

**For Immediate Release**

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*“Alcatraz is not an island...Alcatraz is an inspiration, it is the idea that you can control your own destiny, and self-determine your own future”*

*Richard Oakes, Mohawk*

*The government did all these things and sat on tribes for so many years ... and yet still, in 1969, there's still a group of people who were willing to stand up and say, we want our freedom. We want to be Native people. We want our own governments. We want the right to self determination. It's a revolutionary act.”*

*Wilma Mankiller, Cherokee*

**ITVS and KQED present James M. Fortier and Jon Plutte’s  
ALCATRAZ IS NOT AN ISLAND  
To Air Nationally on PBS November 7, 2002 at 10:00pm**

*The first in-depth look at the history, politics, personalities, and cultural reawakening of the 1969-71 American Indian occupation of Alcatraz Island..*

(San Francisco, CA)— Independent Television Service (ITVS) and KQED presents director James M. Fortier (Métis-Ojibway) and producer Jon Plutte’s one-hour public television documentary **ALCATRAZ IS NOT AN ISLAND** with “Law and Order” star Benjamin Bratt (Quechua) providing voice-over narration. **ALCATRAZ IS NOT AN ISLAND** won the Best Documentary Feature award at the American Indian Film Festival in San Francisco, was a Land Grant Award Finalist at the 2001 Taos Talking Pictures Festival and was an official selection for the 2001 Sundance Film Festival. The film will premiere nationwide on PBS on November 7, 2002 at 10:00pm (check local listings), and is a co-presentation of ITVS and KQED. Additional funding was provided by the California Council for the Humanities, the Pechanga Band of Luiseño Mission Indians, and the Muscogee Creek Tribe of Oklahoma.

The filmmakers are also working with ITVS to develop a **community outreach program** to bring the film directly to reservation and urban Indian communities with an emphasis on Native youth, as well as educational institutions, and human rights and social activism venues.

*The occupation of Alcatraz was not just an Indian story, but a story of people seizing control of their own futures through social and political activism. In these times of questioning and reexamination of the role of activism in America, the 1969 Indian occupation of Alcatraz reminds us that there is a place for*

*action in the political world, and that positive change can be made in the face of overwhelming government resistance. This is an opportunity to educate, to continue a dialogue discussing these issues, to inspire the next generation of activists, and perhaps most importantly, to honor those who have sacrificed so much and dedicated their lives for the advancement of all free people.*

### **Community Outreach Objectives**

- Bring the film and its message of Indian self-determination to rancheria, reservation, and urban Indian communities throughout the country.
- Tour will feature community screenings followed by a gathering to discuss the issues raised in the film.
- Participants may include the filmmakers, as well as some of the featured occupation participants from the film like Ed Castillo, Denise Quitaquit, Dr. LaNada Boyer, and John Trudell, as well as guest speakers with expertise in the field of Indian activism, and self-determination issues.
- This outreach program will be available for tribal schools, tribal colleges, American Indian Studies Programs, and tribal organizations wishing to collaborate with us in this endeavor, among other native American organizations.
- American Indian radio stations and programs can broadcast the community gathering and discussion.

This is an opportunity to educate, to continue a dialogue discussing these issues, to inspire the next generation of activists and American Indian leaders, and perhaps most importantly, to honor those who have sacrificed so much and dedicated their lives for the advancement of all Indian people. If you are moved by the message of this film and the goals of the filmmakers, there IS something you can do to help. The filmmakers are seeking partners from within and outside the American Indian community to collaborate with on this outreach program.

### **About the Film**

For thousands of Native Americans, the infamous Alcatraz is **not** an island . . . it is an inspiration. After generations of oppression, assimilation, and near genocide, a small group of Native American students and “Urban Indians” began the occupation of Alcatraz Island in November 1969. They were eventually joined by thousands of Native Americans, retaking “Indian land” for the first time since the 1880s. ***ALCATRAZ IS NOT AN ISLAND*** is the story of how this historic event altered U.S. Government Indian policy and programs, and how it forever changed the way Native Americans viewed themselves, their culture and their sovereign rights. The story of the occupation of Alcatraz is as complex and rich as the history of Native Americans. This documentary examines the personal sacrifices, tragedies, social battles and political injustices many Native Americans experienced under the United States Government’s policies of assimilation, termination and relocation — all eventually leading to Alcatraz.

