



Green Voices

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GREEN VOICES



Defending Nature and the Environment
in American Civic Discourse

EDITED BY RICHARD D. BESEL AND BERNARD K. DUFFY

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P R E S S

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Foreword

PHILIP C. WANDER

Although in a sense, nature is silent, others—politicians, business leaders, environmentalists, and the media—claim the right to speak for nature or for their own interests in the use of natural resources. Hence, here's the dilemma: If nature cannot speak (at least not in public forums), who has the right to speak on nature's behalf?

—Robert Cox, *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere*¹



Books, essays, films, documentaries, poems, songs, and scientific research about nature exist in the midst of a life-or-death political struggle, a nonviolent struggle, for the most part, fought out in the cultural/public sphere, where arguments, public debates, questions about principles, assumptions, evidence, and credibility still count for something.² This is especially true when debate rises above good and evil cartoon characters to explore how existing socioeconomic and political arrangements are and are not coping with a real and expanding crisis.

Cox asks a subtle question: Since nature cannot speak for itself, who then speaks for nature? It is an important question, however, because it raises an issue of credibility. Why is credibility so important? Because great concentrations of wealth and power, with PR firms, ad agencies, and “experts,” in tow, have been speaking for nature all over the world for over a century, not only through mass media but also, and this should be kept in mind, through their representatives in Congress who depend on them for donations, speaker fees, and potential employment after public service.³

The impact of special interests on American politics is not easy to measure. But it is most certainly bipartisan. Representative Raúl M.

Grijalva, Democrat of Arizona, cochairman of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, tells us in the Op-Ed page of the *New York Times*, February 26, 2014:

When I was elected to Congress in 2002, George W. Bush was president and big business wrote environmental policy. We all remember Vice President Dick Cheney's energy task force—a who's who of mining and oil interests—and the administration's constant questioning of climate science.

President Obama won the White House by running as an agent of change: change from Mr. Bush's way of doing business with business, and change from Washington's habitual corporate favoritism.

I was an enthusiastic supporter of the president then and I still am—I consider his environmental record a tremendous improvement over his predecessor's. But that record is still being written, and it is heading in the wrong direction. If the president approves the Keystone XL pipeline on the basis of the lobbying and bad science that has been offered to support it, much of his good work will be undone and a business-as-usual atmosphere will settle back on Washington like a heavy cloud. It would be a bad end to what could still be a very strong environmental legacy.

Who speaks for nature? Who speaks for the environment? Who is in a position to shape what is and what is not being said and what is being done and what is not being done in relation to government policy? Cox's question is important for another reason. When we know who gets to speak, we are in then in a position to ask who does not get to speak for nature/the environment.

Who does not get to speak for nature/the environment? Common sense tells us that the answer is probably the poor. The poor among us do not speak, are not heard, and are not taken seriously, even if they have something to say about a whole range of issues. So, let us ask a couple of questions, in relation to nature/the environment: Who among us is least likely to enjoy the benefits of clean air, land, and water? Who among us is most likely to live on or near spills, leaks, dumps, and burial sites?

Common sense has its limits. So, let us place dots representing people on the map who live nearest to toxic waste and then consider their net worth. And the result is an imbalance of almost biblical proportions. That is to say, it is all about the poor. It is the poor who are most likely to live in or near to the most barren and polluted areas. The dots stand

for those who have the greatest need for and the least ability to fight for and promote environmental justice.⁴

In their textbook, *Environmental Science*, Professors Richard T. Wright and Dorothy F. Boorse write:

The largest commercial hazardous-waste landfill is located in Emelle, Alabama. African Americans make up 90% of Emelle's population. This landfill receives wastes from Superfund sites and every state in the continental United States.

A Choctaw reservation in Philadelphia, Mississippi, was targeted to become the home of a 466-acre hazardous waste landfill. The reservation population is entirely Native American.

A recent study found that 870,000 U.S. federally subsidized housing units are within a mile of factories that have reported toxic emissions to the EPA. Most of the occupants in these apartments are minorities.⁵

The larger category in these facts, though, is socioeconomic status. So, while poor minorities live near such sites, it is also true that the poor members of the majority, in this country, are also more likely to live near these sites. The poor among us is most inclusive: It includes peoples of every race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and age group.

To call the previous facts *biblical* reminds us, believers and nonbelievers, that religion can be and has been a source of critique over the centuries. This truth, however, has become too easy to ignore and to forget. In America and throughout the Western World, writes Jim Wallis, "we have responded to all that the scriptures say about the poor by pretending it just isn't there. We have cut the poor out of the Bible." The God of the Bible, however, is the deliverer of the poor: "This God has a special love for the disenfranchised and marginalized—those who are on the bottom of everybody else's priority list. If that isn't clear from the Bible, then nothing is. It is evident from start to finish."⁶

Change the names of peoples who suffer, so that biblical concern is not confined to the Israelites in the Ancient World, but can be understood to include Native Americans and Third World peoples, in the world in which we find ourselves. In the United States, Native Americans struggle against having their reservations (i.e., homes) turned into dumping grounds for toxic waste. Third World peoples face the same problem. And, it is true in both cases that the push to dump comes from those who profit from dumping and there are billions of dollars at stake.

The poor and the powerless are beginning to break the silence. The Delhi Climate Justice Declaration, in 2002, addressed these issues head

on: “We, representatives of the poor and the marginalized of the world . . . resolve to actively build a movement from the communities that will address the issue of climate change from a human rights, social justice and labour perspective.”⁷

There is an irony in this statement, and it should not be ignored. Environmental catastrophes are more inclusive than one might suppose. Victims of manmade and natural disasters, depending on where they take place, include rich and poor, powerful and powerless, men and women, adults and children, black, brown, yellow, red, and white, Christian and non-Christian, French and non-French alike. Climate change, in particular, is radically egalitarian in its projected, long-term consequences; although as it now stands, climate change still weighs most heavily on the poor.⁸

So I place talk about nature/the environment in relation to real-world crises, crises, catastrophes, disasters that can affect any or all of us and have, in fact, affected the lives of people like ourselves, in this country, over the last decade. I take up these issues in relation to: mass media; personal experience; and history, how the struggle over nature/the environment has been articulated over time.

NATURE/THE ENVIRONMENT: MEDIA⁹

In Akira Kurosawa’s film *Dreams* (1990), one of the episodes is called “Mount Fuji in Red.” Recently, while watching *Dreams* with my wife, Wenshu Lee, we were struck by its prophetic nature. In the film, Mount Fuji turns red, because it is reflecting the meltdown of six nuclear reactors.

On March 11, 2011, an earthquake and a tsunami struck the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear complex in Japan. It caused three meltdowns. As of this writing, some six thousand people have died and many more received near lethal doses of radiation. Thousands of people were evacuated, croplands were destroyed, dairy herds left to die. The private power corporation and the government, from the beginning, tried to play it down. But, as we later learned, the threat was real. There was genuine concern that Japan, as a country, might become uninhabitable.

In 2012, PBS’s *Frontline* aired “Inside Japan’s Nuclear Meltdown.” It interviewed scientists, politicians, and workers at the plant, ordinary folks who had fled the site. It raised some important and quite relevant questions: What happened? What caused it? What is and is not being done about it? What does the future look like now? What does all this

have to tell us about the dangers of nuclear power plants all over the world?

Action films, documentaries, news, and cartoons have begun to address environmental crises.¹⁰ Some of the work comes with teaching supplements, to use in classes on the environment in school. Fusing word and image is not new, but in relation to important civic issues it helps to expand our knowledge about and deepen our feelings for the issues.¹¹

In *Life in the Balance* (1987), a companion to Audubon TV specials, David Rains Wallace writes: “An education in survival might well begin with this simple and powerful truth: in abandoning our environment we begin to abandon ourselves . . . in conserving our environment we insure our future.”¹²

Walter Corson, three years later, in *The Global Ecology Handbook: What You Can Do about the Environmental Crisis*, a “Practical Supplement” to the PBS series *Race to Save the Planet* (1990), wrote:

There is ample evidence of the seriousness of the world’s population, resource, and environment problems—poverty and hunger, deforestation and species loss, soil erosion and desertification, air and water pollution, acid precipitation and ozone layer depletion, as well as the greenhouse effect and climate change. . . . A growing number of people—development experts, environmentalists, business executives, government officials, religious leaders, and journalists—are beginning to recognize that their long-term aims and activities are mutually dependent, not mutually exclusive.¹³

In 2003, a new supplement to *Race to Save the Planet* quotes William D. Ruckelshaus, a prominent Republican, former administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and member of the World Commission on Environment and Development:

Can we move nations and people in the direction of sustainability? Such a move would be a modification of society comparable in scale to only two other changes: the agricultural revolution of the late Neolithic and Industrial Revolution of the past two centuries. These revolutions were gradual, spontaneous, and largely unconscious. This one will have to be a fully conscious operation, guided by the best foresight that science can provide—foresight pushed to its limit. If we actually do it, the undertaking will be absolutely unique in humanity’s stay on earth.¹⁴

TV series, books, and their diffusion into high schools, colleges, and universities not only signaled the existence of a political movement, they also participated in it. Gleaning from essays, lectures, photographs, songs, poetry, bumper stickers, graffiti, and so on, speaking to multiple audiences and working in concert with various environmental groups, the movement continues to grow.

Those involved include scientists, politicians, professors, publishers, environmental scientists, and ecologists. It includes voluntary groups such as the Audubon Society, the Sierra Club, the World Resources Institute, along with professional associations and universities where nature/environmental issues have spawned institutes, departments, research, and classes in the natural and social sciences as well as the humanities.

Happily, the movement continues. In 2006, *An Inconvenient Truth* was an Academy Award-winning documentary film directed by Davis Guggenheim. It was about former Vice President of the United States Al Gore's efforts to educate citizens about global warming via a comprehensive slideshow. In 2007, Gore received the Nobel Prize for his work on climate change.

In the same year, *The 11th Hour: Turn Mankind's Darkest Hour into Its Finest* (2007) aired. It was produced and narrated by Leonardo DiCaprio:

The 11th Hour explains our ecological crisis and points out pathways for change. We already have solutions that, if implemented, could reduce the human footprint on the planet by 90%. *The 11th Hour* demonstrates that there is a need for action. The 11th Hour Action website and online social action community help people take the next step. The 11thHour online community is devoted 24/7 to helping people understand what they can do at the individual, local, state, national and international levels. Come join the movement for change and create a profile or group at: www.11thehouraction.com.¹⁵

Calls for radical change continue. In 2008, WGBH in Boston put together a program that had already appeared in *Frontline* and *Nova* under the name of *Global Warming: What's Up with the Weather?*

Deadly flooding in Africa. Catastrophic hurricanes in the U.S. Record-high temperatures worldwide. Are these natural, temporary glitches in our global climate, or is the devastation the result of global warming? The weather is different now—but

why? . . . Manmade carbon dioxide has overloaded the earth's atmosphere. With demand for fossil fuels increasing daily, experts predict emission levels will triple in the next 100 years. But the greenhouse effect remains the subject of heated debate among scientists, climatologists, and futurists. Some believe the earth's temperature will rise by nearly 10 degrees, melting arctic ice caps and, paradoxically, bringing about a new Ice Age. Others believe the weather will stay relatively normal. Who's right? Decide for yourself . . .¹⁶

In 2008, CNN aired a two-part documentary hosted by Anderson Cooper, *Planet in Peril*. Cooper, along with CNN's chief medical correspondent, Dr. Sanjay Gupta, and *Animal Planet's* Jeff Corwin, talked about environmental change in thirteen countries, trying to bring viewers the stories behind the statistics.

The debate is global, and it is heating up. In 2006, Films for the Humanities and Sciences released a video, *Listening to America with Bill Moyers*, with the subtitle *Politics, People, and Pollution*. The blurb on the back on the box reads:

This program with Bill Moyers explores the delicate balance between corporate productivity and environmental responsibility look at the growing number of corporate "green" ads and asking what is image? What is reality? Featured in the program are industry representatives and grassroots environmentalists who examine corporate America's willingness to protect the public's health and safety. The program travels to a rural Louisiana area known as "Cancer Alley" where we meet citizens struggling to get the chemical industry to operate in a responsible manner.

In 2008, PBS's *Frontline* aired "Heat: A Global Investigation":

For years, big business—from oil and coal companies, to electric utilities, to car manufacturers—has resisted change to environmental policy and stifled the debate over climate change in America and around the globe. Now, facing rising pressure from governments, green groups and investors alike, big business is shaping its approach to the environment. FRONTLINE investigates what some businesses are doing to fend off new regulations and how others are repositioning themselves to prosper in a radically changed world.¹⁷

The preceding quotations provide a sketch of programs you may or may not have seen and heard on TV. Most of them I did not take in at the time. But, because the CDs are available, they can be seen now, in our own homes. I write this sentence on the same day (April 24, 2014) I read an email from Robbie Cox, who had read an earlier draft of this foreword. Bring your sketch up to date, he wrote, note the nine-part series on climate change produced by Showtime that begins April 2014, *Years of Living Dangerously*. It involves a whole raft of talent and expertise, facts and personal stories, and onsite visuals from all over the world. The most important TV documentary ever made, said one critic quoted on the website. Clearly, a must-see. I had already missed the first episode, but I can kick it up for free.

Now, rather than celebrate or criticize this or that program or episode, I try to lay out what mass media, nonprofit and for-profit, has been and is still contributing to our civic discourse over the past quarter century. The warnings grow more urgent; the evidence grows stronger. My impression, on reading the website, is that *Years of Living Dangerously* will continue this trend. But watch it for yourself and see if this prediction proves true.

In all this, the question is not whether or not I agree with what I have heard and seen in these “texts,” but what is, in fact, being said and shown on environmentally related issues; and, more importantly, what is not being and/or ought to be said and shown.¹⁸

NATURE/THE ENVIRONMENT: LIVED EXPERIENCE

Programs about nature and the environment in the media reach mass, even global audiences. We all stand to learn from what has been and is now being communicated. It is an important part of our global, civic discourse. But two problems should be kept in mind. Some of what we see is good; some of it is not. Most of what we see comes from what experts, authorities, and performers (i.e., by announcers and in voiceovers) read to us.

But here is the key: they send and we receive; they know and we learn; they are right and we are supposed to believe. Maybe, but how do we judge what we are being told and shown? Even if it turns out to be good stuff, is anything really getting done? When problems are aired, they are designed to be persuasive. Even when they urge the drafting of new legislation, the fact that millions upon millions of people may be watching implies that something is or will be done to solve the problems being shown. With nature and the environment, though, we, the

audience, have what is being shown all about us and even, as with toxic chemicals, inside of us.

As we grow older, we meet other folks who care about the environment—friends, neighbors, fellow students, coworkers, people who are in a position to get a handle on what is really going on. We may even encounter, hopefully, an angry housewife or two like Lois Gibbs. Lois drew on personal experience to talk about environmental hazards:

Lois Gibbs moved to Love Canal with her young family in 1972. Her son began attending the Ninety-ninth Street School in 1978 and soon developed a number of medical problems and began having epileptic seizures. Around the same time, residents in homes close to the elementary school began reporting problems—chemicals were leaching into basements, lawns were starting to die, and pets were becoming ill.¹⁹

Lois Gibbs faced down a major corporation, along with the “facts” that Hooker Chemical’s “experts” threw in her way. Lois Gibbs teaches us an invaluable lesson: The living environment is not merely what we read in books, see on films and TV, or learn about in school. It is all about us from beginning to end, and we should pay attention to it.

Lois Gibbs became an angry, hysterical housewife, in the words of those, mostly male, aligned with the Hooker Chemical Corporation, when she began talking about the toxic waste underlying Love Canal. I do not know if she ever read about environmental problems before becoming angry. Rachael Carson’s *Silent Spring* began raising questions about toxic chemicals in 1961. Did Lois Gibbs attend political meetings; was she a card-carrying member of the Sierra Club or the Audubon Society, or any other activist group? It seems unlikely, at least in the beginning.

But consider here the primal environment for each and every one of us—*home*. Before “da, da,” “no, no,” and “hot, hot,” before language, there was *home*. Talk about the “environment” is adult talk. “Civic discourse,” too, is adult talk. It is an extension of what needs to be said and done in the here and now of adults. What gets lost in adult talk, though, is what we experienced as children. We forget the efforts made by those who worked to create a space where a baby could grow up.

Adults talk about *home*, as a place, a structure on a street with an address. *Home* for children, however, is a here, an already here. It is the here where responsible adults—parents, grandparents, care givers, among others—place medicine bottles, cleaning fluids, knives, guns, and the like up high and/or locked away. Here, *home* becomes a place with

gates in front of the stairs, where doors leading outside are locked, a place where responsible adults do all sorts of life-affirming things designed to create a safe environment for children.²⁰

In time, children learn life-preserving words like “dangerous,” “careful,” “look out.” Older children hear warnings: “Do not drink anything from blue bottles, with a skull and cross-bones on them.” “The iron is very, very hot.” “It can burn you.” “Do not leave the yard.” “Do not go into the street.” “Look both ways before you cross the street.” “Do not pick up food from the sidewalk.” A child learns a hundred warning words and internalizes a thousand fears about the environment inside and outside *home*. Some of the words are in English, as in the preceding. Other words are in Chinese, Swahili, Spanish, French, the languages of the place. But all of us learn. We must learn to survive. Responsible adults try to protect us and to teach us a language, so that we may protect ourselves.

Dangers lie in various places: home, yard, street, and so forth. Children learn about dangers coming from different things: bad water, spoiled food, cleaning liquids, medicines, stairs, bath tubs, toys, stair steps, falling from trees, roofs, and so on. Looking back, I am struck by how easily warnings about guns, sharp objects, bad water, spoiled food, car exhaust, and the like have begun to translate into problems lurking in a much larger and more dangerous lifeworld, where the air we breathe, the water we drink, the earth around us, and the food we eat can and have become dangerous.

While true, if we take time to think it through, the intimate little worlds we grew up in, as children, were made safe by those who loved us, an effort that went on for years. This fundamental truth offers a starting point for creating a *home* for children all over the world.

If we begin with ourselves, then move to consider children in general, moral and social principles begin to emerge. That is to say, they become audible, relevant, and potentially useful in the struggle to create safe environments everywhere. Create it not only at home, at school, at church, and in our local communities but also, in cooperation with others, in the world as a whole. Here, moral and ethical principles become obvious, compelling, and meaningful. Here, in the context of everyday life, principles, absolutes, and categorical imperatives begin to make sense.

Children, parents, students, workers, citizens, over time we learn things about our environment. But we pay little attention to this, until we encounter a crisis. Yet, the clues are there. We just need to pay attention to them. I grew up in Bloomington, Illinois, company town for State Farm Insurance, two colleges, and lots of retired farmers, a little over thirty-two thousand people.

I spent a few months each year with my grandparents Wander on a farm in Iowa, near the Minnesota line, and my grandparents Martin in Linden Iowa, a village of three hundred people, thirty miles from Des Moines. So town, farm, village, then fifty years in and around Bloomington, Illinois; the farm; Linden, Iowa; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; San Jose, Los Angeles, and now Chico, California. Many places entered into and became my environment. On reflection, though, what I once took for granted as safe and good, gradually, over time, began to pose a problem, even to the point of becoming dangerous.

Each of us has a past and, within this often melodramatic stream of successes and failures, joys and sorrows, hopes and fears that enter into the stories that we tell about ourselves, we may create an environmental history. Throw a green light on our lived experience. Come to terms with *the* environment and, if you bear with me, we can try out another way of making sense of this book and our environment in the here and now.

INTO THE "I" OF THE STORM

I would talk about you, but I do not know you. I have not heard/read your stories. I could talk about the editors and authors in this book. Anne Marie Todd was a colleague of mine at San José State. Bernard Duffy, a former student. But I do not know them well enough to talk about their personal experiences with nature and/or environment. Though, if I had thought to ask them about it, there would be stories to tell.

There is one person I do know well enough to talk about such matters. Accordingly, what follows is personal, an autobiographical reflection. In relation to the real issues, it is best read not as something to remember, but as something that you can do on your own about yourself.

As you read this next section, please jot down some notes about you and your environments. This may seem hokey. But reflect for a moment: if together we could gather our *collective recollections*, we could grow an environmental archive—an archive that would add to a growing body of civic discourse—and, at the same time, provide a personal, sensual dimension to how we understand and talk about important sociopolitical issues.²¹

Sugar Creek: In the 1950s, growing up in Bloomington, Illinois, my friends and I used to go skinny-dipping in Sugar Creek. Larger than a stream, even during the hot summers, its banks were over grown with weeds, wildflowers, and shade from large oak and maple trees.

I remember one day, when I was around eleven years old, my dad, sort of offhandedly, said that it might be unwise to swim in Sugar Creek. There might be something in the water. It was not an order. Less than a warning, it bordered on being a caution.

Next time, when my little friends and I went to Sugar Creek, I sniffed the water and studied its color and the stuff it carried, but I found nothing strange. It was free of turds, dead rats, ailing tadpoles, and the like. So we dove right in. A decade later, back from college, I learned from one of my friends that Sugar Creek no longer had frogs. And no one went there to swim anymore.

Bug juice: I made my way back to the Midwest several times over the years. I flew into Chicago, where I would rent a car, visit my great aunt Ruth, a couple of close friends, attend a funeral, a high school reunion, a professional conference. I drive slower now than I did fifty years ago, when I was streaking down two-lane highways. As a young man, driving alone, I used to stop occasionally to clear bug juice off my windshield.

My windshield now remains clean, almost spotless, like the grill in front of the car. I look out the windows and see no-till corn for miles and miles. The weeds no longer need to be plowed under. I no longer see tiger lilies in the culverts. There are no crop infestations. Insects no longer hum, buzz, or light up the night sky. The fields now are drenched from the rains, along with herbicides, insecticides, and chemical fertilizers.

