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Book Review of *Native Activism in Cold War America: The Struggle for Sovereignty* by Daniel M. Cobb.

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Nearly all of the many books dedicated to Native activism focus on the Red Power movement that flourished between 1968 and the late 1970s. In the minds of most people familiar with the topic, Native activism has become synonymous with events such as the 1969
occupation of Alcatraz Island, the 1968 creation of the American Indian Movement (AIM), the 1972 Trail of Broken Treaties, the 1973 occupation of Wounded Knee, and the 1970s civil war on South Dakota’s Pine Ridge Reservation. In the present book, Daniel Cobb argues that Native activism is not limited to these events. In an effort to prove his thesis, Cobb turns his attention to the Native forms of political activism that thrived from the mid-1940s to the end of the 1960s.

The reason why this period has been so far largely overlooked is simple: its activism was not characterized by the confrontational tactics made famous by AIM. Rather, this less spectacular kind of activism was made up of seemingly mundane activities such as grant writing, organizing community meetings and youth councils, and petitioning the government. More reformist in nature, the Native activism of the 1950s and 1960s tried to improve living conditions for American Indians by working within the system.

With meticulous precision, Cobb traces the activities across the United States of organizations such as the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC), and the Coalition of American Indian Citizens just to name a few. Among the famous and not-so-famous actors of this story are Vine Deloria Jr., Clyde Warrior, Robert K. Thomas, Hank Adams, Helen Peterson, Robert Burnette, and many others.

Among the book’s key points is the complex relationship between the NCAI and the NIYC. Whereas the NCAI favored working with Congress and through the courts, members of the NIYC believed this strategy had failed to produce results. The creation of a Point Four Program for American Indians, for example, never materialized despite much effort on the part of the NCAI. The impatience with the NCAI’s conservative tendencies reached a boiling point in the mid-1960s as a younger generation of Natives began arguing for a more militant approach, one that would ultimately open the door to the more confrontational activism of the 1970s.

It is fairly safe to say that the subject of Cobb’s book will never be turned into a Hollywood movie. Though lacking in spectacle, it nonetheless makes a vital contribution to the study of Native activism. Despite a few omissions (very little space is given to the fish-ins, and no mention is made to the brief occupation of Alcatraz in 1964), Cobb has done an amazing job unearthing precious information to offer deeper insights into a forgotten page in the history of American Indian actions for change.

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