Out of Alcatraz came the “Red Power” movement of the 1970s, which has been called the lost chapter of the Civil Rights era. Thirty years after the take over of Alcatraz, *ALCATRAZ IS NOT AN ISLAND* provides the first in-depth look at the history, politics, personalities and cultural reawakening behind this historic event, which sparked a new era of Native American political empowerment, and a cultural renaissance.

Among the many people interviewed for the production of *ALCATRAZ IS NOT AN ISLAND* are occupation leaders John Trudell, Dr. LaNada Boyer and Adam Fortunate Eagle, along with several other prominent participants, including Wilma Mankiller, Grace Thorpe, Leonard Garment and Brad Patterson. Associate Producer and Historical Consultant Dr. Troy Johnson and Native American author/historian Robert Warrior provide much of the historical commentary in the film. Also included in the documentary is an abundance of historical photos by Michelle Vignes and Ilka Hartmann and archival 16 mm footage — much of which has never been seen by the public.

*ALCATRAZ IS NOT AN ISLAND* is directed by James M. Fortier (Métis-Ojibway), and produced by Jon Plutte. The Executive Producer is Millie Ketcheshawno (Mvskoke), and the Associate Producer and Historical Consultant is Dr. Troy Johnson. *ALCATRAZ IS NOT AN ISLAND* was edited by Mike Yearling. Writers are James M. Fortier, Jon Plutte, and Mike Yearling with Dr. Troy Johnson and Millie Ketcheshawno. Original music was provided by Jim Wilson (Choctaw), and the documentary is narrated by Benjamin Bratt, with additional voice work provided by Ojibway recording artists Wayquay. The soundtrack also features Native American performers Quilt Man, Koljademo, Douglas Spotted Eagle, Keith Secola, Ulali, and Juno Award (Canadian Grammys) winner Jerry Alfred and the Medicine Beat, among others.

The film features Peter Bowen, Dr. LaNada Boyer (Shosone-Bannock), Edward Castillo (Cahuilla-Luiseno), Tim Findley, Adam Fortunate Eagle (Anishinabe-Ojibway), Robert Free (Tewa), Leonard Garment, Shirley Guervera (Mono), Dr. Troy Johnson, Millie Ketcheshawno (Mvskoke), Wilma Mankiller (Cherokee), Alan Miller (Seminole), Don Patterson (Tonkawa), Brad Patterson, Denise Quitiquit (Pomo), Grace Thorpe (Sac & Fox), Brookes Townes, John Trudell (Santee Sioux), Susan Tsosie (Yurok), Robert Warrior (Osage) & Ed Willie (Paiute-Pomo).

### **Occupation Background Summary:**

In the 1950s, after decades of failed policies and programs, the U.S. government under President Eisenhower implemented the Relocation/Termination Programs as the official Indian policy of the Federal Government. These two programs were designed to lure Indian people off the reservations and into major cities, such as San Francisco, in order to complete the assimilation and acculturation of Native Americans. By the mid-1960s the San Francisco Bay Area's urban Indian community was one of the largest and best organized in the country.

Rather than dissolving into the urban "melting pot," Bay Area Indians tenaciously clung to their cultures, formed social and political organizations, and began to mobilize. Echoing the *Free Speech*,

Civil Rights *and anti-war* struggles and other social justice movements, Bay Area Indians began their own protest of Indian treaty and civil rights abuses. On November 20, 1969, following two previously unsuccessful occupation attempts, a group of Native American students from various California Universities, with support from Bay Area Indian organizations and leaders, began the nineteen-month occupation of Alcatraz Island. Today, the Indian people whose lives were most affected by the occupation regard it as perhaps the most important event in the post-reservation struggle for Indian land, treaty, and civil rights.

Nearly 30 years after the occupation, many historians identify the 1969 occupation of Alcatraz Island as the spark which ignited the "Red Power" movement of the 1970s.