Dead fish: Teaching a class on argumentation, decades later, at San José State University, the topic being debated was about pollution. After the first debate, one of my students came by my office and told me that he knew that something wrong was happening. Periodically, the fish in the creek behind his house died off. He remembered seeing dozens upon dozens of them belly up floating on by. We all knew, he said, that companies were dumping poisons into the sewer.

From corporate basement to city sewer: In a class on political communication, an older student, a Navy vet who was working for a large, powerful, rich, and well-respected corporation in South San Jose, came by my office. He told me that he had many times seen workers pouring the acids used to cleanse the wafers used in computers down the large drain in the basement that led directly out into the city sewer system and from there God knows where. But he saw it with his own eyes and knew damned good and well what it meant.

I asked my colleague, Ken Salter, who had a law degree from Bolt Hall at U.C. Berkeley, whether or not someone who saw such a thing at work could, on his own time, bring it to public attention at a city or county council meeting. Certainly he could, Ken said. But he would be

fired on the spot. Even if it were true, my student had no legal recourse to sue his employer either for damages or to get his job back. I had not and did not urge my student to exercise his right to freedom of speech, and I told him why. Because freedom of speech did not then, and does not now, include the corporate state, even when it concerns protecting the health of thousands of citizens in the city in which we live.

Smog and smoke: Los Angeles, in the 1970s, was a joke. At least in the Bay Area, where I lived, people thought LA was uninhabitable. Flying into LAX meant descending into a thick, brownish-green, pea-soup-like fog. The word “smog” was just then coming into use. Smog indices were on their way up. Stories about shortness of breath and lung cancer were beginning to expand beyond cigarette smoking to include the air we breathed.

I paid special attention to smog and cigarette smoke. My parents smoked, my father two packs a day of Camels, my mother a pack or two of filter-tipped Cools. Years later, playing four-on-four at Washington Street Park in Sunnyvale, where teams that lost sat down for an hour or more, I was suddenly reduced to playing defense only. After the game, I clung to the cyclone fence gasping for breath.

One teammate bawled me out for not hustling. Another, an older guy, said he did not think that lack of hustle was the problem. Next day at Kaiser, my doctor listened to my breathing and chuckled. “I’ll bet your energy has flagged. Not to worry, it’s a slight case of bronchial asthma.” I got an inhaler and next day I was back on the courts.

Laws were passed. I began to think about secondhand smoke and outlawing smoking in all public spaces. Millions of dollars poured in to keep public spaces—restaurants, bars, planes, busses, and office buildings—safe for addicts (i.e., smokers). PR firms pumped out messages saying outlawing smoking in public places would hurt business, infringe on free enterprise, and deprive citizens of their right to light up whenever and wherever they wanted to.

“I would rather fight than switch,” ran an ad, which could mean from one brand to another or from smoking anywhere to having non-smoking areas. Nonsmoking laws, the ads said, would prevent hard-working employees from making an honest living. In-house experts produced data showing that secondhand smoke was harmless, and scholars in various academic fields, including communication studies, were paid to do research and to testify in court for the cigarette industry.

Despite a big money and pro-smoking PR campaign, a rag-tag, poorly financed, anti-smoking coalition prevailed. Some years later, with mounting healthcare costs and armed with scientific evidence that did not come from “scientific experts” in the pay of the tobacco industry,

the courts found against the industry. They were liable for knowingly injuring the health of millions of people over the years. The settlement required the industry set aside billions to help pay for medical costs for many years to come.

The settlement also required the industry to place the whole of their carefully maintained, well-indexed, private archives online. Here are letters to, from, and about consultants in academic fields of study, history, political science, and communication studies, placing them inside a well-financed conspiracy to promote ill health at home and abroad. Some of the scholars, so implicated, were then and are now quite well known in their respective fields of study.²²

In response to losing out in America, the tobacco industry doubled and redoubled its efforts to expand markets abroad, so that it could continue profiting from a product that caused human misery and greatly increased healthcare costs. Pushed by the senior George Bush administration, Taiwan, in a couple of years, went from old folks buying tobacco in state stores to grade school students puffing away in schoolyards. Downstream, of course, this will mean the same as it meant in the United States—increases in the rates of lung cancer and heart failure, and ballooning healthcare costs.

Weapons into plowshares: In the 1950s, nuclear power was a noble idea, beating nuclear swords into plowshares. Twenty years later, I joined folks from San Jose to drive south, along the coast, to protest the opening of a nuclear power plant that had been built on a fault line. If there were a meltdown, a nuclear engineer told us, an area the size of the state of Pennsylvania could become uninhabitable for a few thousand years. We waved placards, made speeches, and denounced the project at chain-locked gates, as a few guards looked on. After several hours, we drove back home, with stories about Three Mile Island and Chernobyl ringing in our ears.

Debates in classrooms: My students voted to debate whether nuclear power should be outlawed. I thought it would be useful to invite a spokesperson for the industry to address my class. I truly wanted them to think for themselves. So I contacted one of the big corporate contractors and they sent out their official spokesperson. He made a good case for backup systems and improvements in construction, a nice fellow. After class, I took him out for lunch over at Peanuts, a student hangout whose chief virtue is that a turkey was carved up each day for sandwiches and that they serve draft beer.

Over lunch, we talked about nuclear power and the dangers of leaks. At one point, the industry rep glanced about and quietly told me that a major nuclear facility owned and operated by his company had

sprung numerous leaks, water and gas. I would never reveal my sources, even to my students or in my writing. I told him so. He knew that, but I wanted to make it absolutely clear. I never did reveal his name, or the name of his employer, or the location of the facility. But I believed him. He was in a position to know. He had no reason to fib. Quite the opposite, he stood to lose his job, if he were found out. It was, in the words of my teacher, Robert Newman, reluctant testimony, and therefore all the more credible. A few years later, what that spokesperson told me was front-page news in the *New York Times*.

Lee Jackson's term insurance: I grew up with Lee. From grade school to high school we hung out. He played saxophone and I the cornet. We began in third grade, played in band and orchestra, in the swing band, and then in a small band for proms, the YMCA, country club parties.

Then I went off to graduate school and became a professor. Lee became a radio announcer and then, a few years later, an insurance agent in Freeport, Illinois. One day my dad and I went to visit Lee. And there, he told us a strange and troubling story.

Lee was selling term insurance hand over fist to as many workers as he could in the local tire factory. No money for him in these little transactions. The big money was in savings account life insurance, where you pay each month over the course of the lifetime.

But the workers had figured out that too many of them were coming down with cancer. Lee told them it was only a matter of time before his company would find out about the dangers and, as soon as it did, it would refuse to insure them.

A matter-of-fact story, but it was moving. Even now I can see him sitting on the chair next to us telling us about it. I remember thinking about workers and their families and corporate profits. I think about the “outsourcing” of jobs to other parts of the world, where, for many reasons—no unions, no safety rules, no class-action lawsuits, no laws protecting the environment, and so forth—production costs are for sure cheaper. This kind of logic underlies efforts to increase profits by getting rid of and/or not enforcing government regulations at home and abroad.²³

Agent Orange and Michael Madden. Michael flew a Huey in Vietnam under jungle-spraying copters. He crashed. He came back from the war with shrapnel in his back. He went on to get a PhD, in communication studies, at the University of Iowa so that he could gain a platform to denounce that war.

The cancer spread. Surgeons removed all they could, prostate gland, testicles, and so on. On the night before he died, I sat next to him on the couch. Grass helped. As we sat there, passing a number back and forth,

he reflected. "You know Phil," he said, "after all these years, Vietnam finally got me." Susan Owen, Peter Erenhaus, and Harry Haines were also there that night. We had worked together for years on war-related research, articles, books, and panel presentations.

Peter and another mutual friend, Richard Morris, organized a conference on the Vietnam War at Rutgers. It brought veterans and activists together, to talk about what they had learned. During a break, I chatted with a nurse sitting next to me. She had lived in a hooch located under the path planes took when landing. As they came in, they jettisoned whatever Agent Orange they had left in their tanks. She had had two radical mastectomies.

The vets talked about how they had been treated, on coming home, spit upon, screamed at, called baby killers. Todd Gitlin, a featured speaker, responded that he had not spit on vets. And neither had I. We knew that American soldiers did not start the war. Those doing the fighting had not requested repeated escalations. And they had not authorized the use of Agent Orange. For the vets who made it home, many of them joined and became a well-informed part of the antiwar movement.

What the vets at Rutgers really wanted to know was how they could more effectively protest the Veteran's Administration (VA) refusal to admit that Agent Orange was, in fact, a health risk. If the VA told the truth, they would begin paying medical bills for vets experiencing serious (and very expensive) health problems. The VA eventually admitted this truth. It opened the United States to class-action suits by our service men and women, on one side, Vietnamese civilians on the other, where, according to Wikipedia, twenty million tons of herbicides had been sprayed between 1961 and 1971, not so much to clear the jungles as to kill off farm crops mainly used to feed civilians. To this day, four decades later, where Agent Orange was spread, residents have higher rates of cancer, miscarriages, and children born with physical deformities.

Agent Orange and Jimmie Hays: Jimmie was veteran of the Second World War. He had been a cook on an aircraft carrier that survived the Battle of Midway. He farmed before he enlisted. After he came back, he worked for a steel plant in Gary, Idaho. In sweltering heat, sweating his life away, Jimmie moved back to work on the family farm. Years later, he too came down with cancer. He told me, one afternoon, lying on the couch in the living room, that he had used Agent Orange (sold as an herbicide to farmers) for several years. He sprayed it through a pipe affixed to the front of his tractor. Each day he sprayed, he came in for lunch drenched from head to toe.

Jimmie told me that he had asked the salesman about the herbicide and had been told that it was harmless. It also said so on the label.

Jimmie looked away for a moment. He was not angry. He was too tired for that. His voice was soft, tinged with sadness and a hint of disbelief.²⁴ To gather statistics on exposure and rates of disease in farming in this country over the years would not be impossible. But it would be costly. Such research seldom qualifies for funding by the Defense Department, the Ford Foundation, or the Hoover Institution. There are facts to be found, truths to be told, but there is, as Michel Foucault argues, a relationship between truth and power.

Bob Amyx: An activist for the county: Bob was staff director for Parks and Recreation in Santa Clara County and, I should add, a staunch Republican. He had seen a lot of action in WWII, and he took his baseball and golf seriously. Bob was civic minded. He saw the relationship between parks and family values. Parks are good places for folks in the cities to take their children. It sure as hell beats taking them shopping or, in the present climate, to leave them to TV, iPhones, iPads, computer games, and so on.

Bob knew early on that land prices would go sky high in the Bay Area. So, he reasoned that the best policy for creating parks lay in buying more and more land. He led the County Board of Supervisors to put a tax increase on the ballot dedicated to acquiring parklands, and it passed.

I walked precincts for a progressive supervisorial candidate, Dan McQuarquodale, who walked door-to-door because he had no money for ads. When Dan unexpectedly won the election, he appointed me to the Parks and Recreation Commission. I was on the commission for six years, chair for one year, in the 1970s. I walked with Bob and other commissioners to inspect hundreds of acres and made several recommendations for acquisition and improvements to the County Board of Supervisors. And almost all passed.

Bob was well prepared, articulate, and he never flinched, even when told to establish more parks on the poor side of town. He immediately set about buying up small parcels of land along the river and working with the flood control folks to set up a linear park that included walking and bike trails and connected with school grounds. Bob also worked with the city park people to create pocket parks. He bought up small parcels of land that adjoined school grounds creating multi-use, good-sized, neighborhood parks all over San Jose, Milpitas, Sunnyvale, Cupertino, and Santa Clara.

As a direct result of Bob's leadership over a thirty-year period, Santa Clara County now has one of the finest park systems in the country. Hundreds of thousands of people visit these parks each year. Bob also helped me understand some of the practical politics involving public parks:

Never let private vendors into the parks, because they will soon take over.

Taxes can work for the public good. Create parks for everyone to enjoy.

Be aware of people at the meetings working for special interests.

When confused with ordinary citizens, they can swing votes.

As chair, I required “professionals” to identify themselves before they spoke.

Teacher and founder—Christine Oravec: Christine was one of the founders of the study of environmental rhetoric in my field of study, and a friend of mine. Edwin Black directed our dissertations. I read her work carefully, enjoyed her conversation, and was saddened by her retirement. She taught at one of the most influential programs in communication, at the University of Utah. There her commitment and brilliance as a scholar inspired generations of students whose dissertations focused on environmental issues.

One of her students, Dennis Jaehne, worked with me at San José State University where he is now dean of undergraduate studies. He and I collaborated on two essays on environmental issues, one on eco-logic and assumptions about time that reached into hundreds and thousands of years and the problems this presents for humanistic studies and for the realities of democratic politics. And the other concerned a debate about global warming that took place at the University of Pittsburgh.²⁵

I was invited to contribute. I accepted because Dennis agreed to work with me. He had been an environmental activist before enrolling in graduate school. His scholarly preparation and his knowledge of the most important and advanced research was extensive and, for his coauthor, reassuring.

Robert Cox: Teacher, founder, critic, and public activist: “Robbie” attended graduate school at Pitt, a couple of years behind me. He remains a friend of the man who was once the “next president of the United States.” Al Gore, you may remember, was the central figure in the documentary *An Inconvenient Truth: A Global Warning*.

Robbie taught at the University of North Carolina and, along with Christine, helped found the field of environmental rhetoric. He also twice served as the president of the Sierra Club and still serves as a member of their executive board. I attended his workshop on environmental justice at NCA a few years back. I rely heavily, as you may have noticed, on Cox’s book, *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere*, third edition, not only because it is a good book, but also because I know, admire, and respect the author.

Happy birthday/Butte County: On March 15, 2014, Wenshu and I watched Joshua Fox's documentary *Gasland*. It is about fracking, drilling underground in shale, breaking it up, to release natural gas enclosed in the shale. The next day, March 16, on my birthday, we had breakfast at Coda, in Chico, a fancy student hangout. From there we went to a gathering at the Chico Women's Center called by Citizens Action Network—Frack-Free Butte.

There was a band, kind of folk-country, speakers, showed a few minutes of *Gasland*, registered folks to vote, urged us to attend committee hearings involving city and county government, had organic food and a massage table in the backyard, and they handed out leaflets, lots of leaflets, and they made stacks available for us to hand out on our own.

The information on the leaflets included the following:

One gallon of frack solution can contaminate up to one million gallons of groundwater (1-1 million ratio). "Hydraulic Fracturing and Water Quality: A Cause for Concern?" <http://www.watereducation.org/doc.asp?id=2699>, Sept/Oct 2012.

Benzene, a chemical used in fracking, causes blood cancers of aplastic anemia and leukemia. The EPA's maximum continuation level for benzene in public-water systems is 5ppb (parts per billion). "Basic Information about Benzene in Drinking Water," [http://water.epa.gov/drink/contamknants/basic information/benzene.cfm](http://water.epa.gov/drink/contamknants/basic%20information/benzene.cfm)

Wyoming, in 2009/2010, had worse air quality than the worst air quality days in LA, due to the fracking wells located there. "Wyoming's smog exceeds Los Angeles' due to gas drilling," content.usatoday.com, 3-9-11, Wendy Koch.

Air, water, soil contamination, earthquakes, well leaks, yes. But there was also information that went beyond the left-liberals, teachers, retirees, and young and old new age folks we expected to see:

Rabobank, the world's largest Ag bank no longer sells mortgages to farmers with gas leases (<http://www.Dutchnews.nl/news/archives/2013/07/rabobank-will-not-finance-shal.php>).

Nationwide says it won't cover damage related to a gas drilling process. The risks involved in FRACKING operations are too great to ignore. Bloomberg *Businessweek*-July 12, 2012.

At home, that afternoon, we watched *Gasland Two*. It included interviews with ordinary folk who shared their experience with

fracking—faucet water that burned, associated health problems, decline in property values. Farmers, cattle ranchers, people living in small towns, concerned scientists, and a mounting threat to LA and Dallas/Fort Worth who have wells around as well as inside city boundaries.

Chapters in the book you are reading talk about coalitions of common folk, government officials, railroad barons, chambers of Commerce, people of faith, professors, among others, working to save nature and the environment. Such coalitions are crucial when a crisis calls for action, in this case, at local, state, and national levels. But the point to keep in mind is that, while coalitions are necessary, they are context-specific, depending on the issue, purpose, peoples, and the interests involved.

Yesterday's political coalitions may bring good news, but here and now, they must be theorized anew and gathered together into a common cause, if they are to become effective. The struggle for meaningful change is difficult. It can also be dangerous, even in this country. Ordinary, God-fearing, straight-arrow folk run the risk of being called "critics," "activists," "subversives," and may find themselves on file with this or that intelligence gathering government bureau, for having participated in a march, signed a protest letter, or spoken out publicly at a political rally. It is a possibility, but one has often to overcome fear in order to do the right thing.

HISTORY: NATURE/FUTURE

Real problems, a looming catastrophe, debates over action, inaction, and delay, nature/the environment now: Suddenly a Godsend, a historical respite: *The National Parks: America's Best Idea* (2009), a film by Ken Burns. One of the great strengths of this film lies in the simple fact that its audience includes millions of people who have spent time in national, state, county, and city parks here and in other countries. Millions of us saw the film and learned about America's parks and public lands and, at the same time, recalled our own experiences of wilderness, gardens, creeks, rivers, and lakes in the countryside and in our cities, towns, and metropolitan centers, and, in my case, my father, sixty years ago, driving my mother, grandparents, and me cross country to see Yellowstone Park.

In the midst of this great national achievement, however, there is little to remind us that parks and public lands were not always there waiting to be appreciated. They are the products of fierce political struggle.

“America’s best idea” is an idea that people, powerful, wealthy, as well as ordinary people by the tens of thousands, fought for night and day over the years.

The summary on the back of the box holding Burns’s film touches on the wonders, but it also talks about the struggle:

History, national pride, great filmmaking, a canonical work, there are many ways to pigeonhole this work. From the standpoint of civic discourse on a global issue, there is another and, and I believe, theoretically interesting way to make sense of it. Parks or preservationist movement represented an ongoing movement to save massive areas of wilderness from relentless efforts to turn nature into profit. The movement, though, also had corporate backers, the transnational railroads for whom park visitors represented paying customers, as folks from the East paid good money to travel to the West to see the wonders.²⁶

A vast chunk of Yosemite, Hetch Hetchy Valley, was severed from the original parkland, lost to commercial interests in San Francisco who wanted water to grow a bigger and more profitable city.

President Teddy Roosevelt, so strong and in control of things in retrospect, maneuvered in the shadows, using questionable interpretations of presidential powers, to get round a Congress influenced by entrenched wealth, to save millions of acres of parklands from exploitation.²⁷

What can we learn from preservationist politics is the importance of enlisting people of faith in the struggle to save the environment. John Muir stressed the importance of the sacred. Wilderness is sacred and so is life on the planet. Consider *religion* and the *environment* and the possibilities for crafting another coalition, one that includes a Creator of life and does not assume that the United States is the only place that counts.

John Muir, a naturalist, preservationist, and friend of Teddy Roosevelt, knew that wilderness in this country was disappearing. And, further, that much of it was beautiful, inspiring. It was not land that could only be redeemed by lumber and mining interests, concessionaires, and the like. It was part of God’s Creation. Exploiting and destroying natural beauty was to violate Creation.

Muir’s father forced him to memorize the Old Testament. As an adult, he turned from the Holy Book and dogma, finding the sacred in God’s Creation. He dedicated his life not merely to preserve the “wilderness” but the work of God done eons before the appearance of man, holy writ, and efforts to dominate and profit from *nature*. Invoking God

and nature, the preservationist and conservationist movement in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries expanded its political coalition to include all kinds of people of faith.

Muir did not think that religion alone would save the land, certainly not by itself, however many prayers were said. He was also quite a practical man. He formed alliances with politicians, business leaders, biologists, and he founded the Sierra Club, so that the struggle could be carried on in villages, towns, cities, and states, all over the country.

NATURE/THE ENVIRONMENT/GOD

In no other sphere of current concern has there been a more religious tone to public awareness. Rightly so, for it is here if anywhere that we come face to face with the fundamental questions of our place in the universe and our responsibilities for it: with the destructive potential of human intervention on the one hand, and on the other the awe-inspiring beauty of so many of the life forms now at risk. . . . What is needed is not less science but a more farsighted view of its effects.²⁸

The culture wars pitting science against religion are over, or should be, at least this is the view of Jürgen Habermas, who believes that we now live in a “post-secular world.”²⁹ This is also the hope of Jonathan Sacks, chief rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregation of Britain and the Commonwealth.

Habermas and Sacks believe that we come to terms with the obvious: the growing impact of religion on politics, the most obvious being the role religious groups played in the collapse of the USSR, but it has also been growing in the United States; and a waning belief in science and technology as the answer to our problems. Note, the argument here is not that religion has triumphed and that science should be scrapped.

True, science and scientists have, over the last hundred years, helped to create genocidal weapons and develop new and more efficient ways to turn nature into natural resources. True, when scanning the ideological alternatives for calling such achievements into question, religion offers one way to raise the issues. True, in this moment, religion continues to offer ways to hold science and technology responsible, morally responsible for its “miracles.” Put another way, life-affirming religions look beyond the here and now to consider long-term consequences and, at

the same time, to recall the sacred as a way of exposing the limits of runaway science and technology.

The nature/environmental movement has been doing this for some time. In the case of nature/the environment, the crisis now includes preserving sacred places, along with sustaining life on the planet. This way of talking, in our time, is no longer merely idealistic, mystical, or ceremonial. It has, sadly enough, become a practical way of talking.

It is also a daunting way of talking, when the immensity of the task dawns on us. With the dawning, however, more inclusive ways of working together present themselves. Still, beyond Muir and a few mystical experiences, religious support for civil rights and antiwar movements, what role can or does religion play now in nature/environmental politics?

