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Russell Means' Use of the Universal Ecosystem Metaphor
as an Act of Indigenous Resistance

Clarissa McIntire

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Russell Means' Use of the Universal Ecosystem Metaphor as an Act of Indigenous Resistance

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Studies of American Indian protest rhetoric often define American Indian opposition either by its resistance or its conformity to non-Native institutional discursive norms, suggesting that only one of the two can be considered authentic to American Indian cultures and identities. Addressing this debate, this thesis examines an instance of Native opposition which successfully blends the two approaches: Russell Means' 1989 statement to the United States Senate. Means employs the mode of story to effectively shift discursive authority from the Senate committee members to pan-Indigenous peoples. I call this shift *rhetorical occupation*, or the appropriation of rhetorical space. Through rhetorical occupation, Means displaces the dominant narrative of governmental power with his own story, drawing on Lakota storytelling practices and both complying with and resisting white Euro-American forms of persuasion. This analysis suggests that rather than defining a broad category of culturally authentic American Indian opposition rhetoric, scholars should consider how Native opposition rhetorics reflect distinct tribal rhetorical traditions and take unique approaches to navigating non-Native discursive norms.

Keywords: Russell Means, rhetorical occupation, occupation, story, metaphor, performativity, Indigenous rhetorics, opposition rhetoric, protest rhetoric

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Introduction

In 1989, Oglala Lakota activist Russell Means appeared before the United States Senate Special Committee on Investigations of the Select Committee on Indian Affairs. Prompted by reporting in the *Arizona Republic* regarding corruption in federal organizations and tribal governments, the committee invited Means to testify on the validity of the claims. In a 1987 series, the *Republic* alleged that the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) “actually has thrived on the failure of [federal] Indian programs” and called the programs “costly, ineffective, and unresponsive” to the needs of American Indians (qtd. in Blair 242). The *Republic* also accused several nations’ tribal leaders of complicity in fraud and other schemes violating several federal laws, including the 1910 Buy Indian Act. The act required the BIA and tribal officials to give preference to Indian-owned companies when awarding federal contracts on reservations, but officials had primarily awarded contracts to non-Indian contractors, many of whom used front companies, either in full knowledge or willful ignorance of the fraud.¹ The growing public perception of corruption on Indian reservations prompted senatorial investigation.

Means was preceded in testimony by Phillip Martin, chief of the Choctaw Indians Mississippi; Wilma Mankiller, principal chief of the Cherokee Nation; Twila Martin-Kekahbah, chairwoman of the Turtle Mountain Tribal Council; and Joe Flett, chairman of the Spokane Tribe. Following their testimonies, each of which reaffirmed the federal government’s responsibility to address corruption in federal programs and on reservations, Means left his seat in the audience, joined the four panelists, and offered a statement of a slightly less amiable tone

¹ I primarily use *American Indian* and *Indian* throughout this paper because, like Margaret McCue-Enser, I find “rhetorical veracity” in using the terms Means preferred (“Intersectional Rhetoric” 261). Means argued that “Indian” was a derivation of the Italian phrase *In dio*, or “of God,” and identified as American Indian. He disliked “Native American” because anyone born in the United States could claim to be a native American (“‘I Am Not a Leader’: Russell Means’ 1980 Mother Jones Cover Story”).

than the other testifiers. Rather than commenting solely on the *Republic*'s allegations, Means' testimony redirected public attention to the injustice of the federal government's involvement in Indian affairs. Means argued that the United States could and should not consider American Indians its responsibility because it had no legitimate claim over them. The Senate Special Committee appeared to recognize Means' claim. Committee chairman Senator Dennis DeConcini of Arizona concluded that "the time for tinkering [with federal Indian programs to make their oversight more effective] is over" ("Federal Indian Programs"). Although tribes continue to face limitations to their constitutional rights to self-determination, the committee's 1989 final report recommended that the United States government take unprecedented steps to increase American Indian sovereignty (United States Congress).

Russell Means was an established activist well before the 1989 senatorial hearings. For two decades he had led or participated in occupations of well-known landmarks, including Alcatraz; the Black Hills, the Lakota Nation's most sacred site, and what is now known as Mount Rushmore; and Wounded Knee, a town in the Lakota's Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota. This much-studied period is now known as the Red Power movement, the "'classic' era of national pan-Indian" demonstrations that lasted from approximately 1969 to 1978 (Hitchmough 225; see also Kyrová and Tóth; Lake, "Enacting Red Power"; McCue-Enser, "Ada Deer and the Menominee Restoration"; Sanchez and Stuckey). During this time, Means served as national director of the advocacy group the American Indian Movement (AIM). After leaving AIM, Means continued to advocate for Indigenous groups all over the world. He mounted unsuccessful campaigns for the presidency of the Oglala Sioux, governorship of New Mexico, and nominations for the vice presidency and presidency of the United States. And by 1989 the *New York Times* reported Means was "one of the nation's best-known Indian leaders" (Shendon).

Means later appeared in an Andy Warhol silk screen in 1996 and several films between 1990 and 2012 (including Disney's *Pocahontas* and the 1992 version of *The Last of the Mohicans*). He was both a figurative and literal face of the fight for American Indian sovereignty. Renowned scholar Vine Deloria, Jr., (Standing Rock Sioux) wrote, "If Russell Means has faults, and we all do, he also has talent and dedication which greatly outweigh the faults and which in my mind make him one of the greatest Indians of our time" (qtd. in Smith and Warrior 274). Despite his pivotal role in AIM and multifaceted history of advocacy spanning four decades, scholarship on Means himself remains limited (Cook-Lynn; Stripes).

