

13. Richard Erdoes, Red Power's Ally

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Abstract: Austro-Hungarian visual artist and author Richard Erdoes (1912–2008) provided support to some of the most radical segments of the Red Power struggle, leading members of the American Indian Movement (AIM). This chapter interprets Erdoes's role as an Austrian ally to the radical wing of the Red Power movement. Scholarly studies of figures like Erdoes can help not only improve our understanding of non-Native involvement in Red Power but also inform non-Natives' current discussions of the ideal characteristics of allyship, solidarity with Indigenous causes, and interracial coalition building. Erdoes's trajectory is an example of how one individual transformed the legacy of Habsburg encounters with Native Americans in the crucibles of the twentieth century and forged it into an intercontinental network for the struggle for Indigenous rights on Turtle Island.

Keywords: Native American rights, Red Power movement, photography, authorship, publishing, autobiographies, social movements, the long 1960s

Austro-Hungarian visual artist and author Richard Erdoes (1912–2008) spent the last half of his long life being an ally and providing support to some of the most radical segments of the Red Power struggle, leading members of the American Indian Movement (AIM). Born in Vienna, and raised and educated there and in Berlin, Erdoes increasingly became active as an anti-fascist art student, and as a result became marginalized in the lead-up to World War Two. He migrated to New York before the outbreak of the war. For the next several decades, Erdoes worked as an illustrator and photographer for major US magazines such as *National Geographic*, *Life*, and *Time*. He had also begun a career as an author and illustrator of children's books. Several assignments in the 1960s took Erdoes to major hubs and events of the emerging Red Power movement, and he developed close relations with several major families in

the struggle, including the *Lame Deers* (Miniconjou Lakota) and the *Crow Dogs* (Sicangu Lakota) of the Rosebud Sioux Reservation. Over the following decades, not only was Erdoes tasked with heading the team defending AIM medicine man Leonard Crow Dog in court from an indictment over the standoff at Wounded Knee in 1973, but he also coauthored a series of autobiographical books that fixed the insiders' meaning of the radical Native sovereignty struggle and Native spirituality—with Archie Fire Lame Deer, Mary Crow Dog subsequently *Brave Bird*, and Dennis Banks. He also helped the movement build a transatlantic network of central European solidarity groups. Thus, Erdoes subtly but materially and powerfully contributed to both the movement and the amplification of its voices and meanings.

Studies of alliances for Native American sovereignty rights and related causes have started to map out the particularities and some more general patterns in interracial coalition building. Ethnic studies scholar Andrea Smith, whose own claims to Cherokee ancestry were repeatedly called into question and remain unsubstantiated,¹ theorized how and why Native women activists' skills and approaches have made for especially fruitful coalition building for social justice across ethnicities, races, ideologies, and other social categories.² Analyzing some of the same case studies, non-Native veteran activist and geographer Zoltán Grossman explained their success in Native-non-Native alliance building with an ability to frame their locality as a place of shared identity and their resources worthy of preservation against an outside, often corporate, threat.³ Most recently, non-Native historian Luca Falciola traced how the National Lawyers Guild served as a clearing house for “radical lawyers” who not only worked pro bono for the major US social movements in the long 1960s, but became

1 Sarah Viren, “The Native Scholar Who Wasn't,” *New York Times*, May 25, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/25/magazine/choerokee-native-american-andrea-smith.html>; also as “The Sunday Read: ‘The Native Scholar Who Wasn't,’” *The New York Times* podcast, 6 June 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/06/podcasts/the-daily/andrea-smith-native-american.html>; ICMN Guest Editorial, “Cherokee Women Scholars' and Activists' Statement on Andrea Smith,” *Indian Country Today Media Network*, 12 September 2018, <https://ictnews.org/archive/choerokee-women-scholars-and-activists-statement-on-andrea-smith>; Samantha Allen, “Meet the Native American Rachel Dolezal,” *Daily Beast*, 12 July 2017, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/meet-the-native-american-rachel-dolezal>; Scott Jaschik, “Fake Cherokee?” *Inside Higher Education*, 5 July 2015, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/07/06/scholar-who-has-made-name-choerokee-accused-not-having-native-american-roots>. Accessed November 14, 2023.