Richard Leeman's chapter in this book is instructive. He studies a speech that Reverend Benjamin Chavis made in 1991. He commends what it said, in part, for the synthesis of religion, politics, and the environment that Chavis offers:

We are opposed to any attempt to export toxic wastes from the United States to Third World people of color communities. U.S. foreign policy has always been connected to its domestic policy. Do not let the media tell you that [President H.W.] Bush does not have a domestic policy. His foreign policy is his domestic policy. A nation which would deliberately dump on its own because of race is a nation which would dump on the global community because of race. The policy is consistent, both domestic and international.

If there is a God and if we are all children of God, then treating one race, ethnic group, gender, or class differently from another becomes more than discrimination, it is a sacrilege. And if it can be shown that such talk and the policies it engenders threaten life on the planet, it then becomes an assault on all that is sacred. All life is sacred in the eyes of a life-affirming God.

Rabbi Sacks reasons thus: Once God is understood to embrace all life on the planet, then the God of Protestants, the God of Catholics, along with a Muslim and a Sufi God, the Buddha, and other Sacred Figures can be called upon to enlist people of various faiths to work in concert to affirm, protect, and sustain life on the planet.³⁰

There are, in fact, death-affirming gods. There have been many and they may be found, at one time or another, in almost every religion or

religious faction. Recall the gods called upon to endorse slavery or bless the domination, even the extermination, of other tribes, religions, races, people living in other cities, countries, and nations. In the eyes of such gods, we are definitely not all God's children.

Here God's children have been reduced to the children of a particular god. Thus the one true God becomes a little god worshiped by a particular tribe, religion, state, or nation. This kind of god works to increase the power and advance the interests of those who call upon it. They are little or partial gods, because they come down from the heavens to work for a particular people. In relation to the God of us all, they are false gods.

Gods serving the interests of this or that tribe, city-state, or nation may be said to have "chosen" them, at least by those who claim this god to be their god. Chosen people though, whatever horrors they rain down upon other peoples, may and have historically argued that, on the basis of their special spiritual status, they are justified in doing this. If it does not offend their god, then it is alright. They may even be led to believe that committing the most horrible, unprincipled, and immoral acts against others is a sacred obligation. Or that, from a pragmatic point of view, failing to commit what we now call "crimes against humanity" will lead their god to punish them for all eternity.³¹ They are not "us." They are other than us and, therefore, they are "inferior" to us. Chosen peoples, accordingly, are free to treat others following the dictates of their god. Chosen peoples can deploy genocidal weapons against others and feel justified in doing so. At the same time, the efforts of others to develop such weapons to protect themselves from such attacks may justify our using our weapons against them, a preventive strike. In the interests of "our" national/economic security and in accord with the dictates of our god, we may poison their land, air, and water. When accidents occur, they are willed by this or that god; and when *accidents* continue to occur, even to the point of becoming predictable, chosen peoples bear no responsibility for trying to prevent them, because such *accidents* remain their god's will.

Consider the contradictions here, in the United States. If foreigners secured contracts to bury toxic waste in our land and compiled a series of preventable accidents that cost American life, this would justify, if not all-out war, then the use of "terrorist" tactics to put an end to it. When American corporations have *accidents*, bury or, as with fracking, spread toxic waste inside the United States, they may also be considered acts of god. Not, of course, the god of the victims or the God of us all, but the god of those who are responsible for such *accidents*. On the other hand, such events may become a good reason to invest public

funds in science, technology, innovation, and progress in the name of an All-Inclusive, Life-Affirming God, with the goal of saving American lives. From God to god to false gods, there is a great deal of confusion in our civic discourse when it comes to whether or not God/god favors or rejects our actions.

In Rabbi Sacks's view, because we have to work in concert with others to solve pressing global problems, we must turn our face away from death-affirming gods to embrace a Life-Affirming God. We should look upon ourselves, along with others, as God's children. Given the possibilities this opens up for preserving, conserving, and sustaining life on the planet, this may be considered a smart, practical, and, in the eyes of God, a righteous thing to do.

But what about life-affirming atheists, secular humanists, Buddhists, Taoists, Jews, Christians, and other not-chosen peoples? Are we, whoever "we" are at this point, willing to work alongside them to preserve life on the planet? In the eyes of a Life-Affirming God, this is not even a question. Working to preserve, conserve, and sustain God's Creation is a Godly thing to do.³² It may be called a wise thing to do. It may be and should be said in many ways and many languages. When the purpose is clear, there are many ways to say and do the right thing.

CRITICISM/PURPOSE: SEEING THE LIGHT

My purpose in this rather lengthy foreword is not to boost sales of a book, but to locate what is said in it within the context of an ongoing sociopolitical, socioeconomic struggle over the environment. The issues are real and important. They transcend a thousand books and ten thousand essays, sermons, poems, songs, and introductions that give voice to them. The Greater Good may resist personification. But when the Greater Good becomes "*God*," in languages spoken by billions of people, the babble gives way to the delights of working together in and for an all-inclusive and *good* cause.

The issues are not fixed. They change in an ongoing struggle over nature and the environment. It is a struggle that will continue into the foreseeable future or, given the nature of the struggle, into however much "future" is left to us.

As for what does and does not count as *good work*, twenty-four years ago Susan Middleton and David Littschwager published a book of photographs of plants and animals.³³ They had worked with Richard Avedon. On the back of this book, Barry Lopez, a leading environmental author, is quoted. This work, *Here Today: Portraits of Our*

Vanishing Species, Lopez writes, is not just photographically exciting but compelling—the photographs are in truth a gesture of compassion. The authors' devotion to this task is as obvious as their respect for the plants and animal they photograph. It is a moving testament to a human being's mature and admirable concern for the fate of life.

However beautiful the photographs, they are also deeply and profoundly moving. They were then and they are now a contribution to our civic discourse. Susan Middleton talks about this in her introduction:

What has become clear is that our relationship to wildlife is neither simple nor static. Historically it has evolved from a life integrated with the natural world, where myths and spiritual sustenance were rooted in nature. It has become a relationship largely based on dominance and exploitation. I hope these photographs will encourage a reexamination of our place within the community of life on earth and suggest one founded on compassion.³⁴

In modern, electronic societies, there is an endless stream of “think this,” “buy this,” “wear this,” “drink this,” “drive this.” Underlying this material mantra, of course, is an unspoken promise: *You will become so very special for doing this over and over and over until death do us part.* Ponder this for a moment, and you may hear a whisper from Holy Writ in a hundred languages over thousands of years: *Something there is that rises above the distractions of fashion, wealth, and power.*

For Middleton and Littschwager, it is concern for the fate of life here, on this planet, and now, in this moment. Photography is their way. But this is not the only way. The book, the Lopez blurb, and my efforts to call attention to it are beside the point. They may stand near. They may call attention to it. They may even serve as an example of, but they are not the point itself.

The point lies in what we stand to learn about ourselves and how we can together enter into and talk about truly important issues. Here “talk” refers to talk about crises that we are, as Americans, human beings, as citizens of the world, now facing. Thus, what is important here is not a book, as an object of study, but the questions raised, thoughts provoked, and our efforts to enter into the conversation. To enter into it, with all that we have learned and the whole of our experience, saying what we truly believe and what we think and feel ought to be said and done.

With the book you now have in your hands or are reading from a screen, each chapter may become a test of what you do and do not

remember. But, more importantly, this book can also be an opportunity for reflection, inspiration, and working with others on real and pressing issues. The pivotal questions:

What can I do?

What should be done?

How can I and/or we make a difference?

Honestly asked and answered, they become enabling questions. They allow us, if we are lucky, to reorient our lives, participate in globally significant exchanges, and consider possibilities for creating and saving new and better worlds.

How are such questions best framed (in what words and what language)? How are they best answered (in what way and for whom)? What actions make sense in the here and now (in light of the problems before you)? I cannot say, and no book can tell you. Words, after all, cannot interpret themselves. With real questions, the answers have to be lived.

If we persevere, we may move up from being one-who-learns to become one-who-participates in one of the world's most important political struggles. Few of us can afford to fight the good fight full time, true. But none of us can afford to ignore the growing threat. If a new edition of *Here Today* were to be published, between the portrait of the American Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus anatum*) and the Black Toad (*Bufo exsul*) it should include a mirror.

Or perhaps, given the advances in electronic communication, if *Here Today* were to become available online, we could replace the mirror with a "selfie" (*Homo sapiens*).

Get the picture . . . ?

QUESTION AND ANSWER: SECOND THOUGHTS FOR THE TIME BEING

It is one thing for me to ask you and for you to answer: "Yes, I do get the picture!" But suppose you answered with a question: "What in the world are you really talking about?" And you followed up with a second question: "If you think the issues are really serious, why reduce them to a 'yes' or 'no' answer?"

Well, I believe that an environmental movement does exist. And that like the civil rights and antiwar movements of my youth, this movement involves serious and dedicated political struggle. Like the other

movements, this one also has moral, ethical, and theological, as well as local, global, and intimate, profoundly personal dimensions, because while there is much to be done, the resistance to doing something about it is great. So great that we must once again recover what it means to be a citizen, a human being, and what it means to be one of God's children. And with this to discover, for ourselves, what it means to work for the Greater Good, with others, with people we do not know and may even have been led to dislike, even though we have never met anyone like them.

In relation to nature and the environment, we can see and hear the need for change. It is everywhere in the media. We can also, if we reflect on it, feel its importance in our homes, beginning in childhood, through the actions of those who raised us. We learn about the environment, on reaching adulthood, from our friends and from the media, as we learn more about the issues involved. We learn more about it if we choose to work with others in our communities for meaningful change, knowing that no one person, family, group, country, or nation can go it alone.

Creating, preserving, conserving, sustaining life on the planet has become not only a good thing to do, it has also, in our lifetime, become a practical necessity. This is what I believe, and this is what I have tried to say. As you read on, you will find others who pretty much believe the same thing, though they come at it from many different angles.

So, beyond getting the picture, hearing the word, or getting a feel for it, the real question remains: What is to be done? And the real answer lies in what *we*, you and I and countless others, actually do.

NOTES

The author wishes to thank Wenshu Lee, Robbie Cox, Bernie Duffy, and Richard Besel for their responses to this essay.

1. Robert Cox, *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere*, third edition (New York: Sage, 2012), 4. This work does more than create a useful field of study, which is in itself an achievement, it grows out of personal commitment, knowledge, and experience, as a scholar and activist—he is a past president of the Sierra Club—and a clear sense of what needs to be and ought to be said for nature and for life on the planet. I count Robbie Cox as a friend, but this is a truly profound work, in spite of its being a “textbook.” It speaks to multiple audiences: students, even undergraduate students, citizens, scholars, and activists.

2. Ridley Scott's *In the East* (2007) takes up the suffering and deaths of innocent men, women, and children from the dumping and/or leaking of toxic waste products in public water supplies. Since the dumping is premeditated, casualties are predictable, and innocent people are in fact dying, the question raised in this film becomes the efficacy of an eye-for-an-eye response. As I write this (February 17, 2014), thousands of tons of carcinogenic wastes pouring into two major rivers have been in the news for some time.
3. See Cox on "Green Marketing and Corporate Campaigns," in *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere*, 283–316.
4. Cox, *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere*, 245–282.
5. Richard T. Wright and Dorothy F. Boorse, *Environmental Science: Toward a Sustainable Future*, eleventh edition (Boston: Benjamin Cummings, 2011), 137. Wright received his PhD in biology from Harvard University; Boorse, her PhD in oceanography and limnology from the University of Wisconsin–Madison. This is a textbook written by environmental scientists, critics, and activists who also welcome the support for environmental reform found in Jewish, Christian, Islamic, Hindu, and Native American traditions.
6. Jim Wallis, *The Soul of Politics* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994), 151. Cornel West, in his preface, calls Wallis "the major prophetic evangelical Christian voice in this country. Wallis refuses to allow the religious right to have a monopoly on morality and spirituality; he also calls on the secular left to speak to the crucial issues of personal meaning and individual values" (xi). Recently, and most significantly, Pope Francis has advanced a similar view: "Repeatedly, he [Pope Francis] argued that the Church's purpose was more to proclaim God's merciful love for all people than to condemn sinners for having fallen short of strictures, especially those having to do with gender and sexual orientation. His break from his immediate predecessors—John Paul II, who died in 2005, and Benedict XVI, the traditionalist German theologian who stepped down from the papacy in February—is less ideological than intuitive, an inclusive vision of the Church centered on an identification with the poor. From this vision, theological and organizational innovations flow. The move from rule by non-negotiable imperatives to leadership by invitation and welcome is as fundamental to the meaning of the faith as any dogma." James Carroll, "Who Am I to Judge," *The New Yorker*, December 23, 2013, 32.

The political right in this country, in relation to the poor, has turned the Christian Bible on its head. The poor are poor because

they are lazy and mentally, morally, and spiritually inferior. Those who think that government has a moral obligation to help the poor and the powerless, those who cannot or have not been able to help themselves, are seen as communists, socialists, and liberals, a threat to a nation that lives “under God.”

Instead of writing off God and religion, one should consider the possibility that the critical potential of religion for critique has been blunted by less interesting religions, religions whose critical potential is sapped by accommodation to secular power and wealth. In this view, neither Christianity nor Islam should be rejected out of hand because factions seeking power and commending violence are articulating them in a dogmatic way.

Marx too is concerned for the powerless and the poor, yet he was an atheist. But what kind of gods and what sorts of dogma were dominant in Prussia in the nineteenth century? And might people of faith now, early in the twenty-first century, not have found them brutally dogmatic and, in the context of extreme poverty and the rise of a god-endorsed Prussian nationalism, not a little dangerous? Robert John Ackermann argues that the potential for religious critique in a good cause has, in many cases, been obscured by bad theology and worse politics. See Ackermann, *Religion as Critique* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985).

7. Cox, *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere*, 245.
8. See note 5 in this foreword.
9. Mediated and lived experience draw a useful, though arbitrary, distinction. There were Japanese audiences who saw “Mount Fuji in Red” in the theater and on TV. A decade later, there were Japanese who saw Fukushima on TV and their computers, but there were also Japanese, in Fukushima, who experienced it firsthand. Many of them, no doubt, also saw it on TV and their computers.
10. The issues sometimes come as a complete surprise. In a Japanese documentary film, *Jiro Dreams of Sushi* (2011), Jiro, an eighty-five-year-old proprietor and chef of a tiny, ten-seat, three-star Michelin sushi restaurant in a Tokyo subway station, talks about his life, work, and Zen-like ethic. We see the eldest son going to the fish market to select the best tuna and other fish. Later, Jiro and his son reflect on the disappearance of fish that were once abundant. Jiro urges that the fishing industry not drop their nets too low because they are picking up undersized fish and destroying the prospect of future generations.
11. Wright and Boorse fuse word and image, science and politics, and

- what a “sustainable future” means in the here and now of the struggle over the environment.
12. *Life in the Balance: Companion to the Audubon Television Specials* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987), 293.
 13. The Global Tomorrow Coalition, *The Global Ecology Handbook: What You Can Do about the Environmental Crisis*, ed. Walter H. Corson (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), xiii. This book was a practical supplement to the PBS series *Race to Save the Planet* (1990). Walter Corson was senior associate in the coalition’s office.
 14. Quoted in Edward C. Wolf, *Race to Save the Planet: Study Guide/2003 Edition* (Pacific Grove: Brooks-Cole, 2003), 4. The quotation is taken from the article “Toward a Sustainable World” that Ruckelshaus published in *Scientific American*, September 1989. Among other things, this reminds us that there was a time when saving the environment was a bipartisan project and that independent, scientifically grounded facts formed a shared basis for argument.
 15. Verbal summaries of visual material can never translate the content. I have relied on the summaries that come on the box or cover of the DVD. Having watched the films, these blurbs prove pretty accurate, and, honestly speaking, they do the job as well or better than I could do it. I have done this throughout. What is good here, though, is that when the films are available, you, the reader, can make your own comparisons.
 16. Printed on the back of the box and on the jacket.
 17. Printed on the back of the box.
 18. There are other ways to summarize this material. For example, as conservative, liberal, or radical, depending on who is describing it and the course of action that should or should not be implemented. Political orientation in relation to American politics is relevant, but the credibility of the sources and the accuracy of the information, in relation to the environment, seem to me more to the point, given the grave nature of toxic waste, air pollution, climate change, and all the rest. The work here grows out of my early efforts to move beyond the “text” to talk about the sociopolitical structure that existed in the content of what was then called “prime-time” TV in “Cultural Criticism,” *Handbook of Political Communication*, ed. Dan Nimmo and Keith R. Sanders (London: Sage, 1981) . Then and now, I am interested in part/whole relationships as opposed to isolating and reporting on isolated objects and content.
 19. See chapter 10 in the present book.
 20. Note the extent to which *home* here reflects a much earlier

environment. My parents, seventy years ago, could not have known about the dangers that parents face now: biphenyl A (BPA), found in hard, clear plastics, has been shown to cause miscarriages and mental retardation in animals. Perchlorate, a chemical found in rocket fuel and other propellants widely spread around the United States during missile tests in the 1950s that now shows up in mother's milk. And so it goes with other POPs (persistent organic pollutants), such as polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDE), and phthalates.

Then there are the toxins, formaldehyde, asbestos, arsenic, mercury, lead, and alcohol, found in building materials, paints, cocktails, whose threat to life and health have, over the past quarter century, been scientifically demonstrated and empirically discovered. Manmade, widely used in and/or produced by industrial processes that make their way into our bodies, our homes, and into the lives of our children, they are a serious and yet to be articulated violation of family values and all that could and should be held sacred in the world in which we find ourselves.

21. If we could get the authors in this book to do likewise, we could set up a website, inviting still others to offer a better, more intimate and far-reaching "introduction" to this book, especially when it is being used as a textbook.
22. Dr. Lee and I read through many of these documents. We read private letters and meeting minutes. It was a troubling, sad, and disillusioning experience. The archives are still available online.
23. Life-affirming policies, though, would argue for helping other countries to adopt and enforce such regulations, or for the United States to place tariffs on goods produced by companies enjoying an unfair and morally questionable advantage. Again, recall that illness and death associated, for example, with dumping toxic waste into local water supplies, is predictable. Immoral and sinful actions only become punishable when laws have been passed making them so. Such acts, though, even when criminalized, may continue, if the laws are not enforced. As with selling drugs, dumping poison into land, air, and water may be regulated more effectively through means other than criminalization.
24. Jimmie no doubt sprayed other pesticides. Those available to and used by farmers included organophosphates, highly toxic early on, derived from nerve gas used in WWII, and linked to severe damage to the nervous system in humans; chlorinated hydrocarbons, long lasting, and linked to cancer; and inorganic pesticides, compounds that usually contain mercury and arsenic that are also linked to

- cancer. Taken singly and/or together, these are terribly dangerous but, and this is the crux, “officially” approved for use at home and abroad.
25. See Philip Wander and Dennis Jaehne, “On the Prospects for a ‘Rhetoric of Science,’” *Social Epistemology* 14 (2000): 211–233; and Philip Wander and Dennis Jaehne, “From Cassandra to Ghaia: The Limits of Civic Humanism in an Ecologically Unsound World,” *Social Epistemology* 8 (1994): 243–259.
 26. Words printed on the box of the six-DVD set. I thought it quite accurate, having watched, and there was no way I could be more concise as to its content.
 27. Recently (March 24, 2014) a bill H.R. 1459, the “No More National Parks” Act, was introduced into the House to deny presidents the right to set aside land for national parks. The drive for personal/corporate profits regardless of the costs to others, the downstream *costs* as they are sometimes called, never sleeps.
 28. Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 64.
 29. Jürgen Habermas, *An Awareness of What Is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age*, ed. Michael Reder and Josef Schmidt, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010).
 30. On Jainism and Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in relation to the environment, see Dale Jamison, ed., *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy* (Malden: Blackwell, 2003), 52–139.
 31. The dangers facing chosen peoples and the temptations to invoke uncritical gods when it comes to creating, building, and sustaining an empire is the subject of Todd Gitlin and Liel Leibovitz’s *The Chosen Peoples: America, Israel, and the Ordeals of Divine Election* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010). The first line of defense for particular gods is for those invoking them to condemn those who object to national policies as not belonging to or seeking to undermine our nation, race, or our religion. On certain issues, civic discourse in the United States all but comes to a halt in the face of charges of anti-Semitism or un-Americanism. Often these charges hinge on historical analogies and evil intentions attributed to the other. Such rhetoric shifts the debate away from the legal, moral, ethical, spiritual, theological, and long-term consequences of this or that course of action. *The Chosen Peoples* challenges such diversions. They compare and contrast the claims of two different peoples, Americans and Israelis, to having been *chosen* to dominate others, Native Americans on one hand and Palestinians on the other. *What a challenge*: reconciling a rhetoric of diversion, division, and

domination with preserving life on a planet imperiled by genocidal weapons and environmental catastrophes! On the *unchosen* peoples, see 147–181.

32. Historically, religious peoples have foretold the end of time, the end of life on the planet. Now secular and religious peoples are grappling with a fact-based prediction about the end of time and life. Do we turn to God, to science, to political struggle? Too divisive and unnecessarily so! For, as my mother used to say: *God Helps Them Who Help Themselves*.
33. Susan Middleton and David Littschwager, *Here Today: Portraits of Our Vanishing Species* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1991).
34. *Ibid.*, 15.

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We also offer our gratitude to the individuals with whom we have had the pleasure to work. Always professional and patient, Rafael Chaiken and Michael Rinella at State University of New York Press have helped to make our publication process an enjoyable one. The anonymous reviewers, production editor Diane Ganeles, and copyeditor Dana Foote have offered sage advice that has improved the collection significantly. We are grateful to Cal Poly and Dean Douglass Epperson for providing Bernie with a sabbatical and Richard with assigned time to work on this project and for the administrative assistance of Krista Burke. Our sincerest thanks also extend to the authors of the chapters. Without their willingness to make revisions and meet deadlines, readers may have found themselves holding a much slimmer and less engaging work.

