

THE MUSIC BEHIND THE RED POWER MOVEMENT

Est. Time: 45 - 60 minutes

Subjects: Social Studies/History

Age Range: High School, AP/Honors/101

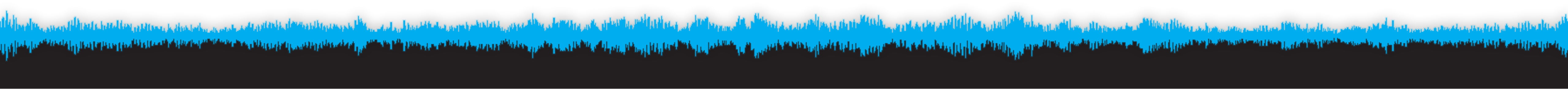
View the classroom lesson version [here!](#)

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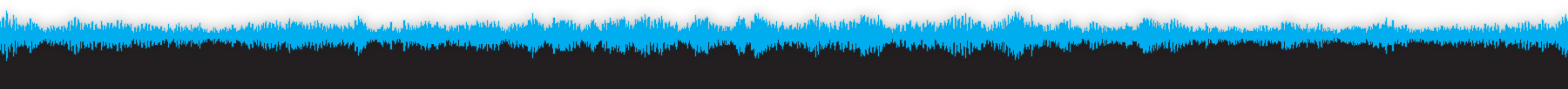
What was the Red Power Movement, and what role did Folk and Country music play within it?

In this lesson you will:

- Identify Dennis Banks as an important historical figure
 - Explore the role of Buffy St. Marie, Peter La Farge, and Johnny Cash as advocates for Native American rights
 - Examine the Alcatraz occupation, the Mount Rushmore occupation, the Trail of Broken Treaties, and other key events in the Red Power Movement in the 1960s and 1970s
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In this lesson you will:

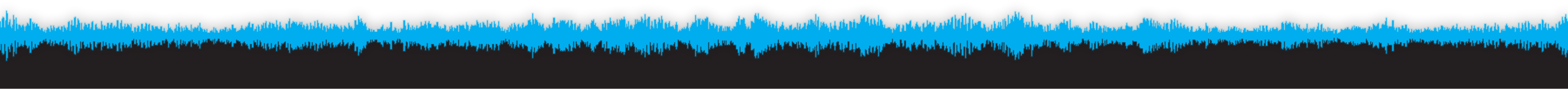
- Examine the conflict between the Red Power Movement and the Federal Government, particularly the FBI
 - Identify the role folk music plays in social movements
 - Consider the ways the poetry of John Trudell and Ishmael Hope relate to the Red Power Movement
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Examine **this montage** of important historical activists, taking note of how many you recognize.






Consider or ask a friend:

- Which individuals do you recognize?
 - How might you know of them? Are they associated with any social movements? If so, what movements?
 - Do you recognize the individual in the lower right hand corner? What do you know about him?
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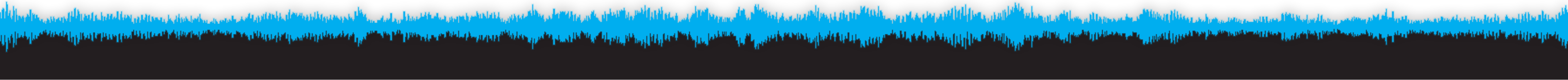
Nowa Cuming (a.k.a Dennis Banks) was an Ojibwe and Turtle Clan activist and leader of the American Indian Movement (AIM). Born April 12th, 1937, on the Leech Lake Indian Reservation in northern Minnesota, Banks co-founded AIM in 1968 in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

He participated in the Alcatraz Island and Trail of Broken Treaties protests in the late 1960s and early 1970s and co-led the armed occupation of Wounded Knee, South Dakota on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in 1973.





Consider or ask a friend:

- As a Native American, what kinds of issues might have Dennis Banks fought for? How might his issues be similar or different from those of the other figures?
 - Why might Dennis Banks not be as well known as the other individuals featured?
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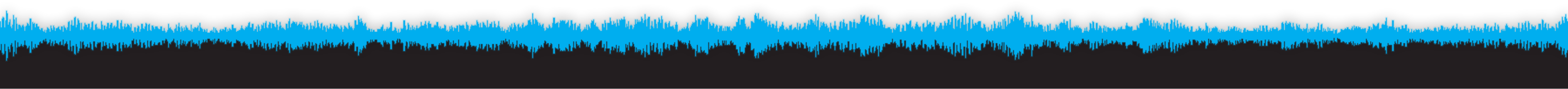
Dennis Banks began being an activist for Indigenous Rights in the late 1960s. At the same time, Folk musicians were also expressing political activism in their songs.