2 Andrea Smith, *Native Americans and the Christian Right: The Gendered Politics of Unlikely Alliances* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2008).

3 Zoltán Grossman, *Unlikely Alliances: Native and White Communities Join to Defend Rural Lands* (Seattle, WA and London: University of Washington Press, 2017).

activists themselves and redefined legal theory, strategies, and practice in the process.⁴

Yet, all these worthy studies have focused on social justice coalitions as intergroup relations, and not as the trajectory of individual lives—a biographical approach that can unearth and reveal a single person's decisions and relationships in alliance building. Emerging from my earlier research and aiming to refine its focus and analysis, this chapter interprets Erdoes's role as an Austrian ally to the radical wing of the Red Power movement. My argument is that such extensive contributions by allies in the Native American sovereignty rights struggle call for extensive and interdisciplinary research that carefully maps out and critically examines their relationships and output. Scholarly studies of figures like Erdoes can help not only improve our understanding of non-Native involvement in Red Power, including the history of former Habsburg involvement, but also inform non-Natives' current discussions of the ideal characteristics and attitudes of allyship, solidarity with and support for Indigenous causes, and interracial coalition building for shared struggles. Erdoes's trajectory is an example of how one individual transformed the legacy of Habsburg encounters with Native Americans in the crucibles of the twentieth century and forged it into allyship and an intercontinental network for the struggle for Indigenous rights on Turtle Island.

Red Power: The Native American Sovereignty Movement in the Late Cold War

Native American sovereignty evolved as a group of concepts in the history of relations between Native nations and European and North American governments. Between the sixteenth and the mid-twentieth century, Native rights were dramatically curtailed not only in law and federal policy, but also in the actual practices of Indian relations on the ground, which began with trading and treaty making, and lasted through Indian removal, reservations, and boarding schools, and reached their nadir with the termination policy of the post-World War Two era.

The termination policy meant the ending of the federal protection of Native Americans. Since its own birth in the late eighteenth century, the US government had developed both a rationale (the federal trust relationship)

4 Luca Falcicola, *Up against the Law: Radical Lawyers and Social Movements, 1960s-1970s* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2022).

and a bureaucracy for the administration of its policies (including the Bureau of Indian Affairs, its Indian service, reservation agencies, and other entities) that kept Native communities as wards of the US federal government, a peculiar status with exemptions from local and state laws. Termination meant that this federal relationship and services would be withdrawn, and Native Americans would be made into average US citizens, subject to all the laws, having all the rights and obligations (including taxation) of any other US citizen. This also meant that the members of the terminated tribes also lost the federal recognition of their tribal affiliation, and all the assistance and sense of identity that accompanied that affiliation.

Beginning with congressional legislation in 1953, the termination policy had disastrous effects on the nations that it involved. Over a hundred tribes were terminated. These Native people now had to assume federal, state, and local tax burdens, compete with non-Native enterprises in the marketplace, and obey state laws that conflicted with their treaty rights. Termination meant the withdrawal of virtually all federal services, including food and health assistance, treaty annuity payments—everything. Without federal assistance and with inadequate means to support themselves, the terminated Native communities further sunk into poverty, crime, and disease. Termination also ended tribal affiliation for many Native people, which contributed to a sense of hopelessness and uprootedness. Native land, Native communities, and individual Native people now had to rely on the services of the individual states, who had no extra resources to assume jurisdiction and provide for them—this created tension between states and the federal government.

It was against this policy and its results, the full economic and cultural annihilation of Native nations as collective entities, that Native groups had to mobilize. Indigenous Americans have always asserted their sovereignty rights in various forms, but in the late Cold War their goals included not only the reinstatement of the pre-termination status quo—some aimed for the full scope of collective rights, extending to those of fully independent countries. Whilst older and more moderate Native bodies such as the National Congress of American Indians lobbied for the overturning of termination, the radical sovereignty struggle was spearheaded by a variety of Native American organizations, the most assertive of which was the American Indian Movement and their allies. During this period, their ideas of what was desirable, feasible, and realistic in terms of sovereignty changed. Much of what North Americans understand as Native self-determination today—Indigenous or jointly controlled tribal police, courts, educational and cultural institutions, off-reservation hunting and fishing rights, tax-exempt casinos, and more

cultural awareness on the part of majority North Americans—were achieved or strengthened during this period by the sovereignty movement.

