

Abstract

This thesis examines Indigenous resistance in Chicago during the 1960s and 1970s, arguing that Native community-building and strategic rhetoric formed the core of urban Indigenous resistance in this period. While national narratives of Native activism often overlook Chicago, the city's Indigenous community strongly resisted Euro-American colonialism through a variety of methods. This paper narrates the experiences of the communities while considering the unique urban backdrop of Chicago and the broader colonizing context of relocation policy. By analyzing three sites of activism, the 1961 American Indian Chicago Conference in Hyde Park, the American Indian Center in Uptown, and the Chicago Indian Village in Wrigleyville, the thesis traces both continuity and change in Indigenous strategies, demonstrating how community itself functioned as an assertion of sovereignty and survivance while rhetorical approaches shifted from subversive diplomacy in the early 1960s to overt militancy in the 1970s. Centering Indigenous voices, this project challenges Eurocentric historical narratives and positions Chicago as a crucial hub of community, rhetoric, and resistance. These stories demonstrate how Native Chicagoans sustained and transformed Indigenous traditions of diplomacy, survival, and sovereignty.

**Creating Community and Maintaining Resistance:
Chicago Indigenous Activism in the 1960s and 70s**

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Introduction

“And for three or four nights I'd wake up in the middle of the night feeling that there was something drastically wrong.”¹ Ben Bearskin briefly shared his experience going back home to Nebraska in a longer interview with Studs Terkel. Terkel interviewed Benjamin Bearskin in 1965 as a part of a longer series of interviews with Chicagoans to investigate urban life in the twentieth century. So what did Ben² find so wrong with his nights spent in Nebraska? Ben went on to share, “it puzzled me until I began to realize that it was quiet, that was what was wrong.”³ Spoken like a true Chicagoan, Ben grew accustomed to the “street noises” that he could no longer sleep without.⁴ Anyone from the city can relate. As Chicagoans, silence often becomes deafening and we hold onto the rare sound of a passing ambulance that reminds us, so fondly, of the city we call home.

Continuing the interview, Ben explained "I think that's a source of pride, a lot of fellas feel that it's a source of pride because we enjoy a distinction that no other person has. We are at home whereas every other person came from somewhere else."⁵ When Ben referred to "home," he wasn't talking about Chicago. Benjamin Bearskin grew up on the Winnebago reservation in Nebraska and moved to Chicago in 1947. When Ben talked about “home,” he referred to Turtle Island, the original name for the land of the North American continent. Ben was a member of the Winnebago tribe, native to the land of Wisconsin and northern Illinois.⁶ Furthermore, Ben named

¹ Benjamin Bearskin, "Interview with Benny Bearskin," by Studs Terkel, *Divisions Street: America*, 1965, <https://studsterkel.matrix.msu.edu/dstreet.php.html>.

² Throughout the paper, I attempt to use the names Native Chicagoans used for themselves or others in the community used for them. This is why I refer to several people by first names or with a formal prefix.

³ Bearskin, "Interview with Benny Bearskin."

⁴ Bearskin, "Interview with Benny Bearskin."

⁵ Bearskin, "Interview with Benny Bearskin."

⁶ “Tribal History,” Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska, last modified May 12, 2025, <https://winnebagotribe.com/tribal-history/>.

this idea of “home” and Native identity as a source of pride. His Winnebago ancestors, along with Native ancestors of other Nations, originally inhabited Turtle Island and continued to remain on the land Turtle Island and, specifically, the land of Chicago for thousands of years.

Chicago possessed unique geographical features which established the land as a hub for travel and trade long before European contact. Although the Nishnabé, or Potawatami, Nation primarily connected with this land, many Nations passed through. Winnebago, Miamis, Potawatomis, Odawas, Illinois, Shawnees, Mascoutens, Kickapoos, and Meskwaki all connected with the land of Chicago.⁷ Chicago's geography provided portage, the route taken to carry boats or goods overland from one body of water to another, from Lake Michigan to the Chicago River. Because the river connected the many waterways that made the interior of the continent navigable, Native people and, eventually, European colonists found this geographical point extremely valuable. Many Native people passed through the marshlands of Chicago, making the difficult journey from the lake to the river for trade or travel.⁸ Already, the land of Chicago served as a cosmopolitan center that controlled and connected many Native Nations within Turtle Island. In *Muddy Waters: Native Peoples, Chicago's Portage, and the Transformation of a Continent*, John William Nelson argues that this very geography aided early forms of Native resistance to European colonization. Europeans found portage at Chicago extremely difficult to navigate. Portage could be deadly depending on the season, time, and skill. Native people, specifically the Anishinaabeg, made up of the Potawatami, Ojibwe, and Odowa Nations, knew these routes well because they formed relationships with the land. Over generations, Native people cultivated a deep understanding of the land and discovered the times of day, times of year,

⁷ John William Nelson, *Muddy Ground: Native Peoples, Chicago's Portage, and the Transformation of a Continent*, 1st ed, The David J. Weber Series in the New Borderlands History Series (University of North Carolina Press, 2023), 10.

⁸ Nelson, *Muddy Ground*, 2.

and specific routes that made portage easier to accomplish.⁹ Interested in working with the land rather than conquering it, the Anishinaabeg Nations became experts at navigating the difficult terrain. By the time Europeans arrived on the land in the late seventeenth century, Indigenous people held deep knowledge of the land. Because the Europeans required help from Native people to navigate a difficult but critical portage, Native people commanded respect from Europeans and kept control of the region for much longer.¹⁰ Therefore, the very land of Chicago provided Indigenous people with the opportunity to resist European control and colonization.

In the early 1950s, Ben Bearskin sent for his wife and child, still living on the Nebraska reservation, to live with him in Chicago. At the time, Ben, his wife Fredeline, and their child made up less than 1,000 Native Americans living in Chicago. For Ben, the opportunities for work drew him to the city. He said he could rely on "50 paychecks a year" which he couldn't get back on the reservation.¹¹ Beginning in 1956, the U.S government began convincing Native people of this same idea. The 1956 Relocation Act heavily propagandized and incentivized Native people to leave reservations and relocate to cities across the United States. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) advertised the program as a chance to escape the poverty-stricken reservations and acquire a steady city job.¹² The BIA promised a great amount of assistance and aid to any person or family who chose to move to one of many cities involved in the program. Denver, Los Angeles, Cleveland, Seattle, and, of course, Chicago, participated in the effort to move Native people into their cities and help them adjust to city life. Unsurprisingly, the program did not run as advertised to Native people. In reality, the federal policy functioned as a way to remove Native people from communities they formed on reservations and disperse them

⁹ Nelson, *Muddy Ground*, 10.

¹⁰ Nelson, *Muddy Ground*, 7.

¹¹ Bearskin, "Interview with Benny Bearskin."

¹² Larry W. Burt, "Roots of the Native American Urban Experience: Relocation Policy in the 1950s," *American Indian Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (1986): 88, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1183982>.

across the country. In another attempt to eradicate Native people and tradition, the U.S. government hoped Native people would simply disappear into city life, leaving their cultures, traditions, and identities behind.¹³ Additionally, the BIA provided minimal assistance compared to what the government promised. Unfamiliar with city life and the people around them, Native people relied on the BIA to provide them with what they needed. However, the BIA would often stop providing assistance or aid to relocatees very quickly, leaving them stranded in the city.¹⁴ Many Native people despised relocation, claiming the government did not prepare them for urban life. Roughly 100,000 Native people moved from reservations to urban areas through the Relocation Program.¹⁵ Chicago's Native population alone grew from under 1,000 at the time of Ben Bearskin's move to over 20,000 by the mid 1970s.¹⁶

Many Native people became "urbanized" through the Relocation Program, but not always in the way the federal government hoped. In his interview, Ben explained, "I like this term getting 'urbanized.' It means that you have to learn the ropes. Like a person moving out from prairie country into the woods."¹⁷ Ben, likely aware of the government's true intentions behind encouraging urbanization, refused to acknowledge it as assimilationist or negative. He also refused to give in to the common Euro-American narrative that urban life was superior to the "backwardness" of reservations. In fact, his comparison of moving from the prairie to the woods took power away from the program's colonization attempts. To Ben and many other urban Natives, urbanization simply involved adapting to different environments which Native people

¹³ Burt, "Roots of the Native American Urban Experience," 94.

¹⁴ Douglas K. Miller, *Indians on the Move: Native American Mobility and Urbanization in the Twentieth Century*, Critical Indigenities (The University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 137.

¹⁵ Miller, *Indians on the Move*, 1.

¹⁶ Newspaper clipping "Ethnic groups cling to their unique heritages," July 28-29, 1976, Council of Mojave - newsletter, Box: 18, Folder: 23, Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel, The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

¹⁷ Bearskin, "Interview with Benny Bearskin."

had done for thousands of years. Therefore, Native people urbanized in their own way.¹⁸ Ben Bearskin did not fade away into the city as the lawmakers behind relocation policies intended. For Ben, his family, and many Native people who moved to Chicago from reservations, quite the opposite occurred. Chicago provided a space for Indigenous people from different Nations to come together and form a Pan-Indigenous community.

Towards the end of the 1960s and into the 70s, the public political consciousness greatly increased, particularly among young people, across the United States. Students protested the Vietnam War, the Black Panthers became more militant as they fought for Black Power, and other racialized minority groups took inspiration from the Black Power movement and protested for their rights.¹⁹ Many associate this period in U.S. history with extreme political awareness, activism, protest, and resistance. Native people, similar to other marginalized groups, built upon this momentum to create a national Native American resistance movement. The occupation of Alcatraz, the start of the American Indian Movement (AIM), the takeover of the BIA offices, the occupation at Wounded Knee, and more defined a distinct era of Native American activism. *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* by Paul Chaat Smith (Comanche) and Robert Allen Warrior (Osage) provides a detailed introduction to the radical activism of Native people on a national scale during this period. Smith and Warrior simultaneously provide an overview and an extremely detailed account of Indigenous activism. The book narrates three major events in the late 1960s and early 1970s including the occupation of Alcatraz, the takeover of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the seizure of Wounded Knee. Smith and Warrior emphasize the shift towards more major displays of activism and protest that

¹⁸ Miller, *Indians on the Move*, 4.

¹⁹ Vine Deloria, *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, 3. print, Avon Books 64477 (Avon Books, 1970), 83.

differed from earlier, more patient and gradual resistance strategies.²⁰ Through retelling these radical acts of Indigenous organization, Smith and Warrior guide readers through a turning point in Native activist history. The book has become a staple in Indigenous Studies and United States history courses. Despite their detail, Smith and Warrior include significantly fewer details of Native women within the movement. This, accompanied by their description of women often taking on more traditionally Euro-American roles, relegates women to the background of the movement. The article “American Indian Women’s Activism in the 1960s and 1970s,” written by Donna Hightower-Langston (Cherokee Nation), fills many of these gaps by framing women's roles and Indigenous feminist perspectives in a broader view of Indigenous activism. Hightower-Langston adds to Smith and Warrior's account of Native resistance through her focus on the American Indian Movement (AIM) and the Fish-in movements.²¹ By centering Indigenous women's roles and notable contributions to the movement, this article frames women as not only part of the movement but integral to it. Both *Like a Hurricane* and “American Indian Women’s Activism in the 1960s and 1970s” also emphasize sovereignty as a crucial element of Native resistance. Contrasting with other marginalized activist groups, Indigenous people did not fight for civil rights but treaty rights.²² Native people understood their struggle as one of Independence, self-determination, and sovereignty rather than equality and acceptance.

Despite the fairly comprehensive overview of Native activism in the 60s and 70s between Smith and Warrior and Hightower-Langston, neither of them mention Chicago as a center for Native activism. *Like a Hurricane* only briefly mentions Chicago when discussing Clyde Warrior's National Indian Youth Council's attendance at the American Indian Chicago

²⁰ Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* (New Press, 1996), 37.

²¹ Donna Hightower Langston, “American Indian Women’s Activism in the 1960s and 1970s,” *Hypatia* 18, no. 2 (2003): 117, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2003.tb00806.x>.

²² Langston, “American Indian Women’s Activism in the 1960s and 1970s,” 122.

Conference: "That summer, students from Boulder participated in a national conference on Indian affairs in Chicago."²³ Similarly, Hightower-Langston only mentions Chicago in one sentence she dedicates to the same conference.²⁴ Between Smith and Warrior's and Hightower-Langston's detailed accounts of Native activism, Chicago seems to be entirely left out of the Native American activist narrative. So did anything happen in Chicago? Few scholars who write about Native activism at this time even mention Chicago. Even many non-Indigenous Chicagoans have no clue what occurred in their own city just a few decades ago.

Some current scholarship does focus on Chicago as a site for Native activism; however, each piece had some limitations. In the article "The Voice of Eastern Indians: The American Indian Chicago Conference of 1961 and the Movement for Federal Recognition," authors Laurence M. Hauptman and Jack Campisi explain the tensions between Natives from the East and West at the American Indian Chicago Conference. At the conference, people from East of the Mississippi River, often belonging to smaller, urban Native communities, reported invalidating experiences as people from West of the Mississippi River, often belonging to larger Native communities on reservations, prioritized discussion about reservation life and policies around Western Nations.²⁵ This article helps to ground Indigenous thought and action in Chicago. For many, the conference inspired change in many Nations, both on and off reservation, in the coming years. Through complicating Indigenous identity, Hauptman and Campisi nuance the activism present in Chicago. However, their article only focuses on one aspect of the Chicago conference. Furthermore, Hauptman and Campisi utilize Chicago as a jumping-off point for Native resistance but do not further expand upon this resistance in the context of Chicago.

²³ Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 42.

²⁴ Langston, "American Indian Women's Activism in the 1960s and 1970s," 116.

²⁵ Laurnce Hauptman and Jack Campisi, "The Voice of Eastern Indians: The American Indian Chicago Conference of 1961 and the Movement for Federal Recognition," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 132, no. 4 (1988): 324.

David R. M. Beck and Rosalyn LaPier (Blackfeet) challenge an assumption that Native people viewed cities as foreign in *City Indian: Native American Activism in Chicago, 1893-1934*. Beck and LaPier insisted that Chicago, as well as other cities, have remained sites of Indigeneity. They share the activism by Indigenous people in Chicago from the World's Columbian Exhibition to the Century of Progress International Exhibition.²⁶ Beck and LaPier chose to frame their content around these two events to showcase common Euro-American views of Native people in tandem with the local activism of Indigenous people living in Chicago. This book frames Indigeneity in Chicago as continuous. Often overlooked, Beck and LaPier emphasize this idea of continuous Native presence as central to Indigenous self-determination, survivance, education, and more in Chicago. While this book provides quality context for future activist movements, it does not cover the period during and after relocation which significantly impacted Indigenous presence and resistance in Chicago.

Community Self-Determination: American Indian Education in Chicago, 1952-2006 presents an excellent account of educational Chicago activism and Indigenous projects, especially during the 1960s and 70s. Author John J. Laukaitis acknowledges the infrequency of what he deems "quiet activism" in activist scholarship compared to the excitement of the protests and the violence of many activist movements in the 1960s and 70s. Nonetheless, he emphasizes the importance of including "quiet activism" in resistance narratives to accurately represent the history of Native communities.²⁷ He also situates Indigenous activism within specific places. Especially in urban environments, each community's relationship with local governments, organizations, and institutions shaped the ways they advocated for themselves, their rights, and

²⁶Rosalyn R. LaPier and David Beck, *City Indian: Native American Activism in Chicago, 1893-1934* (University of Nebraska press, 2015), 2.

²⁷ John J. Laukaitis, *Community Self-Determination: American Indian Education in Chicago, 1952-2006*, Tribal Worlds (SUNY press, 2015), 1.

their identity as Native people. The book explores education as key to Native self-determination in Chicago. Laukaitis advocates for the complete agency of Native people in their own self-determination and community building. He states, “Chicago would become the epicenter of the self-determination movement.”²⁸ Laukaitis takes issue with many scholars who make assumptions about the similarity of Indigenous people in urban areas. However, in many cases, specific problems, grievances, issues, and solutions Indigenous people encountered varied widely from place to place.²⁹ Laukaitis also defined education as part of activism, especially when discussing Indigenous people and practices. While *Community Self-Determination* provides an in-depth analysis of Native Chicago education as a form of activism, it overlooks some other critical events and themes that shaped Indigenous activism in Chicago.

This paper hopes to build upon previous scholarship by examining both the continuation and shift in strategies Indigenous Chicagoans used to resist colonialism and oppression during the 1960s and 70s. One major component of Indigenous resistance strategy in Chicago throughout the period involved community. Community was central to all forms of resistance Indigenous Chicagoans engaged in. A strong community not only established a strong foundation for successful resistance, the formation and continuation of that community constituted resistance itself. To maintain such a strong sense of collective identity, belonging, and mutual care in an urban environment that attempted to individualize and colonize its people, was itself resistance. This paper also emphasizes the strategic rhetoric of different Native organizations in Chicago at different points throughout the 1960s and 70s. The change in rhetoric and language displayed how Native people manipulated distinct moments and opportunities to resist Euro-American colonialism in specific ways. From a far more subversive rhetoric in the

²⁸ Laukaitis, *Community Self-Determination*, 24.

²⁹ Laukaitis, *Community Self-Determination*, 14.

very early 60s to far more overt language by the mid 70s, the shift in rhetoric over the two decades demonstrated how Native people in Chicago aligned their resistance with the larger political and social moment that allowed them to exercise diplomacy, identity, and traditions in the best ways possible. Both community-building and rhetoric help to build a Native activist community that rejected Euro-American colonizing efforts, promoting self-determination, survivance, and sovereignty.

Chapter 1, Hyde Park, tells the story and outcomes of the American Indian Chicago Conference in 1961. This chapter focuses on how strong Native community and subversive rhetorical strategy combined to create a unique opportunity for Native people to both retain their traditions and strengthen their community while exercising their sovereignty and creating diplomacy between Native Nations and the United States. Chapter 2, Uptown, tells the longer story of Native Chicago in the 1960s and 70s through its American Indian Center. This chapter heavily emphasizes how community itself was a powerful tool for resistance against Euro-American conceptions of city life. It also examines the shifting rhetoric in the Center's newsletter to argue how Native people at the Center remained keenly aware of the broader political moment and the extent to which they could present their Indigenous identities, practices, and traditions without pushback from Euro-American systems. Throughout this chapter, the community, strategy, and rhetoric of the Center emphasize the importance of Indigenous survivance as resistance in Chicago. Chapter 3, Wrigleyville, follows the story of the Chicago Indian Village, established and active in the early 1970s. Known at the time as Chicago's most militant Native group, the Chicago Indian Village emphasizes the necessity of strong community and Indigenous values for prolonged protest. An analysis of the Village's rhetoric mirrors the

changing political climate of the Nation in which militancy and "radicalism" became increasingly popular forms of protest.

Returning to the 1965 Terkel interview, Benjamin Bearskin explained:

When you become urbanized, you learn how to think in abstract terms. When you go out here on Broadway to catch the CTA bus going South, you subconsciously know that there's a driver but you take no interest in him as a person he's more like an object... this can be a difficult thing for specifically an Indian child who in his family life and all the associations of the family he learns to establish relationships on a person to person basis.³⁰

In Euro-American scholarship, history seems to function the same way Benjamin describes the CTA bus. Academic history can often assume an "abstract" quality that removes the people from their own history. Altogether, this paper seeks to decolonize this abstraction by sharing the story of the Indigenous Chicago community in the 1960s and 70s. This is the story Benjamin Bearskin (Ho-Chunk/Oceti Sakowin), Irene Dixon, Frank Fastwolf, Willard LaMere, Rose Stevens, D'Arcy McNickle (Metis), and other community members that ran and participated in the American Indian Chicago Conference. This is the story of Fredeline Bearskin, Helen L. Peterson (Oglala Sioux), Faith Smith (Ojibwe), Margaret Redcloud (Ojibwe), Vivan Mason, and other women at Chicago's American Indian Center. This is the story of Carol Warrington, Mike Chosa, Betty Jack, and all the members of the Chicago Indian Village. The historical methods that shape this paper attempt to center the stories of the people and communities discussed. Through their stories, a narrative emerges that highlights the centrality of Native community to their resistance. Through their words, an extremely clever and relevant strategy evolves that ensures the continuation of the community, the people, and Indigenous identity.

³⁰ Bearskin, "Interview with Benny Bearskin."

Chapter 1: Hyde Park

The drum continued to beat and people danced. The laughter and chatting mixed with the sound of the drum. Children ran around and played with each other. Some people made their way over to the food for a snack. Others, finished with their food, joined the drum and began to sing again. The clock on the wall read one, darkness falling over the city long ago. But no one seemed ready to turn in, the rhythm of the drum kept everyone going. Some shared stories, others tried to solve issues from that day's meetings. Many kids, freshly out of school for the summer, ran around or played with friends. Some traveled from across the country, others from just a few neighborhoods away. Men, women, and children, members of 90 nations, Sioux, Chippewa, Oneida, Tuscara, Hopi, Navajo, Cherokee, Creek, and so many more united in one place for one purpose.³¹ Everyone who listened to the drum beat that night, those who slept in the dorm rooms, and those whose letters sat in the office all hoped to be part of something historic.

At the American Indian Chicago Conference (AICC) in June of 1961, Indigenous people from across Turtle Island made their way to Chicago in hopes of changing U.S. federal policy and Euro-American societal views towards Native people and Nations. The conference, establishing Chicago as a hub for Indigenous thought, unity, and resistance, created a strong community of diverse Native people. The members of the AICC left the conference with a stronger sense of unity between all Indigenous people of Turtle Island, an experience of a major international event led by Indigenous people and values, and a diplomatic document influencing relations between Native Nations and the United States. In "Understanding Tribal Sovereignty: Definitions, Conceptualizations, and Interpretations," Amanda J. Cobb's (Chickasaw) describes

³¹"AICC Registration," June 1961, Professional Activities, 1952-2006, Box: 345, American Indian Chicago Conference-Prelim. Matters; Minutes & Proceedings [1 of 2], William C. Sturtevant papers, 1952-2007, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

the importance of sovereignty; “for Native peoples, or nation-peoples, sovereignty is the nation’s ability to exist, thrive, and continue—not as individuals with individual rights, but as a collective whose sole existence is geared toward the continuation of the group.”³² Through participants’ commitment to this community, their Indigenous traditions of resistance, and their intelligent use of subversive rhetorical strategies, the conference became a unique opportunity for Native people to exercise their sovereignty.