Watch [this video](#) to learn about folk singer-songwriters and activists, Buffy Sainte Marie and Peter La Farge.





Consider or ask a friend:

- What does Antonino D'Ambrosio argue is the function of Folk music? How is that function different from mainstream popular music?
 - Poet and activist John Trudell remembers La Farge “addressing the reality we were going through and how we felt about it.” How might such actions have a positive effect for Native American communities?
 - How did Buffy Sainte-Marie conceptualize her position as unique to both Indigenous Peoples and musicians? What does she suggest her position might have allowed her to accomplish?
 - Why might musicians such as Peter La Farge and Buffy Sainte Marie have been considered a threat to some people?
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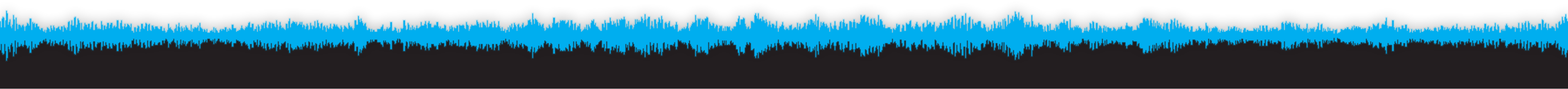


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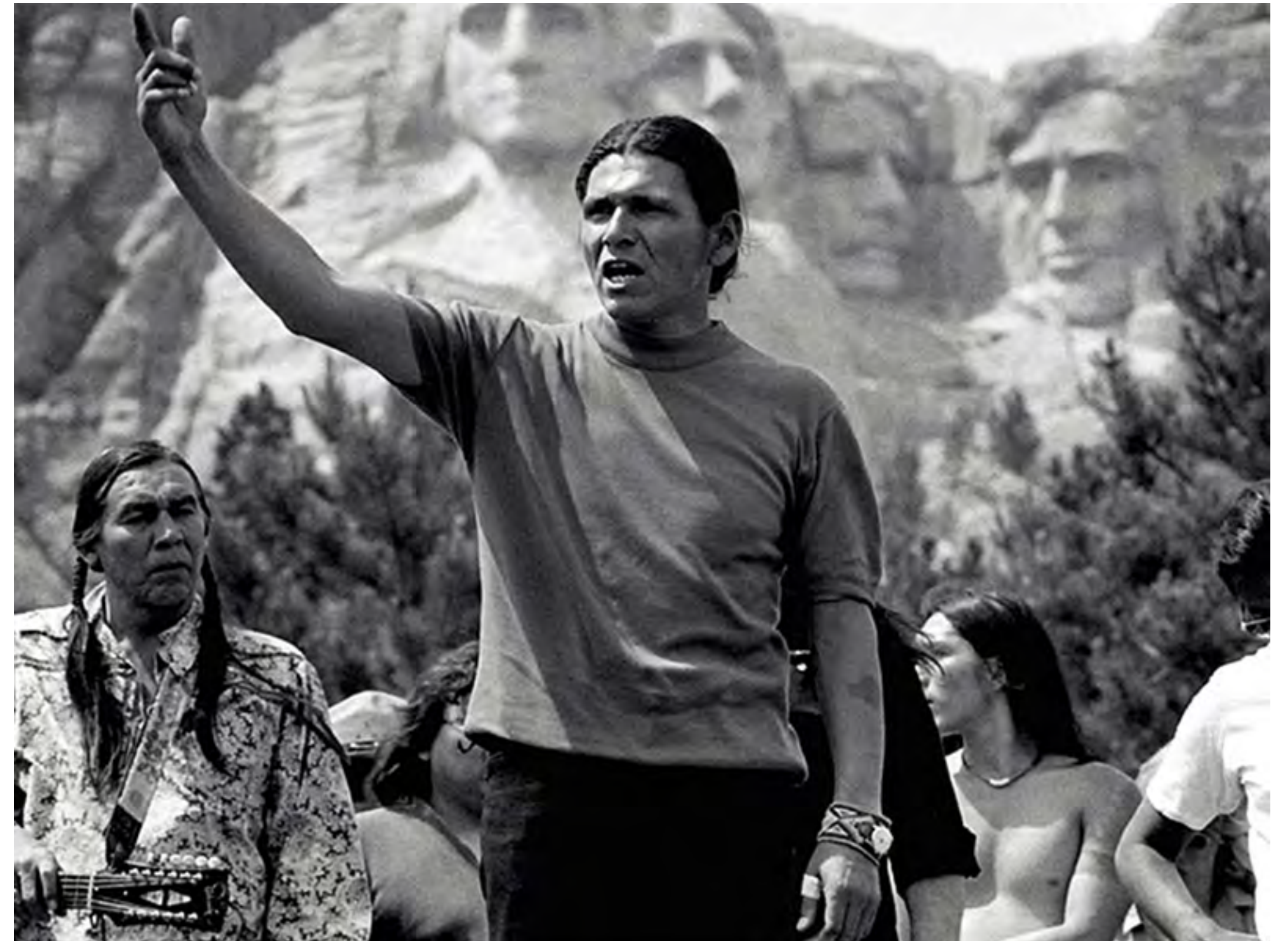
Watch [this video](#) detailing how the music industry and U.S. government rebuffed and blacklisted artists such as Buffy Sainte Marie and Johnny Cash.