The late Cold War was a period of opportunity for Native Americans to pursue a militant campaign for sovereignty rights in the United States. Native communities were struggling against the US government's termination policy already in the 1960s.⁵ In the same decade, a variety of social movements—civil rights, feminism, gay liberation, the Chicano movement, free speech, the struggle against the US war in Vietnam, and others—had also swept the country and beyond, and they inspired some of the forms of Native activism. The global contest between the US and the USSR had kept American race relations and rights on the agenda, and this issue became even more charged once President Jimmy Carter adopted human rights as a pillar of US foreign policy in 1976. Advances in news media technology allowed Native Americans to forcefully stage their own performances of identities and rights in front of cameras that beamed their protests into households not only in the United States, but around the world. Jet travel enabled Indigenous American activists and their non-Native allies to visit each other in a variety of countries, including on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

An Austrian Accent in the Native Sovereignty Movement: Richard Erdoes and AIM

In his book on Native American activism before the radical sovereignty movement, Daniel Cobb discusses Indigenous American involvement in Martin Luther King, Jr.'s May-June 1968 Poor People's Campaign in Washington, DC. One of these marches took the Native people and their allies to the State Department, where they forcefully expressed their views on current US foreign policy.⁶ The Poor People's Campaign was the same protest event that brought together the Indigenous delegation with Richard Erdoes, an Austro-Hungarian-German émigré who would serve as a chronicler of the radical sovereignty movement, and would also shape that struggle in subtle ways.

5 See Ada Deer, "How the Good Guys Won," *Journal of Intergroup Relations* 3 (1974), 41–50; Harry A. Kersey, Jr., *An Assumption of Sovereignty: Social and Political Transformation Among the Florida Seminoles, 1953–1979* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 23–50.

6 For more, see "Many Roads" in Daniel M. Cobb, *Native Activism in Cold War America* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 147–70.

Richard Erdoes was born in Vienna in 1912 to an Austrian mother and a Jewish Hungarian opera singer father with the family name Erdős.⁷ The boy grew up in central European cities like Vienna, Berlin, and Frankfurt, where his family periodically moved for stage performances. An avid young journalist and cartoonist, Erdoes incurred the wrath of the Nazis in the early 1930s, and had to move to Austria, where he continued his studies in art and worked for anti-fascist newspapers. After the Anschluss of 1938, Erdoes fled to Paris, London, and eventually to New York, where he lived in the city's exile German community and worked as an illustrator and photographer for magazines such as *National Geographic* and *Life*. The latter magazine sent him to Washington, DC to cover the Poor People's Campaign in 1968. It was there that Erdoes met the Lane Deers, a traditionalist family of the Pine Ridge Lakota Sioux Reservation of South Dakota. Through the Lane Deers, Erdoes befriended both Dennis Banks and the Crow Dog family, prominent political and spiritual leaders of the American Indian Movement. In the following four decades, Erdoes coauthored a total of five memoirs with Banks, the Lane Deers, and the Crow Dogs, shaping the perception of the radical Native sovereignty movement.⁸

From Stereotypes to Allyship

Being interviewed by Erdoes in the late 1980s, Lakota medicine man Archie Fire Lane Deer pointed out that, "if you talk about the respect for our people in East Germany, when you walk there, I have to thank this man called Karl May, even though it was a world of fantasy that he had written

7 "E. Richard, operaénekes," in *Magyar Zsidó Lexikon*, ed. Újvári Péter (Budapest, 1929): 237. <https://mek.oszk.hu/04000/04093/html/0245.html>; Obituary, *Világ* 3, no. 137 (1912), 11, Arcanum, https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/Vilag_1912_06/?query=Erd%C5%91s+Rich%C3%A1rd&pg=246&layout=s; Aladár Schöpflin, *Magyar Színházművészeti Lexikon* 1, 1929, Arcanum, https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/Lexikon_MagyarSzinmuveszetiLexikon_01/?query=Erd%C5%91s+Rich%C3%A1rd&pg=534&layout=s. Accessed November 14, 2023.

