Club, a Native American Student organization. The two students were outraged to find out that Garcia would serve on UNM’s board of regents the following year despite protests from the Kiva Club. In response, Casuse and Nakaidinae kidnapped Garcia at a sporting goods store in a style reminiscent of Tijerina’s “courthouse raid” six years before.⁸⁴ Police officers soon arrived

⁸³ NIYC Press Release, 2 Mar 1973, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder May 21, 1973 News Releases, DBCAH Library.

⁸⁴ Reies Lopez Tijerina was a pastor and Chicano activist who advocated for restoring New Mexico land grounds to descendants of original Spanish and Mexican owners. Tijerina spent seven years avoiding confrontation and arrest by Arizona and New Mexico authorities between 1957 and 1964, during which time he formed La Alianza Federal de Mercedes, a group that argued for historical land grants.

and shot Casuse, killing the 19-year-old as he left the store. Law officials apprehended Nakaidinae, charging him with kidnapping. The following day, a Gallup Independent article displayed Casuse's body lying on the cement street with several policemen standing over the body holding long rifles. The caption referred to Casuse and Nakaidinae as "yellow" and "shallow malcontents." This controversial newspaper article provoked the Navajo population to protest against white⁸⁵ discrimination in Gallup.⁸⁶ This incident, happening only days after the outbreak of the Wounded Knee occupation, revealed that Wounded Knee was not an isolated incident but was instead indicative of a national wave of Indian activism.

Casuse's death incited Native American demonstrations against racism on a scale like never before. On March 3, thousands of Indian protesters took to the street and paid their respects to Casuse at Gallup's downtown funeral parlor. The NIYC helped organize several more protests in Gallup to challenge racism and to remember Casuse. On March 31, about 3,000 Indians marched through downtown Gallup with between 2,000 and 3,000 more Native people lining the streets. They advanced in lines of up to 23 people

In June 1967 Tijerina led an armed raid on Rio Arriba County courthouse in Tierra Amarillio, New Mexico to free eleven prisoners and to place district attorney Alfonso Sánchez under citizen's arrest for disrupting a peaceful Alianza protest.

Sánchez was not at the courthouse, and a fire broke out leaving a prison guard killed and a deputy sheriff badly injured. Tijerina escaped with two freed prisoners, but he was arrested within days by New Mexico police. The manhunt that resulted in Tijerina's arrest and the month he spent in prison brought international attention to Tijerina and the land grant struggle.

⁸⁵ Although Wilkinson and other Native Americans used the term "white" to describe racial discrimination in Gallup, that designation pointed to the contradictions and limits of organizing Native Americans around racial issues. Mexican Americans controlled much of the structure of local politics and small businesses that disadvantaged Navajos, such as cash loan and liquor stores. Wilkinson's use of the term "white" speaks to his need to speak to national audiences like AIM and the Field Foundation, even though in Gallup the protest was directed at a group that was not necessarily perceived as "white" locally.

⁸⁶ For Tijerina, see Peter Nabokov, *Tijerina and the Courthouse Raid* (Berkeley, CA: Ramparts Press, 1970); Gallup Independent (Gallup, NM), 2 Mar 1973; *Americans Before Columbus* (Albuquerque, NM), May 1974, Vol. 7, No. 2

shoulder-to-shoulder. AIM leaders at Wounded Knee sent encouraging messages to the demonstrators, and AIM leaders called Larry Casuse a “true warrior of the American Indian.” NIYC leaders told Nakaidinae, who was still in jail, that he had “triggered another Indian movement.”⁸⁷ This movement united Indians across the country to challenge racial discrimination and the incredible poverty that Native people experienced both on and off reservations. American Indian direct activism climaxed in the spring of 1973, and the Youth Council was as involved in New Mexico as AIM was in South Dakota.