Consider or ask a friend:

- Why might Columbia Records executives not have wanted Johnny Cash to release *Bitter Tears*? What about the album do you think they were against?
 - According to Adam Beach, what was the result of the banning of *Bitter Tears*?
 - Why does Buffy Sainte-Marie suggest her music was banned from radio?
 - Why would the government want to keep Buffy Sainte-Marie “silenced,” as Trudell mentions? What power do you think the music of Sainte-Marie, Cash, and La Farge might have?
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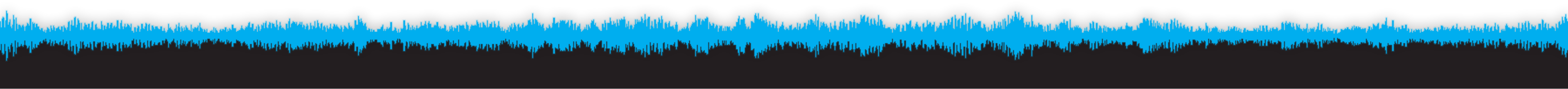
Musicians such as Peter La Farge, Buffy Sainte Marie, and Johnny Cash could be considered part of the Red Power Movement, which fought for Indigenous Rights and Justice throughout the 1960s and 1970s.






Read **this poem** by Santee Dakota writer, AIM activist, and musician John Trudell.

Consider or ask a friend:

- What experience is Trudell recounting in the poem?
 - What was Trudell's response to being arrested?
 - What might Trudell mean when he writes, "I was the Vietcong, I was Crazy Horse"?
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Consider or ask a friend:

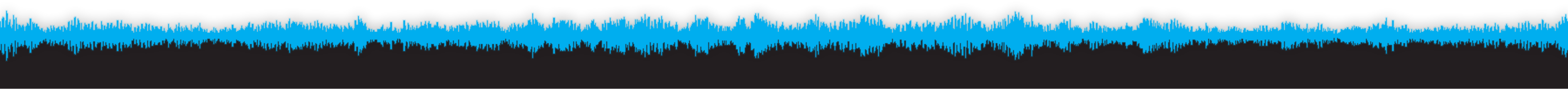
- Why did Trudell express pity for those who arrested him?
 - Where does Trudell find his strength during the ordeal described in the poem?
 - Who might Trudell be addressing in the final stanza of the poem?
 - What connections might you draw between John Trudell's activism and the activism of Sainte-Marie, Cash, and La Farge?
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Examine **this handout** detailing Native American protests and occupations in the 1970s as part of the Red Power Movement.





Consider or ask a friend:

- What sort of issues were Native Americans concerned with in their protests? How were these concerns similar or different to those made by leaders in other social and racial justice movements?
 - Where did these groups stage their protests? Why might these places be historically important to Native Americans?
 - How might these protests have served to raise awareness of Native American issues? What might a non-native hearing about these protests in the news have learned?
 - Are these protests similar in style to any other you might know about? How might the issues advocated by AIM still be of concern today?
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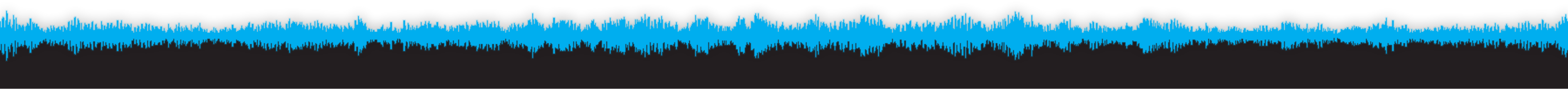


Examine **this handout** of song lyrics observing and commenting on historic figures and issues of concern to the Indigenous Community in the United States and Canada.