A greater body of scholarship exists on American Indian opposition rhetoric, or what McCue-Enser calls "protest rhetoric." Much scholarship on opposition rhetoric focuses on militant or extreme forms of opposition, calling into question whether those forms that "acquiesce to the institutional and discursive norms of the state" may be considered oppositional (McCue-Enser, "Ada Deer" 71).² For example, many scholars have attended to various rhetorical aspects of American Indian activism in the 1960s and 1970s, including the Red Power-era rhetoric of AIM, imprisoned AIM member Leonard Peltier (Lakota and Dakota), and the responses of the federal government (Endres; Kelly, "Rhetorical Counterinsurgency" and "Détournement"; Knittel; Meister and Burnett; Sanchez, Stuckey, and Morris; Rome). However, McCue-Enser notes that "politically moderate" approaches to opposition, such as that of Ada Deer (Menominee), have been overlooked ("Ada Deer" 64). To address this lack of critical attention to politically moderate American Indian opposition, this paper analyzes Means' unique rhetorical strategy, paying particular attention to his use of metaphor and story within a

² McCue-Enser, Lake, and other non-Native scholars often refer to this as "protest rhetoric," but I use the term "opposition rhetoric" to recognize that Native peoples may not consider themselves protestors. For example, those who gathered at Standing Rock in 2016 called themselves "water protectors" rather than protestors.

politically moderate approach to activism.³ In doing so, I rely on Kimberly Wieser's (Cherokee, Choctaw, and Creek) model of story, which suggests that story is in Native cultures a rhetorical mode which employs simultaneously the concepts known to Euro-American rhetoricians as narrative, metaphor, and performativity.

Means' unique rhetorical style—one which blends confrontation with political deliberation—employs the mode of story to effectively shift discursive authority from the Senate committee members to pan-Indigenous peoples, including Means himself. I call this shift *rhetorical occupation*. Through rhetorical occupation, Means displaces the dominant narrative of governmental power with his own story. He compares the Euro-American metaphor of the food chain as a framework for power acquisition with the Lakota and other tribes' teachings of an interdependent ecosystem as the organizing structure of the universe. His story calls the Senate's authority into question by acknowledging a higher law and showing that their leadership is the cause of many problems in American Indian nations. I begin by outlining the concepts of rhetorical occupation and, specifically, the function of storytelling as a mode of rhetorical occupation. I then conduct a close textual analysis of Means' statement before the Senate committee, outlining how he uses story to rhetorically occupy the Senate hearing. Finally, I discuss how the concept of rhetorical occupation can expand scholarly definitions of Native opposition rhetoric. While scholars have often considered Native opposition either illegitimate unless it is confrontational or ineffective unless it is moderate, an analysis of Means' storytelling

³ I acknowledge that synthesis is “the more common problem-solving strategy for Native peoples,” and analyzing Means' work is a departure from the commitment I make in the next section to rely primarily on the theory and perspectives of American Indian scholars (Wieser **xii**). However, due to the constraints of the genre, the traditions of the academy, and my status as a non-Native scholar of American Indian rhetorics, I proceed with an analytical method.

suggests that his opposition rhetoric blends the two extremes by being both moderate and confrontational.

Rhetorical Occupation

Despite his skill as a rhetor, Means considered rhetoric a burden rather than a blessing. As he writes in *If You've Forgotten the Names of the Clouds, You've Lost Your Way: An Introduction to American Indian Thought and Philosophy*, published shortly before his death in 2012, Means believed humankind's ability to reason had done them great harm:

We two-leggeds are not at the top of the food chain, we're at the bottom, because of all the creatures on Earth, we're the only ones who are cursed with the power of reason. We don't know the things we need to know to function in life by instinct, the way all other animals do. This is why we have to learn from all our relatives—all the children of the Earth Mother are our teachers. (82)

Means invokes a metaphor of the food chain but inverts it, arguing that humans are not above all other creatures, as the Euro-American metaphor suggests, but below them. Means believed that humans have reasoned away and thus forgotten the Creator's instructions on how to live well, including maintaining what Indigenous scholars call "right relationships" with the land and with each other (Allen, *Spider Woman's Granddaughters* 9). However, he also believed that performativity is the redeeming quality of rhetoric; he thought that when used for good, with a pure heart, reason could "affect Infinity," changing the world by helping people find their way back into right relationships with the land and with each other (81). In his statement to the Senate, Means sought to "affect Infinity" through rhetorical occupation.

I derive *rhetorical occupation* from Casey Ryan Kelly's concept of metaphorical occupation. In his analysis of the founding document of the Indians of All Tribes (IOAT), the

group to which Means belonged during their 1969 occupation of Alcatraz, Kelly suggests that the group enacted metaphorical occupation. IOAT, he writes, “invited sympathetic audiences to metaphorically ‘occupy’ Euro-American texts in a manner that mirrored the act of physical occupation” (“Détournement” 170). When the group physically occupied the famous penitentiary island in San Francisco Bay, they engaged in “subversive *misappropriation*” of the texts the United States government relied upon to justify their governance of American Indian peoples (170; emphasis in original). In a similar move, though with key differences, Means rhetorically occupied the Senate hearing. He subversively misappropriated his opportunity to speak before the Senate to tell his story of predator and prey.

A definition of terms is necessary. By physical occupation, I refer to the subversive misappropriation of a space or place, such as the 2011 Occupy Wall Street encampment in Zucotti Park in New York City. Metaphorical occupation, as Kelly defines it, means to engage in the rhetoric of *détournement*, or the “disassembl[ing] and imitat[ion of] texts until they clearly display their oppressive qualities” (170). In contrast, rhetorical occupation refers to the subversive misappropriation of *discursive* space, broadening Kelly’s classification from texts alone to many forms of communication, including Means’ testimony. Rhetorical occupation of a discourse implies using that discourse for a purpose at odds with the intended purpose of the individual or group who holds power over that discourse. This strategy has special significance for Means and all American Indian peoples. By engaging in rhetorical occupation, Means achieves at the Senate hearing what IOAT, AIM, and other American Indian advocacy groups achieved through physical occupations during Red Power: a reclamation of rhetorical sovereignty. Scott Richard Lyons (Ojibwe/Dakota) defines rhetorical sovereignty as “the guiding story in our pursuit of self- determination, the general strategy by which we aim to best recover

our losses from the ravages of colonization: our lands, our languages, our cultures, our self-respect” (“Rhetorical Sovereignty” 449; see also King). Means’ rhetorical occupation focuses on recovery of rhetorical space. It seems fitting that he would rhetorically occupy a Senate hearing considering his experience participating in physical occupations.