⁸⁷ *Americans Before Columbus* (Albuquerque, NM), May 1974, Vol. 7, No. 2

THE WAKE OF WOUNDED KNEE II

The Wounded Knee occupation had aftereffects that nobody anticipated. The U.S. military response added to the symbolism of the siege, but it came as a complete surprise to AIM members. Moreover, the presence of AIM and the FBI contributed to ever greater factionalism on Pine Ridge Reservation. For example, at one point the road between Wounded Knee and Highway 18 was obstructed by five separate roadblocks: AIM's roadblock, the FBI's roadblock, Wilson's supporters' roadblock, a roadblock built by Wilson's detractors, and finally a roadblock created by a frustrated family that could not return to their home in Wounded Knee. Moreover, the occupation shattered Pine Ridge's two primary political parties, and many splinter groups formed during the aftermath.⁸⁸ In the years following Wounded Knee, Pine Ridge Reservation experienced an increased FBI presence and an astonishing murder rate of 170 per 100,000.⁸⁹

In the months after the siege, NIYC members reevaluated their stance on whether Wounded Knee was productive. During its annual meeting in August 1973, the NIYC drafted a policy statement affirming that the group would not endorse any future actions that resembled the Wounded Knee occupation. NIYC members pledged that "If there is a great injustice in an Indian community and we feel it imperative to support one group of Indians against another, we will do so taking care not to endanger or destroy the tribe we

⁸⁸ Philip D. Roos, Dowell H. Smith, Stephen Langley, James McDonald, "The Impact of the American Indian Movement on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation," *Phylon* 41:1 (1980), 91-92.

⁸⁹ Ward Churchill, "The Bloody Wake of Alcatraz," in *American Indian Activism* eds. Troy Johnson, Duane Champagne, and Joane Nagel (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 251.

are seeking to save.”⁹⁰ The Wounded Knee occupation had garnered enormous attention, but NIYC officers recognized that they needed to distance themselves from the episode in order to maintain their respect from Indian communities as well as their funders.

The highly publicized takeovers of the BIA headquarters and Wounded Knee did not happen in a vacuum. Many protests took place in other parts of the country, and the NIYC actively participated in some. But the federal government was also caving to demands for greater tribal self-determination, and the NIYC was helping to reform the BIA by gaining influence within the agency. The Youth Council was certainly swept up in the fervour of the period and staunchly supported AIM during the occupations. But the NIYC gradually found itself reeling from the aftermath of major occupations. Youth Council leaders watched their achievements towards reforming the BIA undone and saw how vulnerable they were to having their funding suspended in the aftermath of the militarized Wounded Knee episode. The NIYC’s role in the American Indian protests of New Mexico at the same time as Wounded Knee II were largely forgotten, as was the NIYC’s participation in numerous protests between 1969 and 1973.

The fallout from Wounded Knee had direct consequences for the NIYC. By 1973, several NIYC staff members received their salaries through a manpower contract with the BIA and the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act. However, the BIA neglected to make any payments to the NIYC for more than a year. BIA officials claimed that the Wounded Knee incident had tied up most of the BIA’s resources, and the agency conducted several investigations into pan-tribal groups such as the NIYC. This plunged

⁹⁰ *Americans Before Columbus* (Albuquerque, NM), 3 Aug 1973, Vol 4 Iss. 1.

the Youth Council into severe financial disarray.⁹¹ To make matters worse, Wilkinson found himself unable to draft a proposal for the Field Foundation during the Spring of 1973. This Field Foundation had provided roughly \$40,000 a year since Wilkinson became executive director, but with a declining staff and mounting financial problems, he only managed to obtain an emergency grant of \$10,000 for the second half of 1973. Moreover, the controversy of Wounded Knee convinced some directors of the Field Foundation that allocations to the NIYC should be cut back considerably. The Field Foundation would have probably cut back support were it not for Leslie Dunbar's growing friendship with Wilkinson.⁹² Thus NIYC leaders had to reinvent themselves to adjust to this new political climate brought about by Wounded Knee.

After the Wounded Knee siege, the NIYC began to emphasize the importance of tribal affiliation and to downplay pan-tribal identity. Immediately after AIM agreed to disarm and evacuate Wounded Knee on May 5, Wilkinson sent a letter to the Field Foundation. He apologized for not communicating with the Field Foundation during the Wounded Knee incident, but he "felt that the foundation preferred it this way" given the elevated media attention that Wounded Knee had attracted.