We wish to thank the individuals and institutions that have assisted us in finding primary documents or have granted permission to include their materials in the book. Trish Richards, special collections assistant at the University of the Pacific Library, was invaluable in locating texts and materials from the John Muir papers collection. Some of the sources referenced in chapter 2 were found with her assistance. Alaska Northwest Books granted permission to include excerpts from *Two in the Far North*, by Margaret Murie, in chapter 7. Permission to quote from Margaret E. Murie's unpublished speeches was granted by the Murie Center in Moose, Wyoming; the American Heritage Center of the University of Wyoming; and the Alaska and Polar Regions Collections and Archives of the Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks. Toby McLeod provided the transcript for the Edward Abbey speech referenced in chapter 12. Ken Sanders's recollections of the event addressed in the chapter were informative, and the assistance of Sarah Stude and Jaena Alabi are much appreciated. Each of you has our earnest appreciation.

Finally, we are grateful to the environmental speakers without whose insight, altruism, and courage there would not be a subject for study. We hope that this collection will inspire others to delve deeply into the rich discourse of environmental activism.

—Richard D. Besel and Bernard K. Duffy
San Luis Obispo, California

Introduction

Green Voices in the Swelling Chorus of American Environmental Advocacy

RICHARD D. BESEL AND BERNARD K. DUFFY

As much as the environmental dilemma is a problem of ethics and epistemology, it is also a problem of discourse.

—M. Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline S. Palmer,
Ecospeak: Rhetoric and Environmental Politics in America



Although a number of books skillfully analyze the written works of environmental activists and leaders, their spoken words remain relatively unstudied. Given Killingsworth and Palmer's epigraph about the importance of discourse in addressing the "environmental dilemma," we believe that this is an oversight. Wayland Maxfield Parrish observed half a century ago that "speeches have often been instrumental in shaping the course of history, in defining and strengthening a people's ideals, and in determining its culture."¹ In specific reference to the environmental movement, Alon Tal has more recently noted, "The 'oration' has been a central mechanism for galvanizing change."² *Green Voices: Defending Nature and the Environment in American Civic Discourse* aims to redress this paucity of scholarship. After all, when it comes to the leaders, heroes, and activists of the environmental movement, "There is no better way to understand their environmental vision, than through their spoken words."³

The study of environmental speeches is important for several reasons, many of which are highlighted here. We begin with the assumption that the speeches of environmental leaders are social repositories that allow us to glean reflections about then-prevailing attitudes and ideas. In addition to better understanding the contribution of environmentalists

to American intellectual and social history, the study of their spoken words also assists in appreciating the diverse and important roles of communication in human-nature relationships. As Parrish notes:

We may expect to learn from a study of the notable addresses of the past some lessons that we can apply to the preparation of our own speeches, for though the subjects of controversy that concern us may be quite different from those that exercised the talents of earlier speakers, yet the *methods* of discussion and argument remain very much the same from age to age.⁴

The essays written for this book address important—yet relatively unknown or unexamined—speeches delivered by famous or influential environmental figures. In other words, this collection examines the broad sweep of U.S. environmental history from the perspective of nature’s leading advocates.

Before briefly outlining the chapters of this book, a few issues that may assist the reader in better understanding our approach should be addressed. Although the words “nature” and “environment” are in the book’s title, neither we nor the chapter authors intend to imply that there is a set meaning for either term. On the contrary, as the chapters make clear, there are a variety of ways one may define “nature” and “environment.” Instead of positing a monolithic definition, we should consider the position taken by the environmental communication scholars James Cantrill and Christine Oravec: “The environment we experience and affect is largely a product of how we come to talk about the world.”⁵ Thus, as cultural, historical, material, rhetorical, and social conditions change, so too may understandings of experienced environments. The defense of the environment has been affected by the changing perceptions of what is being defended.

No less constructed than “environment” or “nature” is the phrase “civic discourse.” Scholars have grappled with this notion at least since ancient Greece, where citizens had both a right and a duty to participate in the affairs of the polis. In his “Funeral Oration,” Pericles makes clear democracy’s need for broad participation: “We do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say that he has no business here at all.”⁶ The impulse of civic participation that animated ancient Greek democracy has persisted to the present day. Daniel Barber argues that “citizen participation and citizen involvement are concepts that stand at the heart of the democratic process and at the center of American life.”⁷ Rhetoric and environmental communication scholars also have emphasized the importance of civic

participation by engaging and extending the work of “public sphere” scholars such as Jürgen Habermas and others.⁸ It is no accident that rhetoric professor and former Sierra Club president Robert Cox’s popular textbook is titled *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere*.⁹ For civic discourse scholar Kluver:

Civic discourse serves as the defining rubric of national identity as the participants in the social order define the nature of that order as well as their places within it. Civic discourse ultimately helps to create the society of which it is a part, as it is through discursive practice that the society articulates its expectations, assumptions, and norms, and ultimately becomes its own articulated ideal, within the bounds of human nature.¹⁰

Advocates who are the subjects of the chapters in this volume each contributed in their own ways to larger conversations about the environment, nature, and national identity. Their words formed part of the fertile earth from which uniquely American environmental expectations, assumptions, and norms were grown.

The origins for this book are found in a conversation between the two of us several years ago. The project resulted from a melding of Bernard’s longstanding interest in the study of public address and Richard’s focus on environmental rhetoric. Among the relevant books available at the time, it seemed to us that none made chapter-length analyses on environmental speeches their chief concerns, despite the potential usefulness of such a collection for students and scholars alike. *Speaking of Earth: Environmental Speeches That Moved the World* is an anthology containing brief introductions but little analysis.¹¹ Its strength lies in its international breadth and publication of primary texts. Three other mainstays of environmental communication research do an excellent job of addressing written rather than oral works: *Landmark Essays on Rhetoric and the Environment*; *Earthtalk: Communication Empowerment for Environmental Action*; and *Ecospeak: Rhetoric and Environmental Politics in America*.¹² Although title terms “Earthtalk” and “Ecospeak” imply a focus on speeches, this impression is not confirmed in the texts themselves. Instead, these texts operationally position speaking and talking within a broader definition. Two other books, *Green Culture: Environmental Rhetoric in Contemporary America* and *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, offer extensive analyses of environmental rhetoric and historical artifacts but discuss speeches only in passing.¹³ The time seemed right to propose *Green Voices: Defending Nature and the Environment in American Civic Discourse*. Our intent

was not somehow to do a better job in addressing environmental communication issues than what had already been published—a virtually impossible task. Instead, we sought to publish a collection of essays that would make a new contribution to the conversation that had already begun.

We began by contacting a handful of scholars who were familiar with some of the key rhetors we wished to have in the collection. We also released a general call for chapters. Although we would like to say that this book now includes all of the green voices of importance in the American context, limitations on book length alone make this impossible. We do not pretend to have incorporated every important speaker; indeed, we believe no text could do so. However, we have done our best to include representative analyses of some of the most interesting and important environmental artifacts of our time. We hope you will agree.

Despite having in common a definitively rhetorical focus, the contributions in this book reflect a variety of methods and approaches. Some focus on a single speaker and a single speech. Others focus on several speeches. Some are historical in orientation, while others are more theoretical. Contributors were not constrained by a predetermined outline or structure. As in nature, diversity here emerges as strength. Thus, the organization of the text did not lend itself to divisions based on approach or number of artifacts. Instead, given the historical importance of many of the speeches, the chapters are arranged in a roughly chronological manner. We believe this helps the reader to perceive the historical arc of U.S. environmentalism as it unfolded in the pages of great and influential speeches.

The collection begins with two chapters that analyze speeches delivered during the mid- to late nineteenth century. The first, by Michael J. Hostetler, examines the rhetorical appeals of Charles Sumner. The young Republic was less than a century old, and citizens of the 1860s still grappled with the enormity of their relatively new homeland. For Hostetler, Sumner's 1867 efforts serve as "a distinct example of how Americans sought to come to grips with the size of North America's environment." After all, how could a nation call itself a democracy given the problem of enormous scale? Hostetler interprets Sumner as arguing that "by promoting a vision of a unified nation both occupying a huge continent and grounded in republican virtue," that nation could be both immense in size and democratic.

Although Michael Hostetler chose to focus on several artifacts, the second chapter, by the book's editors, focuses on a single speech delivered by the "father of preservationism," John Muir. More than any other advocate, Muir's writings and speeches echoed through the ages.

Perhaps it was because the enormity and wildness of nature did not frighten Muir. Instead, Muir thought sublime settings, like his beloved Yosemite, should be enjoyed by all. However, we point out that Muir was keenly aware of the dangers inherent in inviting more people to indulge in outdoor activities; the very rhetoric that produced a desire to protect the most sublime locations simultaneously could despoil those very destinations irrevocably.

Chapters 3 and 4 analyze artifacts from the early 1900s. By the turn of the century the Progressive movement had taken hold. Disenchanted with politics as usual, many orators tapped into the public's disdain of corruption and desire for reform. Theodore Roosevelt characterized the reformist spirit of the times. Leroy Dorsey analyzes Roosevelt's rhetoric in light of the unbridled enthusiasm for governmental action to promote social change: Roosevelt "employed the arguments of the Progressive movement to undergird conservation and to reconcile the movement's contradictory arguments in a way that promoted environmental concerns and helped to create a more receptive audience for his platform." A collection on environmental speeches would be incomplete without an appreciation for what Roosevelt accomplished to protect the environment and give importance to conveying from one generation to the next the legacy of unspoiled public lands.

Anne Marie Todd's chapter focuses on several speeches delivered at the See America First Conference. Although Dorsey sees Roosevelt working within the context of a Progressive movement upset with politics as usual, Todd identifies a different kind of contextual disappointment informing the conference. For Todd, the See America First gathering allows scholars to understand how appeals to "American exceptionalism" were used to bolster tourism in the Western states. Upset that U.S. citizens were spending tourism dollars abroad, advocates attempted to convince the general public that they should keep those dollars at home because there were grander sites to be seen in the West.

In chapter 5, Melba Hoffer turns the reader's attention to the early twentieth century's most important environmental ethics writer, Aldo Leopold. Best known for writing *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold's contributions to contemporary understanding of environmental ethics are virtually unmatched. His ideas regarding "land health" and the "land ethic" are now part of the canon in environmental studies courses everywhere. Hoffer illustrates how Leopold "pressed the cause of environmentalism with a firebrand orator's intonations and a philosopher's moral sensibilities."

Although the first five chapters may be said to analyze some of the "early roots" of U.S. environmentalism, the next five arguably capture

the sentiments of what many have called “mainstream environmentalism.” Chapters 6 and 7 analyze a variety of speeches delivered from the 1950s through the 1970s. Brant Short focuses on the oratory of Sigurd Olson, former president of the Wilderness Society and the National Parks Association, while Elizabeth Lawson turns to the “grandmother of conservation,” Margaret Murie. What Short and Lawson make clear is the way both Olson and Murie infused their rhetoric with personal inspiration drawn from three decades of experience. In the chapters by Short and Lawson, both Olson and Murie finally receive the kind of attention they deserve, attention that is usually reserved for other well-known advocates like Rachel Carson.

Best known for writing *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson is perhaps the most influential U.S. environmental writer since John Muir, with many considering her book a marker for the birth of mainstream environmentalism. However, Carson’s efforts to draw attention to the negative effects of industrial pesticide use drew the fire of the corporate sector like no one had before. Michel Haigh and Ann Marie Major’s chapter analyzes two of Carson’s speeches. They illustrate how Carson continued her political efforts “to encourage grassroots involvement and bring scientific knowledge to the American public” beyond the written pages of books like *Silent Spring*.

Chapter 9 features the second president to appear in this volume: Jimmy Carter. However, unlike other chapters that examine instances of successful rhetoric, Terence Check analyzes a series of Carter’s energy speeches delivered in the late 1970s to understand their failure. For Check, these texts can be read as a fragmented jeremiad, one where Carter hoped “to communicate successfully the scope of the energy crisis to the American people.” However, “Carter’s appeal to civic sacrifice had several limitations, given constraints posed by public perceptions of fairness and reciprocity.”

No less well known than John Muir or Rachel Carson is Lois Gibbs, the speaker who is the focus of chapter 10. Unlike Muir or Carson, Gibbs did not decide to be an environmentalist because of a long-held conviction. Her career as an environmentalist resulted from a personal and public crisis. A housewife turned environmental activist, Gibbs has often been labeled the founder of the antitoxins movement. In considering Gibbs’s 1979 congressional testimony, Katie Gibson argues it was Gibbs’s ability to “voice an ethic of care” that allowed her to overcome much of the sexist vitriol preventing substantive environmental action in the Love Canal community of New York. For Gibson, it is an ethic of care that “legitimizes the voices of everyday citizens in public decision-making and bolsters the significance of grassroots citizen action.”

Despite her reservations about speaking in public, few were better than Gibbs at emphasizing the importance of “compassion, inclusion, and community.”

By the 1980s, mainstream environmentalism had taken a firm hold: Earth Day, the Environmental Protection Agency, and several pieces of environmental legislation had existed for over a decade. The final five chapters of this volume analyze how mainstream environmentalism continued to develop in the late twentieth century and into the twenty-first, as well as how other perspectives began to challenge and complement earlier environmental efforts.

In the wake of the accomplishments of mainstream environmentalists, some advocates in the 1980s adopted more moderate positions in their conservationist efforts. One important political figure during this time was U.S. Senator Frank Church, whose oratory “saved” the River of No Return Wilderness, an area that Ellen Gorsevski notes is bigger and no less beautiful than other well-known areas such as Yellowstone National Park. In chapter 11, Gorsevski identifies in Church’s speeches an effective “light green” rhetoric. It was through his moderate posturing that Church was able to protect so much of the land that fellow residents of Idaho had grown to love.

In contrast to Church’s moderate approach, the early 1980s also saw the popularization of a more “radical” environmental rhetoric. Beyond the halls of Congress, groups such as the newly formed Earth First! organization staged “image events” to engage and outrage the public.¹⁴ Derek G. Ross turns to Edward Abbey’s speech at the first protest performance of Earth First!, arguing that the “desert solitaire” embodied his multitudinous roles of “anarchist, activist, philosopher, and the spiritual founder of the environmental movement.”

The 1980s and 1990s saw the emergence of legendary environmental characters such as “Cactus Ed.” However, as Ross Singer makes clear in his analysis of Robert F. Kennedy Jr.’s rhetoric, melodrama has also never been more popular than in recent years. Building on the work of Steve Schwarze, Singer argues that Kennedy’s effectiveness was attributable to his melodramatic “modeling of moral character through personal testimony and his polarization of ‘crony capitalism’ as immoral enemy.” In short, Kennedy believes that one needs to pick a side and dramatize that choice.

Unlike previous analyses, Beth Waggenpack and Matthew VanDyke engage in a bit of stargazing in chapter 14 when they consider Ashley Judd’s environmental rhetoric. Although celebrities have often lent their names to a range of environmental causes, few have been as articulate or committed as Ashley Judd, for whom stopping mountaintop coal

mining in her home state of Kentucky became a passionate obsession. Waggenpack and VanDyke approach Judd's speeches from the perspective of metaphoric criticism and Cox's understanding of the "rhetoric of the irreparable." They argue that Judd "uses metaphors to constitute her environmental identity, establish audience perspectives on mining practice, and mobilize the audience toward action." By stressing the irreparable nature of mountaintop removal coal mining, Judd encourages her audiences to see the urgency of the current moment and to take action to stop these mining practices.

The collection comes to a close with chapter 15, written by Richard Leeman. Turning to the rhetoric of Benjamin Chavis Jr., speaking at the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in 1991, Leeman explores the concepts of environmental racism and environmental justice. Indeed, "While mainstream environmentalists deplored the universal harms caused by institutional neglect and greed, Chavis and his fellow attendees highlighted the discriminatory nature of such environmental ills, noting the human cost of pollution that systematically targets populations based on their race, color, or ethnicity." Although the chapters were arranged primarily in a chronological order, this is the one chapter that violates that pattern. Concluding with a chapter about justice seemed appropriate to us because, as Leeman notes, many environmental justice activists ask us to think about our discourse in terms of "the world it seeks to change, the people who seek to change it, and the rhetorical path by which they seek to do so."

Although environmentalism is unquestionably political, the environmental voices represented here are less often politicians than unelected advocates speaking to influence society and those who held the reins of power. These ordinary citizens typically are extraordinary in their vision and resolve. Even as they represent groups and interests, environmental voices invariably stand out as unique and individual in challenging normative thinking and social inertia. Their rhetoric is also highly individual, exemplified by paeans of the American landscape, passionate pleading, closely reasoned argument, and abrasive objection. Although most environmentalists speak with the humility of those who recognize the limits of one person's ability to effect change, the scale of their cause invariably lends poignancy and gravity to their words. Veracity rather than style is the most consistent source for their eloquence, although some like Muir attempt in words to match the grandeur of their subjects. While great causes often attract and create larger-than-life personalities such as Theodore Roosevelt, some environmental advocates such as Lois Gibbs begin as reluctant actors on an expansive stage whose plaintive refrains are eventually heard despite concerted efforts to suppress them.

Early advocates who were derided in their own time as irritating cranks rubbing against the grain with unwelcome warnings of looming disaster are later lauded as pathfinders and patriots. Others continue to annoy those who callously deny the importance of their cause. Some were driven by ideology as much as a desire for the health and survival of their families and their communities. Whatever their labels or motivations, we are reminded of Philip Wander's now well-known advice to rhetorical critics: We should acknowledge "the existence of crisis" when we see it and "situate 'good' and 'right' in an historical context."¹⁵ We hope this collection has, as Wander graciously says, captured "the efforts of real people to create a better world."

NOTES

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2. Alon Tal, *Speaking of Earth: Environmental Speeches That Moved the World* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), xv.
3. *Ibid.*, xx.
4. Parrish, "The Study of Speeches," 1.
5. James Cantrill and Christine Oravec, *The Symbolic Earth: Discourse and Our Creation of Environment* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 2.
6. Pericles, "The Funeral Oration," in *A Synoptic History of Classical Rhetoric*, ed. James J. Murphy, Richard A. Katula, and Michael Hoppmann (New York: Routledge, 1991), 216.
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10. Randy Kluver, "Elite-Based Discourse in Chinese Civil Society," in *Civic Discourse, Civil Society, and Chinese Communities*, ed. Randy Kluver and John Powers (Portsmouth: Greenwood, 1999), 11–12.
11. Tal, *Speaking of Earth*.
12. Craig Waddell, *Landmark Essays on Rhetoric and the Environment* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Star A. Muir and Thomas L. Veenendall, *Earthtalk: Communication Empowerment for Environmental*

- Action* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 1996); Killingsworth and Palmer, *Ecospeak*.
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 14. Kevin Michael DeLuca, *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism* (New York: Routledge, 2001).
 15. Philip Wander, "The Ideological Turn in Modern Criticism," in *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism*, ed. Carl R. Burghardt (State College: Strata, 2010), 92.

ONE

Coming to Grips with the Size of America's Environment

Charles Sumner Says Farewell to Montesquieu

MICHAEL J. HOSTETLER

Firm like the oak may our blest nation rise,
No less distinguished for its strength than size.
—Charles Pinckney Sumner, 1826



Late on the night of March 29, 1867, Charles Sumner, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was summoned to the home of Secretary of State William Seward. There Sumner became the first member of Congress to be informed of the Johnson administration's deal with Russia to buy the huge, remote, and largely unknown tract of land in the northwest corner of North America called Russian America.¹ By April 4, Sumner had decided to support the treaty, and five days later, after a short debate held in executive session, the Senate overwhelmingly ratified it. While the cession of Alaska occupied Sumner's attention for just a few days in the spring of 1867, his overall engagement with the issue and its ramifications would dominate his public discourse for the following seven months. Sumner's rhetorical effort included three substantial discourses: the revision and publication of the speech he gave in the Senate in support of the Alaska treaty, a long magazine article that appeared in September, and a lecture delivered in ten states during October and November. What Sumner embarked on in 1867 was nothing less than a one-man rhetorical campaign to promote a vision of national expansion known as continentalism.

Sumner's three texts are related to the cluster of issues surrounding what George Steiner has called the "American Dimension," the overwhelming physical environment of North America.² It is a perspective on

the environment largely lost in the twenty-first century. Today, Americans are accustomed to seeing the environment as in need of protection from economic exploitation and population growth. It has not always been so. In the eighteenth century and for much of the nineteenth, it was not that voracious development threatened the environment, but that the environment threatened America's political economy.³ The particular characteristic of the environment that so threatened the political order was its enormity. The nation's outrageous size was mind-boggling to Europeans and constituted a quintessential American political dilemma from the time of the founding.⁴

James Madison had strenuously argued in Federalist No. 14 against Montesquieu's view that republican governments were impossible in large territories. The practical and theoretical issues of geographical size, however, recurred as the nation grew. The purchase of Louisiana⁵ and the prolonged national debate over internal improvements⁶ are just two examples. By the end of the Civil War the country stretched to the Pacific Ocean, but the proposed purchase of Russian America opened up some of the old objections to growth, objections that Sumner countered in his philosophy of continentalism. His philosophy supported a position that lay somewhere between the unbridled boosterism of the early proponents of growth and the more sinister imperialism that was to appear as the twentieth century approached.⁷ For Sumner, the question of size had moved away from matters such as transportation and communication, argued without resolution in recurring debates about "internal improvements," back to issues of political philosophy reminiscent of Madison's quarrel with Montesquieu. Sumner's pointed reference to Montesquieu in the magazine article he wrote shows that the echo of previous debates about the size of a republic had grown faint but not inaudible. Not surprisingly, the debate tended to be rekindled on the occasion of large acquisitions of territory like the Alaska Purchase. As others who addressed the issue of the nation's size, Sumner wrestled with the tension between the unity he deemed essential to America's destiny and the mammoth dimensions of the North American continent, which he saw the United States occupying. Within this tension lay the huge environment's threat to the Republic. From Sumner's perspective, the tension is resolved and the threat removed through the extension of what he called "republican institutions."