This was certainly not the first time Indigenous people walked the halls at the University of Chicago. Although infrequently discussed, Chicago and Hyde Park had long served as a hub for Indigenous thought, activism, and sovereignty. Rachel Caroline Eaton (Cherokee Nation) earned her PhD from the University of Chicago just 42 years earlier in 1919, making her the first Indigenous American woman awarded a PhD.³³ She wrote about the history of the Cherokee Nation, leading the way for Indigenous people to share stories of their own Nation. In defining her own Nation’s history, Eaton found a way to promote Cherokee agency within the confines of Euro-American academia. Beginning in 1963, the University of Chicago started its funding of the "Indian Voices" newspaper publication. Not only did the university work with Clyde Warrior (Ponca), a notable Indigenous activist famous for founding the National Indian Youth Council and his work in the Red Power movement, to produce the newsletter, it provided funding through the Carnegie Corporation for the Carnegie Cross-Cultural Education Project.³⁴ In one 1965 edition of "Indian Voices," Warrior discussed his attempt to implement an accredited course on Cherokee language at Northeastern State College in Tahlequah, Oklahoma with the program

³² Amanda J Cobb, “Understanding Tribal Sovereignty: Definitions, Conceptualizations, and Interpretations,” *American Studies* 46, no. 3/4 (2005): 115–32. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40643893>, 124.

³³ Rachel Caroline Eaton, *A History of the Cherokee Nation*, ed. David V. Berry et al., *New Directions in Native American Studies*, volume 26 (University of Oklahoma Press, 2025).

³⁴ Robert K. Thomas, Clyde Warrior, *Indian Voices*, June 1965, Series 6: North American Indians 1936-1971, Box 48, Robert Thomas, Editor, Ethel Cutler Freeman papers, 1934-1972, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, 1.

funding.³⁵ He claimed “many white people persist in thinking that Indian languages are dead or dying anachronisms; but anyone living in the southwest, or in eastern Oklahoma, or in the Sioux country, or almost anywhere in Mexico or northern Canada would have to be 'deaf as a post' to believe this.”³⁶ However, the college refused to accredit the class, having “relegated [it] to the level of baton twirling, fly casting, and basket weaving.”³⁷ Warrior argued the arbitrariness of the distinction made between accredited languages like Spanish and French, and non-credited languages like Cherokee. He also recognized that accrediting a Cherokee language course would legitimize Indigenous knowledge within academia which white academics, upholding Euro-American colonizing standards, had no interest in. The Chancellor of the college explicitly stated “to offer Cherokee for credit would lead to the offering of and authorization of crediting courses in Choctaw, Creek, and other Indian languages.”³⁸ Warrior and the audience understood the implication that the Chancellor did not welcome the legitimacy of “other Indian languages” either. However, Warrior fought back in the edition of “Indian Voices” and challenged the Chancellor's decision. Through his discussion of patriotic actions of Native people during World War II, Warrior sarcastically challenged the colonialist perspective of delegitimizing Native languages: “but now it is supposed, evidently, that those same Indian speaking G-I.'s came home to shed their languages along with their uniforms.”³⁹ Warrior equates the veteran identity of the uniform, which most understood and honored, with the Native identity of the language. Warriors' conversation on the importance of Cherokee language asserted the existence and continuation of the Cherokee Nation, promoting its sovereignty. The University of Chicago, publisher of the

³⁵ Thomas and Warrior, *Indian Voices*, 1.

³⁶ Thomas and Warrior, *Indian Voices*, 2.

³⁷ Thomas and Warrior, *Indian Voices*, 2.

³⁸ Thomas and Warrior, *Indian Voices*, 2.

³⁹ Thomas and Warrior, *Indian Voices*, 2.

paper, provided Clyde Warrior with a platform to discuss such topics, acting as a platform to amplify Indigenous struggles of representation and legitimacy.

Unfortunately, the University of Chicago and other academic institutions encouraged the production of other scholarship on Native people as well. The far more funded, resourced, and prevalent work came from white anthropologists. Producing what Vine Deloria Jr. refers to as a “compilation of useless knowledge ‘for knowledge’s sake,’”⁴⁰ anthropologists at the University of Chicago studied various Native Nations, Indigenous literature, and emerging Pan-Indian traditions. Although they studied Native people, anthropologists often produced misinformed work, actively harmful to the communities they studied. Their fascination often belittled Indigenous societies and their findings often took extremely eurocentric perspectives. Anthropologists contributed to the harmful stereotype that Native people were stuck in the past. Even contemporary analyses of Native activist movements flattened complex identities and defined them “as opposed to something ‘White’”⁴¹ rather than exploring the nuances and history behind Native organizing. Their inability to decenter their own Euro-American, academic perspectives further colonizes Indigenous identity and traditions.

James H. Howard, whose work exemplifies an intellectualizing, oversimplifying anthropological perspective, published articles on Indigenous music, dance, and revitalization movements in the mid 1960s. In his analysis of the gourd dance, which he described as “quite different from most other Indian dances,”⁴² he promoted harmful, intellectualized, and reductionist views of Native people. As an explanation for the limitations of his study, he claimed “an even greater problem lies in the very cursory descriptions of the warrior society

⁴⁰ Vine Deloria, *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, 3. print, Avon Books 64477 (Avon Books, 1970), 94.

⁴¹ James H. Howard, “Pan-Indianism in Native American Music and Dance,” *Ethnomusicology* 27, no. 1 (1983): 72, <https://doi.org/10.2307/850883>.

⁴² James H. Howard, “The Plains Gourd Dance as a Revitalization Movement,” *American Ethnologist* 3, no. 2 (1976): 243, <https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.1976.3.2.02a00050>.

dances by early ethnographers, few of whom bothered to describe the choreography of the dances, much less provide transcriptions of their music.”⁴³ However, he completely ignored the possible wealth of knowledge on the subject from elders and community members that could be easily accessible if he truly cared to engage with them. Furthermore, he claims that potential interviews with members who perform the Gourd Dance would “suffer from being completely post hoc and in some sense a rationalization or justification of behavior rather than actual motivations.”⁴⁴ His intellectualization of this topic stopped him from engaging with this Native tradition in any meaningful way. Additionally, he also took the perspective of an expert, more so than the Native communities themselves. He perceived the Gourd Dance as a Pan-Indian tradition which he defined as “the process by which certain American Indian groups are losing their tribal distinctiveness and in its place are developing a generalized, nontribal ‘Indian’ culture.”⁴⁵ This definition incorporated a deficit perspective and contributed to the false and harmful narrative of the erasure of distinct Indigenous tradition. He also claims “borrowers of Pan-Indian forms are usually sublimely unaware of the specific tribal origins of the forms being borrowed”⁴⁶ which minimized the extent to which National identity remained and flourished while communities united under a common identity. Through his deficit perspective of Pan-Indianism and his argument for the “unawareness” of Indigenous communities, he also contributed to a harmful stereotype of Natives as people lacking intelligence, care, or strategy. Finally, Howard, more interested in observing the formation of new Native traditions, like the “Pan-Indian movement,” did not mention the real reason the movement began in the first place—Native people, nearly erased by the removal and attempted genocide of the U.S. government,

⁴³ Howard, “The Plains Gourd Dance as a Revitalization Movement,” 243.

⁴⁴ Howard, “The Plains Gourd Dance as a Revitalization Movement,” 255.

⁴⁵ Howard, “Pan-Indianism in Native American Music and Dance,” 71.

⁴⁶ Howard, “Pan-Indianism in Native American Music and Dance,” 71.

realized the need for community among all Native people beyond tribal affiliation to resist oppression and carry on tradition as a people. A critical analysis of Howard's paper exemplifies the stereotyping, dismissiveness, and eurocentrism that many anthropologists contributed towards.

However, by June 13th, 1961, some of the very people referred to in the monotonous writings of the white anthropologists, possibly relegated to a footnote or an appendix, may have entered the very same building to discuss their own future. The nameless faces of the “test tubes” and “living laboratories,”⁴⁷ as Deloria Jr. sarcastically called them, sat at the table, name and Nation recorded, as they drafted what they believed would be the defining document of Indigenous sovereignty in the 20th century. Occupying the very place of their once "superior" observers, the Native participants at the AICC contradicted the anthropologist in every way. Focused on real problems within their own communities, they worked to create actionable steps to improve the lives of themselves, their neighbors, their Nations and their community across the country.

Native people, struggling under the colonizing U.S. policy of relocation and termination, desired an opportunity to make their collective voice heard and exercise the sovereignty of their Nations. The Kingston conference of the Indian-Eskimo⁴⁸ Association of Canada, a conference about proposed policy changes concerning the treatment of Indigenous people in Canada, further inspired the need for a similar event in the United States. Local Chicago Native leaders worked with Sol Tax, an anthropologist at the University of Chicago, to organize the American Indian Chicago Conference (AICC). As an “action anthropologist,”⁴⁹ Tax tried to help the populations

⁴⁷ Deloria, *Custer Died for Your Sins*, 97–98.

⁴⁸ Joan Ablon, “The American Indian Chicago Conference,” in *Currents in Anthropology*, ed. Robert Hinshaw (DE GRUYTER MOUTON, 1980), 1, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110809299.445>.

⁴⁹ Nicole Collier Ryan, “Action Anthropology and Sol Tax in 2012: The Final Word? Darby C. Stapp, Eds. Richland: Northwest Anthropology. 2012. 264 Pp.,” *Student Anthropologist* 3, no. 2 (2013): 196–98, <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.sda2.20130302.00016>.

he studied. Tax's position of privilege as a white professor of anthropology and the request he received from the Emily Schwarzhaupt Foundation for a "report of the current Indian situation"⁵⁰ positioned him as a great resource to Native people. In collaboration with the local Indigenous community in Chicago, Tax used the University's resources to organize a meeting for Native people across the country. The goal of the conference centered around producing a diplomatic document concerning the future of Native communities and a plan for their relationships with the United States government. Tax delegated himself to the logistics of the conference. He reasoned "am convinced that you have much to teach that is important for all of us. We have planned for you, spoken for you, done things 'for you' and done many bad things to you. The least that we can do now is to listen to you, for once."⁵¹ Therefore, Tax set up a Steering Committee of Indigenous people as the leadership and decision makers of the conference and worked to make the University of Chicago a welcoming place for Indigenous knowledge, community, and ideas.

As Tax explained, the conference presented "a rare opportunity for Indians to speak for themselves, instead of having somebody else speak for them."⁵² Indeed, the conference planners scheduled the AICC at a unique time. In June of 1961, when the conference took place, the position of commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs remained vacant with no federal policy towards Native people.⁵³ This gave Indigenous people a unique opportunity to contribute their proposals to the federal government which could have great influence on the future of federal policy and leadership. The conference members expressed the need for a Native Commissioner

⁵⁰ Ablon, "The American Indian Chicago Conference," 1.

⁵¹ Nancy Oestreich Lurie, "The Voice of the American Indian: Report on the American Indian Chicago Conference," *Current Anthropology* 2, no. 5 (1961): 490, <https://doi.org/10.1086/200229>.

⁵² Sol Tax, "The Voice of the American Indian" May 1961, Professional Activities, 1952-2006, Box: 345, American Indian Chicago Conference-Prelim. Matters; Minutes & Proceedings [2 of 2], William C. Sturtevant papers, 1952-2007, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁵³ Tax, "The Voice of the American Indian" May 1961

“who thinks like an Indian, acts like an Indian, and understands Indian problems.”⁵⁴ Additionally, the current administration under John F. Kennedy appeared sympathetic towards issues concerning Native people and seemed fairly receptive to the idea of self-determination. Therefore, by organizing and producing a collective proposal on their ideas for their own future in June of 1961, Native people gave themselves the greatest opportunity to shift the policies and programs that greatly impacted their lives.

The Steering Committee, made up of men and women from several Nations all over the country,⁵⁵ weaved many aspects of traditional consensus-based decision making, forcibly removed from official tribal governance due to U.S. government colonization, into the fabric of the conference. This intertwined Indigenous sovereignty into the logistics and processes of the conference. Meeting days before the conference began, the Steering Committee created a report which outlined key aspects of the conference's structure. U.S. policy historically targeted traditional decision making methods in more than half of federally recognized tribes due to guidelines from the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act of 1936, or the Alaska Reorganization Act of 1936.⁵⁶ These pre-colonial governmental processes remained central to the sovereignty and community in many Nations. However, the reintroduction of these methods, formally established in the procedures of the AICC, promoted the legitimacy of Indigenous methods and increased the degree to which Native people could exercise their sovereignty. The Steering Committee decided conference members would elect a

⁵⁴ Sol Tax, "The Voice of the American Indian" PROGRESS REPORT No. 6, June 7, 1961, Professional Activities, 1952-2006, Box: 345, American Indian Chicago Conference-Prelim. Matters; Minutes & Proceedings [2 of 2], William C. Sturtevant papers, 1952-2007, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, 5.

⁵⁵ American Indian Chicago Conference, *Declaration of Indian Purpose; the Voice of the American Indian* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961), 47.

⁵⁶ LaDonna Harris et al., "Wisdom of the People: Potential and Pitfalls in Efforts by the Comanches to Recreate Traditional Ways of Building Consensus," *The American Indian Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (2001): 116, <https://doi.org/10.1353/aiq.2001.0005>.

new chairman, from a panel of names, every day for the 6 days of the conference.⁵⁷ Because of the conference's international attendance, this ensured that one Nation did not dominate the leadership. This created a more equitable structure, considering the multiple and diverse perspectives. Furthermore, they decided to divide attendees into discussion committees of no more than 50 people "in order to provide maximum opportunity for everyone to participate."⁵⁸ From the Steering Committee report, they clearly prioritized equitable contributions that ensured each member felt included. This mirrored the traditional decision making strategies of many Indigenous Nations which involved all "who were concerned with the issue or affected by the decision."⁵⁹ This also promoted unity between all members at the conference as many Indigenous ideas of community depended on participation in decision making. Each discussion committee would also elect a chairman. All members of the conference also elected a committee for rules and credentials. The Steering Committee placed great emphasis on elected representation and leadership which prioritized the collective will of the conference. Traditional Indigenous ideas of leaders which, in many Nations, "functioned primarily as facilitators, consensus builders, and announcers of decisions"⁶⁰ greatly inspired the leadership at the conference. The roles of these elected chairman and committee members, outlined clearly by the report, served as facilitators and spokespeople for the discussion committees. Moreover, the Committee decided that, for the first three days of the conference, the general assembly session at the end of each day would involve sharing reporters and conversation topics and would not involve voting on many matters.⁶¹ This idea incorporated many Indigenous concepts of decision making that involved

⁵⁷ "Report of the Steering Committee," June 1961, Professional Activities, 1952-2006, Box: 345, American Indian Chicago Conference-Prelim. Matters; Minutes & Proceedings [1 of 2], William C. Sturtevant papers, 1952-2007, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁵⁸ "Report of the Steering Committee," June 1961.

⁵⁹ Harris et al., "Wisdom of the People," 115.

⁶⁰ Harris et al., "Wisdom of the People," 115.

⁶¹ "Report of the Steering Committee," June 1961.

deep deliberation and conversation which facilitated group consensus. Additionally, the committee's hope that “as the Conference proceeds decisions can be reached in a spirit of unity and that formal balloting will not be necessary,”⁶² reflected Indigenous ideas of consensus-based decision making. Many Native Nations did not view decision making as something to win or lose. Instead, traditional methods focused on participation, discussion, community, and representation. The goal traditionally focused on finding a solution that worked in the best interest of all that had a stake in the issue; therefore, a vote was seldom necessary. Through the Steering Committee's addition of several Indigenous governmental traditions, historically undermined by colonial U.S. policy, to the conference proceedings, the AICC provided a place for Native people to practice tradition and participate in community. This gave members of the conference power in the methods used to organize their decisions, inherently uplifting the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples.

Despite the Steering Committee's hope that all members could reach a consensus, they also outlined procedures for the possibility they could not. The Committee's discussion of voting representation unearthed a vital conversation on the multitude of identities present within the AICC. This discussion contributed to an increasing awareness of the diverse experiences of Native people in the United States and ultimately led to greater unity between them. Often, Native people who lived east of the Mississippi River did not possess federal recognition, lived in more populated urban areas, and faced different problems from those living in the West.⁶³ Many Native people who lived west of the Mississippi were citizens of federally recognized nations, located on reservations, and dealt with different but equally devastating relationships with the United States government. The Steering Committee proposed that, if any decisions

⁶² “Report of the Steering Committee,” June 1961.

⁶³ Hauptman and Campisi, “The Voice of Eastern Indians: The American Indian Chicago Conference of 1961 and the Movement for Federal Recognition,” 318.

required a vote, they would weigh the decision 60% in favor of “official delegates from the federally-recognized tribes.”⁶⁴ Upon the adoption of these resolutions, Mrs. Irene Mack (Menominee), challenged this point.⁶⁵ This prompted a lively discussion from the Steering Committee on the equity of this voting method. On the one hand, Robert Burnette, President of the Rosebud Sioux, argued that “the Conference owes recognition to the elected leadership of the tribes.”⁶⁶ Supporting him, Hank Hawkins (Snohomish), said he represented 9,000 people in Washington.⁶⁷ The members of federally recognized tribes claimed that they represented a great number of people and had specific assets at stake and, therefore, should make up a majority percentage of the vote. However, those from non-federally recognized Nations felt that these delegates and that their communities already dominated the conference. They feared their voice would be underrepresented in the outcome of the conference. They argued “all who are here are Indians; all should be recognized.”⁶⁸ Native people from non-federally recognized tribes, the majority of which lived in urban areas or off-reservation, claimed U.S. officials and Native diplomacy did not consider them in any policy related to Indigenous people. However, many Native people living in the East did not have access to a large community and federal recognition like many Nations in the West. The smaller subcommittees, formed throughout the nation leading up to the Chicago conference, unified many of the Native people in the East and provided a unique opportunity for off-reservation native people to come together and form a larger community east of the Mississippi.⁶⁹ Urban and off-reservation Natives viewed Chicago as a

⁶⁴ “Report of the Steering Committee,” June 1961.

⁶⁵ “American Indian Chicago Conference – Minutes of the Opening Session,” June 13, 1961, Professional Activities, 1952-2006, Box: 345, American Indian Chicago Conference-Prelim. Matters; Minutes & Proceedings [1 of 2], William C. Sturtevant papers, 1952-2007, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁶⁶ “American Indian Chicago Conference – Minutes of the Opening Session” June 13, 1961.

⁶⁷ “American Indian Chicago Conference – Minutes of the Opening Session” June 13, 1961.

⁶⁸ “American Indian Chicago Conference – Minutes of the Opening Session” June 13, 1961.

⁶⁹ Hauptman and Campisi, “The Voice of Eastern Indians: The American Indian Chicago Conference of 1961 and the Movement for Federal Recognition,” 319.

chance to collectively express their dissatisfaction with the current system of relocation and termination on a large scale.⁷⁰ They wanted this conference to represent their concerns and their struggles from a paternalistic and harmful relationship with U.S. governmental control. Although the Committee eventually maintained the 40-60 voting split, the AICC provided a platform for Native people to discuss the disconnect between on versus off-reservation, urban vs rural, and federally recognized vs not. They considered the complexity and nuance of each Indigenous person's situation and identity. Members began to question this "us versus them" mindset and adopted views that included this diversity when considering struggles and solutions for the broader Native community. The Chicago conference assisted in the collective community of all Native peoples by providing a place for diverse Indigenous experiences to meet and deliberate.

Soon, the Chicago conference idea caught wind and attracted massive amounts of interest and support. Unfortunately, not everyone had the time, resources, or funds to attend. Many who could not attend in person wrote letters instead, exhibiting commitment from many diverse groups of Native people. Evident by the hundreds of letters written to Sol Tax and the Steering Committee leading up to the conference, Indigenous people and communities from all over desired to contribute their grievances, opinions, and solutions. Everyone from Native leaders and those on reservation tribal committees to people representing very small urban Native communities wrote to Chicago.⁷¹ Some printed their letters on letterheads while others wrote on scrap paper and all contained differing levels of English. Many people expressed their regrets for their inability to attend the conference in person. Most explained that money or missed work

⁷⁰ Hauptman and Campisi, "The Voice of Eastern Indians: The American Indian Chicago Conference of 1961 and the Movement for Federal Recognition," 316.

⁷¹ Letter Collection, 1961, Professional Activities, 1952-2006, Box: 345, American Indian Chicago Conference-Prelim. Matters; Minutes & Proceedings [1 of 2], William C. Sturtevant papers, 1952-2007, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

inhibited their travel. While the letters coming into Hyde Park represented views from a diverse range of people, all exhibited a collective commitment to changing their future.

While people in vastly diverse situations wrote to Chicago, a consistent pattern of prioritizing community emerged throughout the letters. A sense of community with fellow Natives came naturally to most people writing. Many discussed concerns and hope for the entire Indigenous community in the United States, not just those local to them. Additionally, many writers expressed an aspect of kinship with each other, even for those they had never met. One participant wrote, “one arrow is easily broken, but a handful cannot be broken.”⁷² These writers understood that they shared experiences as Indigenous people and that this identity united them. This unifying theme manifested in suggested solutions that took all Native people's situations into consideration. Many stated their specific concerns with the caveat they understood many Native people shared the issues. One person articulated this point by stating “our health, education, and welfare problems are the same as all other Indians. So we do not here mention our needs in higher education, etc.”⁷³ Many writers also shared their presumed collective grievances with the BIA.⁷⁴ While the AICC provided struggling people with an outlet to air their grievances, it also gave Native people an opportunity to center Pan-indigenous community. This positioned the idea of community as an integral part of success and future for Indigenous people.

Aside from their discussion of community, these letters expressed educational concerns as one of the largest issues facing Native people. One writer considered education as “the most

⁷² Tax, "The Voice of the American Indian" PROGRESS REPORT No. 6, 1961, 1.