Wilkinson found it necessary to distance the NIYC from Wounded Knee. He assured the Field Foundation that the "NIYC has consistently held that one's basic identity is to his tribe which is the most important thing which will ensure our survival as

⁹¹ Gerald Wilkinson to Leslie Dunbar, 29 Oct 1973, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder Fall '73 74-20, DBCAH Library.

⁹² Leslie Dunbar, "NIYC description," undated, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder Spring 1974 74-86 (75-2), DBCAH Library.

a people.” He claimed that the NIYC was “noting with glowing alarm the tendency of many in the [Indian] movement to dispel the belief in tribes. The tendency is to discount tribal differences... and to assume that every reservation belongs to any Indian.”⁹³

Indeed, only a small minority of Oglala Lakota represented the occupiers; the majority was composed of Indians from other reservations, urban Indians, and non-tribal Chicano activists.⁹⁴

Wilkinson argued that the NIYC promoted the development of tribal community members rather than pan-tribal identity so that he could disassociate his organization from the pan-Indian Wounded Knee occupation. Tribal governments were making major strides towards self-governance in the background of the BIA and Wounded Knee takeovers, and by the mid-1970s tribes could negotiate directly with the federal government. Pan-tribal direct action began to have contradictory outcomes as it became more confrontational. The BIA takeover resulted in the destruction of administrative records that tribes relied on to govern themselves. And Wounded Knee II, although powerfully symbolic of the injustices that American Indians faced, was originally intended to upset the tribal government of Pine Ridge. Moreover, it had devastating consequences for the tribal community itself, which suffered from violence and espionage in the following years. The NIYC did not abandon direct action, but the group became more cautious about how its activism would affect individual tribal communities. The NIYC had been struggling for tribal sovereignty since its inception. Although

⁹³ Gerald Wilkinson to Leslie Dunbar, 15 May 1973, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder 73-106 Spring '73, DBCAH Library.

⁹⁴ Timothy B. Powell, “All Colors Flow into Rainbows and Nooses: The Struggle to Define Academic Multiculturalism,” *Cultural Critique* 55 (Fall, 2003), 160.

protests and takeovers had been an effective way for the NIYC to win the audience of the U.S. state, by 1973 pan-tribal organizing appeared to hinder the movement towards tribal self-determination that was being promoted by the Nixon Administration.

Funders' reactions to Wounded Knee revealed how dependent the NIYC had become on outside funding, but the NIYC survived and still considered direct action as a viable tactic. More than 500 AIM members faced criminal charges related to Wounded Knee, and AIM became overwhelmed attempting to raise funds to provide legal assistance.⁹⁵ By contrast, NIYC reemerged as a fully-functioning organization by 1974. Wilkinson told the Field Foundation that although the NIYC still faced some budget issues, "we find ourselves the best organized Indian activist organization in the country." Wilkinson could even point to the organization's recent history as a militant group to argue that the NIYC played a unique role among Indian groups. Wilkinson contended that the NIYC was "the only group in Indian country working with extremist angry radical groups and more conservative tribal chairmen and established Indian leadership."⁹⁶

Dunbar read Wilkinson's letter and was "so impressed by it that I did something rare, which was to excerpt big chunks of it for my boards' reading."⁹⁷ The Field Foundation had been funding the NIYC only haphazardly with emergency loans since the Wounded Knee incident. However, Leslie read Wilkinson's new proposal and agreed to

⁹⁵ Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 270-271.

⁹⁶ Gerald Wilkinson to Leslie Dunbar, 29 Apr 1974 Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder Fall 73 74-20, DBCAH Library.

⁹⁷ Wilkinson's letter is quoted from in the above paragraph.

secure whatever funding the NIYC needed to resume its prior level of activity.⁹⁸ The NIYC embraced its paradoxical role as an ally of both militant youth and establish tribal leadership, and the Field Foundation continued to view the NIYC as representative of Indian issues nationally.