8 These included Lakota medicine man John Fire Lane Deer's autobiography, *Lane Deer: Seeker of Visions* (1971); with Mary Brave Bird, *Lakota Woman* (1990) and its sequel *Ohitka Woman* (1993); with Archie Fire Lane Deer, *The Gift of Power: The Life and Teachings of a Lakota Medicine Man* (1992); with Leonard Crow Dog, *Crow Dog: Four Generations of Sioux Medicine Men* (1995); and with Dennis Banks, *Ojibwa Warrior: Dennis Banks and the Rise of the American Indian Movement* (2004). Biographical note, guide to the Richard Erdoes papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, <http://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.erdoes>, accessed 27 April 2024.

about, never seen Lakotas, and made ridiculous things as Navajos with Mohawk haircuts—but he still raised the consciousness of the people of the Indian people.⁹ Here Erdoes, the interviewer, cuts in to explain his own positionality as a child in Germany and Austria: “I can tell you all about that! We were all born and raised pro-Indian, all the German, and Austrian, and the Swiss and French kids clapped when they see the Indian [in western films]—going ‘Boo!’ when the cavalry come.”¹⁰ The case of Richard Erdoes is one instance when Habsburg cultural deployment of claims about Native Americans as well as age-old transatlantic white fantasies about being in an alliance with, or even finding a home among American “Indians” and being adopted into their communities were both transcended and transformed into a joint struggle for social justice.¹¹ Growing up in central Europe in the 1920s, Erdoes was certainly familiar with the transatlantic visual, literary, and performance forms of ‘playing Indian,’ including the Western dime novels, the Wild West show spinoffs, the Völkerschau ethnic exhibitions, and Karl May’s Winnetou stories. In his first career as an artist in the United States, Erdoes may have channeled this naïve European fascination with American “Indians” into his publications of Native American folklore, myths, and stories.¹² His photographs of his early involvement with the Crow Dog and Lamé Deer families suggest a shift from classical white Euro-American depictions of American Indians to a more overt acknowledgement of Native agency and participation in US modern urban life. During the Lakota medicine man’s visit to New York City in 1969, Erdoes posed Henry Crow Dog wrapped in a blanket, sporting traditional head gear, and holding a fan and pipe—studio poses reminiscent of the classical Anglo-American portraiture of Indian headmen and delegations by George Catlin, Charles Bird King, McClees

9 Box 135, Folder 631, “Archie Fire, Tape 3; Wolakota,” Audio recording, 1/2, 2 March 1986, Richard Erdoes Papers. Transcription by the author.

10 Ibid.

11 In the light of the fraught morality and ethics of Native American identity politics and non-Native cultural appropriation, it is important to emphasize that despite his personal—almost intimate—involvement in both substantively supporting and shaping the meaning and memory of the radical Native American sovereignty movement, as far as I can tell, Richard Erdoes himself never claimed any Native ancestry, status, or identity.

12 These included Erdoes’s first book about a Native American tribe, *Pueblo Indians*, for the Young Readers’ Indian Library series (1967), as well as his *American Indian Myths and Legends* (1984) and *American Indian Trickster Tales* (1998), both coedited with Alfonso Ortiz. “Guide to the Richard Erdoes Papers WA MSS S-2609,” Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University Library, Yale University, last exported on 24 April 2024, <https://ead-pdfs.library.yale.edu/1286.pdf>. Accessed November 14, 2023.

and Brady, and Edward Sheriff Curtis. Of the ten shots, Erdoes selected for publication a half profile with an expression of gravity on Crow Dog's face.¹³ In contrast, Erdoes's photos taken a year later show John Fire Lane Deer on tour—getting on a plane, sitting in a city park and in a newspaper office, smoking a cigarette, giving an interview, and looking out the window over the skyline of a metropolis.¹⁴ Even in their ambiguity—Erdoes produced a 'classical Indian' profile in the window shot—the photographs recognize both the subject's idiosyncrasy (Crow Dog's cowboy hat and cigarette) and the agency suggested by the appearance of "Indians in unexpected places."¹⁵ Taken together, these images are visual evidence of Erdoes's transformation as portraitist and photojournalist, and clues of his attitude toward his Native collaborators. His photographs attest that Erdoes was both shaping and documenting the self-representation of traditionalist Native individuals.