⁷³ “Non-Reservation Indian Appeal to the American Indian Chicago Conference,” 1961, Professional Activities, 1952-2006, Box: 345, American Indian Chicago Conference-Prelim. Matters; Minutes & Proceedings [1 of 2], William C. Sturtevant papers, 1952-2007, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁷⁴ American Indian Center “Statement to the American Indian Chicago Conference,” June 12, 1961, Professional Activities, 1952-2006, Box: 345, American Indian Chicago Conference-Prelim. Matters; Minutes & Proceedings [1 of 2], William C. Sturtevant papers, 1952-2007, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, 1; Sol Tax, "The Voice of the American Indian" PROGRESS REPORT No. 6, June 7, 1961, Professional Activities, 1952-2006, Box: 345, American Indian Chicago Conference-Prelim. Matters; Minutes & Proceedings [2 of 2], William C. Sturtevant papers, 1952-2007, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, 2.

urgent need.”⁷⁵ The AICC gave many people the opportunity to share concerns over education which extrapolated many issues facing Native people and prioritized youth success as resistance to colonization and erasure. In these letters, Native people conveyed their need for a balance between opposing, yet quality, forms of education. Traditional Indigenous educational methods would impart Native values, teachings, and traditions on young people as a strategy of intergenerational resistance, while quality Euro-American would set their young people up for success within the Euro-American system, ensuring a high quality of life. The first major concern involved the methods of education the United States required Native children to participate in. One writer expressed their concerns that “In the schoolroom, this kind of educator tries to teach children to be ashamed of being Indian and to look down upon the ways of their elders. The children are not taught anything about the achievements and virtues of the Indian peoples but are taught much that stresses the superiority of the whites.”⁷⁶ Many clearly noticed the harmful and assimilatory practices of these schools. This writer, wishing to remove young Native people from that environment, proposed that “it might be better for the Indian peoples themselves to assume control of the schools and to try to create better kinds of schools.”⁷⁷ Through controlling the education of future generations, Nations could pass down values, traditions, and practices that would otherwise die out with their elders, ensuring their own sovereignty. Indigenous people understood the importance of intergenerational thinking and providing the next generation with these tools. Many letters also highlighted the lack of educational resources both on and off reservations and inadequate funding for primary and

⁷⁵ Sol Tax, "The Voice of the American Indian" PROGRESS REPORT No. 5, May 26, 1961, Professional Activities, 1952-2006, Box: 345, American Indian Chicago Conference-Prelim. Matters; Minutes & Proceedings [2 of 2], William C. Sturtevant papers, 1952-2007, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, 5.

⁷⁶ "Memorandum on Indian education for American Indian Chicago Conference," 1961, Professional Activities, 1952-2006, Box: 345, American Indian Chicago Conference-Prelim. Matters; Minutes & Proceedings [2 of 2], William C. Sturtevant papers, 1952-2007, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, 5.

⁷⁷ "Memorandum on Indian education for American Indian Chicago Conference," 1961.

post-secondary education which would hinder young people's quality of life in Euro-American society. Many also suggested schools establish lunch programs for Native students.

Unemployment in the household due to employer discrimination often created poverty for families. One mother, explaining how she prioritized her children's health, wrote "occasionally my own skip a lunch hour and go without because ma and pa were unable to provide that necessity."⁷⁸ These writers, often mothers, described how school lunch programs could greatly increase the living standards for their children. Another concern involved the barriers to entering higher education for young Native people. Understanding the importance of higher education to a quality life under Euro-American standards, Native people discussed needs for tuition assistance, acceptance requirements, and higher quality post-secondary vocational programs. Through their discussion of education, Indigenous people writing to the AICC expressed their concerns and suggestions on issues of food insecurity, assimilation, employment, and intergenerational unity. Their focus on both traditional forms of Indigenous-centered education and quality Euro-American educational opportunities for their young people, implemented in the final proposal document at the AICC, demonstrated their commitment to education as a way to improve their lives within and beyond Euro-American society.

The AICC's organizers, including the Steering Committee and Tax, centered community and financial accessibility in multiple aspects of the event. Especially as many Native people, systematically marginalized by U.S. policy, had limited funds and resources, the conference prioritized affordability and mutual aid to gather representation from the maximum number of the country's many Indigenous communities. To provide the greatest assistance possible for the

⁷⁸ Josephine S. Hall, letter to American Indian Chicago Conference from Albert Lea, Minnesota, June 12, 1961, Professional Activities, 1952-2006, Box: 345, American Indian Chicago Conference-Prelim. Matters; Minutes & Proceedings [1 of 2], William C. Sturtevant papers, 1952-2007, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, 2.

highest attendance, the organizers decided to adjust the price based on a few factors. To make up for time and travel expenses, the AICC implemented a distance subsidy which lowered the price of the conference for those who lived farther from Chicago.⁷⁹ Those who lived closer, they reasoned, could and did accommodate the difference. The organizers also varied the price of attendance for Indigenous and non-Indigenous members.⁸⁰ This simultaneously partially subsidized the cost for Indigenous members and conveyed that Native voices would take priority at the AICC. This structure of pricing, while a small consideration, created a more equitable environment for the attendees. Additionally, a distinct lack of explanation or discussion around these pricing choices indicated a strong understanding of equity and generosity among the attendees. Furthermore, Native people in Chicago welcomed those from out of town with open arms. While many visitors stayed in the university dorms during the conference, local Native Chicagoans opened their doors to anyone who needed a place to stay, embracing their role as hosts. Benjamin Bearskin, president of the Chicago American Indian Center, welcomed the entire group on the first night of the conference and made the American Indian Center a welcoming place for all attendees during the following days.⁸¹ Aligned with traditional Indigenous values of generosity, those that could would give what they had and those who needed assistance would graciously accept it. The pricing adjustments and generosity of local Natives contributed to a strong sense of community, belonging, and togetherness throughout the conference which unified all attendees and strengthened the collective power of the conference.

⁷⁹ American Indian Chicago Conference Pricing, June 1961, Professional Activities, 1952-2006, Box: 345, American Indian Chicago Conference-Prelim. Matters; Minutes & Proceedings [1 of 2], William C. Sturtevant papers, 1952-2007, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁸⁰ American Indian Chicago Conference Pricing, June 1961

⁸¹ Sol Tax, "The Voice of the American Indian" PROGRESS REPORT No. 2, February 22, 1961, Professional Activities, 1952-2006, Box: 345, American Indian Chicago Conference-Prelim. Matters; Minutes & Proceedings [2 of 2], William C. Sturtevant papers, 1952-2007, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, 2.

So, during the middle of June in 1961, The University of Chicago became the setting of a truly international gathering. People from all over Turtle Island traveled to Chicago to participate in the Pan-Indigenous community the AICC created. Each night, after a long day of discussion, members would gather in Mandell Hall just to talk some more. Locals like Ben, Freddie, and Norma Jean Bearskin, who lived on the North side of Chicago less than an hour away, likely stayed late into the night. Perhaps Dennis Bushyhead (Cherokee) from Claremore, Oklahoma started a conversation with Marie Potts (Maidu) from Sacramento, California about their relatives at home. Maybe Lloyd Eagle Bird (Sioux) from the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota talked with Mr. and Mrs. Beaulieu (Ojibwa) from Ontario, Ottawa about their trips to the conference. The AICC did not only give Indigenous people a space for productive problem solving, it carved out time for community building. The conference brought people from different Nations, identities, and experiences together. Because the conference prioritized relationship building as well as deliberation, members came out of the conference with a much more united view of Indigenous communities across Turtle Island. While they all had their differences, all members clearly hoped to contribute to something much greater than themselves.

During the AICC, the role of gender, such a prevalent issue in Euro-American society at the time, did not emerge as a concern or topic of conversation. The lack of explicitly gendered, hierarchical language surrounding the structure or discussions of the conference demonstrated the AICC's commitment to Indigenous values and practices. Compared to many Euro-American women at the time, who fought against a misogynistic culture that constantly belittled and berated them, Indigenous women did not have the same concerns. Native American conceptions of gender differed from Euro-American ideas. In many Indigenous Nations, as Diné writer, poet, and scholar, Laura Tohe explains in her article "There is No Word For Feminism in My

Language,” “we didn't need to fight for our place in our societies because it surrounded us constantly.”⁸² Many Native people, influenced by their Nations' matriarchal and matrilineal structures, did not contribute to the harmful misogyny that plagued many Euro-Americans. In most Indigenous Nations, citizens treated women and their responsibilities with respect and honor. In many Nations, Native women were also integral to leadership and decision making. Therefore, Native women naturally became integral to the conference not only as participants but active planners and members of the Steering Committee. After all, Irene Mack (Menominee) initially opposed the process of voting that would give urban Natives less voice, demonstrating Native women's willingness to participate as active members with important opinions, not just as background support.⁸³ Of course, from a Euro-American perspective, Indigenous women faced multiple forms of oppression, considering their intersectional identities. However, the conference lacked the overt misogyny and sexism prevalent in Euro-American society at the time. The topic of gender did not appear in any of the letters sent in to the conference or the resulting document produced by the conference. Many women wrote lengthy letters to the Steering Committee and Sol Tax. If they thought gender oppression was an issue in their community or in the broader Native community, they would have likely mentioned it in their letter. Yet, even the letter written by women lacked any discussion on the topic of gender. Similarly, the Declaration of Indian Purpose, the final document produced by the collective power of the conference, did not mention gender. Considering many traditional Indigenous perspectives of gender, this topic likely did not emerge as an issue during conversations at the conference. Within the majority of Native communities, Indigenous women did not attribute systemic oppression to their gender because

⁸² Laura Tohe, “There Is No Word for Feminism in My Language,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 15, no. 2 (2000): 110, <https://doi.org/10.1353/wic.2000.0014>.

⁸³ “American Indian Chicago Conference – Minutes of the Opening Session” June 13, 1961.

Indigenous systems did not subordinate women.⁸⁴ The AICC, which decentered Euro-American perspectives, gave Native women a chance to define and solve issues on their own terms. Furthermore, conference attendees treated women as equals and respected as leaders in the community. This relative gender equality during the conference resisted Euro-American hierarchies. Instead, they conceptualized gender in terms of Indigenous relationships and traditions which contributed to the sovereignty of Native people through the continuation of their historic societal structures.

As the conference began, another issue of representation emerged. The members of the AICC, many coming from across the country, were excited to experience the city of Chicago. However, one moment from the conference highlighted the complex exchange between Euro-American institutions and Native communities that encompassed concepts of expectation and transaction as well as subversive Indigenous strategies of representation and diplomacy. On the Saturday of the AICC, the White Sox invited the members of the conference to attend a baseball game for free. However, they also had a request from the attendees; "In return, the Chicago White Sox invite those who come with your costumes to demonstrate an Indian Dance out on the ball field a few minutes before game time."⁸⁵ The request from the White Sox, part of a major Euro-American sports institution, established this relationship with AICC members with the expectation of entertainment under the guise of philanthropy. Despite their offer of free tickets, which they undoubtedly viewed as charitable, their expectation of entertainment lacked any consideration for the labor of Native performers, making the relationship transactional. Additionally, the request specifically for an "Indian Dance" in "costume" showed an extreme

⁸⁴ Tohe, "There Is No Word for Feminism in My Language," 107.

⁸⁵ Sol Tax, Final Report of the Coordinator, May 26, 1961, Professional Activities, 1952-2006, Box: 345, American Indian Chicago Conference-Prelim. Matters; Minutes & Proceedings [1 of 2], William C. Sturtevant papers, 1952-2007, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, 2.

lack of education, care, and accuracy on the part of the White Sox which undermined the value and significance of the performance for the White Sox and their spectators. Furthermore, this lack of care resulted in more effort and labor from Native performers as the Sox then tasked Native people with planning and coordinating all the elements of their performance. However, AICC members did end up performing which carried its own subversive form of power. With the offer to perform in front of thousands at Comiskey Park, members likely saw this as a chance to represent their identities, showcase their traditions, and promote diplomacy for a largely Euro-American audience. Each member likely faced a tension between appropriation and representation while making their decision. Because this type of tokenism from Euro-American institutions occurred frequently in this decade, this example characterizes many moments where Native people had to contend with ideas of appropriation, transactions, inclusion, and diplomacy. However, these interactions, often steeped in ignorance, invisible labor, and an expectation of service from Euro-American people and institutions, did offer an opportunity for resistance. Native people at the AICC cleverly took advantage of this opportunity as part of a diplomatic strategy to improve relations, representation, and awareness in Euro-American public opinion.

Given the broader political context of the United States during the early 1960s, a subversive strategy that promoted sovereignty and awareness while working within Euro-American frameworks and expectations was logical. Indigenous activism stemmed from a long history of resistance to colonialism and resilience to attempted erasure, eradication, and genocide which stayed fairly consistent over the centuries of colonial rule. However, the strategies Native people employed to resist colonists and white supremacy at various historical moments did change. In the very early 1960s, the United States began to emerge from a very conservative, patriotic decade. Soldiers returned home after World War II and men took their

place back as the heads of household as they relegated women to a domestic sphere once again. The Red Scare and McCarthyism of the 1950s, still lingering, sparked fear in any conversation deemed too radical or anti-American.⁸⁶ However, the ongoing Cold War between the United States and the USSR motivated U.S. officials to minimize discriminatory policies to limit fuel for anti-American propaganda by the USSR.⁸⁷ Indigenous activists considered all of this in the strategies, proposals, and advocacy they developed. An approach U.S. society deemed too radical would, at best, be dismissed and, at worst, be met with violence and increased oppression. However, Indigenous activists could take advantage of the patriotism and anti-discriminatory sentiment. In this way, Native resistance strategically considered broader political implications and cleverly shaped advocacy to create the greatest opportunities for Native people.

Specifically, Native people's rhetorical strategies during the AICC indicated their awareness of the political and social moment and allowed for the greatest expression of freedom and resistance met with the least pushback from Euro-American society and government. Notes from the meeting, the letters sent into Chicago, and the Declaration of Indian Purpose all contain patriotic rhetoric and language emphasizing reform within the limits of U.S. government and policy. AICC leaders and participants implemented patriotic themes in their written documents that incorporated extremely calculated, careful, and intentional rhetorical strategies. One Navajo man, Mike Kiyaani, wrote to the AICC about the violence he and his church experienced from police for using their "Sacramental peyote herb."⁸⁸ As a father and a veteran himself, Mr. Kiyaani expected the U.S. army to draft his son for the Vietnam War, writing "I have a feeling that he might be called upon to serve in the Armed Forces, to which I have no objection for my

⁸⁶ Burt, "Roots of the Native American Urban Experience," 86.

⁸⁷ Burt, "Roots of the Native American Urban Experience," 86.

⁸⁸ Mike Kiyaani, letter to American Indian Chicago Conference, June 13, 1961, Professional Activities, 1952-2006, Box: 345, American Indian Chicago Conference-Prelim. Matters; Minutes & Proceedings [1 of 2], William C. Sturtevant papers, 1952-2007, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, 2.

boy to go.” However, he further explained “But, from the viewpoint of being a U.S. citizen, and a U.S. veteran, would this seem logical and fair to me to have someone that's dear to my heart serve in the Armed Forces and at the same time be denied my constitutional right I dearly earned.”⁸⁹ Mr. Kiyaani's argument employed a few key rhetorical strategies which leveraged his relatability and likely evoked sympathy from Euro-Americans. First, he appealed to his identity as a U.S. veteran and his son’s likely participation in the U.S. military to argue his entitlement to rights as a U.S. citizen. Next, he appealed to his constitutional rights to practice his religion. Both operate within the U.S. conception of citizenship, rights, and legality. Furthermore, in the opening keynote address to the conference, Pueblo anthropologist and linguist, Edward P. Dozier asked ““Not simply what can our government do for us, but what can we do for our government.”⁹⁰ By forefronting patriotism, Dozier demonstrated the conference's collective dedication to the United States, appealing to a ease Euro-Americans associated with pro-American sentiments. Additionally, while many Indigenous people had citizenship in their own Nations, they positioned themselves foremost as U.S. citizens worthy of government aid. They asked the United States to give them “full rights as citizens,”⁹¹ claiming they were “proud of their citizenship.”⁹² Not only did asserting their U.S. citizenship create favorable conditions for a diplomatic relationship with the United States, it also inherently granted them more power. Reinforcing their citizenship was, itself, a strategy to exercise sovereignty as U.S. citizens enjoyed specific rights which Native people could take advantage of. They also appealed to a shared sense of community with all Americans as they convinced U.S. lawmakers that their

⁸⁹ Kiyaani, letter to American Indian Chicago Conference, 1961.

⁹⁰ Edward P. Dozier, transcript of Keynote Address at American Indian Chicago Conference, June 13, 1961, Professional Activities, 1952-2006, Box: 345, American Indian Chicago Conference-Prelim. Matters; Minutes & Proceedings [1 of 2], William C. Sturtevant papers, 1952-2007, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

⁹¹ Dozier, transcript of Keynote Address, 1961.

⁹² Tax, "The Voice of the American Indian" PROGRESS REPORT No. 6, 1961, 1.

proposed solutions would be “productive and rewarding for American Indians and their fellow-Americans.”⁹³ Moreover, they aligned themselves with the United State's core principle of democracy, stating “there is no greater and emphatic example to the world of the effectiveness of a truly democratic society than the diversified Indian societies of America.”⁹⁴ Their supposedly patriotic dedication continued as they borrowed language closely associated with pro-American Cold War messaging; “To remain Indians and yet Americans, we believe in democratic principles and human rights in a free world.”⁹⁵ Their references to "fellow-Americans," a "truly democratic society," "democratic principles," and the “free world” position themselves within, and, therefore, not a threat to, U.S. power and imperialism. Through this seemingly assimilative, patriotic rhetoric, strategic Native resistance succeeded. Through their strong rhetoric, the AICC participants convinced the U.S. government that Native people had finally adopted Euro-American principles of American patriotism, citizenship, and democracy. This allowed Native people to request increased assistance and resources from the, now sympathetic, U.S. government.

Within the letters written to the Steering Committee and the resolutions presented in the Declaration of Indian Purpose, it appeared as though many Native people took collective accountability for the issues within their community. However, Native participants utilized Euro-American rhetoric as a strategy to assert sovereignty over their own programs. The continuation of Indigenous communities and Nations required Native people to exercise sovereignty over government, social programs, education, cultural centers, and more. After a long history of paternalist U.S. policy towards Native Nations which included removal, termination, and relocation, Native people wanted the right to determine their own futures.

⁹³ American Indian Center “Statement to the American Indian Chicago Conference,” 1961.

⁹⁴ Dozier, transcript of Keynote Address, 1961.

⁹⁵ Dozier, transcript of Keynote Address, 1961.

Additionally, due to the history of oppressive and controlling U.S. policies, Indigenous communities employed strategic rhetoric to frame their desire to exercise their sovereignty. Many Native people took ownership by appealing to the Euro-American “bootstrap mentality.” They claimed “we don't want a free ride - we want assistance which many of us need badly. We will meet the government more than halfway in our cooperation,”⁹⁶ and “we recognize that we also have responsibilities and obligations - the burden is not only on the side of our government.”⁹⁷ They appear to take accountability for their situations and include themselves in any plan for solving their own issues. They insisted “have the obligation to better ourselves and our communities.”⁹⁸ The official Declaration of Indian Purpose even states “We believe that the Indians must provide the adjustment and thus freely advance with dignity to a better life.”⁹⁹ Through these statements, Native people seem to acknowledge their responsibility for their own struggles and offer to put in work to solve them. However, Native participants paired these ideas with statements such as “the government should make preparations to act as a trustee or overseer but otherwise should begin to train Indians to take over governmental functions on Indian reservations or in Indian ‘cultural centers’;”¹⁰⁰ “it would be a great error to see these centers as places where things are done to Indians and for Indians ‘for their own good’ as so much of our past Indian Affairs policy has been carried out;”¹⁰¹ and “programs designed to assist Indians should be based on their needs; they should be involved in, and understand the program.”¹⁰² In this way, Native people subversively took back power and control over their own programs, increasing their ability to exercise their sovereignty. Disguised as an attempt to take

⁹⁶ Dozier, transcript of Keynote Address, 1961.

⁹⁷ Dozier, transcript of Keynote Address, 1961.

⁹⁸ Tax, "The Voice of the American Indian" PROGRESS REPORT No. 6, 1961, 1.

⁹⁹ American Indian Chicago Conference, *Declaration of Indian Purpose; the Voice of the American Indian*, 4.

¹⁰⁰ Tax, "The Voice of the American Indian" PROGRESS REPORT No. 6, 1961, 1.

¹⁰¹ American Indian Center “Statement to the American Indian Chicago Conference,” 1961.

¹⁰² Tax, "The Voice of the American Indian" PROGRESS REPORT No. 6, 1961, 10.

accountability for their own situation, Native people really used the language of responsibility as a strategy of resistance. In this way, they could exercise their sovereignty under the guise of accountability, creating less opposition from the U.S. government and its policies.

Interestingly, the conference also blended elements of traditional U.S. governmental rhetoric and structure with more traditional Indigenous practices to create an environment that felt authentic to its members while appealing to its target audience. While the letters written to the conference and the traditional methods of order and decision making reflected Indigenous ideas of community and advocacy, the final document produced from the AICC, the Declaration of Indian Purpose, reflected Euro-American rhetoric. The AICC created the very name “The Declaration of Indian Purpose” to evoke comparisons to the Declaration of Independence.¹⁰³ Within the document, the Statement of Purpose, Creed, Legislative and Regulatory Proposals, and Conclusion closely mirrored the Preamble, the Declaration of Natural Rights, the List of Grievances, and Resolution of Independence found in the Declaration of Independence. Furthermore, they borrowed specific phrases from U.S. founding documents meant to evoke patriotic spirit. For example, in the Creed, they stated “We believe in the future of a greater America, an America which we were first to love, where life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness will be a reality.”¹⁰⁴ By copying this language, famously associated with independence and freedom for Euro-Americans, Indigenous attendees framed themselves as part of U.S. history and traditions. The Declaration of Indian Purpose was an extremely thorough, well thought out, eloquent, and diplomatic document. It combined these rhetorical strategies with actionable steps the U.S. government could take to improve the lives of Native people. The AICC attendees exhibited a high level of diplomatic knowledge by presenting their arguments

¹⁰³ American Indian Chicago Conference, *Declaration of Indian Purpose; the Voice of the American Indian*, 5.

¹⁰⁴ American Indian Chicago Conference, *Declaration of Indian Purpose; the Voice of the American Indian*, 5.

and evidence on Euro-American terms. The document supported its arguments with U.S. documentation including quotes from *U.S. v. Kagama*, Chief Justice John Marshall, The Meriam Survey, Treaty of 1867, and many more.¹⁰⁵ The Declaration also considered diverse Native perspectives from those in federal-recognized Nations on reservations to those in urban settings. The Declaration's appendix contained suggested policy for various contemporary issues of individual Nations including the Menominee Termination Act, the Resolution on the Kinzua Dam, and "the Alaska Situation."¹⁰⁶ The participants and leaders of the AICC produced an intelligent, focused international diplomatic document filled with evidence, strategies, and proposals catered to its Euro-American audience while asserting the sovereignty of Native Nations.