Wilkinson's skills as an organization director should not obscure the fact that the NIYC was still very much a reflection of Native youth up to and during the Wounded Knee occupation. This reflected changes that had taken place much earlier than Wilkinson's directorship, under the leadership of Clyde Warrior (Ponca) in the mid-1960s. Before Warrior had become elected director, he had become increasingly popular among Indian youth through militant rhetoric that often made the organization's funders of the 1960s uncomfortable. Warrior had almost scared away the NIYC's main donor, the United Scholarship Service, when his famous essay "Which One Are You?" listed different types of Indians who caved to the dominant society to varying degrees. Labeling himself "an angry nationalist" type, Warrior called young Native Americans to embrace their "new Indianness" and "raise some hell."⁹⁹ The following year, Warrior was elected president of the NIYC in a landslide victory, and he consolidated his power by creating an age requirement for the Youth Council's board of directors. From 1965 on, 75 percent of those who sat on the board had to be under the age of 21, and the young and militant board kept Warrior as president until his early death in 1968. Wilkinson inherited this reality, and a young and impatient board ensured that Wilkinson would lead the NIYC in

⁹⁸ Leslie Dunbar to Gerald Wilkinson, 18 Jun 1974, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder Spring 1974 74-86 (75-2), DBCAH Library.

⁹⁹ Shreve, *Red Power Rising*, 148-149.

a militant direction at least until Wounded Knee II dramatically changed the political landscape.

Throughout the heightened period of Red Power, the NIYC often reflected the militant views of its board rather than the personality of Wilkinson. Up to and during the Wounded Knee occupation, NIYC members protested the constitutions of the Creek and Cherokee tribes, which they claimed gave “white” or “mixed-blooded” Cherokees and Creeks hegemonic control over those tribal governments.¹⁰⁰ Wilkinson made many of these charges personally, which had some irony because according to many Wilkinson “didn’t look Indian.” His mysterious background as a North Carolina man of Cherokee descent led some members to complain that a “white man” controlled the council, at least initially.¹⁰¹ By 1973 Wilkinson had won over many of his critics by adopting the militant language of Clyde Warrior and by taking on controversial causes that were popular among young Indian youth, such as regaining control of the Cherokee and Creek tribal councils from “white” Indians. The pan-tribal structure of the NIYC offered an avenue for protesting the leadership of newly self-governing tribes in the early 1970s, but this role faded as the pan-tribal groups themselves lost much of their legitimacy with the

¹⁰⁰ Gerald Wilkinson to Leslie Dunbar, “Report on Activities March-April 1973,” 15 May 1973, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder 73-106 Spring ’73 DBCAH Library. Mixed-bloodedness is a complicated topic that has powerfully affected the politics of many Southeastern tribes such as Cherokees and Creeks. For thorough discussion, see Circe Sturm, *Blood Politics: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 56. For more on the Creek and Cherokee constitutions, see chapter four of Duane Champaign, *Social Change and Cultural Continuity among Native Nations* (London: Altamira Press, 2007).

¹⁰¹ Shreve, *Red Power Rising*, 185-186.

renewal of reservation-based activism.¹⁰² In the aftermath of Wounded Knee II, the NIYC shifted its course by focusing on localized issues involving justice.

The Youth Council began to work with reservation Indians to help spur grassroots activism, turning away from pan-tribal issues such as BIA reform. For example, the NIYC became deeply involved in Tohono O’odham politics after the homicide of a Tohono O’odham man roused the NIYC to action. In July 1972, a grand jury acquitted a Pima County Sherriff from charges of murdering Philip Celeya, a Tohono O’odham man, in front of several Indian witnesses. NIYC sent officers to investigate, and they found that Phelps Dodge Corporation had been systematically harassing Celeya’s family because it wanted to expand its mining town of Ajo, Arizona into Celeya family ranchland. The NIYC subsequently established a field office in Ajo and began petitioning for the Office of Contract Compliance and the Equal Employment Opportunity to investigate Phelps Dodge.¹⁰³ In the wake of controversy surrounding AIM’s pan-tribal activism, the NIYC shifted its focus from BIA reform to localized issues involving justice.