The peculiarity of the urban setting notwithstanding, Erdoes initially acted on his white and central European sensibilities when he sought out Native Americans from the reservations. As it circulated across the Atlantic, the age-old trope of the 'vanishing native' had located 'Indians' on the reservations, and not in contemporary urban relocation programs, or in other settings where their presence and activities contradicted this cultural and social prophesy. During the years when the urban militant American Indian Movement was emerging in Minneapolis, Richard Erdoes was building relationships with the families of the traditionalist factions of the Lakota Sioux reservations. This also positioned him in a peculiar way in the politics of Native America. His friends the Lane Deers and Crow Dogs had been marginalized and become part of the opposition to reservation tribal governments established after the passage of the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act, which imposed a US democratic model on Indigenous American governance, and at the same time further divided Native communities into haves and have-nots in terms of economic and political power.

13 "Portraits of Henry Crow Dog, Rosebud Sioux, done at 251 W89 NYC 1969," photo contact print, Richard Erdoes Papers, <https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/2052893>. Accessed November 14, 2023.

14 "John Fire Lane Deer on tour with me, fall 1970; Jackie riding at Crow Dog's place; Rachel Strange Owl's baby in cradleboard," photo contact print, Richard Erdoes Papers, <https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/2052887>. Accessed November 14, 2023.

15 For more on scholarship on Native modernities and engagement with twentieth century US life, see Philip Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

Erdoes and European Solidarity with Native American Sovereignty

The event that catalyzed the transatlantic alliance for Native sovereignty was the spring 1973 occupation and siege of Wounded Knee, South Dakota. In late February 1973, the village was taken over by Oglala Sioux traditionalists and the militant activists of the AIM. During the ensuing three-month long standoff, the occupiers held their ground in the face of overwhelming pressure—and firepower—from the Pine Ridge Reservation tribal police, South Dakota state troopers, the FBI, federal marshals, and the American military—the full force of the United States government. The demands of the occupiers—a federal investigation into the wrongdoings of tribal chairman Dick Wilson, the reinstatement of the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty as the basis of relations between the US government and the Sioux nation, and amnesty for all in the village—were at best partially met by a government that stalled, negotiated, hedged its bets, and tried to wear out those in the Knee by sealing the roads, imposing a media blackout, and keeping the village under withering gunfire that killed two activists. The government's subsequent wholesale legal prosecution of all the occupiers notwithstanding, the protest camp proved to be a momentous event that galvanized Native activism, garnered national and international solidarity, and became a milestone on the road to further US and international legislation on Indigenous rights.

After the 1973 siege of Wounded Knee, the US government embarked on a large-scale legal campaign against the AIM. Their strategy was to prosecute the leaders, members, and allies of the movement regardless of the expected outcome, simply to deplete their coffers with the court costs, tie up their human resources, and wear down their energy and spirit. The federal and state governments charged hundreds of sovereignty activists, and the trials were held in several locations around the US Midwest, which necessitated the creation and moving around of offices by the Wounded Knee Legal Defense/Offense Committee (WKLD/OC), a group of lawyers and volunteers dedicated to the defense of AIM and their allies. As AIM was founding support groups in Europe and opening an office in West Berlin, WKLD/OC was struggling to keep up with trial expenses and other bills. These years proved to be a supreme test for the resilience and resourcefulness of the radical Native sovereignty movement in the face of overwhelming pressure from the US government. It was during this period that European solidarity groups came to play a crucial role in the survival of the radical Native sovereignty movement.