While these three forms of occupation—physical, metaphorical, and rhetorical—involve subverting expectations, they differ in what they occupy and, thus, in their results. For example, I compare IOAT’s physical occupation of Alcatraz with Means’ physical occupation of the Senate hearing. In 1969, the federal government’s expectation of visitors to Alcatraz was that they would experience it as a place of public memory. The island would soon be repurposed as a campground or other recreational area. Visitors, arriving and departing regularly in a rotating procession, would be offered information about the island’s history as a former military fort and penitentiary. IOAT subverted these expectations by taking possession of the land and its buildings for over a year and a half, much longer than the average visitor was expected to stay. They restricted public access and cited the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie to justify their actions, which stipulated that any out-of-use federal land would be returned to American Indian peoples. Their presence drew attention to the group’s demands and prompted the public to consider Alcatraz as American Indian land taken by the federal government. The occupation resulted in a federal policy change (the rescinding of the Indian Termination Policy), which was one of the IOAT’s demands.

On the other hand, the story Means tells in the Senate hearing allows him to occupy not the building itself but the narrative of the hearing. The committee members expected Means to fulfill the exigence of his invitation by speaking to the validity of the *Republic*’s accusations and suggesting actions the federal government could take to ameliorate the situation while abiding by

the Senate rules in discourse and manner. Means does choose to abide by the Senate rules, but in a move that may have been more unsettling to his audience than breaking rules of decorum, he does more than speak to the subjects of the hearing. In words alone, he occupies the Senate's discursive space, regaining control of that space—however temporarily—just as he had done in the many physical occupations he participated in throughout his life. He achieves this rhetorical occupation through storytelling. In the following section, I explore story as a rhetorical device in American Indian cultures.

Story as Rhetorical Occupation

Many scholars of American Indian rhetorics, such as Malea Powell (Indiana Miami and Eastern Shawnee) and Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo), point to story as a primary, though by no means exclusive, rhetorical device in many Native cultures.⁴ Kimberly Wieser (Cherokee, Choctaw, and Creek) offers a model of story upon which I rely in my analysis of Means' storytelling as rhetorical occupation. She asserts that in American Indian cultures, story contains three elements often considered separate in Euro-American rhetorical theory: narrative,

⁴ This review incorporates perspectives from individuals from different American Indian nations. In doing so, I adopt Wieser's paradigm of "Intertribalism." Intertribalism—as opposed to "trans" paradigms, such as Transindigeneity, which tend to focus on the friction between Indigenous nations—"incorporates Native notions of relatedness" and aims to foster collaboration between nations as well as between Native and non-Native peoples (Wieser xii). I adopt an Intertribalism approach in this study, considering not only Oglala Lakota culture and rhetorical traditions but also their commonalities with those of other nations. I also adopt Wieser's Intertribalism paradigm because it positions me, a non-Native scholar, in a place to participate in this conversation but not center myself in it. In the spirit of finding intercultural commonality inherent in Intertribalism, I hope to contribute to the cross-cultural transmission of knowledge that has been active for decades among Native and non-Native scholars and to generate scholarship that may benefit American Indian peoples. In doing so, I am guided by Wieser's vision for scholarship that develops "knowledge and arguments grounded in Indigenous structures tied to Indigenous perspectives, allowing us to see relatedness and commonality while maintaining tribal specificity and sovereignty" (xii). By considering how story functions in many different American Indian cultures, this study views Means' statement to the Senate as a representation not just of the Lakota nation's rhetorical traditions alone but also as a representation of related Indigenous traditions. After all, Means considered himself to be a representative not only of the Lakota but also, as he told the committee, a "spokesman for my people, the American Indians of the United States of America" ("Overview").

metaphor, and performativity. In this model, stories are narratives, but narratives are not stories, since story includes so much more than only narrative:

Narrative, present in all cultures, gains primacy as a rhetorical mode and functions not just as an analogue to, but also as a metaphor for, the listener's/reader's reality. And because American Indian epistemologies are open and polycentric, not closed as those of Western culture are, metaphor is fluid. And because of this fluidity, syncretism—the phenomenon among all peoples in which metaphor becomes cultural currency—becomes a key means of both physical and spiritual survival. (Wieser 27)

Wieser suggests that metaphor is an essential characteristic of story, just as narrative is. Finally, stories are also performative. Their words “actually change reality,” not only “the way the reader perceives it”; “unlike in structuralist and poststructuralist thought, words are not merely signifiers; they are *inherently* performative, *always* enacting meaning” (Wieser 25). A complete understanding of story as a rhetorical mode requires consideration of all three elements because they rely and build upon one another. The next few paragraphs further define each of these three elements and their role in story.

Wieser uses narrative to mean a sequence of events in a cause-and-effect relationship, similar to non-Native scholars' use of the term. James Jasinski writes that narratives show relationships “between or among things . . . over time” through plot, or “a structure of actions,” (390). Both Wayne C. Booth (14) and Hayden White also identify the time-ordering of events as central to narrative (5). The Western narrative may at times behave argumentatively as analogy, “inviting the reader or audience to see one situation in terms of another,” (Jasinski 395). It may also permit “the evaluation of an action or event in terms of its favorable or unfavorable consequences” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 266). The difference between the American

Indian story and the Western narrative is many Native cultures' employment of story as both analogy and pragmatic argument. Though Western narratives *may* act as analogies for or evaluations of events, Wieser suggests that in both cases, stories always do so. In Wieser's model, story behaves consistently in many American Indian cultures when used internally (from a Native rhetor to a Native audience).

Wieser's final two characteristics of story assume a definition of reality that varies greatly from non-Native definitions. While many Euro-American cultures consider reality as firm and changeable only in certain ways, many American Indian cultures consider reality a flexible, "interwoven series of relationships in which everything is ultimately connected" (Wieser 10). Allen agrees that American Indian peoples consider all things to be malleable for someone who knows how to affect them through methods like "walking in a sacred manner, owning a sacred power, and ceremony" ("Symbol and Structure" 269). Lakota traditions emphasize the idea that reality includes both what is seen and unseen, aligning "the mythic world with the temporal world of past and future into a mystically understood present which for the native is the real world, a whole world," says Lakota scholar Arthur Amiotte (30). This definition of reality as changeable and not wholly tangible is essential to understanding story's metaphoric and performative capacities.