In the months following Wounded Knee, the Youth Council worked with members of the Tohono O’odham tribe to revoke Edward Berger’s contract as Tohono O’odham tribal attorney. The Youth Council spread information throughout Tohono O’odham villages about corruption surrounding Berger’s tenure. Berger made \$67,000

¹⁰² There were a number of reasons why tribal governments were perceived as illegitimate by some grassroots activists, even after the BIA lost much of its influence over tribal governance. In some cases, tribal members rejected tribal election procedures and voter turnout was low. In other cases tribal membership codes seemed to favor particularly political factions. The Cherokee and Creek membership rules left out some groups that identified as tribal citizens while enfranchising others with comparatively little tribal ancestry.

¹⁰³ NIYC Press Release, 13 Jul 1972, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder May 21, 1973 News Releases, DBCAH Library.

per year, whereas most Tohono O’odham people made less than \$1,500. Moreover, Berger had been paid almost \$500,000 to settle mining contracts and to create an industrial park on the reservation. In short, the entire tribal budget seemed to be going to one man.¹⁰⁴ The NIYC succeeded in helping Tohono O’odham citizens to pressure the tribal council to remove Berger through protests and testimony. The NIYC claimed that three out of four Tohono O’odham working on the case died as a result of organized crime, and went on to demand a federal investigation. Wilkinson made his work with the Tohono O’odham one of the centerpieces of his proposal to the Field Foundation that convinced Dunbar to reinstate funding to the NIYC as soon as possible.¹⁰⁵

Although the NIYC shifted its attention to reservation issues after Wounded Knee, urban Indians living in Navajo border towns still faced mounting discrimination and continued to stage mass demonstrations. In April 1974, police officers took almost no action after six Navajo men were murdered in Farmington and Gallup. Moreover, the press neglected to cover the executions until a white man was murdered.¹⁰⁶ Indians in New Mexico were outraged. Relatives of the slain men organized a silent protest with AIM and the UNM Kiva Club, and over 3,000 mostly Navajo people marched on May 4. Demonstrators carried placards reading, “White Man’s Racism Must Stop,” “Indian Unity,” and similar pan-tribal messages. Tijerina joined the march, recalling his collaboration with the NIYC in the 1968 Poor People’s Campaign. He asked a reporter if

¹⁰⁴ “Today’s Papago,” 8 Apr 1973, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder May 21, 1973 News Releases, DBCAH Library.

¹⁰⁵ Gerald Wilkinson to Leslie Dunbar, 29 Apr 1974 Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder Fall 73 74-20, DBCAH Library.

¹⁰⁶ NIYC Press Release, 30 Apr 1974, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder Fall 73 74-20, DBCAH Library.

this “is still the day and age when the philosophy is that the only good Indian is a dead Indian?” John Redhouse (Navajo) emerged as the leader of the protest, and he presented a list of demands to the City of Farmington requesting a further investigation. Redhouse helped instigate a New Mexico-based campaign against anti-Indian racism, but he soon joined the NIYC and shifted his attention elsewhere.¹⁰⁷

In 1974, the NIYC also began to help organize Navajo residents of Burnham, New Mexico to resist the construction of coal gasification plants by El Paso Natural Gas and Western Coal and Gasification Company. The NIYC created a new top-level position and hired John Redhouse as the project coordinator, giving him the same salary as Wilkinson.¹⁰⁸ Redhouse’s position in the NIYC led him to refocus much of the energy of Native activists in northwest New Mexico from generalized anti-racism rallies to project-specific protests.