As European solidarity groups did much to support the Native sovereignty struggle across the Atlantic, one Austro-German ally directly contributed to the movement from within the United States. After participating in the protest takeovers of Mount Rushmore in 1971 and the Bureau of Indian Affairs Building in 1972,¹⁶ Erdoes and his wife Jean (née Sternbergh) had opened their home in New York City to their Native friends and provided members of the radical Native sovereignty movement with a logistical base during their visits to the East Coast.¹⁷ In May 1975, Richard Erdoes was asked to head the defense committee for AIM medicine man Leonard Crow Dog.¹⁸ For the next two years, the Erdoeses hosted the family in New York City, provided moral support to Crow Dog behind bars, and maintained a logistical base and communications center for the defense work. Yet it was not Richard Erdoes's personal lobbying that eventually swayed Judge Robert Merhige, who had originally sentenced Leonard Crow to prison. The judge summoned the defense team to his court in Virginia, showed them some of the petitions he had received from around the world, and re-sentenced Crow Dog to time already served.¹⁹

As he devoted much of his life to the members of AIM and their cause, Erdoes was working to build a transatlantic alliance. While he hosted and travelled with Germans in the United States,²⁰ they were not all in the solidarity movement. However, the fact that his papers contain newsletters and publications from German solidarity organizations suggests that he at least followed the work of the transatlantic alliance for Native American sovereignty. Most importantly, in 1974 Richard Erdoes hosted author Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich, who had become a literary spokesperson for Native

16 "Lame Deer at Mount Rushmore Black Hills, S. Dakota, Late summer 1971 with Lee Brightman," photo contact prints, Richard Erdoes Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. <https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/2052891>; "Take over of BIA Bldg Nov. 1972," photo contact prints, Richard Erdoes Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. <https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/2052892>. Accessed November 14, 2023. Mary Brave Bird with Richard Erdoes, *Ohitika Woman* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1993), 201.

17 Biographical note, guide to the Richard Erdoes papers, online, accessed 19 June 2023; Mary Crow Dog and Richard Erdoes, *Lakota Woman* (New York, NY: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), 112, 197, 226; Brave Bird with Erdoes, 205.

18 Brave Bird with Erdoes, 86–88.

19 Crow Dog and Erdoes, 238–39. While there were solidarity groups in other European and non-European countries, West Germany was of special importance for the officials of the US government due to that nation being an experiment in postwar reeducation in democracy and it being a major frontline ally against Soviet Communism.

20 "With Werner and Hannelore at Wounded Knee August 1977," "Kirchmeiers, Rolf + Ruth Ohlhausen, Erdoeses (Erich), Crow Dog's Leonard, Francine, Little Ina 1970," photo contact prints, Richard Erdoes Papers.

American issues in East Germany.²¹ In this, at least, Erdoes served as an important node in the transatlantic alliance in the making.

The immediate and personal European response to these Indigenous American calls for support must have given hope to Native sovereignty activists. It certainly spurred efforts within AIM to strengthen and make more permanent the existing transatlantic relations, as well as to build new ones. At the invitation of the World Council of Churches, AIM leader Clyde Bellecourt toured Europe in 1974,²² and the following year Dennis Banks and Vernon Bellecourt visited author Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich in East Berlin. This was an important development. As a university professor and popular author of "Indian"-themed novels, Welskopf-Henrich had been recognized by the East German government as a sort of literary spokesperson for Indigenous Americans and commanded a wide following in the GDR and the Eastern Bloc. Moving away from her earlier historical treatments even as she continued consulting for the Marxist historical adventure *Indianerfilme*, by the mid-1970s Welskopf-Henrich had been writing a fiction pentology titled *The Blood of Eagles*, focusing on current Indigenous American issues.²³

By late 1974, Welskopf-Henrich herself had visited the United States, where she met Richard Erdoes. In her letters written to Erdoes in November 1974 and April 1975, Welskopf-Henrich thanked him and his family for their hospitality, fondly recalling the nights that she had spent on the Pine Ridge Reservation of South Dakota. Welskopf-Henrich also shared her hopes that she would be able to publish Erdoes's latest book in German, and reported that she had asked her readers to send petitions to the US on behalf of Russell Means, currently in custody on charges stemming from a shooting.²⁴ As Glenn Penny documented, by the time of her death in 1979, the East German author had been using her full stature and range of resources spanning the iron curtain to promote German solidarity with Native Americans, including the circulation of information, connecting activists, petition writing, and material support.²⁵ Through their visits and correspondence, the AIM

21 Letters to Richard Erdoes from Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich, 8 October 1974 and 1 April 1975, Richard Erdoes Papers. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Yale University.