Wieser and Powell acknowledge that stories in Indigenous cultures have a metaphoric function which invites listeners to consider their lives in the context of Indigenous worldviews. This metaphoric function provides American Indian listeners with opportunities to reexamine reality through a new lens. Metaphors have varied source domains, to use I. A. Richards' term, but stories in Native cultures invite audiences to contextualize their own experience within the Universe. That is, in Lakota culture, all stories can function as metaphors with the same source

domain. Jo-Ann Archibald/Q'um Q'um Xiiem (Stó:lō) calls this *storywork*, or “storytelling for educational purposes,” describing the power of story to teach cultural values in Stó:lō and Coast Salish cultures (ix). Similarly, Allen writes that “at base, every story, every song, every ceremony tells us that we are part of a significant, living whole and that all parts of that whole are related to one another by virtue of their participation in the wholeness of Being” (“Symbol and Structure” 268). For comparison, then, we might rewrite Kenneth Burke’s definition of metaphor as bringing “out the thisness of a that, or a thatness of a this” as bringing out the *universality of a that*, or the reframing of a smaller unit of reality within the totality of being. Stories associate the great Story, the story of the Universe, with an individual person’s experience(s). It is the listener’s responsibility to determine how they might better be in harmony with that Universe. Considering one’s place in the Universe requires a practice Wieser calls *holistic thinking*. Holistic thinking is common in Indigenous cultures but discouraged in most of Euro-American society, which privileges linear thinking. Holistic thinkers engage in synthesis and eisegesis, contextualizing new information within what they already know. On the other hand, linear thinkers typically practice analysis and exegesis, taking apart new information to understand it better. The difference between each culture’s preference originates in the conflicting ways Western and Indigenous cultures define reality.

The final element in Wieser’s model of story, performativity, suggests that words alter reality in ways that cannot be tracked or recognized via methods privileged by Western societies (i.e., discernible through the five senses or proven through the scientific process). The purpose of Native American storytelling, Allen writes, is to “embody and even to manipulate reality, to bring the isolated private self into harmony and balance with the public reality” (“Symbol and Structure” 267). However, recent scholarship in performance studies has begun to recognize and

study the expansive influence of metaphor. Myers and Alexander assert that metaphors “operate in transgressive ways” (164). Raymond W. Gibbs Jr. further suggests that studies of metaphor should embrace “the view from contemporary cognitive science that cognition is not what solely happens inside peoples’ heads (e.g., their brains or interior minds) but is more accurately seen as embodied, enactive, embedded, and extended” (Gibbs 33). Such embracing of performativity moves Western scholarship far from the skepticism of Quintilian, who viewed metaphor as ornamental, aligning it more closely with common knowledge in many American Indian communities. Thus, scholars within and without American Indian rhetorics increasingly consider metaphor as possessing the ability to alter reality in more ways than perception alone. By combining narrative, metaphor, and performativity, story is both a form of communication and a form of action. Means utilizes this dual capacity to realize his rhetorical occupation of the Senate hearing. In the following sections, I analyze how Means enacts a rhetorical occupation through the three key features of his story.

Means’ Story of Predator and Prey

Throughout his statement, Means tells a story of a predator that gains an unnatural amount of power over its prey.⁵ Means begins his story in the first few lines of his statement as he argues that

In these United States of America, this great country of ours, we American Indians, we can be anything we want to be except American Indians; and that is created by the laws

⁵ I treat Means’ statement as orature primarily because it was delivered orally but also because the best record of the event exists in audiovisual format (transcriptions do exist, though none are official nor authoritative). This lack of written records may have appealed to Means. Nearly ten years before addressing the Senate, Means declared that he “detest[ed] writing,” as it “epitomizes the European concept of ‘legitimate thinking’: what is written has an importance that is denied the spoken. My culture, the Lakota culture, has an oral tradition, so I ordinarily reject writing. It is one of the white world’s ways of destroying the cultures of non-European peoples, the imposing of an abstraction over the spoken relationship of a people” (“‘I Am Not a Leader’: Russell Means’ 1980 Mother Jones Cover Story”).

of this nation and condoned by its subsidiaries, the so-called Tribal Government, and designed for the Indian to fail, to be expendable, to be eliminated. (“Overview”)

He suggests that American Indians are “expendable” in the view of the United States government. They will “fail” and “be eliminated.” These words suggest that they are unwanted, much like an invasive species whose existence means little to those who would exterminate them. Because the presence of American Indians does not benefit the federal government, Means says, American Indians are being picked off and kept from truly thriving. Clearly, in this story, the prey symbolizes American Indians, and the predator symbolizes the United States government.

Means’ story continues in separate instances throughout his approximately fifteen-minute speech. He refers to BIA programs as “bloated,” created to “breed and feed” “rampant” corruption, producing “scandal[s] of monstrous proportions,” and delivering no real benefits for American Indians, only “a meal” for non-Native lawyers (“Overview”). Though they appear separately in the text, these descriptors combine to tell a story in which the BIA fills the role of a predator which has gained power beyond its natural role. Means suggests that with its “monstrous proportions,” the BIA has become more powerful than any governing body should be, much like an apex predator which has gained more influence over its ecosystem than it needs to survive. “Bloated,” grotesque, and unhealthily large, it has superseded the natural order and dominates the ecosystem to a degree that puts the natural community out of balance. Means also suggests that the predator did not achieve this dominance by accident. The BIA, he alleges, gave itself the authority to oversee contracting on tribal lands, or to “breed and feed corruption.” “Breeding” suggests an element of deliberateness in that corruption, as breeding animals requires calculation and planning. Perhaps the most important implication in this story is that of what

should be done with this oversized, over-powerful creature dominating the ecosystem. As an unusually violent bear or mountain lion would have to be eliminated to avoid an imbalance in the community and a depletion of prey, so too, Means implies, should the BIA be eliminated so it no longer maintains undue influence over the citizens of tribal nations.