Charles Sumner's discourse provides a distinct example of how Americans sought to come to grips with the size of North America's environment. A careful reading of the three interrelated texts he produced in 1867 helps explain the intersection of rhetoric and geography in America and reveals, among other things, a perspective, now lost, that

viewed the environment as threatening, not threatened. These insights depend on reading the three rhetorical artifacts—speech, essay, and lecture—as closely related parts of a single broader argument regarding national expansion. Based on this reading, Sumner's rhetoric can be seen as a multitextual example of what rhetorical critics Michael Leff and Andrew Sachs call "rhetorical iconicity," a quality of discourse in which the form of expression imitates and reinforces the substance of what is expressed.⁸ In this case, both the unity of Sumner's discourse and its patient, capacious style mirror his whole idea of continentalism.⁹ Furthermore, the very means Sumner adopted to propagate his views reflects his underlying philosophy. The effort he expended in publishing his otherwise unavailable Senate speech, the appearance of his essay in a popular magazine, and his personal appearances on a lecture tour all serve to enact his belief that the United States' continental empire could only be built on republican principles, the most important of which was the consent of the governed. In the end, Sumner's continentalism offered the promise to tame the threat of the continent's outsized environment. It achieved this not through the inexorable, naturalistic processes associated with late nineteenth-century imperialism, but by promoting a vision of a unified nation both occupying a huge continent and grounded in republican virtue.

CONTINENTALISM IN THREE PARTS

Charles Sumner's visionary continentalism is fully expressed in the three major statements he wrote between April and November of 1867. Before looking more closely at these texts, a brief overview of them is in order. First is the speech he gave to the Senate on April 8, in support of the Alaska treaty.¹⁰ Sumner spoke for nearly three hours from a single page of notes.¹¹ Since the Senate had met in executive session, the record of the speech was not made public. Therefore, after the debate Sumner felt obliged to prepare a manuscript version of his speech for publication to put his views on the record. "The Cession of Russian America to the United States" was published about six weeks after ratification. The speech is mostly remembered for its lengthy and exhaustive treatment of the natural resources of Alaska. In his Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Sumner, David Herbert Donald observes that it "was a remarkably accurate and well-informed conspectus of the history and natural resources of the new territory, and it was influential both in shaping public opinion at large and in persuading members of the lower House to appropriate the purchase price specified in the treaty."¹²

Following publication of his speech about Russian America, Sumner set to work on an essay about American destiny entitled "Prophetic Voices about America: A Monograph," which appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly* in September.¹³ The article documents the opinions and prognostications of fourteen celebrated individuals, mostly from the eighteenth century, who spoke of the future development of the United States,¹⁴ especially in regard to its physical growth. Sumner's idea of prophecy involves the prescient wisdom of sagacious men more than the transcendent predictions of seers. For example, he cites Sir Thomas Browne, who wrote in the 1680s that "when America shall be so well peopled, civilized, and divided into kingdoms, *they are like to have so little regard of their originals as to acknowledge no subjection unto them.*"¹⁵ Sumner thinks that Browne's remark was borne out by the American Revolution. He claims that his purpose in collecting such "prophecies" is that, "brought together into one body, on the principle of our national Union, *E pluribus unum*, they must give new confidence in the destinies of the Republic."¹⁶ The primary destiny Sumner has in mind is continentalism, which he describes as "that coming time when the whole continent, with all its various States, shall be a Plural Unit, with one Constitution, one Liberty, and one Destiny."¹⁷

The last product of Sumner's rhetorical labor of 1867 is the lecture "Are We a Nation?"¹⁸ which he delivered twenty-six times, beginning in Pontiac, Michigan, on October 7, and concluding at New York's Cooper Union on November 19.¹⁹ In it, Sumner argues that the United States is indeed a nation, especially since the defeat in the Civil War of nationalism's nemesis, states' rights. Furthermore, American nationalism is grounded in politics "rather than unity of blood or language."²⁰ Based on the political principles of the Declaration of Independence, Sumner foresees a time when "local jealousies and geographical distinctions will be lost in the attractions of a common country. Then, indeed, there will be no North, no South, no East, no West; but there will be One Nation."²¹

As a speaker, Sumner was generally known as an intellectual given to blunt-spoken moralism, especially regarding slavery, the definitive issue of his generation. Donald notes that his public speaking was characterized by "rhetorical exaggeration."²² Historians have given mixed reviews of Sumner's 1867 rhetorical efforts. The speech is remembered chiefly for its voluminous collection of facts and statistics on every aspect of the Alaska Territory. In the American Statesmen series, Moorfield Storey characterizes it as "a miracle of information."²³ "Prophetic Voices about America" is described by Shotwell as a "curious collection of prophecies."²⁴ Regarding the lecture tour, Donald says it was

a “chronicle of disasters,” and that the lecture itself “persuaded those who were already true believers.”²⁵ Critics have recognized some relationship between the three works. Storey notes that in preparing the speech, Sumner grew interested in the broader question of American expansion that provoked the *Atlantic* essay.²⁶ Similarly, Donald sees the lecture tour as Sumner’s effort “further to spread his doctrine of continentalism.”²⁷ All of these critical appraisals are valid as far as they go. However, no critical understanding that satisfactorily accounts for both the texts’ individual traits and their relationship to each other has yet been proposed.

RHETORICAL ICONICITY: ENACTING CONTINENTALISM

Even while observing that Sumner’s three texts are related, critics have failed to recognize a more profound unity that exists between them. The fact of the matter is that the themes of the essay and lecture grow directly out of the speech; all three display a similar style; and the media Sumner employed, while different, all serve to reinforce and enact his philosophy. As mentioned earlier, these connections between the form and subject of Sumner’s discourse constitute an example of a phenomenon called rhetorical iconicity. Drawing on semiotic and metaphor theory, Michael Leff and Andrew Sachs identify rhetorical iconicity as a way of accounting for the fact that “discursive form often enacts representational content.”²⁸ This enactment can be imitative, chronological, psychological, or juxtapositional. In all such cases, various rhetorical elements such as syntax, grammar, or the whole range of stylistic factors (like repetition), may come to reinforce or represent the subject of the discourse. Leff and Sachs cite a common example:

To say that someone is “very, very, very tall” conveys a different meaning than if we merely say: “He is very tall.” In this case, iteration lengthens the sentence and changes its meaning even though no new semantic content is added. The change of meaning occurs because the form of the longer sentence iconically represents the person described.²⁹

Leff and Sachs further argue that iconicity “is a principle more readily apprehended through an interpretive rather than a formal approach to discourse.”³⁰ Accordingly, the authors analyze a speech by Edmund Burke, concluding that its style and content “are imbricated at every level—the sentence, the paragraph, and the discourse as a whole.”³¹

In a critique of Leff and Sachs, Celeste Condit correctly points out that emphasizing dispositional factors such as rhetorical iconicity can lead to an overemphasis on the microanalysis of texts at the expense of understanding the wider contexts of rhetorical messages. She argues that we should “judge a rhetorical artifact not solely on the action within the text, but also on how that rhetoric acts upon the context within which it creates its meaning.”³² Rhetorical iconicity is a textual phenomenon that can transcend the text, manifesting itself in ways other than disposition or style only. In this case, Sumner iconically represents the unity, expansiveness, and democratic basis for his philosophy of continentalism over *multiple texts* and in *delivery*, not in its usual sense of how a speaker looks, acts, and sounds but in how delivery occurs in a particular medium. Sumner enacted his ideology by using *three different media*. By taking this fact into account, we gain a more complete accounting of Sumner’s rhetoric. Considering both text and context helps reveal the connections between the constituent elements of Sumner’s continentalism and the rhetoric he used to propagate it.

UNITY, EXPANSION, AND THE CONSENT OF THE GOVERNED

Charles Sumner’s discourses enact the principles of his philosophy of continentalism through their conceptual unity, expansive style, and popular appeal. First, his belief in the necessity and inevitability of national and continental unity is represented by the consistent theme of the 1867 speech, essay, and lecture. The root of this thematic unity lies in the argument section of the Alaska treaty speech. Contrary to what most historians say about Sumner’s lengthy oration, its most important section is not the long recitation of facts about Russian America, but rather the arguments Sumner advances in support of the administration’s agreement to buy the territory. Granted, the copious information Sumner provided constituted a form of argument in that it addressed the widespread problem of ignorance about Alaska, which could have hindered congressional approval and public acceptance of Seward’s treaty. Nevertheless, political arguments in favor of the cession seem to have meant more to Sumner than mere information about the territory. These arguments dominate the page of notes he used when speaking to the Senate. In these notes, Sumner writes: “Important to consider the character of country. But—treaty will be ratified with reference to other considerations.”³³ Thereafter, he enumerates several of the reasons in favor of ratification: the treaty is advantageous to the Pacific Coast, adds to the American “empire,” gets another monarchical power out of

North America, and is another step in occupying the whole of North America. Further on, Sumner also notes that American occupation of Alaska thwarts whatever designs Great Britain might have on the territory. All of these reasons, with the addition of maintaining "amity" with Russia, are cited in virtually the same order in the printed version of the speech.³⁴

In introducing his arguments for ratification in the published version of the speech, Sumner clearly indicates the importance he attaches to them. They are matters, he says, of

a more general character which . . . challenge the judgment. These concern nothing less than the unity, power and grandeur of the republic, with the extension of its dominion and its institutions. Such considerations, where not entirely inapplicable, are apt to be controlling. I do not doubt that they will in a great measure determine the fate of this treaty with the American people. They are patent, and do not depend on research or statistics.³⁵

According to Sumner, the "controlling" considerations regarding Alaska have less to do with "research and statistics" than with nationalistic political factors like the "unity" and "extension" of the "republic." These are key terms in both Sumner's political philosophy and in the rhetorical works he produced in 1867. Unfortunately, the exhaustive "research and statistics" he goes on to share have blinded many of his readers from seeing the political factors that loomed so large in his thinking.

The origins of both the essay and lecture Sumner would produce later are found in the third reason he gives for ratifying the Alaska treaty. The reason, headed "Extension of Republican Institutions," is central among the five he enumerates and goes to the heart of his position. Sumner says it is not merely "extension of dominion," based on a natural "passion of acquisition," that motivates American expansion, but rather the "extension of republican institutions."³⁶ For Sumner, North America's expansive environment is not to be used so much for economic exploitation, discussed later in the speech, as for the extension of a political ideal. He argues that American independence was motivated by the desire to overthrow "the kingly power," likening this action to the Senate of the Roman Republic prohibiting kings from entering the gates of Rome. He concludes that "our city can be nothing less than the North American continent, with its gates on all the surrounding seas."³⁷ In support, he quotes John Adams as a "prophetic minister," who saw

the destiny of the United States: "It was to spread over the northern part of the American quarter of the globe; and it was to be a support to the rights of mankind."³⁸ The Adams quotation reappears in "Prophetic Voices about America" as the fourth of the fourteen "prophets" Sumner calls to bear witness to America's destiny. The essay is an extended elaboration of the Adams citation in which Sumner shows that Adams was just one of many "prophetic ministers" who foresaw the future.

Both Sumner's *Atlantic Monthly* essay and the lecture "Are We a Nation?" appear to originate in the central argument of the speech on the Alaska treaty. According to Sumner, the treaty is not merely "a visible step in the occupation of the whole North American continent," but also, by it, Americans "dismiss one more monarch from this continent." This is the trend of history: "One by one they have retired. . . all giving way to that absorbing unity which is declared in the national motto, E Pluribus Unum."³⁹ The national motto also appears among the "tokens of Nationality" Sumner lists in his lecture. But more than that, the overall theme of the lecture is nothing less than the "absorbing unity" the motto expresses, especially over against the deadly pretensions of states' rights thinking. In the introduction to the lecture, Sumner asks, "Are we a nation? Then must we have that essential, indestructible unity belonging to a Nation, with all those central, pervasive, impartial powers which minister to the national life."⁴⁰ Sumner goes on to ground the essential unity of the nation in four salient factors. First is language, specifically, the very definition and usage of the term "nation." Second is the history of the formation of the nation followed by several tokens of nationality, including the flag, the motto, the name "American," and geography. Finally, and most recently, American unity has been forged in the decisive victory of the Union over the "perpetual pretension" of states' rights. The lecture concludes with a vision of "the assured unity of the Republic." "Local jealousies and geographical distinctions will be lost in the attractions of a common country. Then, indeed, there will be no North, no South, no East, no West; but there will be One Nation."⁴¹

Sumner's vision of a unified nation occupying a unified North American continent is represented rhetorically in the clear connections between the major works he produced in 1867. A loosely organized or disjointed rhetorical effort would have undercut the idea of unity on which continentalism was based. Not only does this iconic unity appear across the texts, but it also appears within the three texts themselves. The three works are starkly linear in structure with utterly clear introductions, conclusions, and headings. They are all very long but not hard to follow. The unity of the compositions is transparent, just like the political and geographical unity Sumner believed was America's destiny.

In addition to unity, Sumner's 1867 discourses are notable for their patient, expansive style that closely represents the unhurried and inexorable occupation of North America by the United States. All three of Sumner's discourses are notable for their enormous length. This is not uncommon in nineteenth-century oratory, but there is more to Sumner's loquaciousness than mere convention. Sumner's style reflects his belief in what he calls "organic expansion," which he explicates at a key juncture in the Alaska treaty speech. Just after listing the arguments in favor of the treaty, and immediately before the speech's enormous section detailing virtually everything known about Alaska at the time, Sumner posits a two-paragraph "caveat." Here he explains how continentalism, his conviction "that republican institutions under the primacy of the United States must embrace this whole continent," must actually come about:

But I cannot disguise my anxiety that every stage in our predestined future shall be by natural processes without war, and I would add, even without purchase. . . . Our triumph should be by growth and organic expansion in obedience to "pre-established harmony," recognizing always the will of those who are to become our fellow-citizens. . . . Our motto may be that of Goethe, "Without haste, without rest." Let the republic be assured in tranquil liberty with all equal before the law, and it will conquer by its sublime example.⁴²

Like continental expansion itself, Sumner's rhetorical style fits Goethe's motto, "Without haste, without rest." In the speech, Sumner includes details beyond number regarding the government, population, climate, and natural resources of Alaska. The pace of the discourse is slow, deliberate, and exhaustive. As General Henry W. Halleck put it, Sumner "completely exhausted the subject, as well as his readers."⁴³ Similarly, in his *Atlantic* essay, Sumner patiently includes biographical summaries and encomia about each of the "prophets" he cites. The lecture "Are We a Nation?" took over two hours to deliver. In Milwaukee, some impatient audience members uncharacteristically walked out on him.⁴⁴ The leisurely pace of Sumner's discourses stands in contrast to the speed with which he and the Senate were forced to act on the Alaska treaty. He was not happy with the "urgency of negotiation at this hour."⁴⁵ His view, represented in his rhetorical performance, was that the American empire would expand peacefully and inevitably. Americans needed to acknowledge the facts of this process, not try to speed it up.

The final element of Sumner's continentalism that finds iconic representation in his rhetoric is his belief that North American territories be

added to the United States only with the consent of their populations. In a letter to John Bright a few days after Senate ratification of the Alaska treaty, Sumner wrote, "Abstractly I am against further accessions of territory unless by the free choice of the inhabitants."⁴⁶ Near the conclusion of the *Atlantic* article, he says: "It is easy to see that empire obtained by force is unrepugnant, and offensive to the first principle of our Union according to which all just government stands only on the consent of the governed."⁴⁷ What of those living in Alaska? Sumner assented to the cession only after being assured by Louis Agassiz that the territory had a population so small as to be practically negligible.⁴⁸ So it seems that from a pragmatic standpoint, the consent of Alaskans to annexation became a moot point. For Sumner, the consent of the American people to the acquisition was of greatest concern. He states that the arguments in favor of annexation, which he sets forth in the speech, "will in a great measure determine the fate of this treaty with the American people."⁴⁹ The idea of public opinion, and even world opinion, is frequently mentioned in the argument section of the speech.⁵⁰ For Sumner, the expansion of the United States was synonymous with the extension of "republican institutions." What more republican institution was there than consent of the people?

Sumner's commitment to the consent of the people as a foundational principle of continentalism is evidenced in his discourse in at least two ways. First, it is important to the argument of his lecture "Are We a Nation?" For Sumner, nationhood is built on the will of the people and their rights. He makes much of the opening words of the Constitution, "We the people . . .": "Thus by the people of the United States was the Constitution ordained and established; not by the States, nor even by the people of the several states, but by *the people of the United States* in aggregate individuality."⁵¹ Sumner can affirm that we are a nation because, "Side by side with the growth of National Unity was a constant dedication to Human Rights."⁵² His vision of continentalism required the expulsion of European monarchs from North America and its unification under the United States, but only as an expansion of "republican institutions" expressed as "human rights."

Another way Sumner connects the consent of the governed to his philosophy of continentalism is seen in the scope and variety of the three discourses he produced in 1867. He devoted over six months of intense effort to the production of the speech, essay, and lecture. Why did he do it? Historians dutifully note that his marriage to a much younger woman broke up early in the year and that he had many bills to pay due to moving from Boston to Washington. It is claimed that the speech, essay, and lecture tour (for which admission was charged)

were ways Sumner could fill his lonely hours and pay his bills.⁵³ All this may be true, but such explanations overlook the principle in Sumner's political philosophy that might account for his extensive efforts from April to November. Because continentalism required popular support, it can hardly be coincidental that Sumner sought the widest possible dissemination of his views. He wanted the Senate's executive session debate of the Alaska treaty made public. When this effort failed, he took up the task of publishing his speech himself. The *Atlantic Monthly* was a widely read and influential periodical. His fall lecture tour took him west of the Appalachian Mountains for the first time since 1855. For Sumner, continentalism was the expansion of republican institutions that required and depended upon popular support, which he aimed to garner through his own persuasive efforts.

Sumner's insistence that territorial expansion occur only in concert with the consent of the people put a human stamp on continentalism. This human dimension is also powerfully brought out in the essay "Prophetic Voices about America." Sumner was impressed with "men who have lived much and felt strongly." Such people, he asserts, "see further than others. Their vision penetrates the future."⁵⁴ If the present and future of continentalism depended on the consent of the people, continentalism's past could be seen in human terms. Its roots lay in the vision of sagacious leaders. Over against this interpretation, it should be pointed out that Sumner does occasionally articulate his views in terms of the "natural law" philosophy that would become ascendant in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. For example, there is the line already quoted from the caveat section of the Alaska treaty speech, "But I cannot disguise my anxiety that every stage in *our predestined future shall be by natural processes* without war." Statements like this, however, must be seen in the overall context of Sumner's continentalism. He viewed expansion as the vision and result of human wisdom and endeavor more than as the action of blind natural forces. All in all, his vision of empire was more humanistic and less mechanistic than the imperialism of the next generation of American expansionists.

CONTINENTALISM AND THE AMERICAN DIMENSION

By observing the iconic relationship between Sumner's rhetoric and his philosophy of continentalism, we acquire a fuller understanding of both. However, this is not the whole story. Lurking behind and around continentalism is the overwhelming size of America and persistent questions about the feasibility of large republics. It was in this sense that the

environment posed a threat to the political order. Sumner was familiar with these old issues, and they surface several times in his 1867 discourses. First, he knew of Montesquieu's doubts about the possibility of large republics but, in keeping with his views of the popular will, constructed an essay in which the Frenchman was outvoted by a host of other wise men. Further, even though he rejected Montesquieu's objection to a large republic, Sumner was not unaware of the difficulties of governing one. These problems, however, could be overcome. North American geography itself, coupled with technological advances, made a continental empire possible. Finally, and most important of all, Sumner posited republican government as the most effective way to transcend distance, thereby mitigating the threat of the country's huge size to its political order.

First, the specter of Baron de Montesquieu appears at a crucial juncture in "Prophetic Voices about America." Sumner begins the article with the stated purpose of instilling confidence in his countrymen. By bringing into one essay numerous prophetic voices, he sets out to "give new confidence in the destinies of the Republic."⁵⁵ At one level, such renewed confidence was needed due to the uncertainties connected with the acquisition of Alaska, but Sumner saw Alaska as a piece of a larger puzzle. He wanted Americans to have confidence not only to add one new territory to the Union but to claim the whole continent. Cataloging the host of "prophets" was indeed a way to reaffirm faith in America's destiny, but in the conclusion of the essay it appears that Sumner had refutation as well as reassurance on his mind. The conclusion begins thus: "Such are some of the prophetic voices about America, differing in character and importance, but all having one augury, and opening one vista, illimitable in extent and vastness. Farewell to the idea of Montesquieu, that a republic can exist only in a small territory."⁵⁶ In keeping with his emphasis on the voice of the people, Sumner's refutation of the French philosopher seems to be based on a majority vote of the prophets. Montesquieu's well-known opinion is mentioned cursorily without analysis. In the essay's later version, these lines are added: "Through representation and federation a continent is not too much for practical dominion, nor is it beyond expectation. Well did Webster say, 'The prophecies and poets are with us.'"⁵⁷ Yet again Sumner provides a rhetorical enactment of his beliefs, the collective voices of many wise men are to be heeded over the domineering influence of one.

Although Sumner, like Madison before him, rejected the views of Montesquieu, that in no way diminished the reality of North America's gargantuan dimensions. In fact, great distances hindered the imperial ambitions of both Spain and Russia. One of the sages cited by Sumner,

the Spanish diplomat Count D'Aranda, argued that among the difficulties for Spain in governing American colonies were the great distances involved.⁵⁸ Similarly, in the Russian treaty speech, Sumner speaks of the isolated and distant position of Russian America. "The immense country is without form and without light; without activity and without progress. Distant from the imperial capital, and separated from the huge bulk of Russian empire, it does not share the vitality of a common country."⁵⁹ This distance is a reason cited by Sumner for the Russian's willingness to part with Alaska.