22 Bernd C. Peyer, "Who is Afraid of AIM?" in Christian F. Feest, ed., *Indians and Europe: An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays*, ed. (Aachen: Edition Herodt-Rader Verlag, 1987), 551.

23 Friedrich Von Borries and Jens-Uwe Fischer, *Sozialistische Cowboys: Der Wilde Westen Ostdeutschlands* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2008), 44, 47.

24 Letters to Richard Erdoes from Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich, 8 November 1974 and 1 April 1975, Richard Erdoes Papers.

25 For more on Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich, see Glenn Penny, "Red Power: Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich and Indian Activist Networks in East and West Germany," *Central European History* 41

leaders, Erdoes and Welskopf-Henrich were building a Rapid City–New York–Berlin axis for the transatlantic sovereignty alliance.

By the mid-1970s, the transatlantic sovereignty alliance was circulating along a US Heartland–Mitteleuropa axis not only ideas and information, but also material support, and in some cases the bodies of travelers. The transatlantic coverage of the spectacular protest performances of the radical Native sovereignty movement now combined with an older central European fascination with Native Americans, and it generated continental interest in the current struggle of Native Americans. Circulating copies of the Native press and the calls by visiting Native sovereignty leaders for support prompted Europeans to respond in several ways. Whilst petitions were sent from various European countries, most messages of solidarity arrived from East Germany, where this was one of the few officially sanctioned ways of engaging with the culture and society of the United States. On the other side of the iron curtain, Western Europeans initiated a stream of financial donations, which proved to be crucial to the morale and the logistical success of WKLD/OC. This European support helped the WKLD/OC, which represented hundreds of defendants, to achieve an acquittal rate of over 92 percent.²⁶ The release of AIM activists and their allies in turn confirmed for supporters in former Habsburg Mitteleuropa that their solidarity and donations had made a difference right in the US heartland—and thus it further strengthened the transatlantic alliance for Native sovereignty.

Erdoes as Ally and Coauthor

The only two photographs by Richard Erdoes that show him at Wounded Knee in 1973 were taken at the Gildersleeve trading post, which was left at the disposal of the occupiers after its managers were moved out. After a series of shots of the store interior that feature three different “cigar store Indians”, two pictures show the store through the convex mirror hanging from the ceiling in the corner. The clinically bright neon lights and the distorted geometric perspectives of the fisheye glass almost hide the figure

(2008), 447–76; and H. Glenn Penny, *Kindred by Choice: Germans and American Indians since 1800* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 188–98.

26 William Sayer, *Ghost Dancing the Law: The Wounded Knee Trials* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 228; “Wounded Knee Legal Defense/Offense Committee: An Inventory of Its Records at the Minnesota Historical Society,” online finding aid, <http://www2.mnhs.org/library/findaids/00229.xml>, accessed 27 April 2024.

of Erdoes himself taking the photographs.²⁷ Yet it was the photographer whose decisions determined what the images show. The experience of Native American sovereignty activists of their struggle for justice was already subjective and has since been mediated through the agendas of the tellers and writers. The ways in which these veterans have made meaning of their own life histories are visible to us in the fisheye mirror of Erdoes's coauthored books.

Erdoes's role in shaping the perception and historical record of the radical Native sovereignty movement itself deserves a study, a careful examination of his research and writing process as coauthor. Until this is undertaken, two examples will have to suffice. As interviewer and coauthor, Erdoes's subtle presence shaped both the telling of oral histories and the final product. The oral history of Lakota medicine man Archie Fire Lane Deer's experiences and teachings, recorded on audio tapes for their book together, is punctuated by Erdoes's thick Austro-Hungarian-German accent. Pronouncing "th" as "z" and either dropping or nasalizing his "r"s, Erdoes occasionally asks some questions or comments on the story, at one point taking center stage as he relates how he had to spend one of his book advances on a lawyer after being arrested on drug charges because Pennsylvania police had found in his car a Lakota gift pipe, herbs, and tobacco.²⁸

In both of her books coauthored with Erdoes, Mary Crow Dog first explains that the boarding school she attended was run by German nuns who cut off the braids of Native girls and rubbed them in medical alcohol, but then "for the sake of objectivity" she expresses her respect for the German priest who had earlier written Lakota dictionaries and grammars.²⁹ Here

27 "Wounded Knee 1973 Inside Gildersleeve trading post," photo contact print, Richard Erdoes Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, <https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/2052888>, accessed 27 April 2024.