"Following Alcatraz, there's the occupation of other, over 50 other federal facilities (by Indian people) for a total, in the seventies, of some 72 occupations that would take place. Many of these are either led by people who came from Alcatraz or they were participated in by people who came from Alcatraz or they said they were inspired by Alcatraz.... Thirty years later, the Alcatraz occupation is now considered the lost chapter of the 1960's civil rights era"

- Dr. Troy Johnson, CSU, Long Beach

The occupation of Alcatraz was, however, much more than just a political movement for the many Native Americans who were there, and for Native Americans who heard and talked about it on reservations and in cities across the country. Many Indian people now consider it a renaissance for Indian culture, traditions, identity and spirituality.

"Alcatraz was symbolic in the rebirth of Indian people to be recognized as a people, as human beings, whereas before, we were not. We were not recognized, we were not legitimate ....but we were able to raise, not only the consciousness of other American people, but our own people as well, to reestablish our identity as Indian people, as a culture, as political entities."

-Dr. LaNada Boyer (Shoshone-Bannock) /Occupation Leader

The occupation literally changed the lives of Indian people, giving rise to what many Native Americans and their supporters refer to as the "legacy" of the Alcatraz occupation. With the passage of time, it has taken on the characteristics of a Native American oral legend. With a cast of colorful characters, mythic heroes, conflict, suspense, euphoria and tragedy, the occupation is a dramatic and compelling story.

"What Alcatraz started out to be was one thing, and what it became was another. There's no question that the physical occupation of Alcatraz was in some ways flawed and in some ways disastrous, even. And yet, the spiritual meaning of the occupation of Alcatraz and its impact on Native American people and Native American spirituality and politics was greater than that."

Tim Findley, Former Reporter, SF Chronicle

*“Grandfather said that long ago the Sacramento Valley was one freshwater lake. An angry spirit within the earth caused a great shaking which emptied the great lake and left only the San Francisco Bay in its wake. There, in isolation and containing a “truth” was an island. According to our oral histories, that’s where we were told to go and search for a healing treasure for our troubled people long ago. The island became known as “the rock with the rainbow inside,” or “diamond island.” It was said that the “diamond” would heal and restore balance to all our people, everywhere. We were always told that the “diamond” was a thought, or a truth. It was not jewelry. It sparkled and it shined, but it was not jewelry. It was much more.”*

*Darryl “Babe” Wilson (Achoma ‘ Wi / Atsuge ‘ Wi)*

## **About KQED**

KQED operates KQED Public Television 9, the nation's most-watched public television station, and Digital Television 9, Northern California's only digital public television signal, KQED Public Radio 88.5 FM, the nation's most-listened-to public radio station, and the KQED Education Network, which brings the impact of KQED to thousands of teachers, students, parents and media professionals through workshops, seminars and resources; and [www.kqed.org](http://www.kqed.org), which harnesses the power of the Internet to bring KQED to communities across the Web.

## **About ITVS**

Unique in American public television, the Independent Television Service (ITVS) was established by Congress to fund and present programs that "involve creative risks and address the needs of underserved audiences, especially children and minorities," while granting artistic control to independent producers. ITVS has funded more than 350 programs for public television since its inception in 1991. Critically acclaimed ITVS programs include THE FARMER'S WIFE; AN AMERICAN LOVE STORY and SCOUT'S HONOR; Emmy Award-winners BLINK; SING FASTER: THE STAGEHANDS' RING CYCLE; SCHOOL PRAYER: A COMMUNITY AT WAR; GIRLS LIKE US and NOBODY'S BUSINESS; the Peabody Award-winning documentaries TRAVIS; A HEALTHY BABY GIRL; COMING OUT UNDER FIRE and THE GATE OF HEAVENLY PEACE, and duPont Award-winners TAKEN IN: THE LIVES OF AMERICA'S FOSTER CHILDREN and STRUGGLES IN STEEL: A STORY OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN STEELWORKERS. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people. For information, contact ITVS at 501 York St., First Floor, San Francisco, CA 94110; e-mail: [Nancy\\_Fishman@itvs.org](mailto:Nancy_Fishman@itvs.org) or visit the ITVS website at [www.itvs.org](http://www.itvs.org).

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