If distance posed a practical problem for Spanish and Russian imperialism, would not the same be true of the effort of the United States to govern such far-flung territories as Alaska? Sumner answers this question in several ways. First, geography itself favors continentalism. In the lecture "Are We a Nation?" Sumner discusses four "tokens" of national unity: the flag, the national motto, the name "American," and, finally, "the geographical position and configuration of our country."⁶⁰ Whereas history and human effort provide the other "unities," when it comes to geography, Nature itself is the "great teacher." "Unity is written upon it [the nation] by the Almighty hand."⁶¹ According to Sumner, North America provides no natural international geographical boundaries. Second, even if North American geography is auspicious to empire, it still features vast distances and daunting obstacles, especially mountain ranges. For these obstacles, Sumner claims that technology provides at least a partial answer. He argues—once again in the geography section of "Are We a Nation?"—that rivers connect rather than divide the country, and the mountains, which "in other days would have marked international boundaries," are conquered by technology. "The Pacific Railway will neutralize these mountains, and complete the geographical unity of the continent. The slender wire of the telegraph, when once extended, is an indissoluble tie; the railway is an iron band."⁶²

Finally, the most important factor in the ability of the United States to rule the whole, vast continent of North America is neither geographical nor technological but political. Again, according to Sumner, American expansion is about extending republican institutions. Negatively, this meant expelling monarchical powers from North America. Positively, the impetus to extend "human rights" motivates expansion. In the central argument of the Alaska treaty speech, he declares,

By the text of our Constitution the United States are bound to guarantee a "republican form of government" to every State in this Union; but this obligation, which is only applicable at home, is an unquestionable indication of the national aspiration

everywhere. The republic is something more than a local policy; it is a general principle, not to be forgotten at any time, *especially when the opportunity is presented of bringing an immense region within its influence.*⁶³

At the end of “Prophetic Voices about America,” Sumner sets the attraction of republican political institutions over against the idea of gaining empire by war. Peace, he declares, is “our talisman.” With peace comes prosperity so that “the name Republic will be exalted, until every neighbor, yielding to irresistible attraction, will seek a new life in becoming a part of the great whole; and the national example will be more puissant than army or navy for the conquest of the world.”⁶⁴ Similarly, at the conclusion of “Are We a Nation?” Sumner claims that the “maintenance of human rights” depends on a balance of supreme national law and local self-government, which together “constitute the elemental principles of the Republic.” On this political basis, “the growing Republic whose original root was little more than an acorn” will grow to overarch “the continent with its generous shade.”⁶⁵ By constructing republican institutions as both motive and means of imperial expansion, Sumner turns earlier objections to a large republic upside down. While Montesquieu saw republican institutions as too weak and fragile to overcome distance, Sumner believed they were the only things strong enough to conquer space.

CONCLUSION

Charles Sumner’s rhetorical encounter with the American Dimension in 1867 looks forward and backward. The United States’ purchase of Alaska served to propel the nation forward toward new territorial expansion, which would be accelerated by the Spanish War. At the same time, adding Alaska pushed the country backward to the old debate about how big democracies could grow. In his seven-month rhetorical campaign, Sumner enacted the inevitable and peaceful expansion characteristic of his philosophy of continentalism. His vision of a continent unified by an American ideal of human rights guaranteed by republican government is represented in three connected texts marked by a capacious rhetorical style. The texts are an example of a rhetorical iconicity in which Sumner’s discourse represents the united, expansive democratic empire he believed would eventually cover North America.

In Federalist No. 14, Madison deferred some questions of the governance of a huge territory to the future. Pointing out that the

Constitution of 1787 was written with the original thirteen states in mind, he observes, "The arrangements that may be necessary for those angles and fractions of our territory which lie on our northwestern frontier, must be left to those whom further discoveries and experience will render more equal to the task."⁶⁶ Madison undoubtedly would be surprised that his "northwestern frontier," the Great Lakes, would turn out to be the Behring Sea. Even though the country grew rapidly, beyond the imaginations of the Founders, their faith in the republican political institutions they devised endured. Charles Sumner strove to be a keeper of that faith, defending the American political ideal from the difficulties inherent in space and distance. In the end, America's huge environment did not overthrow its political experiment. The environment, as a threat, dissipated. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, Americans began to realize that it was the environment that had become threatened by industrial development, population growth, and neglect.

NOTES

1. The draft treaty had been presented to Johnson's cabinet on March 15 and approved four days later.
2. Cited by John Keegan, *Fields of Battle* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 16. Keegan does not recall the source of the Steiner reference. Letter to the author, March 31, 1998.
3. That is not to imply that the environment is no longer ever viewed as threatening. The threat, however, is not the primordial "waste and howling wilderness" invoked by the Puritan preacher John Danforth in 1670, but rather a capricious and vengeful environment evidenced by drug-resistant diseases, invasive species, and extreme weather caused by global warming. See "A Brief Recognition of New-England's Errand into the Wilderness," in *American Rhetorical Discourse*, Second Edition, ed. Ronald F. Reid (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1988).
4. In fact, the United States is two and half times bigger than all of Europe. Jean Baudrillard once observed, "As soon as you set foot in America, you feel the presence of an entire continent—space there is the very form of thought." Jean Baudrillard, *America*, trans. Christ Turner (London: Verso, 1988), 16.
5. Pro-Louisiana boosterism is exemplified in David Ramsey's speech, "An Oration on the Cession of Louisiana to the United States," *Early American Imprints, Second Series, No. 7148* (Mt. Airy: Lomond Systems, 1955–1956).

6. In the culminating debate on internal improvements, John C. Calhoun exhorted the House of Representatives, "Let us conquer distance!" "Speech on Internal Improvements," *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, ed. Robert L. Meriwether (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1959), volume 1.
7. For an overview of continentalism, see Charles Vevier, "American Continentalism: An Idea of Expansion, 1845–1910," *The American Historical Review* 65.2 (January 1960): 323–335.
8. Michael Leff and Andrew Sachs, "Words Most Like Things: Iconicity and the Rhetorical Text," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 54 (1990): 252–273.
9. For a discussion of the intellectual underpinnings of the style of much nineteenth-century oratory, see Richard Weaver, "The Spaciousness of the Old Rhetoric," in *The Ethics of Rhetoric* (Davis: Hermagoras Press, 1985 [1953]).
10. Charles Sumner, "The Cession of Russian America to the United States," in *Complete Works* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969 [1900]), volume 15.
11. The notes are preserved in the Charles Sumner Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.
12. David Herbert Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 310.
13. Charles Sumner, "Prophetic Voices about America: A Monograph," *The Atlantic Monthly* 20.119 (September 1867): 275–306. A "revised and enlarged" version of the article was published by Sumner in 1874, *Complete Works*, 15:251–433. All references to this essay are to the *Atlantic* version, unless noted otherwise.
14. It should be noted that, for Sumner, the terms "United States," "America," and "North America" could almost be used interchangeably.
15. Sumner, "Prophetic Voices," 277. Emphasis in the original.
16. *Ibid.*, 276.
17. *Ibid.*, 305.
18. Sumner, "Are We a Nation?," in *Complete Works*, volume 16.
19. Walter G. Shotwell, *Life of Charles Sumner* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Company, 1910), 588.
20. Sumner, "Are We a Nation?," 11.
21. *Ibid.*, 64.
22. Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 292.
23. Moorfield Storey, *Charles Sumner* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1900), 338.
24. Shotwell, *Life of Charles Sumner*, 586.
25. Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 311–312.

26. Storey, *Charles Sumner*, 585.
27. Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 310.
28. Leff and Sachs, "Words Most Like Things," 258.
29. *Ibid.*, 258.
30. *Ibid.*, 259.
31. *Ibid.*, 268.
32. Celeste Condit, "Rhetorical Criticism and Audiences: The Extremes of McGee and Leff," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 54 (1990): 333.
33. Sumner, notes, Charles Sumner Papers.
34. The printed version follows the outline of the extemporaneous notes very closely.
35. Sumner, "Cession of Russian America," 36.
36. *Ibid.*, 41.
37. *Ibid.*, 41–42.
38. *Ibid.*, 42.
39. *Ibid.*, 43.
40. Sumner, "Are We a Nation?," 8.
41. *Ibid.*, 64.
42. Sumner, "Cession of Russian America," 53.
43. Cited in Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 309.
44. *Ibid.*, 311.
45. Sumner, "Cession of Russian America," 51.
46. Beverly Wilson Palmer, ed., *The Selected Letters of Charles Sumner* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990), 2:393.
47. Sumner, "Prophetic Voices," 306.
48. Sumner, "Cession of Russian America," 71.
49. *Ibid.*, 43.
50. Under the first argument, he refers to the "desires of our fellow citizens on the Pacific Coast." The second argument may "captivate the public mind." At the end of the third argument, he says continental occupation will be "recognized by the world and accepted by the American people." In discussing the need to ratify the treaty, Sumner hopes "to impress the public mind," and he goes on to say that ratification was important to "the public opinion of the world."
51. Sumner, "Are We a Nation?," 39. Emphasis in the original.
52. *Ibid.*, 54.
53. Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 301, 310; Shotwell, *Life of Charles Sumner*, 584–585.
54. Sumner, "Prophetic Voices," 276.
55. *Ibid.*, 276.
56. Sumner, "Prophetic Voices," 304.

57. Sumner, "Prophetic Voices," in *Complete Works*, 15:428.
58. Sumner, "Prophetic Voices," 298.
59. Sumner, "Cession of Russian America," 32–33.
60. Sumner, "Are We a Nation?," 42–52.
61. *Ibid.*, 51.
62. *Ibid.*, 51.
63. Sumner, "Cession of Russian America," 46; emphasis added.
64. Sumner, "Prophetic Voices," 306.
65. Sumner, "Are We a Nation?," 64–65.
66. James Madison, "Federalist No. 14," in *The Federalist*, ed. Jacob E. Cooke (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961).

TWO

“I had been crying in the wilderness”

John Muir’s Shifting Sublime Response

RICHARD D. BESEL AND BERNARD K. DUFFY



The Scottish-born naturalist, writer, and preservationist John Muir is the most significant founding figure of U.S. environmentalism. On this point there is widespread popular and scholarly agreement. According to Enos Mills, founder of Rocky Mountain National Park, Muir was “the grandest character in national park history.”¹ Environmental historian Roderick Nash, in his canonical work *Wilderness in the American Mind*, observes: “As a publicizer of the American wilderness Muir had no equal.”² Especially important to his public outreach efforts were his books and essays. Pulitzer prize-winning writer Edwin Way Teale says of Muir’s writing: “Never did he get enough of wildness. Of those who have written of nature surpassingly well—Gilbert White, Henry Thoreau, Richard Jeffries, W. H. Hudson—John Muir was the wildest.”³ Muir came to be known simply as the “father of preservationism.”⁴

Although a number of scholars in a variety of fields have already studied Muir’s highly influential written works, virtually nothing has been published about his oral defense of nature.⁵ This lack of scholarship is surprising, especially given Gifford Pinchot’s observation that Muir was “a most fascinating talker.”⁶ Theodore Roosevelt, whose own advocacy for the environment was legendary, highlights the importance of studying Muir’s speeches when comparing them to his written discourse: “John Muir talked even better than he wrote. His greatest influence was always upon those who were brought into personal contact with him.”⁷ In this chapter, we correct this paucity of scholarship by

turning to Muir's November 23, 1895, speech, "The National Parks and Forest Reservations," delivered in San Francisco to the Sierra Club, three years after its founding. Similar to his written works, Muir uses the speech to "recreate in his audience the sensation of mountain grandeur," feelings of awe, and spiritual renewal. In other words, he attempts to evoke from the audience what groundbreaking environmental rhetoric scholar Christine Oravec calls a "sublime response."⁸ Although the speech is consistent with the persuasive appeals used in his extraordinarily successful written works, we contend his speech also reveals a theoretical point of interest that his written texts do not: the rhetorical and environmental limitations of the sublime response. Rather than seeing the most sublime natural settings as places that were dangerous to humans, or locations that Edmund Burke claimed possessed "a sort of delightful horror, a sort of tranquility tinged with terror,"⁹ Muir sees them as places he could call "home." By removing fear from the sublime response, Muir paradoxically advocates for the protection of America's most beautiful locations while simultaneously inviting more people to indulge in "mental and physical reinvigoration" that, he eventually came to recognize, could despoil those very destinations irrevocably.

THE ADVENTUROUS JOHN MUIR

Drawing on experiences from his religious upbringing on his family farm in Wisconsin; his formal education in botany, biology, and geology; and his readings of the Concord philosophers (most notably Thoreau and Emerson); it is not surprising that elements of the sublime saturate Muir's rhetoric. The influences of both religion (Christianity and transcendentalism) and science shaped Muir's perceptions of the world from an early age. In his partial autobiography, *Story of My Boyhood and Youth*, Muir provides readers with recollections of his early experiences and a personal record of what has become the standard Muir biographical narrative.¹⁰

Daniel Muir, John's father, moved his family from their seaside home in Dunbar, Scotland, to an area outside of Portage, Wisconsin, in February of 1849. The young Muir, who had reveled in his experiences of "running ten and twenty miles at a stretch, watching the great storms beating the headlands, climbing craggy ruins of Dunbar Castle by the sea," soon found himself "put to the plough at the age of twelve, when his head scarcely reached above the handles."¹¹ A naturally curious boy, John found much to enjoy about his new surroundings and tried to absorb as much knowledge as he could. However, there was little time

for formal schooling, and John's father discouraged him from reading anything except the Bible. John memorized "the entire New Testament and three fourths of the Old."¹² Despite his father's resistance, John maintained his interest in classics, poetry, and science, borrowing books from neighbors and reading them before beginning his daily chores. For Muir, his father's discouragement to "get up in the morning and read" meant he was up at one o'clock, and happily so.¹³

As a teen, Muir spent hours a day "like the great Newton . . . inventing ingenious machines."¹⁴ At twenty-two, Muir was encouraged to enter a science fair. This encounter allowed him to see the students at the University of Wisconsin, where for four years Muir enrolled in natural science classes, with botany becoming his favorite subject. A successful inventor, Muir eventually found himself employed in a factory tinkering with machines to improve efficiency. After nearly losing his eyesight in an industrial accident, Muir vowed that should his sight return he would never again take it for granted. He chose not to pursue a degree but instead, in 1867, embarked on a botanical field trip that he later documents in *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf*. Although his destination was South America, Muir fell ill in Florida and never completed his trip. Disappointed, a year later the scientifically informed, intellectually curious, physically recovered, and spiritually guided Muir set sail for California via the Panama Canal.

The story of John Muir's arrival in California is now well-known to historians and environmentalists alike, approaching an almost mythic status thanks in large part to Muir's own recollections in *The Yosemite*. According to Muir: "Arriving by the Panama steamer, I stopped one day in San Francisco and then inquired for the nearest way out of town. 'But where do you want to go?' asked the man to whom I had applied for this important information. 'To any place that is wild,' I said."¹⁵ Shortly thereafter, Muir encountered the Sierras and Yosemite for the first time.

Although John Muir never fully adopted his father's strict religious views, he carried with him a deep sense of spirituality, which he ultimately grafted to his environmentalism. According to Teale, Muir was "repelled by the harsh fanaticism of his father's religion" and "affiliated himself with no formal creed. Yet he was intensely religious." Not surprisingly, Muir's understanding of religion and science would come together in such a way that he would see God's beauty in his new natural surroundings. Teale goes on to note:

The forests and the mountains formed his temple. His approach to nature was worshipful. He saw everything evolving yet everything the direct handiwork of God. There was a spiritual and

religious exaltation in his experiences with nature. And he came down from the mountains like some bearded prophet to preach of the beauty and healing he had found in this natural temple where he worshipped.¹⁶

Or, as Robert Underwood Johnson, editor of *Century* magazine, puts it: “In the wilderness Muir looked like John the Baptist, as portrayed in bronze by Donatello.”¹⁷ Once he set foot in Yosemite Valley, he became “a seeker after the sublime.”¹⁸

JOHN MUIR AND THE SUBLIME

The sublime as a subject of study has a long tradition, and, according to Oravec, “the sublime is the founding narrative—the primary trope—in the rhetoric of environmentalism.”¹⁹ Perhaps the first significant treatment of the topic is Longinus’s *On the Sublime*, a rhetoric text written in the first century concerned with the “eminence or perfection of language.”²⁰ Although Longinus’s view of the sublime was arguably too narrow, with its focus on language, an intellectual springboard had been provided for those who wished to theorize the sublime beyond its presence in speeches. The general Longinian observation that humans can be moved by external and natural grandeur would later influence eighteenth-century artists and scholars as they turned to the world around them for an alternative definition. Thinkers such as Immanuel Kant, in *Critique of Judgment*, and Edmund Burke, in *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas on the Sublime and Beautiful*, argued that the sublime was a kind of subjective response, one that is akin to fearful awe and personal insignificance. For Kant, to be sublime, “nature must be a source of fear. . . . Overhanging rocks, thunderclouds and lightening, volcanoes, hurricanes, the stormy ocean, high waterfalls—in comparison with their might, our power of resistance is of no account.”²¹ Similarly, “For Burke, the beautiful is human in scale, the sublime out of scale and threatening.”²² By the time Muir published his books in the nineteenth century, a cultural and philosophical foundation for understanding the sublime had already been established.

That Muir’s rhetoric attempts to evoke a sublime response from his audience is a well-established argument most clearly advanced by Oravec. Building on Samuel H. Monk’s *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England*, Oravec contends Muir’s written works consisted of three elements: Muir shares with audiences his

"immediate apprehension of a sublime object; a sense of personal insignificance akin to awe; and ultimately a kind of spiritual exaltation."²³ Although we generally agree with Oravec's assessment, we believe Muir's attempt to capture the sublime rhetorically downplays the sense of fear that haunts earlier naturalist writings. As a point of comparison, we turn to Henry David Thoreau, a person of significant influence on Muir.

Thoreau's mountain climbing essay "Ktaadn" is illustrative of nineteenth century representations of the natural sublime that preceded Muir's writings. Thoreau, with allusions to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, notes the awe-inspiring views atop New England's Mount Katahdin while at the same time questioning man's place in such hazardous territory. He wonders if man's presence in such "vast, Titanic" locations would be "a slight insult to the gods." Nature "does not smile on him as in the plains" when the climb is long and the air is thin.²⁴ Nature "was here something savage and awful, though beautiful."²⁵ While Kant would object to Thoreau's conflation of the sublime with the beautiful, the presence of a sensibility that finds its origins in the eighteenth century is clear nonetheless.

In contrast to Thoreau's view of sublimity in natural places where the divine admonishes humans, "This ground is not prepared for you," Muir removes the sense of fearful awe and replaces it with a sense of spiritual belonging and longing.²⁶ Noted environmental historian William Cronon has made similar observations:

But even as it came to embody the awesome power of the sublime, wilderness was also being tamed—not just by those who were building settlements in its midst but also by those who most celebrated its inhuman beauty. By the second half of the nineteenth century, the terrible awe that Wordsworth and Thoreau regarded as the appropriately pious stance to adopt in the presence of their mountaintop God was giving way to a much more comfortable, almost sentimental demeanor. As more and more tourists sought out the wilderness as a spectacle to be looked at and enjoyed for its great beauty, the sublime in effect became domesticated. The wilderness was still sacred, but the religious sentiments it evoked were more those of a pleasant parish church than those of a grand cathedral or a harsh desert retreat. The writer who best captures this late romantic sense of domesticated sublime is undoubtedly John Muir, whose descriptions of Yosemite and the Sierra Nevada reflected none of the anxiety or terror one finds in earlier writers.²⁷

Indeed, it would seem unusual that Muir's works would evoke a sense of fear given Teale's observations about Muir's general disposition:

In this world where men are afraid they will catch a cold, afraid they will lose their way, afraid they will be eaten by bears or bitten by snakes or touch poison ivy or fall over a log, John Muir, faring forth into the wilderness unarmed and alone, was the man unafraid. He was unafraid of danger, of hardship, of wildness, of being alone, of facing death. He was unafraid of public opinion. He was unafraid of work and poverty and hunger. He knew them all and he remained unafraid.²⁸

And why should the God of his father be a God to fear when he created such "domesticated" beauty? As writer Gretel Ehrlich observed: "The more widely he wandered in the Sierra and the more painstakingly he scrutinized nature's bounty, the more ubiquitous his god became."²⁹ In *The Yosemite*, nature is not a source of fear but of empowerment: "Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where Nature may heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul alike."³⁰ Nature was Muir's literary muse.

That Muir's rhetoric downplays the use of fear in the sublime response seems clear at this point. However, this same rhetorical approach was used in his oral advocacy. In his 1895 speech Muir also hints at his awareness of a limitation and danger in the sublime response when fear is absent.

JOHN MUIR AS PUBLIC SPEAKER

Though "Muir's books were minor best-sellers, and the nation's foremost periodicals competed for his essays," Muir did not enjoy writing.³¹ Ehrlich points out that Muir did not think of himself as a "literary man."³² And for all of the praise bestowed upon his writings, many have observed that Muir was an even better public speaker and conversationalist, although sometimes overly assertive in demeanor, perhaps especially for those who had not taken one of Muir's natural pilgrimages. His speeches were paeans of nature that had a contagious effect on those open to his proselytizing.