28 Implicitly, Erdoes's story also serves to prove he had suffered and sacrificed for his Native friends, and the causes of cultural revival and sovereignty. This proof of his devotion also shores up his own performance-based movement identity. "Archie Lane Deer," recording, includes Archie Fire, Erdoes, and "Andy" talking about teaching and traveling in Europe, 1 Oct 1988, side 1/2, Richard Erdoes Papers.

29 Crow Dog and Erdoes, 35; Brave Bird with Erdoes, 19. It is a curious coincidence that during the same period that Richard and Jean Erdoes were hosting in their New York City home Mary Crow Dog and her children during her husband Leonard's trial and imprisonment, in 1975 the Museum of Modern Art staged an exhibition of German Jesuit priest and educator Eugene Buechel's photographs (1922–42) of the Rosebud and Pine Ridge Reservations. Did Erdoes and Mary Crow Dog visit the exhibit of the photos made by the German Jesuit priest who passed away the same year she was born, about her own reservation, her old St. Francis Indian Mission school, and her people some thirty years before? We can speculate about what Mary would have said to Erdoes at the exhibition, if in her book she addressed the issue as we see above. Records

Erdoes's mere presence influenced his coauthors to reflect on the role of central Europeans in Native American history, including his role in their memories and lives. Even as he comes across as unassuming and hands-off, Richard Erdoes was a player in the politics of allyship and authorship in the radical Native sovereignty movement. As they recall, Mary Brave Bird/Crow Dog and Richard Erdoes cleared the air in their own relationship thus. Erdoes explained that "[Mary Brave Bird] once caught me looking at her and at once confronted me, saying: 'I know you are sexually attracted to me.' I told her that, being an artist and photographer, I could not help studying people's faces, whether they were men or women, young or old, pretty or ugly. She stared back at me for a moment, shrugged, and said: 'Okay, I half believe you.' We laughed and I was never suspected harboring designs against her virtue, but the remark was typical of her blunt way of confronting situations."³⁰ While his artistic positioning (and his age) enabled Erdoes to dispel the suspicion that he was doing solidarity work because he was sexually attracted to Native American activists—a sexual politics established elsewhere by veterans and scholars³¹—due to the long-standing context of colonialism by even do-gooder "Indian reformers", as well as the recent influx of well-meaning but ignorant or fantasist non-Natives into the movement, Erdoes did exercise power in his relationships with his Native coauthors.

Conclusion

Did Erdoes's own experience of resistance to and exile from oppression in Europe play a role in his solidarity work for the rights struggles of other ethnic groups? Did his Jewishness? These are questions yet to be answered by more thorough research. This chapter has tried to make a case for a biographical approach to examining the cultural historical contexts, personal trajectory, decisions, and relationship politics of Richard Erdoes as an

of the exhibition include Eugene Buechel, SJ, Rosebud and Pine Ridge, photographs, 1922–42, 29 Nov 1975–8 Feb 1976, MoMA [Museum of Modern Art], <https://www.moma.org/artists/853>, <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2480>. Accessed November 14, 2023.

30 Brave Bird with Erdoes, xii.

31 Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Blood on the Border: A Memoir of the Contra War* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2005), 44–45; Brave Bird with Erdoes, 97, 100; also see György Tóth, "The Politics of Solidarity in the Transatlantic Sovereignty Alliance," in György Tóth, *From Wounded Knee to Checkpoint Charlie: The Alliance for Sovereignty between American Indians and Central Europeans in the Late Cold War* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2016), 95–116.

Austrian-born and central European-raised and educated ally of the Native American sovereignty movement of the mid- to late-twentieth century. In his life, interpersonal relations, and work, Erdoes transcended the former Habsburg cultural deployments of claims about Native Americans, and in the crucibles of the US rights movements he transformed this legacy into meaningful encounters of allyship to Red Power. A project like this can enrich studies of non-Native allyship and inform discussions about praxis and supporting activism.

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