True to Oglala Lakota and other nations' similar traditions, Means does not offer an explicit explanation of his story or even directly reference it. Instead, he asks his listeners to pay attention to his figurative language and combine these disparate descriptions to build a cohesive story. Similar to the Stó:lō tradition of storywork, listeners must pay attention to what is unsaid as much as what is said. Wieser notes that "all elements of the story must be placed into a larger mental picture, so to speak, in order for meaning to be made. As with petroglyphs, meaning is in between, in the gaps of the story, as much as in what is explicitly written, if not more so" (Wieser 30). As Fee says, "Indigenous peoples do not view language as a simple coding of thought, but as productive of a reciprocal relationship with a living universe" (562). When Means speaks, he acknowledges humanity's place in the Universe and tasks his listeners with interpreting his characterization of that relationship.

In Means' story, the gaps are literal and figurative. The descriptors "rampant," "breed and feed," "of monstrous proportions," "bloated," and "a meal" (listed in order of appearance), appear paragraphs apart, creating physical gaps in the story. However, the story also has figurative gaps that must be filled by the listener. For example, with "rampant" and "monstrous proportions," Means characterizes the BIA as a wild, predatory animal; from "bloated," "breed and feed," and "a meal," he portrays the animal as large, greedy, and unnatural. As mentioned previously, "breed and feed" implies an element of premeditation: there was conscious effort on the predator's part to expand its influence beyond its natural feeding patterns. Or, more literally,

the BIA deliberately allowed corruption to flourish within its ranks and programs. As for American Indian citizens, Means' story tells that they suffer the "loss and attrition of existing lands to various federal, state and local laws and/or regulations, the abridgement of sovereign rights to remaining lands, and the arbitrary monetary policies of settlement of those rights" ("1989"). "Loss and attrition" can be interpreted in more than one way—literally, as the loss of land, but also as the loss of life and the attrition of physical strength among the prey of the greedy apex predator. Just as a predator which kills for sport goes beyond its natural role, the BIA violates the sovereignty of American Indians by assuming unjust power over them. This concept of natural roles is best understood when considered in the context of American Indian metaphysical thought.

Considering Means' predator-prey story in the context of many Indigenous nations' metaphysical beliefs allows listeners to resolve the story's fragmented plot. Most, if not all, Indigenous cultures' creation stories include some concept of the whole of reality, which is created in perfect balance and maintained by a divine force and in which all beings have a rightful, divinely appointed place. Indigenous education scholar Greg Cajete (Tewa) says that Native philosophies of science, based on commonalities between cultural understandings of creation, assume that "the Earth is alive and nurtures all things of her body and all have intelligence and a right to exist" (77). This right to exist, or the personal sovereignty of every being, is best summarized in Cajete's concept of "natural democracy," the idea that "all are equal and have a say in how their lives will be lived or affected" (77). Means has a similar understanding of the individual's placement in the natural community. In *If You've Forgotten the Names of the Clouds*, Means offers the following analogy:

One day I threw a rock into Victoria Lake, about the size of a beaver pond, and as the series of concentric waves spread outward from the point of impact I had a profound realization—if you envision that central point as your heart, then the nearest circle can be seen as your family. The next circle would be your extended family, followed by your clan, your nation, the world, the Universe . . . into Infinity. In this way I saw that my heart is connected to and affects Infinity . . . with this connection in mind—knowing that your heart has an effect on the Infinite—you see how important it is to have a pure and healthy heart! Our hearts are part of the Infinite, not separate from it. (81–82)

In other words, the individual has a specific place in the Universe and that place is important not only because it is administered by divine design but also because it grants each being the opportunity to influence the world around it.⁶ The overpowerful predator in Means' story upsets the balance of the Universe not only because it abuses its prey but also because it violates other beings' divinely given sovereignty. The creature is given a specific role to fill in the Universe, but by expanding its influence, it disregards the instructions given by the divine, often referred to in many cultures as the Creator (Fee 562). Means does not say this explicitly in his statement; instead, he asks readers to consider his story within the context of Lakota teachings about the Universe, allowing that association to help readers find meaning in what he does not say as much as in what he does.

While it may appear that Means' narrative is merely a series of metaphors (according to the common Western definition), to consider his words only metaphorical would be to overlook the ideological and conceptual traditions they participate in. Contextualizing Means' story within his belief in a divinely created Universe reveals a very different ordering of events than

⁶ Other Native scholars and authors who refer to the *Universe* as a term for the organizing structure of reality include Fee, Cajete, Wieser, Deloria Jr., and N. Scott Momaday, among many more.

traditional Western storytelling: the Universe is organized by the Creator, who gives each being a specific place and role; then the overlarge predator, or the BIA, deliberately seeks undue influence over other beings; and finally, the prey—American Indian peoples among them—are abused by the oppressive predator. The final aspect of the story is enacted rather than described: with Means as representative, the American Indian peoples speak out against their oppressor. There is a clear cause-and-effect relationship between each of these events, despite the seemingly disjointed plot structure.

Means enacts rhetorical occupation by telling a story which displaces a dominant story. Just as physical occupation involves restricting public access to a place or space, rhetorical occupation temporarily controls a discourse and restricts competing narratives from gaining prominence. Means' story of predator and prey tells a story of governmental oppression, but the dominant narrative in the Senate chamber on that day was one of governmental power. In their own statements, Means' fellow panelists Martin, Mankiller, Martin-Kekhbah, and Flett each confirmed the government's responsibility to confront the corruption and other issues taking place in their respective nations. Means does the opposite, telling a story suggesting American Indians' problems arise from the government's assumption of power over them. Perhaps his most direct displacement of the narrative of governmental power comes at the beginning of his statement. While the other panelists begin their statements in English and by thanking the senate committee, Means begins: "*Hau mitakuyepi, miye malakota. Maje tahan ki ne zi tiyospaye ki le hesa woke lila wakan. Mitakuye ate tasunka witko tiyospaye. Mitakuye ina wanbli zuya tiyospaye*" (qtd. in Crick 167). In this traditional Lakota greeting, Means addresses the senators as "my relatives" and tells them which clans he and his parents belong to. In doing so, he creates

identification with his audiences but privileges his own cultural discursive norms rather than the institution's, defying audience expectations from the beginning of his statement.