Consider or ask a friend:

- What story is Buffy Sainte-Marie telling in the lyrics of “My Country ‘Tis of Thy People You’re Dying”? What moments of history might the lyrics be touching upon?
 - What story is Peter La Farge telling in “The Senecas”?
 - What story is Johnny Cash telling in “The Ballad of Ira Hayes”?
 - What do you think the purpose or function of these songs might be? Do they differ in function, or do you think they all hold similar functions?
 - Why might some people view lyrics such as these as “dangerous” or “subversive”?
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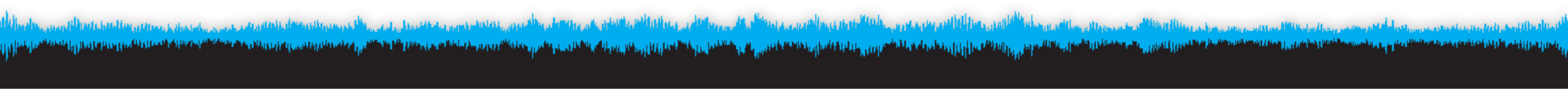


Examine **this handout** detailing how the music industry and the U.S. criminal justice system responded to Native American artists and activists.



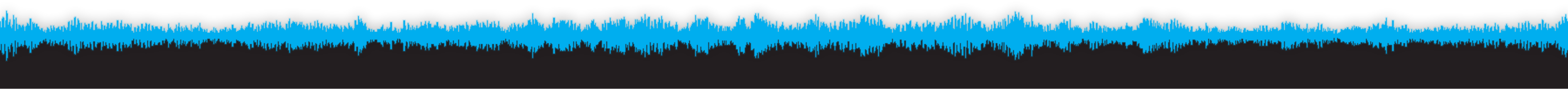


Consider or ask a friend:

- Why might DJs not have played Johnny Cash's album Bitter Tears?
 - What arguments does Cash make for why DJs should play his song "The Ballad of Ira Hayes?" Do you think he makes a convincing argument?
 - What sort of strategies did the FBI use against the American Indian Movement (AIM)? What was their ultimate goal?
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Consider or ask a friend:

- How does the FBI justify its activities of spying on AIM leaders?
 - According to the news article, why did Native Americans initially protest after the murder of Raymond Yellow Thunder?
 - Why might have Native Americans been gathered in front of the court for the trial on Raymond Yellow Thunder's death?
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Read this poem by Tlingit and Iñupiaq writer and actor Ishmael Hope.

Consider or ask a friend:

- What might Hope be attempting to do in this poem?
 - What kinds of activities is Hope suggesting? What might be the intended purpose of these activities?
 - How would you describe the tone or feeling of the poem?
 - In what ways might this poem connect to the views of actions of the Red Power Movement?
 - Could this poem in itself be considered a kind of activism? Why or why not?
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SUMMARY

- Native American social movements in the 1960s and 1970s addressed numerous urgent and long-standing issues experienced by Indigenous People
 - Leaders and members of the Native American social movements staged protests and participated in occupations to bring attention to their cause
 - Folk and Country musicians, like Buffy St. Marie, Peter La Farge, and Johnny Cash, released songs and albums that spoke to the issues expressed by the Native American social movements
 - The US Government engaged in a clandestine counter intelligence program to undermine these individuals and their social movements
 - Writers like John Trudell and Ishmael Hope have used poems as a way to express activism
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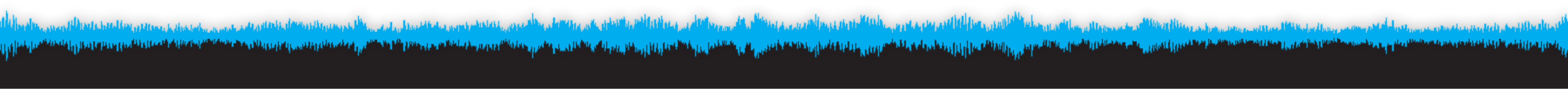
BE CREATIVE

Create a playlist of songs that speaks to issues you care about, or social justice issues in general. If possible, choose songs from a variety of genres (Hip Hop, Pop, Folk, Rock, etc.). Make sure your playlist is at least 15 minutes long. Share your playlist with family, friends, your classmates, or any other individuals or groups that may enjoy it!



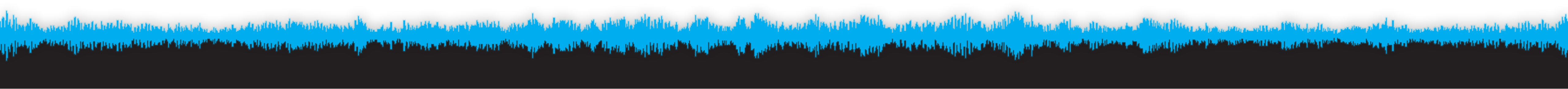
BE CURIOUS

- Do some web research on the **Idle No More** movement and the **Standing Rock** group. Write a short essay on the ways these new social movements compare and contrast with the Native American Red Power movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Are these contemporary groups advocating for the same issues that groups like AIM did in the past? Are their protest techniques similar or different?
- Learn more about writer **Ishmael Hope** and **John Trudell**
- **Listen to** “We Are the Halluci Nation,” a collaboration between John Trudell and the group A Tribe Called Red



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