So what purpose did Chicago serve? What came out of the conference? The AICC did not produce an activist consciousness because the consciousness had already existed for centuries. The letters, the Declaration, and the community formed by every member present made it clear that Native people's desire to create community and exercise their sovereignty continued from a long tradition of Indigenous resistance. However, the conference invigorated Native communities across the United States, offered an opportunity to exercise a diplomatic strategy, and established Chicago as an influential site for Indigenous thought, community, and activism. The AICC strengthened community through its traditional Indigenous decision making methods, focus on equity and financial accessibility, and conversations uniting Native identity despite varying experiences. Additionally, it offered an opportunity for Native people to collectively air their grievances and present solutions that worked for them. Even for those who

¹⁰⁵ American Indian Chicago Conference, *Declaration of Indian Purpose; the Voice of the American Indian*, 13,16, 20, 28.

¹⁰⁶ American Indian Chicago Conference, *Declaration of Indian Purpose; the Voice of the American Indian*, 32, 37-29.

could not attend, writing letters to the Steering Committee encouraged many Native people to name the problems their community faced and create solutions on their own terms. Native communities, rightfully, considered the conference a pivotal and historic moment. By the end of the AICC, participants produced a strategic plan, in the form of the Declaration of Indian Purpose, for improving the lives of Native people on their own terms which they presented to the U.S. federal administration. A year later, in August of 1962, 32 delegates from Native Nations across the country presented a copy of the Declaration of Indian Purpose to President Kennedy at the White House; “Dennis Bushyhead, grandson of the famous Cherokee Chief Dennis W. Bushyhead, read part of the Declaration out loud and then called on the Great Spirit to guide the President’s hand in these troubled times.”¹⁰⁷ In Kennedy’s speech following the meeting, he said:

In your Chicago declaration, you reiterated — which of course was unnecessary your strong love for this country of which you are the first citizens. So I hope that this visit here which is more than ceremonial will be reminder to all Americans of the number of Indians whose housing is inadequate, whose education is inadequate, whose employment is inadequate, whose health is inadequate, whose security and old age is inadequate — a very useful reminder that there is still a good deal of unfinished business.¹⁰⁸

While the president’s sentiment surely provided a starting point, the Declaration produced more than just talk. During the short remainder of his administration, Kennedy signed a bill for increased funding for Native education. In the years that followed his assassination, policies of Lyndon Johnson promoted Native rights to self-determination and introduced a new era of policy on Native Nations and people.¹⁰⁹ The Declaration of Indian Purpose and the AICC was an

¹⁰⁷ AICC letter, December 1962, Series 3: Orlando Cabanban Photographs, approximately 1960s-1970s. Chicago American Indian Photography Project photographs, Ayer-Modern-MS-Photo Project. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives, 3.

¹⁰⁸ AICC letter, 1962, 2.

¹⁰⁹ “1968: President Johnson signs the Indian Civil Rights Act” U.S. National Library of Medicine, U.S. Government Publishing Office, accessed November 3, 2025, <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/nativevoices/timeline/516.html#:~:text=President%20Lyndon%20Johnson%20calls%20for>

instrumental part of this change. Chicago provided a place for Indigenous people to create community, sovereignty, diplomacy, and, most of all, advocate for their right to determine their own futures.



Figure 1. *President Greets Delegates at the Presentation Ceremony*¹¹⁰

Figure 2. *Dennis Bushyhead Reads from Declaration*¹¹¹

%20%E2%80%9Ctermination%E2%80%9D%20to,constitutional%20rights%20secured%20to%20other%20Americ
ans%20%E2%80%A6.

¹¹⁰ AICC letter, 1962, 2.

¹¹¹ AICC letter, 1962, 3.

Chapter 2: Uptown

In 1960, when the Chicago American Indian Center (AIC) was still downtown on LaSalle, another drum beat. Just like that night at the AICC a year later, people talked, kids played, members ate, and the drum kept the beat of the dancing. No one wanted to leave even though the sun set long ago. The Bearskin family, who would provide integral support to the Chicago Conference the next year, played, talked, ate, and danced with everyone else. Benjamin Bearskin, an extremely active participant and leader in Chicago's Native community, made his way around the room at the AIC. As the time neared one in the morning, the group decided to wrap up. After a fun evening of catching up with friends and making new ones at the AIC, the Bearskin family, Benjamin, his wife Fredeline, and their five children, arrived home to find the windows of their apartment shattered. When they got inside, a note on a brick read "You mex, get out of here. This is only the beginning. No kidding. -The Whites."¹¹²

The stories of Native Chicago during the two decades that follow involve narratives of belonging and care as Native people turned an isolating cityscape into a thriving community. Chicago's American Indian Center (AIC), one of many spaces dedicated to fostering Native community during the 1960s and 70s, united Native peoples of diverse experiences, resisted Euro-American assimilatory goals, and uplifted member's pride in their Native identity. Relocation programs, which sent many Native people to cities like Chicago for the first time, attempted to assimilate Native people into city life, isolating them from their identity and traditions. Organizations like the AIC fought this narrative by promoting Native survivance through its strategic focus on community. Gerald Vizenor (Anishinabe White Earth Chippewa),

¹¹² Newspaper clipping, *Chicago Sun-Times*, May 16, 1960, Bearskin Family - clippings, 1960-1969, Box: 17, Folder: 3. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

Native writer and scholar, defines survivance in *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* as “an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuance of stories, not a mere reaction, however pertinent. Survivance is greater than the right of a survivable name. Survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victimry.”¹¹³ The actions, programs, and members of the AIC demonstrated how community itself acted as a powerful tool for survivance and resistance against Euro-American colonization. Additionally, the community, keenly aware of the changing political landscape throughout the decades, shifted their rhetorical strategies accordingly to shape the language in the Center's newsletters and promotional material. In this way, the Center could provide a space for Indigenous survivance and community as well as assistance to its people while remaining fairly uncontroversial to the Euro-American public. Through its commitment to its community and its clever use of shifting rhetorical strategies, the American Indian Center resisted colonization efforts by uplifting survivance through pride in Native identity and traditions of education, celebration, and sharing resources.

The violent act committed against the Bearskin family was far from the only instance of violence and discrimination Native people experienced in Chicago. Native people faced verbal abuse in public places, encountered frequent police hostility and brutality, and experienced racial discrimination in several aspects of life including employment, housing, and education. In fact, the Bearskin family shared that, after the incident, their landlord evicted them from their apartment in East Garfield Park. Moreover, many other landlords refused to house them for fear of damages and retaliation from whites.¹¹⁴ Other Native Chicagoans shared similar experiences.

¹¹³ Gerald Robert Vizenor, ed., *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* (University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 1.

¹¹⁴ Newspaper clipping, *Chicago Times*, May 16, 1960, Bearskin Family - clippings, 1960-1969, Box: 17, Folder: 3. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

Many white people proudly demonstrated their hatred. They expressed, not infrequently, that "the only good Indian was a dead one."¹¹⁵ A mother shared that her "seven year old boy was walking to the store with me, he dropped a gum wrapper. A woman shouted at him and said she would beat him."¹¹⁶ Native people experienced these acts of violence and hatred frequently which created fearful and unsafe conditions for many Native community members. The discrimination they faced often led to a profoundly negative effect on their daily lives. Not only did they have to endure hate from white individuals, they had to work against oppression entrenched in every system they interacted with. Native people expressed frustration with the "last hired and first fired" trend they experienced at their jobs, making it difficult to earn enough to take care of their families.¹¹⁷ The education system in Chicago taught Eurocentric concepts, harmful Native stereotypes, and offered little help to Native students which resulted in very low graduation rates. The healthcare system did not prioritise the well-being of Native people, often diminishing or ignoring their concerns. The combination of frequent unemployment, lack of support for students, and poor healthcare often resulted in the visits from Social Service workers who attempted to remove children from Native parents and separate Indigenous families.¹¹⁸ Euro-American colonizing efforts purposefully set up these systems to oppress Native people and eradicate Indigenous identity. Native people, accustomed to centuries of harmful discrimination and violent oppression from settler colonialism, understood this. Native people created unique strategies, formed strong communities, and participated in organized activism to resist bigotry and colonization in Chicago.

¹¹⁵ Newspaper clipping, *Chicago Tribune*, May 26, 1960, Bearskin Family - clippings, 1960-1969, Box: 17, Folder: 3. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

¹¹⁶ Newspaper clipping, *Chicago Times*, May 16, 1960.

¹¹⁷ Hall, letter to American Indian Chicago Conference from Albert Lea, Minnesota, June 12, 1961, 1.

¹¹⁸ American Indian Center, *Chicago Warrior*, 1971, Chicago Warrior - publications, newsletters, 1957-1971, Box: 17, Folder: 22. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

Many assumed the Bearskins would leave Chicago. However, their commitment to the community they helped create in Chicago kept them in the city. With the fear, violence, and discrimination they faced, many understood if they chose to leave the city. In an article titled "The Price of Ignorance," an AIC member made the point that "the community loses the Bearskin family and is left with the people who threw the rocks. This is tough on the community. It is them who pay the real price for having the rock-throwers among them."¹¹⁹ Despite the bigotry they faced, the Bearskins, an integral part of the Native community in Chicago for 12 years already, stayed.

Like the Bearskins, Indigenous people in Chicago resisted the discrimination and oppression they faced through community. Indigenous Chicagoans participated in a variety of organizations that allowed them to assist and connect with their community. A wide range of events, projects, and ideas centered around community both fueled and directly contributed to Native resistance. Native-run organizations in Chicago welcomed everyone. The AIC wrote, "doors are always open to you. Come on out to visit, and bring a friend or two. We always find room for a weekend."¹²⁰ Resistance required community building; however, for Indigenous people, building a strong community around Native identity was resistance itself. As a Native newspaper writer explained, "When the Indian got old he was taken care of. Everyone helped each other. It was a complete circle. He wasn't worried about making it in his old age because he gave what he had when he was younger and would be given things when he needed them."¹²¹

¹¹⁹ American Indian Center, "The Price of Ignorance," *Chicago Warrior*, May 24, 1960, Chicago Warrior - publications, newsletters, 1957-1971, Box: 17, Folder: 22. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

¹²⁰ American Indian Center, *Chicago Warrior*, October 1967, Chicago Warrior - publications, newsletters, 1957-1971, Box: 17, Folder: 22. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives, 6.

¹²¹ Barry Sigale, "Trails to Suburbia," *Paddock Publications*, May 26, 1969, Chicago Warrior - publications, newsletters, 1957-1971, Box: 17, Folder: 22. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

Community remained an integral part of Indigenous ways of life for centuries.¹²² By centering community, Chicago Natives not only created a strong network which facilitated activism and resistance, they inherently resisted the isolating and individualistic traits of the Euro-American city by committing to the continuation of Indigenous ways of life.

So, after the rock-throwers, the Bearskins moved to Uptown and many more followed. At the beginning of the 1960s, many Native people, previously spread out around the city, moved to Chicago's Uptown neighborhood. Newspapers in the 60s described Uptown as “Chicago's Indian ghetto, where hopes can slowly die,”¹²³ and a “gray, hostile environment.”¹²⁴ As one of the poorest neighborhoods on the North side of Chicago, Uptown’s population included a rising white Appalachian population, Black population, immigrant populations, and a growing Native community. Right on Lake Michigan with Montrose Beach just a short walk away, Uptown remained, for decades, extremely underfunded. However, poverty did not define the neighborhood to its residents. For many Indigenous residents, it became a site for celebrations, protests, community meetings, and more that allowed the community to unite in a common place and goal.

Chicago, and Uptown specifically, provided a hub for urban Indigenous community and a variety of Native organizations. The Grand Council Fire of American Indians, founded in 1923, established the first major modern Native American organization in Chicago and the Midwest. Their mission was “to revive the faith of the Indians in the Great Spirit and transmit it unalloyed to posterity, to keep intact old customs, usages and traditions and engender confidence among the

¹²² Rosalyn R. LaPier and David Beck, *City Indian: Native American Activism in Chicago, 1893-1934* (University of Nebraska press, 2015), 2.

¹²³ Allan Parachini, “Chicago’s Indian Ghettos, Where Hope Slowly Dies,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, May 2, 1976, General - mailings, clippings, 1952-1989, Box: 18, Folder: 28. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

¹²⁴ Susan Nelson, “Indian vs. the City,” *Chicago Magazine*, April 1970, General - mailings, clippings, 1952-1989, Box: 18, Folder: 28. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

tribes, their courage and their cooperation.”¹²⁵ Until 1964 they provided legal aid and social services to the Chicago Native community and continued to sponsor the Annual Indian Achievement Award into the 1990s. St. Augustine’s church, founded by Father Peter Powell in 1961, offered another space for Native people to form community. Although not Native, Father Powell dedicated his life to uplifting Native people. Beloved by his church’s Native community in Chicago and adopted by the Cheyenne Tribe, Father Powell devoted his life to working with and for Native people. St. Augustine’s provided assistance to thousands of Native people and families.¹²⁶ Native people created their own organizations and programs within the church, including a Native women’s association, the Deloria Guild. Father Powell, and the Native community members who replaced him after his retirement in 1967, ensured St. Augustine continued to provide resources and community for Native Chicagoans. Other organizations that developed later into the 1960s and 70s formed Native community around much more explicit resistance. The Young Tribal Organization, founded in 1968, under the leadership of Karen Crowshoe, Bell Jean Aragon, Bill Hoptowit, Ed Kennedy and Gillis Chape, connected established Chicago Natives with “new comers” to support and build the success of the Native community in Chicago. Their mission also emphasized the need to “band together on a national scale in meeting the challenges facing the Indian people.”¹²⁷ Their organization united Native people under a Pan-Indigenous identity which aligned with the growing national Native movements emerging in the late 60s. Additionally, the Native American Committee (NAC), born from the AIC, aligned themselves more closely with the national Red Power movement and later

¹²⁵ AIC, *Chicago Warrior*, October 1967, 6.

¹²⁶ John J. Laukaitis, *Community Self-Determination: American Indian Education in Chicago, 1952-2006*, Tribal Worlds (SUNY press, 2015), 35.

¹²⁷ American Indian Center, *Chicago Warrior*, June 1967, Chicago Warrior - publications, newsletters, 1957-1971, Box: 17, Folder: 22. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives, 2.

dedicated themselves to improving Indigenous education in Chicago.¹²⁸ A person rarely attended the meetings of a single organization. Many Indigenous people in Chicago connected with multiple organizations, projects, communities, and support networks which made the city feel like home.

Founded in 1953, the Chicago American Indian Center became the first urban Native American Center in the United States and established a rich urban Indigenous community which impacted many Native people. The Center initially focused on providing resources for Indigenous people who came to Chicago from the relocation programs. As a grassroots organization, the AIC prioritized leadership and programming run by and for Native people. In their own words, “The purpose of the Center is to promote the natural integration of the American Indian into the community life of Chicago; to promote fellowship and understanding among Indians and non-Indians; to foster the economic and educational advancement of the Indian people, and to preserve and foster arts and crafts and Indian cultural values.”¹²⁹ The Center received part of their funding from the American Friends Service Committee and fundraised the rest through local events and donations. Members chose the Board of Directors from the community. All Board members identified with a Native Nation and positions rotated frequently. The Center employed one white social worker, Robert Rietz, who eventually became the Center’s director. The Center employed Rietz, originally an anthropologist, upon its founding. He remained a fierce ally, co-conspirator, and friend to the Chicago Indigenous community until his death in 1972.¹³⁰ By the 1960s the Center grew tremendously, connecting families to necessary social services, providing food and money for transportation, and

¹²⁸ Native American Committee - pamphlets, newsletters, clippings, 1976-1981, Box: 18, Folder: 36. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

¹²⁹ American Indian Center promotional material, Chicago Indian Center - articles, clippings, mailings, pamphlets, reports [folder 1 of 2], 1950-1973, Box: 17, Folder: 8. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

¹³⁰ Laukaitis, *Community Self-Determination*, 20.

establishing a place for Indigenous community members to gather together. The community worked hard to make the Center their own and implemented many ideas, programs, and events that members suggested. The Center's events, always extremely popular, included pow wows, art exhibitions, fundraising dinners, club events, welcome parties, farewell parties, and more. The Center sponsored many clubs including a Women's Club, Men's Club, Winnebago Club, Canoe Club, a dance team, and several sports. The Center also provided the community with many resources including summer camps, after school tutoring, GED classes, and AA meetings. Chicago's Indigenous community truly showed up for each other in the Center. During 1964, the AIC claimed over 1,000 regularly active members and 2,300 fluctuating members from over 70 Nations.¹³¹ Their events also hosted between 50 and 500 attendees depending on the day and season.¹³² The Center often extended its hours past its usual closing time of 10pm on weekdays and midnight on weekends. Although technically adhering to Euro-American expectations by posting their hours of operation, members understood those times as more of a suggestion than a rule.¹³³ In a small way, the Center resisted Euro-American standards of time by running on "Indian time"¹³⁴ which provided more grace and understanding to its community. In the Center, Native people gave what they could and took what they needed. Because Native community in Chicago ran the Center, they prioritized and uplifted the community in any way they could.

¹³¹ Service Report for American Indian Center, Inc., December 31, 1964, Chicago Indian Center - articles, clippings, mailings, pamphlets, reports [folder 1 of 2], 1950-1973, Box: 17, Folder: 8. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives. 13.

¹³² Service Report for American Indian Center, Inc., December 31, 1964, 7.

¹³³ Service Report for American Indian Center, Inc., December 31, 1964, 13.

¹³⁴ "Stereotypes: 'Indian Time,'" Native Partnership, Partnership with Native Americans, published November 3, 2015, <https://nativepartnership.org/my-thoughts-on-stereotypes/>



Figure 3. *Board Meeting*¹³⁵

Following their community to Uptown in 1967, the AIC moved into the Ravenswood Masonic Temple on Paulina Street in the heart of the Uptown Native American community. For the first time, using a substantial bequest, the AIC owned its own building. The Board of Directors wrote, "It's frightening to think we are landlords instead of tenants."¹³⁶ Much of the Chicago Native community, concentrated in Uptown, felt ecstatic at the new Center's location; just a short walk away from their apartment. This increased participation and accessibility for the Center's social programs, activities, clubs, and events. The new building, with much more room than their old spaces, allowed for new programs, including an after school study program, and expanded others, like the Boys and Girls Scout Troops.¹³⁷ Many community members pitched in one way or another to mold the building on Paulina into their home. This move, embodying the

¹³⁵ Service Report for American Indian Center, Inc.

¹³⁶ AIC, *Chicago Warrior*, October 1967, 3.

¹³⁷ American Indian Center, *Chicago Warrior*, March 1971, Chicago Warrior - publications, newsletters, 1957-1971, Box: 17, Folder: 22. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

core goals of the Center, created new opportunities for the community and, in turn, the community helped make those opportunities a reality.

In fact, the very foundation of the Center revolved around self-determination and agency for its Native community which cultivated Indigenous survivance. The AIC recognized that Indigenous people had become "accustomed to dealing with institutional resources which propose to dispense handouts or services in terms of plans and purposes which remain more or less private to them."¹³⁸ After a long history of United States policy and colonization forcing Indigenous people to interact with systems on Euro-American terms, the AIC strived to put power back into the hands of the community. Nathan Bird (Winnebago), Chairman of the Board in 1964, wrote in a donation request letter, "Their Center is not an institution alien to them and set out by others to help them. It is their own effort."¹³⁹ Similar to the proposals recommended by the AICC, the AIC understood that only Native people were truly equipped with the necessary perspective and priorities to help each other. The Board and the Center's members worked hard to optimize all programs to meet the needs of those who used them. This often involved an emphasis on feedback and a great amount of community involvement. These actions centered self-determination and Native agency as key principles of the Center. Their ability to make change and impact their community in meaningful ways that aligned with their Indigeneity fought back against Euro-American assimilatory goals of urban relocation. Their commitment to these ideas ran deep. In 1968, the Hull House, well endowed, offered to take over the administration of the American Indian Center. While this could have aided the Center significantly in terms of its issues with funding, the Board members rejected the offer. Nathan

¹³⁸ Service Report for American Indian Center, Inc., December 31, 1964, 11.

¹³⁹ American Indian Center donation letter, 1964, Chicago Indian Center - articles, clippings, mailings, pamphlets, reports [folder 1 of 2], 1950-1973, Box: 17, Folder: 8. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

Bird, an AIC Board member, explained "The Hull House is a fine place. We have nothing against it. We were afraid that we would lose our identity if they took us over. It always happens. It would no longer be an Indian center. The whites would take us over and tell us what to do."¹⁴⁰ This rejection of Euro-American interference demonstrated their unwavering dedication to remaining a truly Indigenous organization. While they would have had access to more funding, they likely could not serve their community in the same way, on their terms. By remaining independent, they avoided the bureaucracy and paternalism that their community resented and encouraged survivance. Even without the Hull House, they got by with the help of their community. Members offered donations when possible, volunteered their time as waitresses, tutors, leaders, and contributed their efforts by cooking, event planning, and more.¹⁴¹ Through the Center's commitment to its community and its rejection of Euro-American interference, the Center fostered an environment for Native survivance.

Interracial alliances, while not often explicitly stated, did exist in the Indigenous Chicago community. Some accounts, mostly from white anthropologists, emphasized the distinction Native people made between themselves and other races, especially Black Chicagoans. One anthropological article reported on Chicago Natives "lack of friendliness and understanding toward their Negro neighbors."¹⁴² However, Indigenous people themselves contradicted this sentiment entirely. While the AIC's strategies and outspokenness evolved from the early 1960s to the late 70s, their explicit statements against ignorance and bigotry, towards any group of people, remained consistent. After the stoning of the Bearskin's house, Benjamin and the Native

¹⁴⁰ Newspaper clipping, September 1968, General - mailings, clippings, 1952-1989, Box: 18, Folder: 28. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

¹⁴¹ AIC, *Chicago Warrior*, October 1967, 3.

¹⁴² Paula Verdet, "Summary of Research on Indians in St. Louis and Chicago," Professional Activities, 1952-2006, Box: 345, American Indian Chicago Conference-Prelim. Matters; Minutes & Proceedings [2 of 2], William C. Sturtevant papers, 1952-2007, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

community could have easily separated themselves from the label of Mexican. Appeasing "the Whites" in the note could have made the Bearskins, and the Native community in Chicago as a whole, more palatable to white society, in turn making their lives easier. However, Ben Bearskin's statement that he felt it was "an honor to be taken for a Mexican" created solidarity between the two communities.¹⁴³ A member of the Center, writing further on the matter, explained their position:

It is not only the individual or the individual family who suffers when ignorance and bigotry strike in racial or other prejudice. We all lose. Every one of us. This is true no matter whether the victims are Indians, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Englishmen, Italians, Negroes, Jews, Gentiles, Chinese, or any other of the many human beings we have in this world. Bigotry and ignorance are our common enemies. It is good that we know this and that we help one another against them. Otherwise we could lose much of the full richness of our American life, and be left with the rock-throwers.¹⁴⁴

Although this circumstance was the only mention of race and racial coalition in the AIC literature, this statement exhibited the allyship and kinship Native people felt with different marginalized groups. Additionally, the idea of race did not appear in the AIC literature even when referring to Native people. The relative lack of discussion on race may have indicated that Native people did not conceptualize their identity as primarily racial. While they displayed a strong sense of equality and community for other marginalized and oppressed people, AIC members did not view race as central to their identities and, therefore, their strategies for resistance.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Newspaper clipping, *Chicago Sun-Times*, May 16, 1960.