The NIYC adapted to the changing political climate of activism in the U.S. Along with Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, and other American Indian groups like AIM; the NIYC embraced tactics from the Civil Rights Movement through the early 1970s. After the Wounded Knee incident, the NIYC began organizing around localized environmental issues. Environmental concerns commanded greater attention through the 1970s until the movement finally culminated in mass demonstrations around global issues like ozone depletion, acid rain, and nuclear energy and weapons. The NIYC both

¹⁰⁷ *Americans Before Columbus* (Albuquerque, NM), May 1974, Vol. 7, No. 2

¹⁰⁸ Report by Judge Polier to Leslie Dunbar, 27 Feb 1975, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder NIYC Aug 1974 75-2, DBCAH Library.

benefited from and was a part of the rapidly expanding sphere of environmental activism in the U.S.

By the mid-1970s, the NIYC shifted its attention to environmental issues, and Redhouse's role in the organization allowed the NIYC to attract a broad base of supporters.¹⁰⁹ It was at once an environmental issue and a social justice issue. On the one hand, the construction of massive coal gasification plants would deplete the already meager water from the San Juan River watershed, and gasification would involve enormous strip mining operations that would make the land impossible to reclaim. At the same time, the new plants would draw tens or hundreds of thousands of non-Indians to move to boom towns within the Navajo Nation, and the influx of non-Indian residents could threaten Navajo culture and sovereignty.¹¹⁰ The planned project would consume almost two billion tons of strip mined coal to produce gas for faraway markets in Southern California.¹¹¹ The campaign to stop coal gasification quickly became the NIYC's main project.

The NIYC's campaign to stop gasification underscored the complexities of the environmental activism that emerged in Indian Country in the 1970s. The NIYC used the language of sovereignty and self-determination even when its official position was at odds with the tribal government. The Navajo Nation supported the gasification project on the grounds that the benefits of economic development outweighed the environmental

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ NIYC Press release, 6 Jan 1975, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder NIYC Aug 1974 75-2, DBCAH Library.

¹¹¹ "What is Coal Gasification?" Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder NIYC Aug 1974 75-2, DBCAH Library.

risks. The NIYC's deep analysis of the potential social and cultural impacts of the project illustrated the NIYC's commitment to support issues that strengthened tribal sovereignty. The NIYC's position resembled its ambivalence towards the Cherokee and Tohono O'odham tribal councils, and Wilkinson and Redhouse showed little hesitation in going up against the Navajo Nation to protest coal gasification. Ironically, the NIYC often found itself taking positions against tribal governments because the expanding authority of tribes in the 1970s meant that tribal governments rarely requested the NIYC's assistance.

The NIYC put most of its resources and energy towards creating grassroots awareness of the campaign to stop coal gasification. The Youth Council also lobbied the U.S. Congress to prevent the allocation of a two billion dollar loan to the energy companies that was meant to jump-start the project. The Youth Council struggled against the efforts of the multi-billion dollar energy companies and Navajo Tribal Chairman Peter MacDonald to move the project forward.¹¹² Nevertheless, the NIYC's campaign allowed it to attract a broad coalition of support that included environmental groups, Navajo grassroots organizations, and Black and Chicano associations.¹¹³ But despite the diversity of supporters, the issue remained one of Navajo self-determination rather than pan-Indian resistance. Redhouse argued that "It would be a very grave mistake for the Navajo Tribal Council to approve gasification... It could be a vote for termination of the

¹¹² Bradley Glenn Shreve, "Up Against Giants: The National Indian Youth Council, the Navajo Nation, and Coal Gasification: 1974-1977" *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 30:2 (2006), 23, 26-28.

¹¹³ Coalition for Navajo Liberation News Release, "People's Freedom March," 24 Aug 1974, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder NIYC Aug 1974 75-2, DBCAH Library.

Navajo as a people.”¹¹⁴ By shifting its focus to environmental issues, the NIYC could support issues that were tribal specific while still attracting allies from many different backgrounds.