One might argue that because of Means' history as an active advocate for American Indian affairs, the Senate committee would have expected his defiance, so their expectations would not have been subverted by the statement and thus Means would not be enacting rhetorical occupation. It is true that at least one of the committee members, Senator DeConcini, was aware of Means' past. After Means' statement, DeConcini thanked him "for being here and being as blunt and straightforward as you were today and historically as you have been" ("Overview of Indian Affairs"). Though DeConcini anticipated Means' delivery style, he appeared to be surprised by the content of the statement. After Means concluded, DeConcini asked Means regarding his declaration that American Indians could one day choose their citizenship:

If that were to come about, where you had that absolute right and you or other Native Americans chose that right to renounce American citizenship, then what relation would that individual have? Would they be an immigrant in the United States when they are off the reservation? What status would they have legally? Have you thought that out, Mr. Means? ("Overview of Indian Affairs")

Throughout the question-and-answer session, DeConcini seems skeptical, if not incredulous, at Means' declaration of American Indian sovereignty. Thus, Means still subverts DeConcini's expectations and rhetorically occupies the hearing.

The Universal Ecosystem Metaphor

The predator-and-prey story is a narrative, but it is also a metaphor for maintaining a right relationship with the Universe. Allen explains that "right relationship, or right kinship, is fundamental to Native aesthetics" and differs in specifics between cultures but "everywhere . . .

is characterized by considerations of proportion, harmony, balance, and communality” (*Spider Woman’s Granddaughters* 9). In such a model of the Universe, all beings are equal in sovereignty and honor the sovereignty of others. But in Means’ story, the predatory BIA does not maintain right relationships with those it is supposed to serve. It encroaches on the sovereignty of other beings, and tribal governments further upset that balance. Means refers to tribal governments not only as surrogates for the BIA but also as “parasite[s]” and “incestuous.” To put it another way, tribal governments profit from the BIA’s oppression of American Indian peoples in an unnatural manner. Rather than serving their people, tribal officials benefit from the federal government’s involvement in their politics and policies; Means specifically names corruption not only in contracting regulation but also in residential schools and limits on American Indian religious freedom. By doing so, tribal governments seek to elevate themselves above their citizens. This disrupts the universal ecosystem, in which all beings are interconnected and exist on a single plane of importance, much like the threads of a fabric are bound together in a weave. Instead, tribal corruption contributes to the pecking order with American Indians at the bottom and the federal government at the top.

I use this metaphor of a weave not only because it illuminates the close relationship between all beings in Means’ story—all are bound together, each one influencing every other—but because it mirrors the structure of the story. Working iconistically, the story weaves figurative and literal language together to prompt the audience to compare the characters in the story with the actors in the Senate hearing. For example, Means invokes the image of an overlarge creature while describing the BIA’s corruption: “There is a scandal of monstrous proportions occurring in at least two Indian agencies, the BIA’s branch of land operations and the branch of realty. . . . The BIA does not enforce its trust responsibly—quite the contrary”

(“Overview”). *Monstrous proportions* is embedded within a sentence that, otherwise, is a literal statement. The same pattern appears a few sentences later: “The poorest and richest reservations in our nation suffer from identical problems: mismanagement, a bloated patronage system, no checks and balances, and tribal governments’ waiver of sovereignty in order to initiate debt.” Again, the figurative language, and therefore the story, mingles with the literal. Means is not the first to weave the literal with the symbolic in this way. Origin stories of many Indigenous cultures work similarly, Cajete says, since those stories “are creative interpretations of the experience of a people in participation with places. Literal fact is woven with metaphoric meaning” (75). Means adopts this pattern in his own story, merging his arguments about government corruption with his story about the unnaturally large predator.

If a weave can be used to describe both the content and the structure of Means’ story, then the Western narrative that his story challenges would be best described as a hierarchy. Means alludes to this hierarchy with figurative language that highlights the competitive nature of both the BIA and the tribal governments. The BIA, he says, “is a major *player* in land leases being sold by petty bureaucrats for as meager an amount as forty dollars,” and in tribal politics, “the *game* of ‘who is the most important’ rules”; for both, “the American Indians are the *pawn*” (“1989”; emphasis mine). These metaphors suggest that much like a game of chess, reservation politics have become a fight for the victory of the most powerful at the expense of the least powerful. It is the very concept of a social hierarchy that introduces unrest into communities and, in this case, governments. When the fight for power is introduced, tribal officials forget their roles and responsibilities as members of the great Whole and seek to use power over their citizens for their own personal gain.

This Darwinian struggle for the survival of the fittest, which infects and disrupts the balance of right relationships in American Indian cultures, is a defining aspect of the Western metaphor of the food chain as an organizing structure for power. The metaphor is so ingrained in Western culture that many Westerners have trouble recognizing them. W. Benjamin Myers and Bryant Keith Alexander, quoting psychologist Stephen Pinker, calls these permeating metaphors “fossilized”: “They are foundational to our understanding of a phenomenon, but are so ingrained in our symbolic construction of reality that they go unnoticed, beneath the surface much like a fossil” (165). Some common phrases arising from the cultural understanding of power as a food chain include *It’s a jungle out there* and *It’s a dog-eat-dog world*, which imply competition in the fight for survival, much as members of the food chain compete with one another to live (Fludernik, Freeman, and Freeman 393). Linguist Jonathan Charteris-Black, who specializes in the study of metaphor, shows that the food chain is foundational to the myth of the American Dream, which continues to hold sway in American politics today. The myth “implies that *any* motivated individual can reach *any* social position, irrespective of their personal, ethnic or social background” (Charteris-Black 281; emphasis in original). *Reach* and *highest* indicate hierarchical structure: powerful individuals inhabit upper rungs of the social ladder, and it takes effort to achieve that social position. The food chain metaphor draws on a similar source domain to the story—relationships between living things, though the food-chain metaphor refers specifically to non-human animals—but their differing interpretations of that source domain lead to two different versions of what George Lakoff and Mark Johnson call orientational metaphors. Space indicates relationships in the orientational metaphor, so in the food chain metaphor, height indicates dominance and depth, while Means’ story of a weave-like Universe suggests equality through the imagery of a level plane with all beings in alignment with one another.