¹⁴⁴ AIC, "The Price of Ignorance," *Chicago Warrior*.

¹⁴⁵ Interracial alliances and comparative racial movements in Chicago is certainly a topic worth discussing further. Many scholars have analyzed these coalitions but none invite an Indigenous presence into their discussion. While I do believe these analyses and stories are vital, this was not the main focus of my work as I attempted to highlight the importance of Indigenous activism alone without diminishing the movement through comparison with other racialized movements in Chicago at this time.

Despite the Center's strong stance against racism and bigotry, key differences between Native people and other racialized minority groups may have dampened coalition building efforts.¹⁴⁶ The first major difference involved Native people's unique history. No other group besides Native people were Indigenous to the land the United States occupied. While other activist groups of color navigated and challenged Euro-American systems to gain their rights and freedoms, Native people attempted to circumvent those systems altogether. Additionally, Native identity encompassed more than race. As Helen L. Peterson (Oglala Sioux) articulated in her article, "What does it Mean to be an Indian," published in the AIC newsletter, "an Indian' has three sides: legal (or political); racial; and cultural."¹⁴⁷ This legal distinction separated them from many other racialized groups. Because Native people belonged to distinct Nations rather than a race of people, Native resistance mainly focused on sovereignty rather than equality. Each racialized group in the United States possessed a long history of resistance and developed specific strategies to benefit their goals. However, as the original inhabitants of the land with distinct National identities, Native people's perspective on resistance and activism differed significantly from that of other racialized groups. While Native people in Chicago spoke highly of other racial minorities, they likely thought of their goals as distinct from other activist groups and, therefore, kept mostly within their own communities when building resistance.

In February of 1962, a young man, part of Chicago's Native community, passed his civil service tests and was offered a job in Washington. However, with no money of his own and his father's paycheck delayed, he had no way to get there. Earlier that day, the Center received a \$75

¹⁴⁶ Today, Chicago's American Indian Center builds community with Indigenous people globally. Many of their celebrations, talks, and activities highlight traditions from Nations across Turtle Island as well as Indigenous African Nations and the African diaspora.

¹⁴⁷ AIC, *Chicago Warrior*; October 1967, 8.

donation. Every dollar donated helped the Center pay for their staff, the plethora of clubs, activities, and organizations, and their debts. However, when the Center heard the young man's case, Robert Rietz, the Center's director, told him, "You may as well take it. We'll just be back where we were." The AIC always prioritized taking care of their community members over balancing their checkbook. They explained, "It is part of Indian culture to share and expect to have others share."¹⁴⁸ This idea remained central to the Center's philosophy and operation. They argued, "It is not part of Indian culture to be aggressive and competitive for jobs, housing, and daily sustenance such as urban life demands."¹⁴⁹ The Center upheld these Indigenous values of prioritizing community and assistance over profit. The Center did not require their members to go through any bureaucratic processes to receive help. Instead, if someone in the community needed help, the Center would provide it themselves or find someone who could. These values also appeared in the Center's programs. The AIC established their own thrift store where people could donate old clothes and, for those who needed it, get new clothes for free. Members also regularly took part in the Center's blanket dance where "Someone beats on a drum and the rest of the people dance around and drop money in the blanket. Whoever needs money that week gets it. They dance around for about five or 10 minutes. They drop whatever they can afford, a dollar or five dollar bill, anything."¹⁵⁰ Despite their community's lack of financial resources due to centuries of marginalization from Euro-American colonial systems, Chicago's Native community found ways to collectively help and care for each other, ensuring the well-being of all members. Both the language and the actions of the Center reflected these Indigenous traditions which focused on gifting and community well-being than individual success. In this way, the Center

¹⁴⁸ Newspaper clipping, *Chicago Tribune*, December 10, 1962, Chicago Indian Center - articles, clippings, mailings, pamphlets, reports [folder 1 of 2], 1950-1973, Box: 17, Folder: 8. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

¹⁴⁹ Newspaper clipping, *Chicago Tribune*, December 10, 1962.

¹⁵⁰ Sigale, "Trails to Suburbia."

resisted Euro-American attempts to impoverish Native people and strip Native traditions by prioritizing community assistance.

Upholding the Native values of giving, however, proved difficult to operate within a Euro-American financial system. The AIC consistently owed money throughout the decades and unfortunately, in 1971, the Center ran into trouble and financial scandal which jeopardized their credibility as an organization. Faith Smith (Ojibwe), assistant to Robert Rietz at the center, took over the Center's finances after Rietz's passing.¹⁵¹ Smith mismanaged the AIC's funds and, after her dismissal from the position, attempted to reinstate herself through an illegal meeting, unapproved by the Board of Directors. Even after her dismissal, she continued correspondence with the AIC's financial partners and insisted all communication remain directed to her. This resulted in a scramble to pay back large amounts of debt and overdue salaries and left several programs and resources at the Center underfunded.¹⁵² With their credibility with donors and community members at risk, the Board members attempted to maintain their organization's reputation through honesty. Rather than attempting to cover up the scandal, they issued letters to the community and donors and made a financial audit of the organization publicly available. Although this scandal did harm the AIC's reliability and furthered their financial difficulties, the Center eventually recovered their reputation due to their transparency and commitment to their community.

Perhaps the best demonstration of the AIC's commitment to their community involved their dedication to education. In an interview with Studs Terkel in 1965, Benjamin Bearskin, founding and contributing member of the AIC, described his view on education. He said, "The

¹⁵¹American Indian Center letter, August 30, 1971, American Indian Center donation letter, 1964, Chicago Indian Center - articles, clippings, mailings, pamphlets, reports [folder 1 of 2], 1950-1973, Box: 17, Folder: 8. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

¹⁵² American Indian Center letter, August 30, 1971.

only true investment that I can make in my responsibilities to my family is to encourage my children to get as much education as they possibly can because it's the only thing that no one can ever take away from them."¹⁵³ The AIC, following the same logic, invested a large amount of time, energy, and resources into the education of its members, which promoted Indigenous survivance, strengthened community involvement, and improved the members' quality of life. The Center's leaders and members understood the importance of a quality Euro-American education to progress and improve within the city. However, they also recognized the vital role of a strong Indigenous education which few members of the urban community had access to otherwise.

Programs in the 60s and even more in the 70s provided wonderful opportunities for young people and adults alike to improve their education. Center members took full advantage of these resources. When the AIC implemented a study-center for students, there were "many more interested students than there were available coaches and tutors to serve them."¹⁵⁴ As always, the community stepped in. Members donated their time, books, other materials, and funds to make sure their young people received the help they needed to further their education. Understanding the importance of an education recognized by employers, the Center offered a GED program that combined Indigenous methods of education with more traditional Euro-American content to ensure students felt both invested and prepared for the exam. Once implemented, the AIC celebrated over a dozen graduates every six months which greatly increased the quality and quantity of job prospects for its members, leading to greater financial stability in the community. The AIC also implemented the Explorers Program for younger students with over 200 students

¹⁵³ Bearskin, "Interview with Benny Bearskin."

¹⁵⁴ Service Report for American Indian Center, Inc., December 31, 1964, 7.

enrolled.¹⁵⁵ This program provided assistance for young people in Euro-American schools and introduced them to Indigenous forms of education. However, with only two staff members, the Center encouraged all members to volunteer their time to the program, which many did. The AIC also took issue with the common narrative, or lack thereof, of Native history taught in the Euro-American school system. Robert Rietz argued, "The teaching of Indian history in our schoolroom is less than pathetic." He explained, "The entire Indian removal policy of administrations during the 19th century is unmentioned. Nowhere do young people really learn about the development of the reservation system. Just think of it - extermination, reservations. Yet nothing in our textbooks."¹⁵⁶ Reitz, speaking on behalf of the AIC community, emphasized the lack of Indigenous history and perspectives in the education system. If Native youth did not see themselves represented in their education, they would lose both motivation to continue their education and connection with their Native identity. This posed a major threat to Native survivance as young Natives required connection with their identity to continue actively participating in Indigenous ways of life. So the Center took matters into their own hands and focused on this as a major issue for its younger members. After members identified this as a major problem in their community, they worked to implement possibly their most impressive projects-- the founding of Little Bighorn High School and O-Wai-Ya-Wa Elementary.

Little Big Horn High School, founded in 1971, and O-Wai-Ya-Wa Elementary, subsequently founded in 1973, were the AIC's response to the lack of Indigenous education for Native Chicago youth. Before these schools opened, 95% of Native American students did not complete their education in Chicago Public Schools.¹⁵⁷ Issues of poverty among Native families,

¹⁵⁵ The American Indian Center, "Para-Professional and Training Programs," 1969, Chicago Indian Center - articles, clippings, mailings, pamphlets, reports [folder 1 of 2], 1950-1973, Box: 17, Folder: 8. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

¹⁵⁶ AIC, *Chicago Warrior*, June 1967, 20.

¹⁵⁷ "School in Chicago Caters to Indians," *New York Times*, June 16, 1976.

lack of school funding and resources, and lack of Native American representation all explained the extremely high drop out rate for Native students. The reasons mirrored the concerns for education expressed at the AICC a decade earlier. Responding to these struggles in their community, the AIC founded Little Big Horn High School and O-Wai-Ya-Wa Elementary to fill the gaps left by Euro-American schooling in Indigenous young people's education. These schools encouraged young people to take pride in their Native identity. They also combated Euro-American education's attempts at erasing Indigenous history, experiences, and identity from the classroom. Little Big Horn High School, an outpost of Senn High School, taught classes to Native high school students at the American Indian Center. Students could choose from classes like American Indian History, Tribal Dialects, Indian Art, Indian Music and Dance, and What It Means To Be Indian — in the City and on the Reservation.¹⁵⁸ These classes, taught by Native teachers, provided Native youth with the opportunity to learn content that focused on their identities, experiences, and interests. Additionally, Indigenous methods of education such as lack of grades and rote memorization focused on student's success and well-being as individuals. Little Bighorn cultivated an environment that fostered Indigenous survivance through every aspect of its programming from celebrating Native identity through its content to centering traditional Indigenous education through its pedagogy. Additionally, graduates of Little Bighorn received a high school diploma from Senn High School which set students up for greater employment opportunities in the city after graduation.¹⁵⁹ O-Wai-Ya-Wa Elementary, first directed by Louis Delgado (Oneida), followed a similar approach. Organized and run by Native educators, parents, and community members, O-Wai-Ya-Wa Elementary provided Native elementary children with a foundational education in a space that celebrated their identities and

¹⁵⁸ AIC, *Chicago Warrior*, March 1971.

¹⁵⁹ Laukaitis, *Community Self-Determination*, 70.

rejected rigid structures of Euro-American schooling. Younger students benefited from an emphasis on creativity and relational learning in Native classrooms.¹⁶⁰ These schools actively resisted the colonization attempts of Euro-American society and policy through the education system. Little Big Horn High School and O-Wai-Ya-Wa Elementary produced excellent forms of intergenerational activism that encouraged Indigenous survivance through highlighting Native identity and pedagogy.

On the second floor of the AIC, a group of women sat around a table sewing curtains. They all talked while they worked. Perhaps Margaret Redcloud (Ojibwe) and Vivian Mason shared congratulations on their appointment to the Women's Club board. Perhaps they talked about the bittersweetness of the farewell party they hosted for the Funmaker family. Perhaps they discussed much more, sharing stories, traditions, strategies, and ideas. They surely took great pride in hosting a successful event for the community just as they took pride in their sewing work which would make the Center feel more like home. The next week, they surely felt happy, but not surprised, to see their efforts recognized in the next edition of the *Chicago Warrior*, the AIC's monthly newsletter.¹⁶¹ From the outside, one could argue the AIC conformed and assimilated to Euro-American standards of gender. However, this facade of assimilation into Euro-American gender roles actually served as a strategy to keep Native traditions of gender responsibilities and identity alive. Gender responsibilities within Indigenous societies varied between Nations and remained extremely complex. Despite this, most Native Nations offered a more equitable perspective on gender than the binary and misogynistic Euro-American gender

¹⁶⁰ Laukaitis, *Community Self-Determination*, 66.

¹⁶¹ American Indian Center, "News" April 17, 1962, *Chicago Warrior* - publications, newsletters, 1957-1971, Box: 17, Folder: 22. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

conceptions. The primary difference involved honor, value, and respect for Native women's work. From the outside, the AIC did mimic the traditional Euro-American ideas of gender in many ways. The Women's Club, an extremely active club of Indigenous women at the Center, mainly planned and coordinated parties, completed sewing jobs, and entertained at events. The *Warrior* even advertised a "Charm and Grooming" class for young women and emphasized the importance of hygiene and grooming, especially for attracting young men.¹⁶² However, upon further investigation, these gendered activities held more power than the traditional white, misogynistic perspective may consider. Aligning with many Indigenous Nations' traditions, the AIC honored and respected the work of the women in the community. Within the Center, women did sew, cook, and organize and host events; however, the Center viewed these as important tasks, integral to maintaining a strong community. By hosting celebrations, decorating the Center, and providing meals, the Women's Club helped make the AIC a place where the community felt welcomed, celebrated, and comfortable. These women gained power through creating an environment where Indigenous people could connect with each other and keep their traditions and identities alive.¹⁶³ Even the advertisement for the young women's grooming class included language that rejected Euro-American beauty standards, emphasizing Native beauty traditions; "Years ago before the white man came with their cosmetics, Indian girls were washing their hair with suds from the Yucca plant, painted and prettied themselves for special occasions."¹⁶⁴ Despite the appearance of a "Charming and Grooming Class" marketed towards young women as oppressive and stereotypical, the AIC actually leveraged this language to prompt Native feminine traditions. Contrary to a Euro-American feminist perspective which

¹⁶² AIC, *Chicago Warrior*, October 1967, 6.

¹⁶³ Laura Tohe, "There Is No Word for Feminism in My Language," *Wicazo Sa Review* 15, no. 2 (2000): 104, <https://doi.org/10.1353/wic.2000.0014>.

¹⁶⁴ AIC, *Chicago Warrior*, October 1967, 6.

might view women in the Center oppressed and confined to by their gender roles, these women actually held significant power in their community through their continuation of responsibilities and tradition. The *Warrior's* attention and praise for the Women's Club and other women in the Center demonstrated the community's respect for their contributions. Because of their efforts, Native people gathered together, kept stories and traditions alive, celebrated, and uplifted each other. Women at the AIC played a major role in Native activism and resistance through their work encouraging community and survivance.

These gender expectations did not just apply to women. Men's traditional Native gender responsibilities also made an appearance in the *Warrior's* messaging. Because Euro-American gender stereotypes often imparted inferiority onto women and superiority onto men, resisting colonial gender expectations involved different strategies for each gender. In fact, the Center explicitly discussed men's gender responsibilities and expectations far more frequently. The *Warrior* often offered praise and respect to women's work to challenge Euro-American misogyny. Alternately, the *Warrior* often reiterated expectations of Native men which reminded them to stay connected with their Native identity and deterred them from forming patriarchal views. Upon moving to the city, many Native people, experiencing bigotry, poverty, unemployment, and isolation due to colonizing systems and policies, likely felt a sense of powerlessness. Some Native men embraced Euro-American patriarchal views as a way to gain back some sense of power.¹⁶⁵ However, the AIC recognized the inherent harm of Euro-American patriarchal views and the risk they posed to Native survivance. Therefore, the *Warrior* often

¹⁶⁵ While a few instances of domestic violence by Native men against Native women did appear in the research, any direct discussion of domestic violence has purposefully been omitted from this work. This work does not have the proper space or research to do this topic justice or engage in the analysis it deserves. My decision to exclude this conversation is not to silence the survivors of these crimes but to detract from the harmful Euro-American stereotype and generalization of all Native men as abusers. Additionally, this work is meant to be useful to the community I discuss and honor them. I encourage other scholars within the Chicago Native community to expand on this topic if they wish to do so.ra

reminded men of their Indigenous identities and responsibilities to discourage these harmful beliefs. They warned men against the dangers of assimilation by connecting their gender to their Native identity and values; "We must renew our pride in ourselves as men who can care for our own -- as individuals; as members of a clan; of a band; of a tribe; of a people!"¹⁶⁶ They continued to define manhood in terms that connected them to their Native community. One writer in the *Warrior* argued, "The Indian culture, you see, does not believe that you impose your will on someone. The tribal leaders are not those men who by force of personality enforce their will on the tribe, but those men who exemplify the values of the tribe —generosity, wisdom, a concern for the people."¹⁶⁷ Through reminding Native men of these qualities, the AIC encouraged men to reject Euro-American male stereotypes and embrace their Indigenous roles as leaders for their people. In addition to women's nights, the AIC hosted men's nights and a men's club, explaining men "need to get away once in a while too."¹⁶⁸ This actively encouraged men to form community with each other, rejecting the superiority and isolation often idealized as male dominance in Euro-American society. By framing manhood within Indigenous conceptions and encouraging men to continue upholding their gendered responsibilities, the AIC worked to resist the adoption and spread of patriarchal ideas among its members. This kept them connected to their Indigenous community values and protected against harmful views of masculinity.

The Center and its members promoted a deep sense of community and belonging both within and beyond Chicago, combating the attempted isolation of city life. The Relocation Programs, the reason for many Native people's journey to Chicago, attempted to disconnect

¹⁶⁶ American Indian Center, *Chicago Warrior*, April 1971, Chicago Warrior - publications, newsletters, 1957-1971, Box: 17, Folder: 22. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

¹⁶⁷ Newspaper clipping "Why the Indian Loses Out," General - mailings, clippings, 1952-1989, Box: 18, Folder: 28. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

¹⁶⁸ AIC, *Chicago Warrior*, March 1971.

Native people from their community. However, the AIC and specifically the *Chicago Warrior* resisted these attempts by allowing its members to stay connected to local and national Native events, opportunities, and work. Locally, the *Warrior's* editors encouraged club leaders to write sections for their clubs and many community members often published their own thoughts. This kept the local community connected and invested in a common goal: publishing the *Warrior*. The *Warrior*, however, fostered more than just local community among Chicago Natives. It connected Chicago to a broader Native community across Turtle Island. Occasionally, the *Warrior* posted advertisements for local and national Native companies and craftsmen which Chicago Natives supported when they could. Members often used the *Warrior* as an opportunity to discuss issues facing Indigenous people in varying places in the United States. In one publication, the *Warrior* discussed the issue of Euro-Americans selling inauthentic, appropriated, Native art in New Mexico. They claimed “it perpetrates a fraud on the Indian craftsman, the honest Indian crafts dealer, and the buying public.”¹⁶⁹ Despite the distance, Native people in Chicago clearly felt a responsibility to support all Native people, regardless of location. The *Warrior* provided Native Chicagoans with a platform to bring awareness to issues facing Native people all over the country. Additionally, the *Warrior* often announced pow wows and celebrations all over the United States, mainly in the West, which many members attended.¹⁷⁰ This allowed people to remain up to date on national Indigenous news and provided opportunities to connect with Natives well outside of Chicago. The AIC understood that each member of their community likely had many relationships and connections with people and places beyond Chicago. While the *Warrior* brought Native in Chicago together to resist the

¹⁶⁹ American Indian Center, “The True and the False,” *Chicago Warrior* - publications, newsletters, 1957-1971, Box: 17, Folder: 22. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

¹⁷⁰ AIC, *Chicago Warrior*; June 1967, 9.

isolation of the city, it also connected Chicago Natives with the broader Indigenous community across the country. In this way, the *Warrior* helped position the AIC as part of a larger collective community of Indigenous people from all over the United States.

Similar to language presented by the AICC, the AIC implemented seemingly assimilatory rhetoric into their pamphlets, donor letters, and monthly newsletter as a resistance strategy in the early 60s. Both the participants of the AICC and members of Chicago's AIC understood that the social and political situation in the early 60s necessitated patriotic dialogue to ensure public support for their cause. For the AIC, especially in the first half of the decade, the Center's presence relied heavily on public support. Because they relied on such a large amount of their funding from local donors, the AIC presented their cause as palatable to Euro-American Chicagoans. This way the Center could continue to provide funding for the programs and assistance that strengthened their community. In the early 1960s, the language of the AIC programming focused on integrating Native people into Chicago life. The AIC promoted itself as "a center from which the Indian learns to adapt to urban life."¹⁷¹ This closely mirrored the U.S. government's goal for relocation. Much of the language in the *Warrior* promoted ideas and programs that would make Native people contributing members of the Chicago community. They framed their members as "good citizens," "effective citizens," and "participatory citizens" of Chicago and the United States.¹⁷² Along with their language, the AIC also incorporated patriotic displays into their programming. Native children commonly recited the Pledge of Allegiance at the Center's summer day camps and the Star Spangled Banner often opened or closed AIC pow wows in the 60s. This supposed alignment with colonizing policies led to a brief

¹⁷¹ Newspaper clipping, Chicago Tribune, December 10, 1962.

¹⁷² Newspaper clipping, *Chicago Tribune*, August 8, 1966, Chicago Indian Center - articles, clippings, mailings, pamphlets, reports [folder 1 of 2], 1950-1973, Box: 17, Folder: 8. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

partnership between the BIA and the Center in the earlier part of the decade which greatly expanded the Center's reach. Upon a Native family or person's relocation to Chicago, the BIA would introduce them to the American Indian Center as an additional place for them to access help and resources in their transition to city life. From the perspective of the BIA, the Center could take the burden of helping Native people assimilate so the Bureau could spend less time and resources on each relocatee. However, from the Center's perspective, the BIA did the hard work of connecting new Native people to the Center. After these relocatees learned about the AIC and the strong Native community in Chicago, they almost always joined the community, growing the Center's network, resources, and membership. Despite the patriotic displays and assimilative rhetoric, the AIC, never compromising its values, found subversive ways to reject Euro-American paternalism in favor of Native self-determination. Discussing their members, the AIC Board insisted, "given some autonomy, as they have here in their center, they show remarkable ability, to help each other and relate to others."¹⁷³ They convinced local officials and the federal BIA administration that the AIC could best "deal with personal problems incident to living in and understanding their new urban environment."¹⁷⁴ Although the Center appeared to espouse rhetoric that countered their mission of Native self-determination, this strategy of patriotism actually increased the agency of the Center and its members. Because the AIC played into this "Americanizing" narrative, they gained more independence which, subsequently, allowed more members to partake in an Indigenous community they would not have access to otherwise.