The structure of the NIYC changed as the group shifted its course to rally against coal gasification on the Navajo reservation. The NIYC severed its ties with the BIA and acquired control of the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act funds for American Indians. As a result, the NIYC found itself able to expand its full time staff at the national office from three or four members to twenty-seven. The Youth Council also acquired funds directly through the Indian Education Act, which allowed it to open several remedial schools in New Mexico and Oklahoma. But outside of running the schools, the NIYC practically became a one-issue organization based around opposing development on the Navajo reservation.¹¹⁵

The NIYC participated in its last foray into direct activism when it orchestrated a sit-in by 75 Navajos. The protesters stormed the Navajo Council’s chambers and prevented tribal proceedings for seven hours. The following day, tribal police arrested and jailed eighteen demonstrators. Ultimately Congress rejected plans to finance the two energy corporations, effectively ending the movement in 1977. Congress threw out the proposal for reasons that had nothing to do with NIYC’s campaign.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, the Youth Council emerged as an organization that barely resembled the militant youth group

¹¹⁴ Albuquerque Tribune, (Albuquerque, NM), 6 Jan 1975.

¹¹⁵ Letter to NIYC Board Members, 26 Mar 1976, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder NIYC Aug 1974 75-2, DBCAH Library.

¹¹⁶ Shreve, “Up Against Giants,” 25, 28.

of the early 1970s. By 1977 the NIYC had a large full-time staff, administrative independence from the BIA, and an ideological focus on environmental sustainability that was practically non-existent before the Wounded Knee occupation.

The NIYC's dramatic increase in organizational capacity by the late 1970s made the pan-tribal demonstrations that had marked its earlier years seem less effective than legal or political pressure, and the BIA and Wounded Knee occupations proved that direct action could lead to major setbacks. Executive Director Gerald Wilkinson still ran the NIYC, and he would continue to do so until his death in 1989 at the age of 50.¹¹⁷ But the Youth Council had changed.

Unlike AIM, the NIYC looked away from militancy and provided services, such as employment assistance and training. AIM's takeovers came to an end, with many of its leaders embroiled for years in the legal battles that followed the Wounded Knee incident. AIM's last major engagement was the "Longest Walk" in 1978, a march from Alcatraz to Washington, D.C. organized to bring attention to proposed legislation that would have eroded treaty rights and tribal sovereignty. Meanwhile, the National Congress of American Indians continued to lobby for greater tribal self-determination. All three organizations continued to struggle for tribal sovereignty in different ways, and modern tribes came closer to that goal in the 1970s than they ever had before. Congress passed a series of bills that allowed tribes to administer many programs formerly run by the BIA. Even if this version of sovereignty fell short of what the NIYC and AIM were demanding

¹¹⁷ *New York Times* (New York, NY), 2 May 1989.

in the early 1970s, pan-Indian groups shifted their focus to protecting the newly re-established treaty relationship between tribes and the federal government.

EPILOGUE

In 1974, Wilkinson still felt that he needed to justify the professionalization of the NIYC. Wilkinson argued that “if we utilized exclusively protest marches and demonstrations we would not need the professional core, but we also deal with matters of greater complexity.”¹¹⁸ By the 1980s, this “professional core” was the heart of the Youth Council’s activities. The rapid transformation of the Youth Council in the early 1970s has all but erased the historical memory of the organization’s role in that era’s rising militancy. Even Wilkinson seemed to forget that the Youth Council once employed direct action, and he became an outspoken critic of AIM’s confrontational tactics by the late 1980s. But in spite of Wilkinson’s criticism of AIM’s direct action, the NIYC used the same tactics during the 1970s.

Under the leadership of Gerald Wilkinson, the National Indian Youth Council transformed from a pan-Indian group that balanced militant tactics with reform and services to a professionalized organization that assisted localized reservation causes and operated under a non-profit model that became increasingly common in the 1970s. But until AIM’s standoff at Wounded Knee, the NIYC functioned very much as it had under Warrior, Dumont, and others in the mid-1960s. The Youth Council was still service organization that operated education programs while pressuring for political reform through both indirect and direct action. Just as it had in the 1960s, the NIYC under Wilkinson courted wealthy foundations while producing militant rhetoric that attracted

¹¹⁸ NIYC Budget Narrative, 30 Jul 1974, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T26, Folder Spring 1974 74-86 (75-2), DBCAH Library.