Hierarchical structure is evident not only in Means' depiction of Western politics but also in the rhetorical situation in which he delivers his remarks. For example, when beginning the hearing, Senator DeConcini says, "Many of the federal Indian programs are fraught with corruption. . . . We have found evidence of this problem at all levels, from Washington DC through the bureaucracy and down to the field" ("Overview of Indian Affairs"). Suggesting that the government has levels and that the "field" is located "down" from Washington DC indicates that DeConcini views the government as a hierarchical structure, with the height of each level indicating a greater amount of governing power. Further, the arrangement of the Senate chamber itself indicates a hierarchy: the three committee members are positioned in the front of the room on a stand that situates them above Means, who must glance upward to address them from his seat in the center of the room, with audience members seated behind him. But perhaps the most notable element of the arrangement is who it does not include. Meeting in Washington, D.C., the committee is far removed from the American Indian citizens, who reside in the "field" and whose welfare they discuss. The word *field* itself creates distance between the government and American Indians by implying that the federal government exists in one space and Native peoples in another (see Linda Tuhiwai Smith 127). The spatial gap reinforces the imagery of the food chain. A single, powerful predator exists above many smaller, less powerful creatures at the bottom. They are literally and figuratively separate.

Such division, whether between groups of humans or between humans and nature, is not a part of American Indian culture, Allen asserts. "Whites discuss the supernatural as though it were apart from men, and discuss the natural as though men were apart from it," she writes. "This necessarily forces English-speaking people into a position of alienation from that world which is around them" ("Symbol and Structure" 268). Through his story, Means reunites these

realms in the minds of his audience. By comparing the BIA and tribal governments to creatures, he suggests that not only are they figuratively like animals, but they are also not very different from them either due to their shared space in the Universe. That is, in American Indian traditions, humans are a part of the global ecosystem rather than outside of it and receive a divinely given role and responsibility to the community. By weaving his figurative and literal language together in his story, Means also weaves together the separate actors in the rhetorical situation—Native Americans, non-Native Americans, and the land—and challenges the hierarchical structure of the Senate hearing.

Challenging the food chain metaphor with his universal ecosystem metaphor allows Means to rhetorically occupy the Senate hearing. While his story supplants the Western narrative of governmental power, his use of universal ecosystem metaphor does not completely replace the food chain metaphor. Rather, Means compares the two, highlighting how the food chain is not in harmony with the concept of the universal ecosystem. This draws audience attention to a ubiquitous metaphor they would otherwise have overlooked, inviting them to consider whether it is the most accurate and ethical way to conceive of American political structure. Compared to the universal ecosystem metaphor, the food chain metaphor seems as oppressive and unnatural as the predator in Means' story. Means suggests to his audience that if United States citizens expect and allow their government to elevate itself above its citizens, it will always result in a stratified system of power and the oppression of the citizens at the bottom of that system.

Performativity of the Universal Ecosystem Metaphor

The final feature of story that Means utilizes to rhetorically occupy the Senate hearing is that of performativity. While he uses his narrative to displace the narrative of governmental power and his metaphor of the universal ecosystem to challenge the food chain metaphor, it is

the concept of performativity that puts both into action. “Words and symbols have power,” Wieser writes. “When we put them out into the universe, they have an effect. We have to be careful of the words we use because good and bad creative energies can be sent into the universe” (26). The close of Means’ testimony offers one example of words spoken for such a performative purpose. Means ends by telling the story of the future of American Indian peoples:

The American Indian people’s right to self-determination is recognized and will be implemented through the following policies: the American Indian individual shall have the right to choose his or her citizenship and the American Indian nations have the right to choose their level of citizenship and autonomy up to absolute independence. The American Indian will have their just property rights restored which include rights of easement, access, hunting, fishing, prayer, and water. The BIA will be abolished with the American Indian tribal members deciding the extent and nature of their governments, if any. Negotiations will be undertaken to exchange otherwise unclaimed and un-owned federal property for any and all government obligations to the American Indian nations . . . (“Overview”)

It may seem that these prophetic claims are no more than empty words. As the only non-elected official on the hearing’s panel, Means had seemingly the least authority to make any of his claims a reality. He cannot restore American Indians’ rights to sovereignty or property just by speaking the words. But he does not claim authority here. Instead, he speaks in passive voice, withholding the name of the force behind these changes (e.g., the “right to self-determination is recognized and will be implemented”). Listeners are required to contextualize this gap within the story of the Universe, making the Creator the unnamed force behind Means’ declarations. Telling this story removes the Senate’s authority in this situation, since the federal government

has no role in these events. Though the United States considers many of the outcomes Means mentions to be within the federal government's jurisdiction, including citizenship, rights to property and speech, and self-governance, Means suggests that the government will not be an actor in the future of American Indians. By speaking these passive-voice declarations, he removes authority from the government and returns it to a higher power.

Means does not use his statement as an opportunity to strengthen his ethos by emphasizing his own credibility. Midway through his testimony, he describes what an ethical leader of American Indian peoples must be. "Leaders are supposed to work for a better quality of life for their constituents," he said. "[A] vast majority of the tribal officials parasite on the incestuous world of tribal politics, not as our forefathers, who were the best providers, protectors, defenders, advocates, and friends" ("Overview"). In other words, true leaders give to those they serve rather than take. They are the opposite of the incestuous, parasitical tribal leaders which have infested many nations' governments. True leaders "work" and "provide" while false leaders are idle and steal.