¹⁷³ Newspaper clipping, *Chicago Tribune*, July 7, 1966, Chicago Indian Center - articles, clippings, mailings, pamphlets, reports [folder 1 of 2], 1950-1973, Box: 17, Folder: 8. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

¹⁷⁴ American Indian Center, 5th Annual Powwow Program, Chicago Warrior - publications, newsletters, 1957-1971, Box: 17, Folder: 22. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.



Figure 4. *Pledge of Allegiance at Day Camp*¹⁷⁵

As the U.S. political climate began to shift in the late 60s and early 70s, the AIC's rhetorical strategies changed too. Protest movements increased locally and nationally in these years. In Chicago, the political protests and police riots at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago and the increasing presence and resistance of the Chicago Black Panther chapter made Chicago a hub for political activism. Nationally, even more activism emerged like the anti-Vietnam war protests from Students for a Democratic Society and racial leftists movements like the Black Panthers, Young Lords, and the Asian American Movement. From its founding, the AIC resisted oppression and colonialism through prioritizing Indigenous tradition, community, and survivance. However, as Euro-American society became increasingly politically active, the AIC rhetoric took on a more explicit anti-colonial position. For example, a document published by the AIC in 1969 used phrases like "power to the people" and "power of the people,"¹⁷⁶ likely connoting protest and resistance against institutional oppression started by the Black Power movement. The *Warrior* also wrote directly about the attempted eradication of Native cultures and the prevalence of harmful assimilationist policies which did not appear earlier in the decade. The *Warrior* also engaged with more discussions of Native history, Native Nation's interactions with settler colonialism, and the ways in which white society systematically

¹⁷⁵ Service Report for American Indian Center, Inc.

¹⁷⁶ AIC, "Para-Professional and Training Programs."

oppressed Indigenous people. One member wrote, "his people were kindly, taught the colonist how to live, plant corn, and, in return, the whites introduced fences, stole everything the Indian had, except his disposition; which they could not get at, and which became steadily worse under this treatment."¹⁷⁷ The *Warrior's* language, now openly criticizing U.S. policy towards Native people, differed quite dramatically from the language conforming to U.S. systems earlier in the decade. AIC members called the United States a "paternal administration"¹⁷⁸ and insisted "The American Indian just wants to be left alone to work out his own problems. The last thing they want is more government paternalism."¹⁷⁹ This discussion of paternalism actually mirrored conversations around Native self-determination earlier in the decade. Both demonstrated a consistent goal of resisting colonialism in favor of agency and survivance; however, the language used to reach that goal shifted as direct criticism of the U.S. government became normalized. The AIC's shift in strategy and increasingly activist rhetoric also allowed for more discussion around the complexities of Indigenous identity. A member of the Center, discussing the impact of colonialism on Indigenous societies, wrote "The people really are Apaches, or Sioux, or Navajo, or Omaha, or Mandan, or some other tribal group. The tribal groups were, really, sovereign nations."¹⁸⁰ Members also thought more about the label "Indian." In a section of the *Warrior* from 1971, the newsletter grapples with the term "Indian," stating, "The fact that the name 'Indian' was given to the people by an explorer who knew nothing about them, and who in fact, mistook them for inhabitants of another land, tells us something!! This initial confusion exists today mainly because people other than American Indians have done all the defining of who or

¹⁷⁷ Newspaper clipping, "A Line O' Type or Two," Chicago Indian Center - articles, clippings, mailings, pamphlets, reports [folder 1 of 2], 1950-1973, Box: 17, Folder: 8. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

¹⁷⁸ AIC, *Chicago Warrior*, June 1967, 29.

¹⁷⁹ AIC, *Chicago Warrior*, June 1967, 19.

¹⁸⁰ AIC, *Chicago Warrior*, October 1967, 8.

what an American Indian is."¹⁸¹ By asserting themselves as part of "sovereign nations" and challenging the very idea of the label "Indian," Native people sought to define themselves on their own terms, breaking away from Euro-American conceptions of their identity. In doing this, they reached back and connected with their ancestors' lives "before the white man came,"¹⁸² continuing a tradition of survivance. Yet, they also looked forward. In 1971, the AIC hosted Grace Thorpe (Potawatomi, Kickapoo, Sac and Fox, and Menominee), famous Indigenous environmentalist and activist and daughter of Jim Thorpe, famous Native American athlete. During her visit, she discussed her involvement in the occupation of Alcatraz Island, a prolonged protest for Native rights and sovereignty that gained national attention. Discussing her visit, the *Warrior* included her stories of Alcatraz and her message to the Center. The AIC published part of her talk, quoting her saying the United States "systematically stole our lands and destroyed a once beautiful and natural landscape, polluted the air and water and instituted a program to annihilate the Indians of this land by suppression, prejudice, termination, relocation and assimilation."¹⁸³ The article went on to rally behind their collective identity, saying "WE ARE INDIANS! We will preserve our traditions and culture. WE ARE INDIANS! We will join hands in a unity never before put into practice."¹⁸⁴ This quote, invoking strong community and Native survivance, embodied the core principles of the Center. Although the idea behind these words remained at the very center of the AIC's values since its founding, this language of outright resistance had never been communicated so explicitly. As a broader political consciousness formed in several groups throughout the country in the late 60s, the AIC shifted their strategy from subversive opposition to direct resistance. This use of more explicit language allowed

¹⁸¹ AIC, *Chicago Warrior*, April 1971.

¹⁸² AIC, *Chicago Warrior*, April 1971.

¹⁸³ AIC, *Chicago Warrior*, April 1971.

¹⁸⁴ AIC, *Chicago Warrior*, April 1971.

Native people to grapple with their Indigenous identity and understand their relationship, historically and presently, with the United States. The Chicago Native community simultaneously reached back to build upon the actions of their ancestors, promoting Native survivance, and looked forward to unite against colonial oppression, creating a better future for Native people.

Along with their rhetoric, the AIC also changed their perspective on non-Native participants in the Center's events and programs from the early 60s to the 70s which indicated the Center's shift in strategy from promoting public awareness to protecting Native identity. In the early 60s, the AIC encouraged anyone, Native or not, to take part in the Center's activities. This worked well to meet the needs of the Center at the time. The Center, trying its best to raise funds and help Native people in Chicago however it could, was less particular about who their support came from and why. From the beginning, the Center restricted voting power to Native members. However, the Center insisted, "non-Indian members share fully in all other activities and responsibilities of the agency."¹⁸⁵ This strategy also helped promote the AIC to non-Native Chicagoans, increasing the city's awareness of Native people's presence in the city and some of their struggles. As the 60s ended, their approach, while still inclusive and welcoming, became more protective of their community, traditions, and events. As the Center became more established, it increasingly fought back against assimilation and appropriation. They worked hard to overcome the stereotypes and bigotry they faced from non-Native people. Therefore, they could assert a greater amount of control over who participated in their events and the expectations of that participation. For example, they emphasized that their pow pow was not a "Buffalo Bill Show," instead describing it as an "authentic social and ceremonial gathering which

¹⁸⁵ Service Report for American Indian Center, Inc., December 31, 1964, 2.

is primarily for Indian people."¹⁸⁶ They also explained that they expected mindfulness and respect from any non-Natives attending AIC events. This expectation allowed the AIC to remain a space by and for Indigenous people. These increasing expectations of non-Native participants allowed the Center to protect the identity and traditions of their Native community without the fear of appropriation. This likely made Native members feel more safe and comfortable in the space, knowing that the Center prioritized them above all else. This shift in expectations reflected an emboldened Native community in Chicago that could finally protect their identity and traditions.

The broader political context of resistance in the late 60s impacted more than just the language and participation in the AIC. With the increasing national popularity of the Red Power Movement, the Native community in Uptown, no different from various other sites of Native activism, joined in the resistance movement. The Native American Committee (NAC), connected to the Red Power Movement,¹⁸⁷ started as an organization within the AIC in 1969. Eventually, after the passing of Robert Rietz, the Center's director, the NAC branched off from the Center, forming their own independent organization. The NAC published their own monthly newsletter, the *Redletter*, in which they discussed issues related to the Native Chicago community. The *Redletter*, even more overtly political than the *Warrior*, often discussed the imprisonment of Native people and promoted substantial prison reform.¹⁸⁸ Additionally, the NAC discussed issues of education and became highly involved in the two Indigenous-run schools in Chicago, Little Big Horn High School and O-Wai-Ya-Wa Elementary. The founding of the NAC indicated a shift

¹⁸⁶ American Indian Center, Powwow invitation, November 4, 1971, Chicago Indian Center - articles, clippings, mailings, pamphlets, reports [folder 2 of 2], 1950-1973, Box: 17, Folder: 9. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

¹⁸⁷ Native American Committee, Inc., *Redletter (Chicago, Ill.)*, 1976.

¹⁸⁸ Native American Committee, Inc., *Redletter (Chicago, Ill.)*, 1979, 5.

in Chicago's Native community towards a more direct opposition and resistance to Euro-American systemic oppression.

Both the *Redletter* and the *Warrior* made sure to include more than notifications of events and critical articles. Both newsletters brought humor and joy into their publications which helped strengthen members' morale, fostered a joyful environment for their community, and playfully challenged oppressive systems. Traditions of humor, starting before Euro-American colonization, remained an integral part of Native identity. As Vine Deloria Jr. explained in *Custer Died for Your Sins*, "For centuries before the white invasion, teasing was a method of control of social situations by Indian people. Rather than embarrass members of the tribe publicly, people used to tease individuals they considered out of step with the consensus of tribal opinion. In this way egos were preserved and disputes within the tribe of a personal nature were held to a minimum."¹⁸⁹ For Native people, humor, quips, and jokes stemmed from a long history of pre-colonial Indigenous tradition. Deloria Jr. also explained "When a people can laugh at themselves and laugh at others and hold all aspects of life together without letting anybody drive them to extremes, then it seems to me that that people can survive."¹⁹⁰ In this way, these publications utilized Indigenous traditions to create a more lighthearted atmosphere that the community felt comfortable and familiar with. Native people frequently used humor as a way to form a community which allowed the AIC and NAC to display its welcoming nature. The *Warrior* and the *Redletter* had specific sections for sharing jokes or cartoons. The newsletters also incorporated art and poetry as an integral part of their papers. In one edition of the *Warrior*, the editor wrote "Happiness is... The AIC WARRIOR!/ Ending the Board Of Director's Meetings at midnight!/ Dancing to the STONE SAVAGE!/ Is found in the dictionary/ AIC Canoe Club

¹⁸⁹ Vine Deloria, *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, 3. print, Avon Books 64477 (Avon Books, 1970), 147.

¹⁹⁰ Deloria, *Custer Died for Your Sins*, 167.

outings!/ Getting a dog that is already trained..../Being an Indian."¹⁹¹ Incorporating these sections made the AIC feel personal, fostering a strong sense of community and togetherness in every aspect of its operation. Native people were experts at producing jokes with an overtone of humor and an undertone of resistance. A newspaper article, discussing the moon landing, joked, "Now maybe the white man will go to the moon and give us our reservation back."¹⁹² The Redletter, with a similar section, would often post political cartoons and jokes. One cartoon depicts a Native person and a white man in a psychiatric office. In a panic, the Native man said "I dreamed someone stole my land!" and the white man, equally panicked, said "I dreamed we gave it back to you!"¹⁹³ These sections exhibited just how tight-knit, lively, creative, and humorous the community was. However, they also weaved anti-colonial sentiments into their humor which provided both a strong sense of Native community formed around resistance and an accessible way for non-Natives to critically think about the United State's treatment of Native people. Both the AIC and NAC, recognizing the importance of humor and joy as a core tradition of so many Indigenous communities, implemented poetry, jokes, and cartoons into their literature to create a sense of community, promote Native tradition, and challenge colonialism in a unique way.

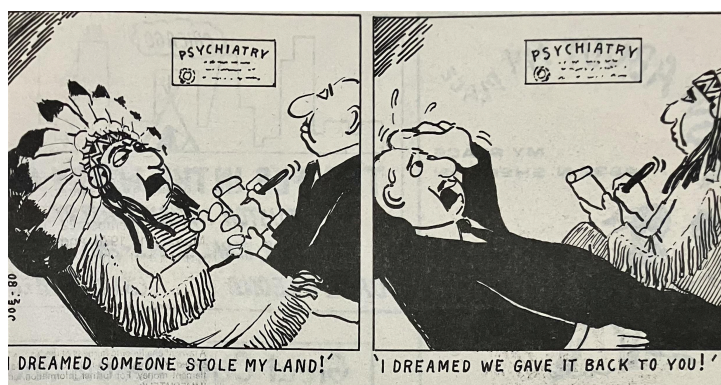


Figure 5. *Cartoon*¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ AIC, *Chicago Warrior*, April 1971.

¹⁹² Newspaper clipping "Why the Indian Loses Out,"

¹⁹³ Native American Committee, Inc., *Redletter (Chicago, Ill.)*, November 1980, 11.

¹⁹⁴ Native American Committee, Inc., *Redletter (Chicago, Ill.)*, November 1980, 11.

“That always felt like the best powwows there.”¹⁹⁵ Between powwows, celebrations, club meetings, parties, youth nights, and the normal late nights at the Center, the Native Uptown Community was steeped in celebration, an excellent strategy of survivance. Indigenous activism in Chicago thrived because Native people understood the necessity of joy and community to resistance. Resistance, activism, and protest easily drained people and led to burn out. In Chicago, Native people understood activism as a part of community, not the other way around. This led to a vibrant and thriving Native community where members supported each other, celebrated with each other, enjoyed each other's company, and, in turn, had a greater capacity for resistance. Additionally, Native joy and celebration was itself a form of resistance, building on ideas of survivance. Not only did powwows provide people with connection and joy, they also gave people a place to practice and share their traditions, embrace their Indigenous identities, and resist settler colonial ideas of assimilation. Powwows hosted by the AIC at the Broadway Armoury attracted pan-Indigenous participation which provided members with an opportunity to learn about different Indigenous traditions and grow their community. The AIC also understood the importance of intergenerational forms of resistance. The Center held many youth nights with half current popular music and the other half traditional Indigenous music. By combining these two, the community made sure that their traditions stayed relevant and important in the minds of their young people. In a photo from a Chicago parade, Native Chicagoans danced in traditional ceremonial clothing on Wabash street, in downtown Chicago, with the city skyscrapers as the backdrop. This image, celebratory in nature, also depicted the survivance of Native celebration, actively resisting colonization efforts. The growing population of Indigenous people in Chicago

¹⁹⁵ Carla Guerue, “Indigenous Chicago oral history project records,” by Melanie Cloud, *The Newberry Library, Chicago*, February 27, 2024.

directly resulted from U.S. relocation policy which, at its core, aimed to fragment, assimilate, and erase Indigenous values, ways of life, and community. Despite this, Native people in Chicago formed their own community, kept their Indigenous traditions alive, and continued to prioritize community and celebration.



Figure 6. *Little Brave*¹⁹⁶

Figure 7. *Dancing on Wabash*¹⁹⁷

In one such celebration, an armory powwow in 1971, the AIC provided an opportunity for traditional Indigenous gender expression that broke the bounds of Euro-American binary gender. In 1971, the term two-spirit had not yet emerged. However, more complex relationships with gender, though severely persecuted by Euro-Americans, had existed for centuries in various Indigenous societies. Though expressing such an identity was extremely dangerous and often met with hate and violence, Native people in Chicago at this time undoubtedly held these identities just as their presence continued in Indigenous societies all over the world. Because Euro-Americans perceived these identities as a threat to white supremacists,¹⁹⁸ Euro-American ideas of gender and power, both written and oral archives have diminished or altogether erased two-spirit stories from history. Therefore, scholars who do the difficult work of uncovering

¹⁹⁶ Native American Committee, Inc., *Redletter (Chicago, Ill.)*, November 1980, 11.

¹⁹⁷ Native American Committee, Inc., *Redletter (Chicago, Ill.)*, November 1980, 11.

¹⁹⁸Theodor de Bry, Balboa's Massacre of the Cueva (recto); Balboa Reaches the Sea (verso), engraving 1655.

two-spirit identities in the archives must read between lines, subvert traditional narratives, and pick up crumbs to piece together the rich stories of people's real lives and identities.¹⁹⁹ A Chicago powwow, hosted by the AIC, might have contained a piece of that story. When advertising the powwow in the *Warrior*, the writer borrowed language from the feminist movement to promote a women's dance which was traditionally intended for men: "Acknowledging the women's liberation movement, this will be the first Powwow in the country to invite Indian women to dance 'man style' dressed in men's costumes if they wish."²⁰⁰ The AIC utilized extremely strategic and purposeful language in this announcement. Borrowing language from the feminist movement aligned themselves with a primarily Euro-American movement which exhibited a level of assimilation into mainstream Euro-American culture. This crossing of gender norms, explained under the pretense of supporting women's liberation, allowed Native people the rare opportunity to express fluid gender identity, a powerful act of resistance against colonial structures. Through this addition to the powwow, the Center provided both two-spirit people and women who wished to compete in men's dance a space to express themselves, building both on Indigenous gender traditions and evolving their resistance strategy.

The AIC intertwined community, resistance, celebration, and survivance beautifully in the events they hosted, programs they sponsored, and support they offered. Native identity, agency, and community remained at the core of everything the Center produced. From its founding, the Center's ideas of grassroots support by and for Native people protected the organization from colonial influence. The Center's unwavering focus on a strong community also helped combat isolation and assimilation for many Natives new to the city. In this way, the community was itself an act of resistance against colonizing policy. Most of all, the AIC

¹⁹⁹ Saylesh Wesley, "Twin-Spirited Woman," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 3 (2014): 339, <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2685624>.

²⁰⁰ AIC, Powwow invitation, November 4, 1971.

provided a place for resistance through survivance. The Center's emphasis on Indigenous methods of education, their powwows and other celebrations, gender responsibilities, the Warrior's language and humor, and the methods of assisting their community all centered Native experiences and uplifted Native traditions. This helped to create a Native in Chicago that thrived together, relied on each other, and asserted their agency and right to self-determination.

Chapter 3: Wrigleyville

A large drum beat as everyone gathered around. Grateful for the warmer weather to come, it was the *dé'mengises* (strawberry moon)²⁰¹, which meant *niben* (summer)²⁰² had started. This year, they gathered near the end of the *Mishigami* (Lake Michigan)²⁰³, just north of the river. Up north, the land was firmer. Just south of their village, the marsh between the *Mishigami* and the river began. *Nsoe'gens*²⁰⁴, much more portable than wigwams, surrounded the temporary village. The *nsoe'gens*, similar to a teepee, had three poles holding the frame but had a more rounded shape. The drum captivated the audience and the community felt the heartbeat of *Segmekwé* (Mother Earth)²⁰⁵ in each beat. The drum was beautiful, made carefully from the hollowed stump of an oak with a dried deerskin stretched expertly ovetop. The Nishnabé village ate their meals of fish and three sisters happily. Everyone mingled, elders told stories, children taught each other how to braid the *wishkpemishkos* (sweetgrass)²⁰⁶, and relatives connected. After all, that was what *niben* was for.

In the sixteenth century, the Nishnabé, Potawatomi, Nation, inhabited the Great Lakes region along with many other Indigenous Nations. They, along with the Ojibwe and Odawa Nations, made up the Council of Three Fires. The Council kept balance, stability, and connection between the Nations. The Ojibwe, the "keepers of the faith," the Odawa, "keepers of trade," and the Potawatomi, "keepers of the fire" upheld a strong sense of community through trade, regular

²⁰¹"CHC's section three provides glimpse into pre-European contact lifeways," Potawatomi, Citizen Potawatomi Nation, February 19, 2021,

<https://www.potawatomi.org/blog/2021/02/19/cpn-celebrates-25th-anniversary-of-name-change/>.

²⁰² "CHC's section three provides glimpse into pre-European contact lifeways."

²⁰³ "CHC's section three provides glimpse into pre-European contact lifeways."

²⁰⁴ "CHC's section three provides glimpse into pre-European contact lifeways."

²⁰⁵ "CHC's section three provides glimpse into pre-European contact lifeways."

²⁰⁶ "CHC's section three provides glimpse into pre-European contact lifeways."

meetings, and peace in the region.²⁰⁷ Before European colonization, these Nations, along with others in the region, primarily lived in village communities and moved with the seasons. With harsh winters near the lakes, citizens of these Nations lived in both permanent settlements and portable homes. The three sisters, corn, squash, and beans, provided villages with sustenance.²⁰⁸ These Nations also became experts at water navigation as the Great Lakes and subsequent rivers provided great access to a large portion of Turtle Island.²⁰⁹

Four centuries later, in 1970, another drum beat as the shadow of Wrigley Field grew longer in the background. Some started the fire and people ate, danced, talked, and laughed. It was still early in the night. The sun had just disappeared over the horizon and the air started to cool down. In early May, with summer around the corner, a large teepee, lent to the group by the AIC, served as the main shelter from the chilly air. But no one seemed to pay much mind to the weather as more community members showed up with their families. The night was just getting started and the lively conversation filled the space. Spirits were high as the drum beat but this was not a celebration, this was a protest.

While both the AICC and the AIC resisted colonial oppression and fought for sovereignty, neither of them centered their strategies around protest. The Chicago Indian Village (CIV), however, created a movement that outright protested Euro-American treatment of Native people. Beginning in the early 1970s and lasting over two years, the CIV attracted a dedicated community that implemented prolonged protest as a strategy for resistance. Although rarely mentioned in detail in current scholarship and often at odds with other Native Chicago organizations at the time, the CIV demonstrated the power and influence of a militant protest

²⁰⁷ "Three Fires Council," Potawatomi Heritage, Citizen Potawatomi Nation, <https://www.potawatomiheritage.com/encyclopedia/three-fires-council/>.

²⁰⁸ "CHC's section three provides glimpse into pre-European contact lifeways."

²⁰⁹ Nelson, *Muddy Ground*, 9.

movement in Chicago. Refusing to tolerate the current conditions and treatment in the city, the CIV established demands from local and national officials that would uplift the lives of Native people. Within the Village, the members kept the occupation alive through Indigenous traditions of strong community, intergenerational perspectives, and relationships with the land.