Indian youth frustrated with the slow pace of change. And while the NIYC pioneered American Indian direct action through sit-ins and marches on Washington in the decade prior to Wounded Knee, Wilkinson oversaw a Youth Council that participated in direct action more frequently and more intensely than ever before. Although led by an almost entirely new leadership, the National Indian Youth Council was at the forefront of the height of Red Power that swept the United States between 1969 and 1973.

The Youth Council finally abandoned direct action after Wounded Knee II because it became clear that the gains it had made by pressuring for federal reform were vulnerable to disruptions in federal service delivery caused by large pan-Indian demonstrations. There is no evidence that foundations did anything to steer the NIYC in a more moderate direction. By contrast, the Field Foundation was attracted to the NIYC precisely because of the attention it drew during its controversial participation in the Poor People's Campaign. Moreover, Wilkinson never hesitated to inform the Field Foundation of the NIYC's involvement in protests and sit-ins.

The period of heightened American Indian action after 1969 also saw a series of positive changes in Indian Country. The Youth Council helped ensure that Native Americans with similar ideologies and goals, such as self-determination and sovereignty for tribes, were given high-level positions in the BIA. In 1974, the Supreme Court ruled in *Morton v. Mancari* that Indian status was a political rather than a racial category, and the increased powers of tribal governments allowed American Indians to pressure for

reform at the tribal level.¹¹⁹ At the same time, the U.S. Congress passed a series of progressive laws that culminated in the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act in 1975, which gave tribal governments the ability to manage federal programs themselves.¹²⁰ All of these gains strengthened tribal sovereignty while making pan-tribal organizing more and more obsolete.

The NIYC played a powerful role in pressuring for reform at the federal level, both through lobbying and through demonstrations. Yet the result was a new politics that left little room for pan-Indian activism. In the aftermath of Wounded Knee, it seemed that large pan-tribal actions had the potential for attracting enormous attention without leading to any clear benefit for Indian peoples. Only one year later, Wilkinson applied for a grant made available through the new Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), and to his surprise the NIYC was awarded an astonishing \$359,358. The NIYC became so successful at administering CETA funds that by 1982 its job training budget stood at over \$1 million.¹²¹ Yet as the NIYC continued to grow as an organization, most tribal governments soon suffered serious setbacks. The Reagan Administration dramatically cut federal funding to Native tribes, which plunged all but a few Native communities into devastating poverty.¹²² The National Indian Youth Council had spearheaded much of the direct activism of the early 1970s, but by the 1980s the NIYC

¹¹⁹ Helton and Robertson, "The Foundations of Federal Indian Law," 44.

¹²⁰ See Philip S. Deloria, "The Era of Tribal Self-Determination: An Overview." In *Indian Self-Rule: First-Hand Accounts of Indian-White Relations from Roosevelt to Reagan*, ed. Kenneth R. Philip, (Logan: Utah State University).

¹²¹ Shreve, *Red Power Rising*, 199-200.

¹²² NIYC News Release, 8 Feb 1985, Field Foundation Archives, Box 2T56, Folder NIYC 85-85, DBCAH Library.

cautioned against militancy and chose to focus instead on the emerging global indigenous movement.

Between 1969 and 1973, Native American youth found few contradictions between accepting foundation funding to promote legal reform while engaging in civil disobedience. The NIYC had done both in the 1960s, and it expanded its involvement in direct and indirect action at the height of Red Power. Foundation support gave the organization resources to negotiate with the state at multiple levels, and militancy became less viable as the NIYC's power and influence grew. This did not stop the NIYC from sponsoring large acts of protest up to and during the highly visible Wounded Knee occupation, and it would continue to employ sit-ins as a tactic even after Wounded Knee. But the federal and philanthropic response to AIM's occupations of the BIA headquarters and Wounded Knee proved that militant tactics could be counterproductive. A new era of self-determination meant that tribes became the focus of American Indian politics after Wounded Knee, and pan-Indianism faded from view.

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