Means never identifies himself as a true leader, but paradoxically, he strengthens his ethos by surrendering any authority he has in the situation. His story suggests that the Creator has all power and that anyone who pretends to have power over another is as "monstrous" and unnatural as the predators in his story. To set himself up as an authority figure would be hypocritical. Instead, Means acts only as a "spokesman for my people, the American Indians of the United States of America," as he tells the senators at the beginning of his statement ("Overview"). As messenger to the Senate, he claims no authority other than that which he represents. His primary purpose in appearing before the Senate is to act according to what he believes will bring the Universe back into harmony. Therefore, by not naming himself as a leader

but still behaving as one, Means shows that he is a true advocate for American Indians. He performs a reality in which he is a true leader, and telling his story puts him in a right relationship with those he represents. By trying to help others return to their rightful place in the universal ecosystem, Means makes himself someone who has found his place. Returning to the comparison of the universal ecosystem with a weave, the federal government has ripped and unraveled that weave by trying to elevate themselves above those they are bound to. Means' statement attempts to mend those rips in the fabric of the Universe by refraining from strengthening his own ethos and seeking only to improve the lives of all American Indians.

By telling his story, Means restores the authority in the situation to a higher power, demonstrates that he is a true leader by obeying a higher law than the laws of the federal government, and, finally, takes a step toward solving the problems that plague American Indian nations. He takes this step through his leadership, which he identifies as both a cause of and a solution to the oppression of American Indians. "The poorest and richest reservations in our nation suffer from identical problems: mismanagement, a bloated patronage system, no checks and balances, and tribal governments' waiver of sovereignty in order to initiate debt," he says. "The problem is leadership. In this case, it is the lack of leadership" ("Overview"). The lack of selfless leadership led to many problems for American Indians, but by acting as a true leader himself, Means addresses and improves the situation immediately. He both draws the Senate's attention to the issue and fills a role which he believes will lead to an improved quality of life for all Native peoples.

Discussion

By engaging in rhetorical occupation, Means accomplishes what he considered rhetoric's redeeming quality: bringing people back into harmony with one another and the Universe. His

story of predator and prey replaces the narrative of the United States government as ultimate authority, and his metaphor of the universal ecosystem challenges the validity of the food chain metaphor. Performativity allows Means to use both his narrative and metaphor to temporarily unseat the Senate committee's authority and relocate it to the highest authority, the Creator, and to all American Indians. This relocation of authority makes the situation closer, however marginally, to the true equality and harmony of the Universe. It is Means' blending of Lakota tradition with Western discursive norms that accomplishes his purpose.

Means' rhetorical approach is complex in its negotiation of both Native and non-Native rhetorical conventions. On one hand, he rhetorically occupies the hearing through storytelling, participating in Lakota traditions and acting according to his cultural and ideological beliefs. On the other hand, he responds to and largely participates in his senatorial audience's discursive norms. This sophisticated approach to his exigence is neither as compliant as Ada Deer's politically moderate lobbying of Congress was, nor is it as confrontational or militant as the physical occupations he once led and participated in with AIM.

The statement to the Senate falls between moderation and aggression, two concepts which scholars have tended to view at odds with one another. McCue-Enser notes that American Indian opposition scholarship has historically considered aggressive forms of opposition as more authentic, and therefore more valuable, than moderate ones. To practice moderation and opposition while in compliance with "the 'white man's methods of persuasion' is akin to cultural annihilation" (72). In her study of Ada Deer and her fight for the restoration of the Menominee tribe of Wisconsin, McCue-Enser argues that Deer's "politically moderate approach" ("Ada Deer" 60) is as valid and authentic a form of opposition as those forms which are not "in collaboration with the state" (71). Ignoring moderate American Indian opposition, protests, and

demonstrations needlessly restricts what American Indian opposition can be and does not consider how American Indian rhetorical traditions may influence a rhetor's choice to pursue political moderation over militant aggression.

Means' rhetorical occupation of the Senate hearing challenges McCue-Enser's suggestion that aggression in American Indian oppositions always "seems incongruent with . . . Native American rhetoric and culture" and has been historically ineffective in achieving real change (72). It is difficult to define "real change" when considering Means' belief that the Universe can be changed in ways beyond that which is visible or traceable. For example, Means' statement may appear to be ineffective in that the Senate did not immediately enact any of the policy changes Means declares will occur. However, Means succeeded in rhetorically occupying the hearing and changing public perception of the event. The day after Means delivered his testimony, *The New York Times* reported Means' accusations of widespread corruption and "rampant graft" in the federal government (Shendon). Though the *Arizona Republic's* reporting focused on fraud in the BIA and in tribal governments, Means expanded the conversation to include the United States government itself.

The concept of rhetorical occupation has some implications for scholars of American Indian rhetorics. It supports McCue-Enser's assertion that "going forward, scholars of Native American protest rhetoric would do well to not only enlarge the scope of their studies, but to reconsider the cultural presumptions they bring to bear upon it" (72).⁷ It also suggests that

⁷ In the spirit of reconsidering cultural presumptions, I add one caveat to the concept of rhetorical occupation. To define it as rhetorical *occupation*—or to so term physical *occupation* or metaphorical *occupation*, for that matter—is to view the practice from a Euro-American perspective. *Occupation* suggests that the spaces and places in question are spaces and places that do not belong to American Indians or where American Indians do not belong. Means would have considered the situation in reverse. From his perspective, non-Native peoples have occupied Native spaces and places for hundreds of years. The many "occupations" he participated in throughout his life were reclamations. To rephrase Means' comment to Senator DeConcini during the hearing's question-and-answer period, "We [American Indians] certainly wouldn't be [trespassing] in the United States, being as we're the landlords" ("Overview"). While the concept of rhetorical occupation is useful in reflecting how non-Native, Euro-American

scholars should particularly consider performativity when studying Native American opposition rhetoric (72). A focus on American Indian rhetors' abilities to influence the federal government overlooks the full scope of their possible impact, including that which may be difficult to discern by Western ways of knowing. Evaluating rhetorical impact holistically is particularly important for any study of Means, considering his belief that reason could "affect Infinity" (*If You've Forgotten* 81). If altering public policy were his only goal, it would be tempting to think his testimony was ineffective. Only by considering Means' cultural and spiritual beliefs and his goal to alter reality can we begin to accurately understand his rhetorical decisions.

audiences often viewed AIM takeovers and other "occupations" and is likely an important rhetorical consideration for those who challenge the government, it is important to recognize its colonial origins.

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