Additionally, their rhetorical strategies, perhaps too radical for the Euro-American media at the time, highlighted their strong commitment to restoring Indigenous ways of life that centered community and relationships with land.

A white landlord had just evicted Carrol Warrington (Menomonee), a member of Chicago's Indigenous community, and her six children from their Wrigleyville apartment. Mrs. Warrington, a single mother after leaving her abusive husband, did not have the money to waste on rent without heat. After months of no heat in the apartment where she lived with her small children, despite her consistent requests, the landlord still had not fixed the issue. Desperate to have essential heat in the cold months of Chicago, Mrs. Warrington refused to pay rent until the heat was fixed.²¹⁰ The result of her rent strike, however, did not end as she had expected and her landlord served her an eviction notice that spring. The landlord discarded her belongings onto the front sidewalk and it seemed she had no place to go. However, that was far from true. Mrs. Warrington leaned on her community for support and they responded.

After sharing her story with her community, many Indigenous Chicagoans decided to create an encampment for Mrs. Warrington and her children until someone offered them a suitable place to live. However, this encampment was bigger than one person. Whether living in Wrigleyville, Uptown, or elsewhere in the city, most Indigenous Chicagoans shared Mrs. Warrington's experience of inadequate housing. Even if their apartments had heat, they usually

²¹⁰ Newspaper clipping, *Chicago Today*, May 6, 1970, Chicago Indian Village - Wrigley Field - clippings, June 1970, Box: 17, Folder: 19. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

had various other issues. Infestations, dilapidated buildings, unsafe neighborhoods, and much more were the conditions that many Native families across Chicago dealt with every day.²¹¹ Furthermore, Native people in Chicago faced “an unemployment rate between 70 and 80 per cent and a school dropout rate as high as 90 percent.”²¹² Native people across the country faced problems of alcoholism and suicide, especially in urban areas like Chicago.²¹³ The Euro-American systems in the city attempted to keep Native people down. By standing behind Mrs. Warrington, Chicago's Native community had a chance to bring these concerns to the attention of the city and enact impactful changes.

So, to protest Mrs. Warrington’s situation and the conditions of so many other Native Chicagoans, a group of the Native community set up camp behind Wrigley Field with the intention to stay for as long as it took for the city to recognize their concerns. Some went to borrow a teepee from the AIC while others retrieved Mrs. Warrington’s belongings that the landlord had thrown haphazardly from the apartment. Together, members from the AIC, NAC, and other community members set up the teepee on the empty lot across from the apartment. Soon, more members joined and much of the Native community came to support her. Some stayed at the encampment for the night while others prepared to remain behind Wrigley Field for longer. Just like centuries earlier, the group had a teepee, a fire, a drum, and their community and a village formed.²¹⁴ Non-Native Chicagoans came to show their support and the local news media picked up their interesting story. They called themselves the Chicago Indian Village (CIV)

²¹¹ Newspaper clipping, “Uptown Indians: Tough Struggle for Survival Continues,” General - mailings, clippings, 1952-1989, Box: 18, Folder: 28. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

²¹² Parachini, “Chicago’s Indian Ghettos, Where Hope Slowly Dies.”

²¹³ Parachini, “Chicago’s Indian Ghettos, Where Hope Slowly Dies.”

²¹⁴ William Granger, “Protesting Indians set up a squatters' village on N. Side,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, June 1, 1970, Chicago Indian Village - Wrigley Field - clippings, June 1970, Box: 17, Folder: 19. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

and the encampment lasted over a month in Wrigleyville. That is, until, on June 7th, a white person living nearby called the police to complain about the noise.

Since its creation, the police force in the United States, originally started as "slave patrols," upheld white, colonial ideals by policing behavior deemed inappropriate by Euro-American society.²¹⁵ The police force in the United States, a tool of white supremacy, kept racial minorities from achieving equality and preserved the racial hierarchy that fueled Euro-American power and supremacy. Additionally, the United States also utilized the police to attack the sovereignty of Native Nations.²¹⁶ Both Euro-American society's racialization of Native people as loud, disruptive, and abnormal and the United State's goal of erasing Indigenous people and traditions led to the over-policing and unfair treatment of Native people. In 1956, a short time after Mike Chosa (Ojibwe) arrived in Chicago from the Lac du Flambeau Indian Reservation in Wisconsin, a police car stopped him for going the wrong way down a one-way street. The police officer, likely affirming the harmful stereotype of Chosa as backwards, recommended Chosa "buy [himself] some gas and get out of town."²¹⁷ This exemplified just one of many ways police repeatedly belittled, disrespected, and harmed Native people. In this way, Euro-Americans used the police to assert white, colonial power, thinly veiled by respectability politics and language of "disturbing the peace." One may find this especially hypocritical because Euro-American colonists originally "disrupted the peace" of two entire continents. Therefore, when a neighbor called the police on the CIV with a noise complaint, the police

²¹⁵ "The Origins of Modern Day Policing," NAACP, NAACP, 2021, <https://naacp.org/find-resources/history-explained/origins-modern-day-policing#:~:text=Slave%20patrols,and%20produce%20desired%20slave%20behavior>.

²¹⁶ Desiree L. Fox, Ciara D. Hansen, Ann M. Miller, *Over-Incarceration of Native Americans: Roots, Inequities, and Solutions* (Safety and Justice Challenge, 2023), <https://safetyandjusticechallenge.org/resources/over-incarceration-of-native-americans-roots-inequities-and-solutions/>.

²¹⁷ Dave Canfield, "Chosa, Indian leader, well trained for role," *Chicago Daily News*, June 15, 1971, Newberry 3 17: Chicago Indian Village - Nike Missile Site - clippings, July 1971, Box: 17, Folder: 17. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

responded with aggression. When police arrived, they interrupted a ceremonial dance at the Village.²¹⁸ Close to 20 squad cars surrounded the encampment. Barbra Randall (Apache) commented "There were so many police and so few Indians ... they must be pretty afraid of the Indians." Walking through the crowd with clubs, the police gave the group until 10:30 pm to wrap up their gathering; however, at 10:15 pm, they started arresting people. The encounter turned violent as police roughly handled several members of the community. Ultimately, the police took ten people into custody. Among them, a nine-year-old boy who the police arrested for throwing rocks. The police also took a prayer mat and a drum.²¹⁹ This extreme police response to a simple noise complaint demonstrated the violence and disrespect Chicago's Native community, as well as Indigenous people throughout the country, experienced for simply practicing their traditions with their community.

The term "radical" usually means extremely different from the usual or traditional.²²⁰ But which tradition serves as the baseline from which "radicalism" is determined? Furthermore, within many activist movements, the term usually describes people or groups who strive to dramatically move society forward with new ideas. When discussing Indigenous activism, this term becomes complicated. In fact, Native people may consider Native activism not the least bit radical. Before colonialism, many Native Nations and communities thrived and continue to do so. For Indigenous communities in Chicago and across the country, a connection with ancestors and a return to Native traditions and identity fueled their activism. However, from a Euro-American perspective, this activism did seem extremely radical as it strayed far from the norm and threatened Eurocentric power and supremacy. While Euro-Americans may have

²¹⁸ Charles M. Smith and Paul McGrath, "Police Arrest 10 in Indian Village," *Chicago Sun-Times*, June 8, 1970, Wrigley Field - clippings, June 1970, Box: 17, Folder: 19. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

²¹⁹ Smith and McGrath, "Police Arrest 10 in Indian Village."

²²⁰ Merriam-Webster Online, s.v. "Radical," accessed November 15, 2025, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/radical>

perceived the CIV's actions and demands may be radical, they were not unthinkable for Indigenous people whose ancestors thrived in the very identities, roles, and traditions the CIV attempted to build upon.

Among the scholarship that discusses Native activism and Chicago Native history during this period, historians often underrepresent or simply leave out the Chicago Indian Village. From existing scholarship, a simplified narrative of the CIV emerges. *Reimagining Indian Country: Native American Migration and Identity in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles*, written by Nicolas G. Rosenthal, challenges the misconception that sites of Indigenous presence occur only on reservations. Although this book primarily focused on Los Angeles' evolving Indigenous population in the twentieth century, it provided quite a bit of context to Indigenous activism in Chicago. In chapter six, "Grassroots Indian Activism: The Red Power Movement in Urban Areas," Rosenthal dedicates a few sentences to the CIV. He explained that the community established the Village to "protest the housing conditions of Native people in the city."²²¹ He further clarified, "the group then moved to occupy a former Nike missile base on Lake Michigan that it planned to convert into housing and a cultural and educational center."²²² Additionally, Laura M. Furlan analyzed the CIV in one paragraph in *Indigenous Cities: Urban Indian Fiction and the Histories of Relocation*. *Indigenous Cities* provides an interdisciplinary perspective on Indigeneity in urban settings. Furlan employed novels, narratives, and films from Indigenous creators to tell the stories of urban Indigeneity. Her description of the CIV in her fourth chapter, "The City as Confluence," names Carrol Warrington and the involvement of the NAC. Furlan ends the paragraph by explaining, "The group demanded an Indian housing complex and

²²¹ Nicolas G. Rosenthal, *Reimagining Indian Country: Native American Migration & Identity in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles*, *First Peoples: New Directions in Indigenous Studies* (University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 137.

²²² Rosenthal, *Reimagining Indian Country*, 137.

adjacent cultural center, to be built in the Uptown neighborhood."²²³ These brief descriptions of the Chicago Indian Village do not fully represent the detail, community, time, and involvement of the movement. From reading these descriptions, audiences would likely misinterpret the CIV as a small, short lived, fringe group. Other scholarship that covers this same time and place does not mention the CIV at all.²²⁴ The Chicago Indian Village likely lacks the deserved attention from historical scholarship because of its unique qualities. The group, more militant than other Native organizations in Chicago but lacking national attention like the American Indian Movement (AIM), the Alcatraz occupation, or Wounded Knee, does not fit into a simple narrative. However, truly understanding the wide range of strategies, movements, and communities that Indigenous people formed to combat colonization and promote survivance of Native cultures and people required complicated narratives.

While most scholarship only mentions the CIV briefly or, more often, leaves the group out of Chicago's Native activist narrative entirely, the full story of the Village reveals a complex and rich history of Native people in Chicago. After police terrorized the encampment in Wrigleyville, the group of close to 750 people moved to an abandoned Nike missile site in Belmont Harbor in June of 1971.²²⁵ That year, the U.S. military and the city of Chicago collaborated to turn the land back over to Chicago with plans to create a public park.²²⁶ Despite this, the Village set up their teepee and turned the missile site into their new home. The group,

²²³ Laura M. Furlan, *Indigenous Cities: Urban Indian Fiction and the Histories of Relocation* (University of Nebraska press, 2017), 176.

²²⁴ John J. Laukaitis, *Community Self-Determination: American Indian Education in Chicago, 1952-2006*, Tribal Worlds (SUNY press, 2015); Rosalyn R. LaPier and David Beck, *City Indian: Native American Activism in Chicago, 1893-1934* (University of Nebraska press, 2015).

²²⁵ Newspaper clipping, Dave Canfield, "Indian leader Chosa has possible injury," Newberry 3 17: Chicago Indian Village - Nike Missile Site - clippings, July 1971, Box: 17, Folder: 17. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

²²⁶ James W. Singer, "Indians here on Nike site," *Chicago Sun-Times*, June 15, 71, Newberry 3 17: Chicago Indian Village - Nike Missile Site - clippings, July 1971, Box: 17, Folder: 17. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

united in their values, hoped for better education, jobs, housing, and, most significantly, a place where Native people in Chicago could live, learn, and share tradition together. The Village attempted to procure the land for public housing and a Native cultural center. However, the local officials would not allow it and, after a few weeks, they threatened to remove the Village from the land. The CIV fought back and members formed a patrol unit to protect their encampment. The patrol, consisting of both men and women, carried guns and wore beaded headbands with a feather in their hair.²²⁷ One image, published in the *Chicago Daily News*, depicts Mrs. Warrington behind the fence with a shotgun.²²⁸ The beaded headbands and feathers provided the group with a symbol of collective Indigenous identity.²²⁹ The Village, likely inspired by other militant activist groups at the time including the Black Panthers and AIM, prepared for an attack at any moment with their guns and Molotov cocktails. Eventually, in early July, the police arrived at the Belmont Harbor encampment and a battle began. The police arrested 12 members and used shotguns, submachine guns, and tear gas to forcibly remove the Native people from the land. Mike Chosa, Mrs. Warrington, and others ended up in the hospital from the attack. Mrs. Warrington "suffered back injuries when four policemen dragged her by her feet for a block along a gravel roadway."²³⁰ Despite this, the Village refused to give up and moved into the Fourth Presbyterian Church basement where the pastor allowed them to stay. However, after a few days, complaints from the church members increased and the church forced the group out,

²²⁷ David Fortney, Newspaper clipping "Scope Mike," Chicago Indian Village - Big Ben Plains - clippings, July 1971, Box: 17, Folder: 12. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

²²⁸ Newspaper clipping, "Indians battle cops, leave base," Fourth Presbyterian Church - clippings, July 1971, Box: 17, Folder: 15. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

²²⁹ Fortney, Newspaper clipping "Scope Mike."

²³⁰ Canfield, "Chosa, Indian leader, well trained for role."

threatening to call the police.²³¹ From there, the Village moved to Big Bend Lake forest preserve northwest of the city in Des Plaines where they stayed for months. However, as the weather got colder, officials told them they could no longer stay at the camp as it did not have adequate facilities for the colder months. The group argued that this wasn't an issue as they can build fires and live off the land, like their ancestors did for centuries. The Village prioritized their community over Euro-American ideas of modern facilities. Yet, once again, officials forced the group to move.²³² This time, they landed at another Nike site at Argonne. Despite claims from the AIC and local media that depicted the CIV as an unpopular, fringe group, the CIV attracted substantial support. One day during the occupation at Argonne, over 200 people arrived at the site in support of the Village and their goals for a Native community and center.²³³ Still, officials padlocked the gate and placed barbed wire in front of the pedestrian path, forcing the Village out once more. The group that remained ended up at Camp Logan, an army training camp near Zion, Illinois where local government officials promised the group temporary use of the facilities.²³⁴ Move after move, constantly battling local police and city officials, the Chicago Indian Village persisted.

²³¹ Newspaper clipping, "Clergyman Tells Ouster of Indians," *Chicago Tribune*, July 5, 1971, Fourth Presbyterian Church - clippings, July 1971, Box: 17, Folder: 15. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

²³² Newspaper clipping, "Indians battle cops, leave base."

²³³ "200 join Indians awaiting eviction at Argonne site," *Chicago Sun-Times*, August 16, 1971, Chicago Indian Village - Argonne, clippings, July 30, 1971, Box: 17, Folder: 11. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

²³⁴ Newspaper clipping, "Cold camp for Indian protesting housing lack," January 1972, Chicago Indian Village - Camp Logan - clippings, January 1972, Box: 17, Folder: 14. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.



Figure 8. *Mrs. Warrington Patrols with Gun*

From the start of the CIV, Betty Jack (Ojibwe) took on a leadership role in the Village along with Mrs. Warrington who remained a central member of the Village.²³⁵ However, Mike Chosa (Ojibwe), brother to Betty Jack, emerged as the Village's main leader. Son of Ben Chosa, president of the Chippewa tribal council for 45 years,²³⁶ Mike Chosa arrived in Chicago in 1956. After graduating from Haskell Institute, a vocational school for Native Americans in Kansas which later became Haskell Indian Nations University, Chosa worked at the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) for five months. However, he quickly quit the BIA because "he didn't think the government was doing anything to help the Indians."²³⁷ His time at the BIA certainly contributed to his disillusionment with Euro-American systems, especially those that claimed to help Native people. Through his time at the BIA, Chosa likely realized that the colonizers had very little

²³⁵ Newspaper clipping, "Indians battle cops, leave base."

²³⁶ Canfield, "Chosa, Indian leader, well trained for role,"

²³⁷ Canfield, "Chosa, Indian leader, well trained for role,"

incentive to help the people they colonized exercise their sovereignty. Chosa also spent four years in the Air Force and studied under Saul Alinsky, a notable Chicago-based community activist.²³⁸ Described by local newspapers as "Chicago's most militant Indian leader,"²³⁹ Chosa led several protests for Native people in Chicago including a sit-in in the Chicago BIA office and a demonstration during the National Conference on Social Welfare. Chosa's commitment to the Chicago Indian Village, however, constituted his most prominent ongoing leadership role in the movement. While his leadership of the Village sparked controversy both within and outside of the Native community, Mike Chosa remained dedicated to the Village and its demands for improving the lives of Native people on their own terms.



Figure 9. *Mike Chosa and the CIV*²⁴⁰

While the Chicago Indian Village remained separate from other militant Native American resistance efforts, their similarities highlight the significance of the Village's prolonged protest as a strong strategy of resistance. Both local newspapers and scholarship mentioning CIV compare this movement to the occupation of Alcatraz. In fact, many newspapers at the time used the phrase "little Alcatraz" to describe the movement.²⁴¹ Of course, the Chicago Indian Village

²³⁸ Canfield, "Chosa, Indian leader, well trained for role,"

²³⁹ Canfield, "Chosa, Indian leader, well trained for role,"

²⁴⁰ Canfield, "Chosa, Indian leader, well trained for role,"

²⁴¹ Granger, "Protesting Indians set up a squatters' village on N. Side,"

differed from the Alcatraz occupation due to their differences in location, mobility, and media attention. However, comparisons to a nationally recognized Native activist movement also validated the work of the CIV as a contributor to wider Native resistance. Like Alcatraz, the Village made deliberate, clever, and skilled decisions about their activism. Similar to Alcatraz activists' argument that the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty entitled Native people to occupy unused federal land, the Village argued they had similar treaty rights that allowed them to reclaim land.²⁴² This informed their initial decision to move to the Belmont Harbor missile site and subsequent moves to the forest preserve and army training camp. Mrs. Warrington herself likened their work to the Alcatraz Island occupation, no doubt inspired by its methods and success.²⁴³ By connecting themselves with the Alcatraz movement, not only did the Village gain more attention from supporters and the media, they connected their work in Chicago with a broader national Native activist movement that championed active protest as a strategy for resisting colonial power.

A group often forgotten about in Euro-American scholarship, children, remained central to the story and purpose of the Chicago Indian Village. The treatment of and consideration for children in the CIV indicated the beliefs, values, and goals of the movement. Additionally, prioritizing children in the Village created intergenerational forms of activism. Firstly, children became members of the Village just like adults. Children did not live with relatives or friends during the Village's existence. They traveled from place to place and lived the same as every other member. Because no village could exist without children, the next generation, the presence of children legitimized the CIV as a true village community. The CIV not only understood the

²⁴² Newspaper clipping, "Wreckers razing 4 Nike sites," July 17, 1971, Chicago Indian Village - Nike Missile Site - clippings, July 1971, Box: 17, Folder: 17. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

²⁴³ Phillip J. O'Connor, "'Squat-in' may grow," *Chicago Daily News*, June 1, 1970, Chicago Indian Village - Wrigley Field - clippings, June 1970, Box: 17, Folder: 19. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

importance of children to the legitimacy of their movement, their children represented the reason for the movement altogether. While talking to a reporter, Chosa explained, “The Indians have been standing back and saying nothing for too long. Now our entire future, and mainly that of our children's, are at stake.”²⁴⁴ Chosa exhibited an intergenerational mindset that centered Native children and their future as the reason for their activism. Additionally, the Village gave Native people an opportunity to practice, uninterrupted by Euro-American restrictions, Native traditions of childrearing and caretaking. Adult members of the Village treated the children as any other member. As one newspaper article on the CIV remarked, “The kids are part of the group and nobody tries to shut them out of anything. They talk with the grown-ups as easily as they do among themselves.”²⁴⁵ Children collected firewood, attended meetings, learned Indigenous history and traditions, and contributed greatly to the sense of community in the Village. These kinds of interactions with children closely resembled traditional Indigenous relationships between children and adults. In many Native Nations, adults viewed children as full members of the community while understanding that children still required some guidance. Furthermore, the CIV rejected Euro-American expectations of the nuclear family and gendered ideas of caretaking. Children from many families joined the Village and, regardless of their biological relationship, adults in the Village collectively took up the responsibility of caring for these children. All members of the CIV encouraged the children to use the only teepee in the Village's possession while most of the adults slept outside.²⁴⁶ Additionally, both men and women performed caretaking roles, differing greatly from Euro-American standards which usually

²⁴⁴ Mike Chosa, *Chicago Indian Village*, 1970, -Chicago Indian Village - Bulletins, 1970, Box: 17, Folder: 13. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

²⁴⁵ Dan Tucker, “Chosa keeping Indian fires lit,” Chicago Indian Village - Naperville - clippings, December 1971, Box: 17, Folder: 16. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

²⁴⁶ David Fortney, Newspaper clipping “Scope Mike,”

expected only women to fill the role. Many photos and stories share times of collective caretaking for the children in the Village. A picture from the Belmont Harbor occupation depicted a child holding the flag of the Village and sitting with a man as they both looked out over the lake.²⁴⁷ The adults of the Village did not disregard children. Instead, resisting Euro-American perspectives of children, they made children central to the daily activities of the CIV as well as to the goals, values, and mission of the movement. Through embracing traditional Native values of intergenerational thinking and child caretaking, the Chicago Indian Village strengthened its community, activism, and purpose.