That Muir enjoyed speaking more than writing is not lost on many observers. For Teale, "Muir talked easily, fluently. But he wrote laboriously, rewriting, polishing, complaining that it took him a month to write a chapter that could be read in an hour."³³ He goes on to note:

"His voice was pleasant, rather low-pitched, a good speaking voice. He had only a slight Scotch burr. Humorous and something of a tease, he also had decided opinions and delighted in argument. Sometimes his assertiveness made people assume he was provoked when he was not."³⁴ An example of Muir's "assertiveness" can be seen in a journal entry from John Burroughs after the two had a "conversation":

He likes to get in the first cut and follow it up. It delights him to see you wince. . . . See how tender Muir assumes to be toward animals! Yet he likes to walk over the flesh of his fellow men with spurs in his soles. . . . Muir had too much of the rough, bruising experience in his life, and I had too little. It made him callous, and it made me a tenderfoot.³⁵

At times, Muir's conversational style could be unrelenting. It was not unusual for Muir to have interactions that would last hours; his "conversational endurance was legendary."³⁶ Ehrlich has even noted that, on some occasions, Muir's one-sided encounters would not end until his wife "or a friend shunted him upstairs into the grim solitude of the writing room."³⁷ However, the tenderfoot Burroughs would also note that Muir was "greater as a talker than as a writer" and that "talk came easily and showed him at his best."³⁸ And how could it not, for "he spoke with the fire of the old Covenanters."³⁹

Despite anything Muir could have written or said about his sublime encounters in nature, he believed it was only through direct experience that anyone could come to understand God. For Muir, nature—and God—were ineffable. Muir's rhetoric was merely an invitation to readers, an invitation that was epistemologically inferior to actual experience. Words were but the pale representation of life in the wilderness:

I have a low opinion of books; they are but piles of stones set up to show coming travelers where other minds have been, or at best signal smokes to call attention. Cadmus and all the other inventors of letters receive a thousand-fold more credit than they deserve. No amount of word-making will ever make a single soul to *know* these mountains. As well seek to warm the naked and frostbitten by lectures on caloric and pictures of flame. One day's exposure to mountains is better than cartloads of books. See how willingly Nature poses herself upon photographers' plates. No earthly chemicals are so sensitive as those of the human soul. All that is required is exposure, and purity of material. "The pure in heart shall see God!"⁴⁰

By removing fear from the sublime response, and encouraging audiences to see nature for themselves, Muir's rhetoric was remarkably successful. However, even Muir recognized the potential danger to the spiritual places he so loved if this particular articulation of the sublime were too successful. This is especially clear in his 1895 Sierra Club speech.

THE DANGERS OF A FEARLESS SUBLIME RESPONSE

Held in the Academy of Sciences, San Francisco, the 1895 annual meeting of the Sierra Club was brought to order by Vice President Warren Olney, who almost immediately introduced "President of the evening" Joseph Le Conte. Le Conte made clear the meeting was called for "the purpose of considering the important question of the reservation of our timber lands, and thus preserving them." Although John Muir easily could have presided, he did not due to his speaking obligations. The announced topic, "The National Parks and Forest Reservations," drew "a large audience of members and friends of the Club," according to the *Sierra Club Bulletin*.⁴¹

In his introductory paragraph, Muir notes via *diminutio* that he is, perhaps, the wrong man to give the speech although his audience surely realized he was the best qualified to do so. Expressing his discomfort in having to deliver a speech on "preservation and management" of parks, he attempts to lower audience expectations and criticizes the legal profession by calling it "lawyer's work," something with which he does not identify.⁴² Shortly thereafter, as in most introductions, Muir attempts to enhance his credibility:

I have not lagged behind in the work of exploring our grand wildernesses, and in calling everybody to come and enjoy the thousand blessings they have to offer. I have faithfully inspected gorges, glaciers, and forests, climbed mountains and trees, and lived with the wild animals, and, as best I could, I have talked and written about them, never sparing myself.⁴³

By noting as he had done in his written works his faithful inspections of material nature, Muir continued to use what Oravec called the "true mountaineer" persona to bolster the legitimacy of his claims.⁴⁴ The *diminutio* is brought to full development when Muir then notes in the end of his introduction that giving speeches and leading in "society affairs" is "unwild work." Indeed, "If any harm should come to the woods from my awkward, unskilled handling of the subject this evening, then you

may lay blame where it belongs—lay it on our Vice-President."⁴⁵ While Muir attempts to understate his rhetorical abilities, it is nonetheless clear to those listening that Muir is neither awkward nor unskilled.

In the second paragraph, where listeners would expect to find an explicit preview, one is glaringly absent. Muir, favoring an extemporaneous delivery style and still managing expectations, instead informs the audience that he planned to "simply trust memory and say what I could in the measured time allowed," for the "compact address" he had planned kept "radiating out in a dozen different directions."⁴⁶ Despite the appearance of a rather improvised address, the body of the speech reveals that Muir had a lifetime of already prepared material from which to draw.

Muir begins the body of his speech with an anecdote about his recent trip to Yosemite. A master of understatement, Muir's "easy six weeks' saunter" provided the inventional resources necessary to comment on the current state of the national park region. And Muir's assessment was generally positive. Federal protection had allowed the sublime beauty of the park that had withered due to human recklessness to return once again. That Muir's understanding of the sublime is one of fearless beauty is partially evidenced in this section of the speech: "Every tree in the park is waving its arms for joy," "lilies now swing and ring their bells," and the chaparral "have put forth new shoots and leaves, and are now blooming again in all their shaggy beauty and fragrance."⁴⁷ For Muir, "in the work of beauty, nature never stops."⁴⁸

After reporting on the current state of Yosemite, Muir takes his audience back to October 1, 1890, when Yosemite National Park was created, to remind listeners of why federal protection was needed in the first place. He laments: "For many years I had been crying in the wilderness, 'Save the forests!'"⁴⁹ It was the "uncountable sheep" that "had eaten and trampled" the sublime flower gardens.⁵⁰ It was the greedy shepherds and the careless visitors who were the threat to this natural, Edenic temple. For Muir, this was a moral and spiritual battle, "a part of the eternal conflict between right and wrong, and we cannot expect to see the end of it."⁵¹ Indeed, the "smallest forest reserve, and the first I ever heard of, was in the Garden of Eden."⁵² This brief mention of the first reserve he had ever heard of provides a transition into Muir's discussion of his first attempt to protect sublime wilderness—the lake meadow where he spent much of his childhood.

Approximately one-third of the way into his presentation, Muir continues his reverse chronological ordering by addressing his experiences in Wisconsin. At first, mention of his childhood home seems forced, unnatural. After all, what could a small farm in the Midwest have to do with the grandeur of Yosemite? However, to dismiss Muir's

recollection at this point in the speech would be a mistake. A closer inspection reveals the deeply personal nature of preservation for Muir; it was in Wisconsin where Muir's principled inclinations first surfaced:

The preservation of specimen sections of natural flora—bits of pure wilderness—was a fond, favorite notion of mine long before I heard of national parks. When my father came from Scotland, he settled in a fine wild region in Wisconsin, beside a small glacier lake bordered with white pondlillies. And on the north side of the lake, just below our house, there was a carex meadow full of charming flowers—cypripediums, pogonias, calopogons, asters, goldenrods, etc.,—and around the margin of the meadow many nooks rich in flowering ferns and heathworts.⁵³

Calling this area a “fine wild region” is also, perhaps, Muir's way of charitably forgiving his father for farming in an area that the Wisconsin conservationist Aldo Leopold would later call “poor land, but rich country” due to the soil's sandy qualities.⁵⁴ Muir went on to recount his attempts to preserve the lake meadow so dear to him:

And when I was about to wander away on my long rambles I was sorry to leave that precious meadow unprotected; therefore, I said to my brother-in-law, who then owned it, “Sell me the forty acres of lake meadow, and keep it fenced, and never allow cattle or hogs to break into it, and I will gladly pay you whatever you say. I want to keep it untrampled for the sake of its ferns and flowers; and even if I should never see it again, the beauty of its lilies and orchids are so pressed into my mind I shall always enjoy looking back at them in imagination, even across seas and continents, and perhaps after I am dead.”⁵⁵

Ironically, Muir, the single most influential preservationist in American history, had failed several times to protect the wilderness of his childhood home. However, it is not surprising that this portion of the speech would influence generations of later environmentalists, including Aldo Leopold.

In the “Good Oak” section of his canonical and posthumously published 1949 work *A Sand County Almanac*, Aldo Leopold reflects on the life of a tree that was recently struck by lightning. In his attempts to saw it into smaller pieces for firewood, Leopold notices the concentric circles that evidence the oak's many years. While cutting through each

ring, he comments on what important events had happened during each respective year to instruct readers about the importance of nature and conservation. As the saw bites into the 1860s, Leopold encounters the pith year of the tree, 1865. In this section of the story, the coincidental birth year of the felled giant, Leopold turns back to Muir:

In that year John Muir offered to buy from his brother, who then owned the home farm thirty miles east of my oak, a sanctuary for the wildflowers that had gladdened his youth. His brother declined to part with the land, but he could not suppress the idea: 1865 still stands in Wisconsin history as the birthyear [*sic*] of mercy for things natural, wild, and free.⁵⁶

One wonders if Muir was not hoping to reclaim and, in a sense, perfect the experiences of his youth. Kenneth Burke explains the impulse toward perfection and repetition when he discusses piety. Following Santayana, Burke agrees that piety is a "loyalty to the sources of our being," a "sense of what properly goes with what."⁵⁷ One might argue that Muir hoped to correct the environmental misdeeds of his Wisconsin forebears because they did not properly align with his preservationist ideals. His father's farm did not possess the grandeur of Yosemite, but as a child Muir perceived sublimity there nonetheless. There he found a chapel of nature, while in Yosemite he would find its cathedral. As an adult he could correct the transgressions of his father and brother-in-law by advocating for sublimity on a grand scale. Muir developed not just a sublime response to nature but a pious response, undergirded by an intense spirituality. The significance of Muir's flashback to his childhood in his 1895 speech cannot be underestimated. At that time, according to Leopold, we find the birth year of mercy "for things natural, wild, and free." As 1865 marks the pith year of Leopold's tree, so too does it mark the pith year of Muir's preservationist and rhetorical efforts.

Although Muir was unable to convince his brother-in-law to preserve a small portion of the family farm, nearly half a century later others attempted to fulfill Muir's wishes. Leopold wrote a letter to Ernie Swift, director of the Wisconsin Conservation Department, one year before publishing *A Sand County Almanac*. He asked Swift to make the old Muir farm "Wisconsin's first state natural area."⁵⁸ One week later, on John Muir's birthday, April 21, 1948, Aldo Leopold died. Not until 1957 were the first forty acres of the old farm dedicated as a county park with Muir's granddaughter delivering the keynote address.⁵⁹

Just as Leopold's saw worked its way back to the oak's year of origin, and just as his saw "reverses its orientation in history," so, too, did

Muir's speech once again return to the present, eventually returning him to Yosemite.⁶⁰ Audience members, historically and morally informed, were primed for the remainder of Muir's speech.

Halfway into Muir's speech, signs of the "fearless sublime" and the need for federal protection are clearly articulated. However, at this point in Muir's speech the limitations of the sublime response also become visible. Although Muir was "calling everybody to come and enjoy the thousand blessings" America's wilderness areas had to offer, he also observed later that "each year the number of campers increases, and, of course, destructive trampling and hacking becomes heavier from season to season."⁶¹ In Muir's estimation, "For every one that I found mountaineering back of Yosemite in the High Sierra, ten years ago, I this year met more than a hundred."⁶² The very discourse that allowed audiences to appreciate nature's sublime beauty and argue for its protection also made those very audiences more likely to seek out an authentic Yosemite experience. And what was there to fear? Muir's understanding of the sublime sanitized it, removing any sense of terror or hesitation.

Unlike the understanding of the sublime expressed by Immanuel Kant, Edmund Burke, or Henry David Thoreau—one in which fearful might meets personal insignificance—Muir's anecdotes reveal that one should not fear God's natural temple. In *The Mountains of California*, Muir explicitly engages the "timid traveler,"

fresh from the sedimentary levels of the lowlands, these highways, however picturesque and grand, seem terribly forbidding—cold, dead, gloomy gashes in the bones of the mountains, and of all Nature's ways the ones to be most cautiously avoided. Yet they are full of the finest and most telling examples of Nature's love; and though hard to travel, none are safer.⁶³

He advises: "Fear not, therefore, to try the mountain-passes. They will kill care, save you from deadly apathy, set you free, and call forth every faculty into vigorous, enthusiastic action. Even the sick should try these so-called dangerous passes, because for every unfortunate they kill, they cure a thousand."⁶⁴ This same fearless, domesticated sublime response is present in his speech, absent the offhand reference to "unfortunates" who perish. Shortly after noting the surprising number of new hikers and campers, Muir offers the following: "Many of these young mountaineers were girls, in parties of ten or fifteen, making bright pictures as they tramped merrily along through the forest aisles, with the sparkle and exhilaration of the mountains in their eyes."⁶⁵ Nature was not to be feared; if the infirm and youthful could bask in God's glorious creation,

what was there to fear for the authentic mountaineer? Muir's address is in some measure a verbal reverie to match his experiences in the mountains. He later recounts a trip following the Merced into the Sierra foothills where he was warned "not to attempt to go to the Valley so early in the season, as the snow was ten feet deep on the mountains."⁶⁶ But rather than turning back, Muir pushed onward. According to Bergon:

Storms, floods, winds, and other hardships that were merely endured by earlier adventurers became delightful experiences to Muir. Sensation achieved a religious intensity, and mountaineering became not an ordeal of conquest or self-testing, but a chance to experience our "spiritual affinities" with mountains, trees, and glaciers—all the "Majesty of the Inanimate" that was the preoccupation of Muir's life and work.⁶⁷

Muir did not find the warning he received in Coulterville in any way deterring: "But this news was only a joyful exhilaration, and I pushed on, my mind glowing with visions of pine-trees I had heard of, ten feet in diameter, snow ten feet deep, and, beyond these riches, the Yosemite rocks and waterfalls."⁶⁸

Three-quarters into his speech, after having obliterated any sense of fear in the sublime response of his listeners, Muir highlights the need to experience nature directly: "Few are altogether deaf to the preaching of pine-trees. Their sermons on the mountains go to our hearts; and if people in general could be got into the woods, even for once, to hear the trees speak for themselves, all difficulties in the way of forest preservation would vanish."⁶⁹ In the California wilderness one could find trees "of the highest value, spiritual and material, so that even the angels of heaven might well be eager to come down and camp in their leafy temples."⁷⁰

One also observes in this section of the speech a shift in Muir's view of the sublime in his discussion of Mount Shasta. Oravec points to Muir's discussion of the mountain in *Picturesque California* as evidence that he subordinated humans to the elements, oftentimes resulting in "destruction and death."⁷¹ However, the 1888 view gave way to a more gentle interpretation in the 1905 speech. Muir recalls a conversation with Asa Gray and Joseph Hooker that took place near a "camp-fire on Mt. Shasta." The focus was on the "beauty and grandeur of the trees" rather than the slightly more dangerous description offered in *Picturesque California*.⁷² From this statement, Muir then argues that the Sierra forests must be protected. Mount Shasta shifts from being a danger to humans to something that benefits humans: "The welfare of the people

in the valleys of California and the welfare of the trees on the mountains are so closely related that the farmers might say that oranges grow on pine-trees, and wheat, and grass.”⁷³

In the final paragraphs of Muir’s speech, the limitation of the sublime response emerges yet again. Muir fully realized that his audiences could be swayed to protect nature’s holy locations; however, he also realized the dangers in creating a desire to visit the sublime areas being protected. While Muir calls on his audience to expand federal protection to other areas, such as the Sierra Forest Reserve, he also warns: “But we must remember that after all trespassers are kept off the parks and reservations and running fires prevented, much more will remain to be done.”⁷⁴ Creating parks, for Muir, was in and of itself a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition to preserve sublime nature.

CONCLUSION

Muir’s rhetoric is undoubtedly an important part of American environmental history. But observers would be remiss in believing his words remain buried in the past. For biographer Thurman Wilkins, Muir remains “at the very cutting edge of present-day environmentalism, his concept of wilderness exerting as much vitality today as when he lived and worked.”⁷⁵ Muir remains, in the words of Edwin Teale, “the most eloquent and powerful voice raised in defense of nature” and the “spearhead of the western movement to preserve wild beauty.”⁷⁶ Indeed, “no one before Muir had succeeded in forging that concern into effective appeals to a national public.”⁷⁷ As we have examined in this chapter, Muir’s success can be credited, in large part, to his rhetorical use of the sublime.

While John Muir’s written texts have been explored by a number of scholars, we turned to his November 23, 1895, speech, “The National Parks and Forest Reservations,” as a way to examine his use of the sublime in his oral defense of nature. Similar to his written works, Muir downplayed notions of fear, preserved a sense of religious awe, and encouraged audience members to experience nature directly. This was not surprising given John Burroughs’s observation that Muir needed “a continent for his playground” and was “probably the truest lover of nature . . . we have yet had.”⁷⁸ Muir wanted others to experience nature as he had, as a place “merged with a pantheistic cosmos. God, or the supernatural, became identical with nature, or the living material world.”⁷⁹ It was in his natural home where Muir felt at ease, spiritually renewed. His use of the sublime was remarkably effective in mobilizing

the preservationist tendencies of a nation. City dwellers wished to protect the very locations Muir had so eloquently described in his written and spoken words. However, these very appeals to sublime nature also created the desire to see those lands, and, thus, allow us to realize a limitation to the use of the sublime in environmental discourse. Muir realized this limitation in his 1895 speech, and environmentalists are still dealing with its implications.

That Muir's insight is still relevant today can be seen in the works of forestry and national parks scholars. According to Urs Gimmi and colleagues, preserving the sublime materiality found within national parks ironically leads to further pressure being applied to the surrounding areas outside of the boundaries. In other words, the notion that a rhetoric detailing the value of a land area can not only lead to protection of that area but also to the desire to live near that area. For Gimmi and colleagues, their case studies "empirically document accelerated growth rates in surrounding areas after park establishment."⁸⁰ Looking back at Muir, we must not only appreciate what appeals to sublime nature have helped us to accomplish, but we must also remember Muir's observation that "much more will need to be done."⁸¹

For Christine Oravec, Muir was the "articulate and persuasive spokesman for the preservation of wilderness."⁸² No wonder, then, that Rachel Carson—an environmental giant in her own right—returned to Muir's words in the final months of her life. After delivering her own speech in San Francisco in 1964, during her first trip to California, she visited Muir Woods. With then president of the Sierra Club David Brower, the wheelchair-bound Carson "paid final homage to one who led the way to her own form of prophetic witness."⁸³ Muir brought "light to the benighted victims of civilization" then and continues to do so today.⁸⁴

NOTES

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 9. Edmund Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas on the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Adam Philips (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 123.
 10. See Muir's *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth*, in *Muir: Nature Writings*, ed. William Cronon (New York: The Library of America, 1997).
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 24. Henry David Thoreau, "Ktaadn," in *The Wilderness Reader*, ed. Frank Bergon (New York: Mentor, 1980), 130–131.
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29. Gretel Ehrlich, "Introduction" to John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra* (New York: Penguin, 1987), xiii.
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78. Brooks, *Speaking for Nature*, 16. Thurman Wilkins quotes Burroughs as saying "that we have ever had." We have decided to use the quotation that corresponds best with Burroughs's journal entries. See the accounts offered in James Perrin Warren, *John Burroughs and the Place of Nature* (Athens: University of Georgia Press), 115; Wilkins, *John Muir*, xiv.
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THREE

Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressive Impulses of Conservation

LEROY G. DORSEY



The conservation movement at the turn of the twentieth century provided its share of drama for public consumption. On one side there were business tycoons and political advocates who appeared flagrant in their disregard for nature. Timber barons, Jack Shepherd noted, had “enjoyed a cut-and-run policy” that “left millions of acres of once-productive forests barren of trees and destroyed by erosion.”¹ Loggers appeared so set to reap economic benefits from their indiscriminate practices that philosopher and poet Henry David Thoreau claimed that if “loggers were tall enough . . . they would lay waste the sky.”² Corporate mining interests, using an 1872 mining law that had not anticipated granting those entities such widespread use of coveted land, ravaged forested areas to clear a path to minerals.³ Wholesale animal slaughter was routine at the time and not just for the selling of animal fur and meat. For instance, the U.S. government regularly hired Native Americans to destroy buffaloes by the thousands to prevent the beasts from causing train wrecks and destroying telegraph poles.⁴ While business interests seemed to place the environment under siege, politicians also appeared indifferent to calls for the protection of nature. House Representative “Uncle Joe” Cannon famously declared, “Not one cent for scenery,” about legislation for conservation—a view shared by many of his colleagues.⁵

On the other side of the drama was Theodore Roosevelt. Historians have acknowledged Roosevelt as a champion of conservation for the bureaucratic trickery he performed to safeguard the environment. For example, the president’s famed “midnight reserves” strategy allowed him to place millions of acres of forests under national control before he

had to sign a spending bill with an attached amendment that robbed him of that power to designate national reserves.⁶ Roosevelt tended to make policy without much congressional input. His “I so declare it” proclamation once established federal bird refuges on Pelican Island, Florida, after he discovered that there was no law preventing him from doing it.⁷ According to David Brinkley, Roosevelt saw the Antiquities Act as an institutional “contraption” that allowed him the power to “dictate land policy in the West” and sidestep Congress. When Congress refused the president’s request to prevent mining operations in the Grand Canyon, he used that act to claim hundreds of thousands of acres in Arizona as “prehistoric ruins,” thus protecting that area.⁸

Roosevelt felt himself under attack from several quarters. In his autobiography, he noted that “many rich men . . . were stirred to hostility” because of his environmental efforts, and “they used the Congressmen they controlled” to block him.⁹ His institutional efforts did find some success despite the intransigence of Congress.¹⁰ But his bits of political deftness do not completely explain how he transformed conservation into such a compelling public topic during his lifetime. While other major advocates of conservation also lent their voices to the cause during the modern era, and the accomplishments of later presidents may have overshadowed Roosevelt’s contributions, Frank Smith concluded that “without the impetus of [his] Presidency,” the conservation movement “would have been far less successful.”¹¹ Paul Cutright echoed that sentiment, claiming that Roosevelt, “more than any other man, was responsible for awakening in the American people the desire to make effective and continuing use of existing natural resources.”¹² Roosevelt may have had some relative success in circumventing Congress *institutionally*, but he had far greater success in going around Congress *rhetorically* to dramatize and popularize conservation.