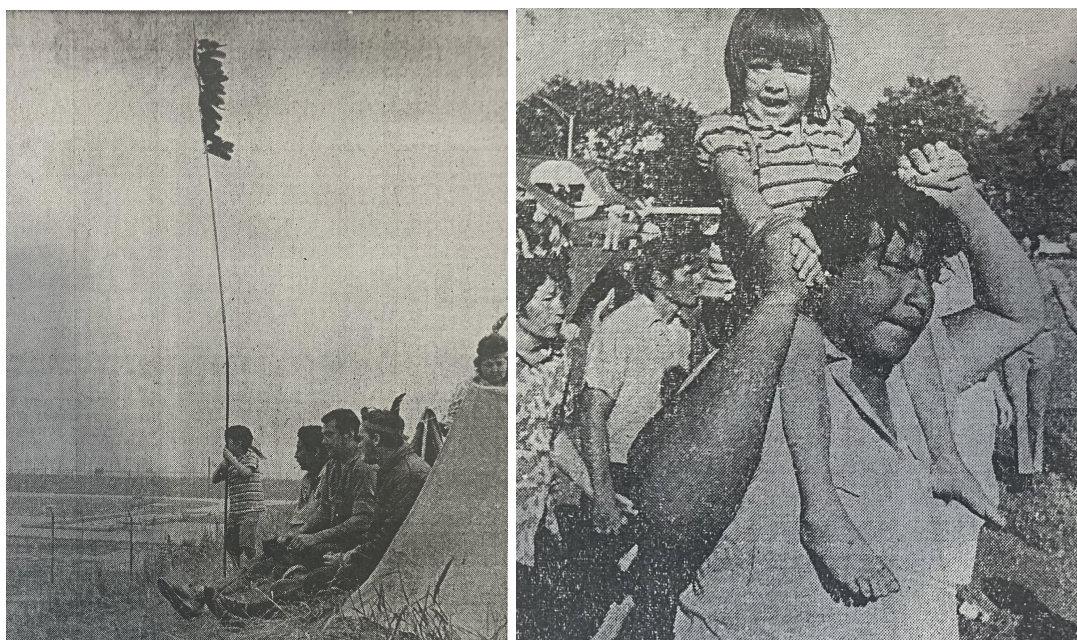


Figure 10. *Sitting by the Lake*²⁴⁸

Figure 11. *Going for a ride*²⁴⁹

Certainly the most radical of Chicago Native resistance, in diverting from Euro-American norms and expectations, the Chicago Indian Village protested through explicit and outspoken

²⁴⁷ Newspaper clipping from Nike Missile Site, Chicago Indian Village - Nike Missile Site - clippings, July 1971, Box: 17, Folder: 17. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

²⁴⁸ Dan Tucker, "Chosa keeping Indian fires lit."

²⁴⁹ Dan Tucker, "Chosa keeping Indian fires lit."

rhetoric that amplified their resistance. The CIV's language, mostly recorded in newspaper articles or their own newsletter, reflected their resistance strategies. The CIV spoke honestly and openly about their attitudes towards the current treatment of Native people as well as the centuries of oppression they faced from Euro-American colonizers. Unlike the language produced by the AICC and earlier language of the AIC, the CIV's rhetoric remained straightforward and bold because it had no desire to appeal to a Euro-American audience. Their goal focused on enacting significant, lasting change quickly through committed and prolonged protest. Their language reflected these strategies. They claimed, "the white man is the devil, Dailey and Nixon are devils."²⁵⁰ They spoke out against the BIA, outright insisting that they did not need the "paternalism" of the BIA which had placed Native people "under their thumb."²⁵¹ In response to a visit from an assistant U.S. attorney to the camp at the Belmont Harbor, members planted a flag and explained the flag meant "unless we get decent housing we'll be here a long time."²⁵² Another member "raised his clenched fist in a 'red power' salute."²⁵³ Members also compared assimilation to brainwashing and called for a rewriting of history that included Indigenous perspectives. All these actions established the group as completely separated from and opposed to Euro-American systems and societal expectations. Betty Jack, a leader of the Village, remarked, "They say we're militant, we're radical... Well all right, but they say whoever speaks the loudest gets heard."²⁵⁴ While they did not totally embrace the terms "radical" or

²⁵⁰ M. W. Newman, "Indian fort Whites require passes to enter missile site," *Chicago Daily News*, June 16, 1971, Chicago Indian Village - Nike Missile Site - clippings, July 1971, Box: 17, Folder: 17. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

²⁵¹ Chosa, *Chicago Indian Village*

²⁵² Newspaper clippings, *Chicago Tribune*, June 1971, Chicago Indian Village - Nike Missile Site - clippings, July 1971, Box: 17, Folder: 17. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

²⁵³ Newspaper clippings, *Chicago Tribune*, June 1971.

²⁵⁴ Newspaper clipping, Chicago Indian Village - Argonne, clippings, July 30, 1971, Box: 17, Folder: 11. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

"militant," they did not deny it. Their strategy relied on U.S. officials and Euro-American opinion viewing them as fully committed to their cause and unwilling to back down. When a reporter asked Mike Chosa "what would happen if police tried to break the camp, the Indian leader pulled a shotgun shell from his pocket and said, 'This is for the first cop who harms an Indian.'"²⁵⁵ Clearly, the slow, gradual process of resistance other Native groups employed did not interest the CIV. Because they saw their community continually struggling, their goals prioritized immediate and substantial change which they believed they could only achieve through active protest. Their unapologetic language reflected their unwavering commitment to the movement. They implemented this explicit rhetoric to communicate their goals and further their resistance to Euro-American colonial oppression.

As the CIV continued its outspoken opposition to the discrimination and violence they faced, the AIC no longer supported the group and tension formed between the two organizations. However, instead of viewing this separation and disagreement as factionalism or division, weakening the strong unity of Chicago's Native community, one can see this split reflected diverging paths both moving towards a shared goal of Native resistance. The members of the AIC, believing the CIV's radical nature would harm the Center's more gradual resistance efforts, claimed the group did not represent the opinions of most Chicago Native people. The Center, unsuccessfully, requested the teepee back which they lent to the CIV, representing the official split between the groups. One newspaper reported, "Antipathy between the Indian Village and other Indian organizations runs deep."²⁵⁶ In fact, a few ladies at St. Augustine's created a petition

²⁵⁵ Canfield, "Chosa, Indian leader, well trained for role."

²⁵⁶ Newspaper clipping, Chicago Indian Village - Argonne.

protesting the original CIV encampment in Wrigleyville which gained over 250 signatures.

While splits like these occur often within activist movements, they do not always indicate the deterioration of the movement. Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee Nation) describes the story of the Chickamauga Path and the Beloved Path in *Our Fire Survives the Storm: A Cherokee Literary History*. During and directly after the Revolutionary War, Cherokee leaders employed different strategies in response to United States' colonists encroaching on Cherokee land. Tsiyu Gansini, a Cherokee warrior, fought endlessly against U.S. troops to protect his land.²⁵⁷ His cousin, Nanye'hi, employed more diplomatic strategies, choosing peace and cultural preservation when possible. The warrior strategies of Tsiyu Gansini became known as the Chickamauga Path as he settled with his people near the Chickamauga Creek.²⁵⁸ The peaceful strategies of Nanye'hi and her impressive ability to adapt cultures and practices became known as the Beloved Path. Both paths worked towards the same goal and both paths remained useful and necessary to continuing Indigenous traditions and life for the Cherokee Nation. Justice explains, "As the Beloved Path was and remains a negotiation that required strength, wisdom, and determination to effectively balance, so too is the Chickamauga approach."²⁵⁹ Although the different paths may disagree about the methods, they both work towards the same goal. Just a few centuries later, the Chicago Indian Village and its cousin, the American Indian Center, followed similar paths. A moment of understanding between the two groups demonstrated this. In May of 1972, at the Center's annual

²⁵⁷ Daniel Heath Justice, *Our Fire Survives the Storm: A Cherokee Literary History*, Indigenous Americas Series (University of Minnesota press, 2006), 32.

²⁵⁸ Justice, *Our Fire Survives the Storm*, 38.

²⁵⁹ Justice, *Our Fire Survives the Storm*, 37.

Buffalo Dinner fundraiser, Mike Chosa and about 20 members of the CIV "crashed" the event where the Center invited Senators Adlai Stevenson III and Charles Percy to speak. The senators planned to discuss current legislation that would give aid to Native people like the 17,000 Natives living in Chicago. The CIV, interested in policies that would impact Chicago Natives, wanted to attend. Although initially hostile, the confrontation between CIV and AIC members eventually calmed as Chosa assured the party they "were only there to listen."²⁶⁰ Ultimately, the Center members allowed the CIV members to stay to hear the speakers. A member of the AIC even remarked that "Chosa is an honorable man...he kept his word that the group was there only to listen."²⁶¹ While they did not necessarily agree with each other's methods, the CIV and the AIC members still respected one another and recognized that they belonged to a larger community with the same goals. As Justice explains, "Chickamanguas are survivors; It is through their defiance that so many of the old ways and traditions have been maintained."²⁶² However, he also maintains that "When the focus centers on the survival and endurance of the People, peace itself can be as much an assertion of defiance as the Chickamauga consciousness of War."²⁶³ Both paths, necessary to the survival of the Cherokee in the eighteenth century, remained vital to Native Chicago resistance in the 1970s. Each adopted different strategies and, although they disagreed, they both created moments of resistance vital to the survival of their community.

²⁶⁰ Chosa, *Chicago Indian Village*

²⁶¹ Chosa, *Chicago Indian Village*

²⁶² Justice, *Our Fire Survives the Storm*, 38.

²⁶³ Justice, *Our Fire Survives the Storm*, 38.

The majority of the written information about the Village remains in local Chicago newspapers including the *Daily News*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the *Chicago Sun Times*. The comments made by these newspapers in their sections on the CIV often portrayed the group as stubborn, unreasonable, and abnormal. Their language dismisses the valid concerns of Native people. When describing a CIV demonstration at the Lincoln Park Zoo, the reporter claimed the demonstrators "dramatize their contention that lions have better housing than Indians do."²⁶⁴ Relegated to the pages of a gossip column in the *Chicago Tribune*, Ann Gerber claimed, "Until the Indians try to become self-sufficient and not beggars, they will not get the respect and bounty they insist is theirs."²⁶⁵ Even in an attempt to sympathize with the cause, the *Daily News*, in an article titled "Indians are Losing Again," wrote, "They remain disadvantaged stepchildren, victims of politics and neglect."²⁶⁶ Whether overt or more subtle, the language choice portraying CIV members and Native people in general as dramatic, "beggars," and "victims" attempted to weaken the agency and resistance of Natives. Additionally, the media heavily reported on the supposed incompetencies of Chosa's leadership. They made several claims about his hot-headedness, inability to compromise, and his poor leadership qualities. Furthermore, the news coverage reliably focused on the shortcomings of the CIV rather than their strengths. Several articles commented on the problem with alcohol in the Village, the cleanliness of the encampment, and the lack of access to facilities. Through undermining the leader of the Village and its appearance, the media coverage discredited the hard work of Chosa, other leaders, and the

²⁶⁴ Newspaper clipping, December 1, 1971, Chicago Indian Village - Naperville - clippings, December 1971, Box: 17, Folder: 16. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

²⁶⁵ Anne Gerber, "VIP," *Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago Indian Village - Camp Logan - clippings*, January 1972, Box: 17, Folder: 14. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

²⁶⁶ Newspaper clippings, "Indians are Losing Again," *Chicago Daily News*, *Chicago Indian Village - Nike Missile Site - clippings*, July 1971, Box: 17, Folder: 17. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

rest of the Village's members. The news media completely invalidated the demands of the Village. In an article titled "Mike Chosa a Bit Choosy," the writer explains:

It has been a long time since the buffalo roamed near Uptown. The fish do not leap in the North Branch of the Chicago River. The deer do not lope through the forest, and we have no hunting grounds, happy or otherwise. If that's what Chosa wants, I'm afraid that he is looking in the wrong place. This is Chicago, not North Dakota. About the best you can hope for here is hot and cold running water, a furnace that works in the winter, and a landlord who keeps the place in shape and doesn't gouge you on the rent. Chosa may as well forget about those broken 100-year-old treaties, and settle for a solid two-year lease on a clean flat.²⁶⁷

This article entirely reduced and dismissed the CIV's purpose. The article, blinded by Euro-American colonialist rhetoric, refused to acknowledge the reason why Chicago no longer looked the way it used to. The misguided author also adopts a reductionist approach to the concerns of the CIV, greatly hyperbolizing the Village's demands. Although their demands appeared radical to many Euro-Americans at the time, the Village attempted to name and undo the harm of colonization in Chicago. While local news media misunderstood and often diminished their goals, the Village resisted the idea that colonial harm and violence was an intrinsic part of the city.

The Village's demands evolved into requests that increasingly challenged Euro-American norms for providing assistance. However, these requests were not as outlandish as many government officials and news media made them out to be. In reality, the CIV progressively grounded more of their arguments in Indigenous practices, traditions, and daily life. The CIV started as a protest against inadequate living conditions for Native people in Chicago. They attempted to work with the city to gain quality housing for all members of the Village. However,

²⁶⁷ Newspaper clippings, "Mike Chosa a Bit Choosy," Chicago Indian Village - Camp Logan - clippings, January 1972, Box: 17, Folder: 14. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

the city continued to present them with unsuitable housing. Chosa described the apartments they toured as "just the same old slum houses we've always lived in."²⁶⁸ While some media portrayed the group as picky for refusing several housing options, the city showed apartments to the group that contained "broken windows, missing screens, rickety porches with no railings or loose railings, broken cabinets and a broken refrigerator."²⁶⁹ The Village refused to settle for the same poor living conditions. After the group arrived at the Belmont Harbor missile site though, their mission began to evolve from simple demands for decent housing to demands for land. On this land, they desired to build "200 public housing units for Indians, an educational complex for 500 Indian children, and an Indian cultural center."²⁷⁰ As they continued their occupation, the group's goals strayed further from Euro-American solutions and trended closer and closer towards traditional Native ideas of living. While occupying the missile site, the Village demanded the city give the 12 acres of land to Native people instead of building a city park. Because prejudice towards Native people by Euro-American society, government, and media appeared more subtle during this period in Chicago, they attempted to shut down the CIV's demands with logical arguments rather than blatant bigotry. However, the Village saw right through these arguments and pointed out several inconsistencies. While reactions from city officials and newspapers immediately dismissed the Village's plans for the missile site; the CIV made a statement:

Oh, Great White Father, you speak with forked tongue. Indians come live on land by Lake Michigan. They say they need home and land is their land. But you say no, Oh Great White Father. You say land by Lake Michigan belong all people. You say land not Indian land. You say land city park. And you say Indian must get off city park. Indian stubborn. Indian say they stay on land. Indian no want to live in flop house, boarding

²⁶⁸ Canfield, "Indian leader Chosa has possible injury,"

²⁶⁹ Canfield, "Indian leader Chosa has possible injury,"

²⁷⁰ Stanley Ziemba, "Leader Hits Drinking, Fights, by Indians at Nike Missile Site," Chicago Indian Village - Nike Missile Site - clippings, July 1971, Box: 17, Folder: 17. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

house or public house. Indian want live on park land. You say no more powwow. If Indian no move, you move him. Indian brave. Indian say him fight. Him make one last stand. Indian know how to make one last stand. Him make one last stand for 400 years now. Night come, you move in troops. But battle not start until dawn. Old tradition. Dawn come. Battle start. Bottles fly. Baseball bats. Rocks. Buckets of water. Battles not what they used to be. Troops charge. Indian fight hard but Indians lose. Old tradition. Indians herded off land. Some Indians pinched and put in paddy wagon. Fence torn down. Say land belong to people. Him give park land to highway builders. No ask people. Him give land to private yacht club. No ask people. Him give land to skeet shooters. No ask people. Him give land to conventioners. No ask people. Him give land to Papa Bear. No ask people. Who you kid, Great White Father. Land only belong to people when Great White Father need wampum from people.²⁷¹

Meant to emulate stereotypical Native language patterns, the statement expertly argued for their demands by including the violent treatment of their people, the long history of Native survival and resistance, and the inconsistencies in the city's reasons for refusing the plan. This statement from the CIV humorously explained the hypocrisy of the situation and unveiled the overt prejudice the city attempted to cover. Additionally, they disputed a claim from the *Daily News* that "the housing development and schools demanded by the Indians would clutter up the landscape and deny the property's use to the public." Chosa cleverly asked, "Why did you not raise this argument against the Army when it first took over these sites back in 1956?"²⁷² The hypocrisy of many counterarguments from Euro-Americans revealed their colonial mindsets and prejudice. The idea that Native people could collectively own land in Chicago, near the lakefront no less, went against many colonial perceptions of land ownership and value. By the time the group made their way to Argonne, their demands grew. They requested 300 acres for an Indian center with trained Native ecologists and conservationists, transitional housing for those coming from reservations, and permanent housing for the staff of the center.²⁷³ As their demands

²⁷¹ Newspaper clippings, "Indians are Losing Again,"

²⁷² "'TF/mt the Army can have the Indians cant'," *Chicago Daily News*, June 23, 1971, Chicago Indian Village - Nike Missile Site - clippings, July 1971, Box: 17, Folder: 17. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

²⁷³ "Fact Sheet," Chicago Indian Village - Argonne, clippings, July 30, 1971, Box: 17, Folder: 11. Virgil J. Vogel research and personal papers, Ayer-Modern-MS-Vogel. The Newberry Library - Modern Manuscripts and Archives.

evolved, they began to center community, the collective power of the Village, and more traditional Indigenous concepts of living. Apart from their guns and encampments, their ability to totally separate themselves from a Euro-American standard, and demand that a Euro-American government meet those demands, exhibited their determination and dedication to Indigenous resistance.

During the movement, the Village created a newsletter for their community which remained for a short time after the end of their occupation. In one issue, John Glass, assistant editor of the Chicago Indian Village newsletter, wrote:

"It is a village that should have never been, the need should have never existed. Its shame is just another page in history that should never have been written, but history is not kind or generous, history is just a collection of truth and facts, history does not bow its head to anyone Great or small, Good or evil. This history records why the Village is here, why it had to be founded, and it will record the shame if it is here to stay, or the glory as it slowly fades away as it is no longer needed."²⁷⁴

The Village, as an encampment, did indeed fade away. Former members of the Village began working with the AIC on a proposal to open a day care in the Center.²⁷⁵ The State of Wisconsin offered Mike Chosa a position working for the American Indian Child Placement and Development program in Milwaukee.²⁷⁶ This program worked to place Native foster children with Native foster families. In this way, Chosa continued to work toward his vision of keeping Indigenous community, identity, sovereignty, and traditions alive for future generations. The other members and families of the Village found homes throughout Chicago.²⁷⁷ While the encampment no longer existed, the movement continued as the group moved into a space in

²⁷⁴ Chosa, *Chicago Indian Village*

²⁷⁵ Chosa, *Chicago Indian Village*

²⁷⁶ Chosa, *Chicago Indian Village*

²⁷⁷ Chosa, *Chicago Indian Village*

Uptown and published their monthly newsletter. While the teepee no longer kept Mrs. Warrington's children dry and the patrol no longer carried guns and Molotov cocktails, the Village's resistance continued. Resistance continued through collaborations with the AIC, publications of the CIV newsletter, and, most of all, through the existence of a strong Native American community in Chicago. Ronnie Winters, editor of the Chicago Indian Village newsletter, started one of their first issues:

"Do You Remember? The Village outside Wrigley Field? The Hungry and homeless people? The teepee that stood as a symbol of the pride and hope of a crushed and over-run nation? The sad times at the Village? The happy times at the Village? The unity and warmth at the Village? The courage, the pride, the will to fight for our rights? The Village did not die! The teepee was taken down, all the tents were burnt, but the fire of the angry Indian did not die! It lives with equal spirit, with equal hope, with equal warmth and with equal unity at 1354 West Wilson. The Chicago Indian Village Lives!"²⁷⁸

²⁷⁸ Chosa, *Chicago Indian Village*

Conclusion

The story didn't end there. Little Bighorn High School and Oh-Wai-Ya-Wa Elementary continued educating Native children into the 1980s. Little Bighorn High School graduated its last class in the late 1980s.²⁷⁹ Both schools impacted the lives of hundreds of young Native Chicagoans. The community continued to address the need for quality education. The Native American Educational Services (NAES) College was founded in 1983 and served many local Native people in their pursuit for higher education.²⁸⁰ The American Indian Center continued its activities, programs, and assistance in Uptown.

A common struggle for historical scholarship of activism during this period concerns its end. Many scholars who tell stories of the 1960s and 70s portray the era as a golden age for activism which ceases to exist as soon as the decade ends. The conclusion of many of these works discuss the formation of factions, rising tensions, corruption, and funding issues to explain the downfall of activist organizations. This idealizes the decades while also contributing to a harmful narrative that organizing and resisting on such a scale never sustained itself. It promotes the idea that true activism has a short lifespan and an inevitable end. When discussing Indigenous resistance specifically, this narrative is simply not true. As long as Euro-Americans colonized and continue to colonize Turtle Island, Native people resist. While Indigenous people may implement different strategies and forms at different times, Indigenous resistance is always present. In Chicago, Native people formed a community on the land before colonization. They continue that community during colonization and it will remain after colonization.

²⁷⁹ John J. Laukaitis, *Community Self-Determination: American Indian Education in Chicago, 1952-2006*, Tribal Worlds (SUNY press, 2015), 103.

²⁸⁰ Laukaitis, *Community Self-Determination*, 64.

I hope that this paper told a story that many non-Natives Chicagoans often forget: the story of a brave, smart, strong, and most of all, united community. In Chicago in the 1960s and 70s, Native people resisted through community. This community allowed them to assert their sovereignty, promote survivance, and engage in prolonged protest. This community also served as the foundations for resistance and a strategy of resistance. Native people, incredibly intelligent and aware of their situation and the broader moment, used specific rhetorical strategies along with this community to ensure their resistance could continue.

Today, community members look back fondly on those years. In 2024, as a part of the Indigenous Chicago Oral History Project, Leonard Malatare (Flathead) remembered his first days in Chicago in 1974. He described his first encounter with another Native person in Chicago: “She said ‘This is a big Chicago Indian community.’ I said, ‘I don't see no Indians around.’ She said, ‘Well, hang around. I'll get off about seven o'clock. I'll take you up to Uptown.’” He also recalled the help he received from everyone in Uptown. He narrated the story of his first time in the Drop-in center, St. Augustine’s assistance center: “‘She said, ‘You got a tribal ID?’ I said, ‘No.’ So she said, ‘well, you got to have a tribal ID to come in.’ I said, ‘Oh, I'm sorry.’ And so I got to leave. She said, ‘No, we'll take care of it. We'll take care of it... we'll try to find you a place to stay up here in the Indian Community.’”²⁸¹ Leonard Malatare’s recollection focuses on the great amount of community and support he received in Chicago. He worked at the AIC and remains an integral part of the community today.

Today, the drum continues. At a workshop, a panel, or a community meal, the drum at Chicago's American Indian Center still beats. Now located in Albany Park, the gymnasium turns into a banquet hall as people sit down around me to talk before the weekly community meal. Old

²⁸¹ Leonard Malatare, “Indigenous Chicago oral history project records,” by Melanie Cloud, *The Newberry Library, Chicago*, February 27, 2024.

friends catch up and new people become acquainted. As more people start to come in, the folding table set out for desserts becomes full. Flags of Native Nations from all its members cover the wall. The drum only stops briefly as the drummers get up to get their food. Then, it starts again. People continue to talk, children run around, and everyone has enough to eat. They offer the extra food to anyone who wants it, saying they have more vegetables from the recent harvest in the kitchen if needed. The Center truly is just as welcoming as all those newsletters said. Even if you come alone, you will have many conversations and start to plan your next visit before you leave. It is always a good time at the Center.

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