Roosevelt’s success in privileging the notion of conservation in the national consciousness was particularly striking given the plethora of other weighty issues the country faced. For many, the Progressive Era of economic, political, ethnic, and social concerns threatened to stall, if not unravel, American progress.¹³ These issues diverted attention away from the environment. Roosevelt’s speeches and writings, though, helped to make the natural resources of the nation matter at a time when their protection was not considered important. In other words, he worked to adjust people’s expectations regarding conservation, as well as to reshape the meaning of the term itself.¹⁴ To do that, he attempted to embed the concept of conservation within the progressive impulses of the era. Specifically, he employed the arguments of the Progressive movement to undergird conservation and to reconcile the movement’s

contradictory arguments in a way that promoted environmental concerns and helped to create a more receptive audience for his platform.

With the changes in economic control and social demographics influencing American development, progressive advocates offered two solutions—religious progressives called for a return to a higher level of morality in public affairs, while scientific progressives urged an embrace of practical efficiency to guide human interrelations. Roosevelt interpreted those issues within the framework of his life as a naturalist and frontiersman, endeavors that he believed acted as a template for modern behavior and that became a subject of his “bully pulpit” to capture media attention. Thus, he positioned conservation as a moral imperative during his Western States tour in 1903. He also contextualized how conserving the environment meant using it prudently as dictated by the federal government, specifically during his Governors Conference on Conservation in 1908. Finally, he synthesized the moral and the practical dimensions of conservation by elevating them in service to patriotism—a patriotism he defined as the physical ability to experience and to protect nature.

COMPETING ANXIETIES IN MODERN AMERICA

Economic and ethical issues clashed in late nineteenth-century culture. According to Maureen Flanagan, political and corporate corruption appeared the standard in public affairs, so much so that many believed the “democratic ideas of equality and opportunity” were in jeopardy.¹⁵ Laissez-faire economic policies and corruptible public officials allowed the creation of corporate entities—“holding companies”—that absorbed their smaller competitors, concentrating the control of production and distribution into fewer and fewer companies. It came as no surprise, then, that by the early twentieth century, over half of the country’s industrial production had been produced by only the top 4 percent of American businesses.¹⁶ Michael McGerr noted that the “wealthy capitalists, manufacturers, merchants, landowners, executives” and other professionals “owned the majority of the nation’s resources” and looked with disdain at those people less well-off who had not attained a similar, privileged status. According to the wealthy, the poor deserved their lot; as a result, Alan Trachtenberg observed, business owners and other wealthy individuals moved out of congested cities for “secluded, clean, and fresh suburban areas.”¹⁷

Moving from a small business economy in rural America to an industrial one in a city created an underclass. “As artisans, tradesmen,

and farmers were replaced by machines,” John Chambers wrote, “former skilled workers joined the ranks of propertyless wage earners.”¹⁸ Some of those “wage earners” rebelled by forming labor unions and striking for better compensation and safety, while still others challenged their corporate employers through more violent means.¹⁹ Rich and poor alike, though, faced a series of economic upheavals at the turn of the twentieth century. Multiple depressions across several decades indiscriminately crushed the livelihoods of citizens.²⁰ Ironically, advances in technology had not only transformed industrialism and the means to become rich, they had also increased the breadth and speed of news dissemination, and, as McGerr concluded, differing groups of people were made “constantly aware of one another,” which helped to generate much of the “friction” at the time.²¹ America’s changing economic, political, and social landscape, with its attending ills of greed and corruption, had created growing divisions in national unity. From such chaotic impulses the Progressive movement emerged.

Scholars generally agree that the Progressive movement was widespread. According to Flanagan, historians have argued that the movement included “upper class, middle class, working class, or urban ethnic immigrants,” all working at “national, state, and local—even international—levels” to bring changes to modern America.²² Those advocates of change tackled a dizzying array of topics, including employment rules, race relations, government reach, immigration and assimilation, women’s rights, education, incorporation of businesses, temperance, economic policies, and so on.²³ As Richard Hofstadter recognized, however, the scope of the Progressive movement makes it difficult to define. Perhaps the most accurate account of the period from sometime in the late 1800s through to the early decades of the twentieth century was that it represented a “rather vague and not altogether cohesive or consistent movement.” The common assumption surrounding the various advocates in the movement involved the restoration of some type of “economic individualism” that had seemingly been destroyed by the “great corporation and the corrupt political machine.”²⁴ Rhetorician J. Michael Hogan echoed that sentiment, observing that progressivism was more akin to an emotional, “gut-level” reaction to destructive social changes where people “advocated a wide variety of specific initiatives,” with many of those initiatives, and the assumptions undergirding them, appearing contradictory.²⁵ The conflicting nature of the Progressive movement played out most starkly between the Christian and the Scientific Progressives.

For the Christian Progressives, corruption in American culture could be traced to the weakening of individuals’ moral resolve. They believed

that the Victorian Age had emphasized individual responsibility through the upholding of Christian values. That “old model,” Clifford Putney argued, “stressed stoicism, gentility, and self-denial.” But without that moral rigor guiding men’s behavior, as evidenced by the greed of “big business to wipe out the ‘little guy,’” and with the inability of both parties to control economic forces, men seemed “unmanly” and in need of “physical fitness” and “religious conviction.”²⁶ With the belief that material progress had led to rising levels of greed, selfishness, and physical enervation, Christian Progressives argued that the answer to those problems rested in reenergizing the public’s belief about the “law of love” that God had wanted for his children to embrace—the fundamental precept that people should treat others as they themselves want to be treated. “Here was the ethical distillation of Christianity,” David Danbom wrote, “apparently invulnerable to assaults from natural and social science and to denominational and theological wrangling.”²⁷ The divine nature and simplicity of this message made it extremely popular during the Progressive Era since it offered a “happy, harmonious, united society . . . bound together by a single standard of values.”²⁸

It was this preoccupation with moral character, however, that Scientific Progressives found wanting. They shared many of the same assumptions that their Social Gospel counterparts held, such as the notion that materialism and selfishness were ruining the country’s development. But they denied a belief in “homogenized Christianity” as the best means to save the nation.²⁹ Rather than focus on the individual’s moral salvation, Scientific Progressives emphasized that the system-as-a-whole was the most important aspect to influence. As Danbom observed, Scientific Progressives promoted policies that positioned an elite class, “armed with the tools of empirical analysis,” in positions of authority in business and government; these elites “could manipulate the citizens in such a way that their behavior served society, regardless of [the citizens’] character.”³⁰ Efficiency in the workplace became a virtue.³¹ The scientific management of workplace labor endorsed a sort of salvation focused on the practical. If people could be satisfied at work, Danbom concluded, because they had achieved an efficient means to work, the selfishness and violence of the era would disappear: “Professional training lifted trainees above their petty concerns, giving them an elevated view of themselves and their social role, making them selfless, and directing their energies toward social service.”³²

The clash between Christian and Scientific Progressives illuminated a critical tension in modern America. Many people wanted to turn to the Church for answers to the ills plaguing the nation. But Christian Progressives, who focused on the nebulous task of perfecting morality,

seemed largely uninterested in pursuing legislative policies that could address some of those ills.³³ Scientific Progressives shied away from discussions about individual character, offering instead what appeared to be practical and objective approaches to solving problems. But they came under fire from workers and employers both, who saw the virtue of efficiency as soulless and the so-called elites exhibiting the same greed and immorality as everyone else.³⁴ By holding rigidly to their respective positions, these discrete ends of the progressive spectrum pulled Americans apart. Theodore Roosevelt exploited both branches of progressivism to find common ground about the environment.

THE ROOSEVELTIAN INFLUENCE

Theodore Roosevelt's childhood experiences have become the stuff of legend. His asthma, sickly constitution, and weak frame, coupled with his recognition that he was not strong enough to hold his own when picked on by other children, led him to strengthen his body. He became an avid athlete, challenging himself with boxing and wrestling matches, hiking, and horseback riding.³⁵ Well before concerns about the weakening of American masculinity had come to the fore at the turn of the twentieth century, Roosevelt had seized opportunities to reinvigorate himself through outdoor exercise.

Roosevelt appreciated the environmental arena as both a site of competition and one of education. Following the deaths of his mother and first wife in 1884, he retreated from public life and headed to the ranching life of North Dakota.³⁶ Taking any opportunity he could to engage with nature, he relished the hunt and bagged his share of trophies. But unlike other hunters, he expressed conservationist leanings. "From the very first days of his residence in the West," Cutright noted, Roosevelt "inveighed against the hunter who shoots indiscriminately." Roosevelt made the distinction between hunting for food and personal trophy versus economic gain.³⁷ Cutright surmised that the young huntsman's western adventures "gave him a broader knowledge of animals," as he witnessed firsthand the number of species slaughtered by "game butchers." Roosevelt's trek through forested areas also gave him the chance to see how loggers had destroyed pristine groves, leading to large areas of erosion.³⁸

However, Roosevelt's sporting life, and the determination to prove his manliness, counted as only part of the influences in making him a crusader for conservation. His intellectual pursuits guided him as well. From childhood, he loved to read, most often about natural history,

particularly birds. He inventoried hundreds of flora and fauna specimens, turning his bedroom into a makeshift natural history museum.³⁹ Upon entering Harvard as a young adult in 1876, he began the study of natural history but eventually pursued other interests. Roosevelt changed majors because he believed that “Harvard utterly ignored the training of the outdoor naturalist,” insisting that “students live in a world of tissues and embryos . . . all dead things, instead of in the woods and the fields . . . where living things proclaimed their equal right to attention.”⁴⁰ After college he became a prolific author, penning several books about living on a ranch, hunting, and natural history.⁴¹

Roosevelt carried his conservationist leanings with him upon his ascension to the presidency in 1901, following the assassination of President McKinley. He worked to overturn decades of attacks on the environment, such as that caused by the abuse of public land laws. For example, the federal government, in an attempt to entice settlers to the West, had created the Homestead Act of 1862. This act had basically given free farmland to any white man who wanted it; fraud and corruption placed much of the land into unscrupulous businesses’ hands.⁴² Roosevelt, however, would use his institutional power actively to bring abusers of the environment to justice. “Unbeknownst to Roosevelt’s opponents” in 1902, Brinkley revealed, “his desk at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue had already become a rubber-stamp center for any serious-minded conservationist or natural resources specialist with an honest agenda.”⁴³ In a well-publicized case, Oregon’s governor informed the president that various mining and lumber companies abused laws to acquire prime real estate from public holdings. Roosevelt initiated a thorough investigation that led to a three-year prosecution leading to some resignations and convictions of several public officials.⁴⁴ While impressive, Roosevelt brought more than his institutional authority to bear on the problem. He brought the power of what Jeffrey Tulis has described as the “rhetorical presidency.”

According to Tulis, presidents prior to the twentieth century tended to refrain from actively seeking public support. They had embraced the Founding Fathers’ cautions about demagoguery. While rhetorical scholars subsequently demonstrated that even early presidents used public rhetoric to influence legislative and cultural concerns, it was perhaps Roosevelt who best popularized the notion of a chief executive’s rhetorical ability to go beyond the use of just institutional power.⁴⁵ He used his “bully pulpit” as a public stage to popularize his ideas and to “go over the heads of Congress.”⁴⁶ Roosevelt seemingly understood that by communicating his character and competence—the hallmarks of rhetorical leadership—about various issues, he could gather public opinion to his

side, or at least appear to gather it.⁴⁷ This proved no more evident than in his campaign for conservation. Stephen Ponder noted that Roosevelt “charmed and bedazzled reporters” to construct an appealing personality that would contrast with perceptions of his recalcitrant opponents on the issue.⁴⁸ Roosevelt capitalized on the media’s fascination with him, using it to promote his life and shape the reception of his political pursuits. Cutright summarized one of the most apocryphal tales about the president that occurred while Roosevelt was on a bear hunt in 1902:

On the very first day of the hunt, some other members of the party caught up with a small brown bear. They stunned it with a blow over the head, tied it to a tree, and then sent a messenger after the President. Roosevelt . . . refused to shoot it. Instead, he told them to let it go. The newspaper dispatch released the next day, describing Roosevelt’s refusal, struck the eye of a . . . cartoonist for the *Washington Post*.

The cartoonist’s depiction of Roosevelt “drawing the line” at shooting a helpless animal “appealed to the public fancy as no other had done before.” Newspapers and magazines reprinted the cartoon millions of times, leading a toy manufacturer to create the Teddy bear.⁴⁹ Bringing the press with him, demonstrating his concern for that animal, and enhancing the larger message of the need for conservation of nature, Roosevelt epitomized the consummate rhetorical leader.

Roosevelt’s speeches and writings throughout his life, particularly his rhetorical presidency, highlighted his character and competence as an expression of progressive ideology. He demonstrated the moral character of progressivism with his words and deeds. Simultaneously, he identified himself with the scientific practicality of progressivism. In both wings of that movement he embedded his concern for conservation, promoting it as an idea that needed urgent action in modern America and that unified the nation.

PROMOTING CHARACTER AND CONSERVATION

Roosevelt’s character as a frontiersman had captured the public’s imagination. As Mark Hanna, a prominent Republican during the Progressive Era, remarked at Roosevelt’s ascendance in 1901, “Now look—that damn cowboy is president.”⁵⁰ The nation had not experienced a president as energetic and peripatetic as Roosevelt seemed poised to be. He understood that his exploits while president could garner him unprecedented access to the American public via the news media. Thus, he

invited reporters along on his journeys, giving himself the opportunity to dramatically present his character and his case for conservation.⁵¹ One of his first such efforts involved his 1903 western trip.

Roosevelt's "Great Loop" tour immediately attracted media attention. His multi-week visit to the Pacific Northwest provided him with journalists eager to document his trek, which culminated in a visit to Yosemite in California. This trip allowed Roosevelt the opportunity to make numerous major addresses along the way about topics ranging from the establishment of American policy in the Philippines to commemorating the Louisiana Purchase. Notably, though, the "Great Loop" offered the president a platform to push his case for conservation. Stopping in Wyoming, North Dakota, Nebraska, and other states, he frequently urged throngs of citizens to plant more trees. Inviting guests such as John Burroughs and John Muir, naturalists and staunch conservationists, along on this unprecedented presidential tour likewise signaled the importance of the environment in Roosevelt's agenda.⁵²

Roosevelt's discourse connected the environment to the issue of character.⁵³ Similar to Christian Progressives, Roosevelt preached that the life of the spirit represented one of the essential elements of national life, and he charged his listeners with a divine sense of purpose in their material affairs.⁵⁴ As a frontiersman, Roosevelt spoke glowingly of pioneers to an audience in San Bernardino, California, referring to them as performing "miracles" in transforming the region from wilderness to modernity. But he also declared that the "old pioneer days have gone." This pivot allowed him to move his audience from the established position of what the pioneer efforts had originally meant. According to Roderick Nash, "Subjugation of the wilderness was the chief source of pioneer pride."⁵⁵ The recent ancestors of Roosevelt's audience had approached the environment as something to be conquered. But he reminded them of the will needed now to apply the "old pioneer virtues" in different ways to address the environmental problems that come from "speed and progress."⁵⁶ He identified those problems in an address that same day. He declared that "we have passed the time when we could afford to let any man skin the country and leave it." True moral character involved the demonstration of "decency" to perpetuate the "things that are of beauty." "You in California," Roosevelt noted, "are preserving your great natural scenery, your great objects of nature, your valleys, your giant trees. You are preserving them because you realize that beauty has its place."⁵⁷ By linking good character and the environment, Roosevelt strategically positioned owners of lumber and mining companies as immoral citizens given their wholesale destruction of the land. Moreover, according to him, preservation represented the manifestation of old pioneer values rather than the subjugation of nature.

Roosevelt's discourse about safeguarding the environment undoubtedly heartened preservationists. Advocates such as Thoreau had identified areas unspoiled by humanity's encroachment as spaces that connected humans to God. Given that notion, approaching the environment for use as an economic resource was nothing short of sacrilegious.⁵⁸ The president's address at Stanford University during his "Great Loop" tour echoed that sentiment. "You have a singularly beautiful landscape," he declared:

Singularly beautiful and singularly majestic scenery, and it should certainly be your aim to try to preserve for those who are to come after you that beauty; to try to keep unmarred that majesty. . . . Yesterday I saw for the first time a grove of your great trees, a grove which it has taken the ages several thousands of years to build up; and I feel most emphatically that we should not turn a tree which was old when the first Egyptian conqueror penetrated to the valley of the Euphrates, which it has taken so many thousands of years to build up, and which can be put to better use, into shingles. . . . There is nothing more practical in the end than the preservation of beauty, than the preservation of anything that appeals to the higher emotions in mankind.⁵⁹

Transcendentalist philosophy of the time urged the acceptance of material reality as a reflection—a gateway—to a higher, moral reality. Roosevelt also popularized that notion. According to him, a forest grove was akin to a temple in which he could worship natural beauty crafted by God. He privileged the aesthetics of the environment rather than privileging the economic benefit of nature, which had resulted in destructive acts against it. Whereas the Christian Progressives and their religious mantras seemed ambiguously helpful in solving America's economic excesses, Roosevelt's romantic notion of ensuring safe spaces of natural beauty provided a practical example of the manifestation of God's will and the president's character.

Roosevelt promoted similar messages about appropriately moral behavior throughout his presidency. He extended the Christian Progressives' philosophy related to ethical character in more cathartic terms. Christian Progressives identified greed and selfishness as elements that had led to particular national problems; notably, they believed that only the "most hard-hearted" businesses could allow children to suffer.⁶⁰ Roosevelt threw a wider net. For him, immoral behavior extended beyond that of easy foils like the lumber companies to the public at large, and he castigated them all as a preacher would admonish his flock.⁶¹ "You all know . . . the individual whose idea of developing the country is to cut

every stick of timber off of it," he charged in his address to the Forest Congress in 1905, made that man a "curse." People who allowed such immoral behavior appeared to commit a greater crime, however. "You are mighty poor Americans if your care for the well-being of this country is limited to hoping that that will last out your own generation."⁶² Essentially, Roosevelt asked Americans to be good stewards of the natural gifts given to them by God and to be good parents by providing for their children's benefit. The president returned to those themes two years later in his Seventh Annual Message. Although the term "conservation" did not appear as a heading in his annual messages until later, Roosevelt had made substantive declarations about conservation-related matters a common occurrence in his Messages to Congress.⁶³ He took aim at the "persons who find it to their immense pecuniary benefit to destroy the forests by lumbering," blaming them for "sacrificing the future of the nation." These active opponents of conservation, along with "supine public opinion," he identified as "savage" for their "reckless disregard of the future." Just as Roosevelt alleged that God had provided his children with the timeless beauty of the environment, it was now humanity's responsibility to do the same for its children. This represented the mark of good character: "No man, here or elsewhere, is entitled to call himself a decent citizen if he does not try to do his part toward seeing that our national policies are shaped for the advantage of our children and our children's children."⁶⁴ Character, as a reflection of religious principles, represented the lynchpin in humanity's relationship with a divinely natural world and a constant in the development of that world for subsequent generations. As Brinkley noted, Roosevelt "saw the planet as one single biological organism pulsing with life and championed the interconnectedness of nature as his own Sermon on the Mount."⁶⁵

Roosevelt's castigations against venal businesses and morally lethargic citizens would have appealed to those progressives who saw America's salvation coming from the reestablishment of Christian principles. However, unlike strict preservationists, he believed in controlled use of the environment as a means to ensure its sanctity as well as its material value. To that end, he also invoked the language of Scientific Progressives.

PROMOTING COMPETENCE AND CONSERVATION

Roosevelt made it clear that conservation was a reflection of the nation's spiritual character. However, he also emphasized that conservation needed to reflect the nation's intellectual impulse, most notably, its

common sense. As a Harvard graduate, Roosevelt had sought higher education, but as a frontiersman, he appreciated the rough-hewn knowledge that pioneers had attained. In a 1906 Message to Congress, he applauded the pioneer farmer as the epitome of American citizenship, particularly for that figure's "self-education" in being able to work with the land to provide for the country. In fact, he preferred the practical knowledge of a farmer, who had studied "the great book of nature itself," rather than the "trained scholar" and his "class-book."⁶⁶ According to Roosevelt, the farmer had taken a commonsense perspective about the environment, or what the president frequently termed as the "wise use" of nature.⁶⁷ For example, he congratulated the people of Redlands, California, during his 1903 tour for their transformation of the area into a fertile wonderland. "It makes me realize more and more," he observed, "how much this whole country should lay stress on what can be done by the wise use of water, and, therefore, the wise use of the forests on the mountains."⁶⁸ Strategically, the farmer's moral decency had led to his practical engagement with the environment, a behavior that did not exhaust resources but maintained them through their use.

But even the pioneer farmer's morally derived, commonsense use of nature would not be enough. Roosevelt admitted in his 1906 Message to Congress that the "frontier conditions" have disappeared, and that, in turn, called for a "substitution of a more intensive system of cultivation."⁶⁹ Flanagan noted that despite Roosevelt waxing poetic "over the glories of sleeping under the cathedral spires of the Sequoias of Yosemite," he believed in the conservation of resources through strict regulation of their use. Individuals and states had already failed to show the scientific rigor or administrative skills to safeguard the environment as a place of beauty and as a resource to perpetuate.⁷⁰

Throughout his presidency, Roosevelt worked to pull the "wise use" of the environment under federal oversight; the Oregon land scandal had demonstrated to him that state and local authorities were unable to manage the task.⁷¹ Particularly, he wanted federal control over preserving forest reserves, protecting wildlife, and transforming arid land into arable areas through irrigation.⁷² According to Flanagan, Roosevelt's chief of the U.S. Forest Service, Gifford Pinchot, proved "influential in applying scientific management based on a cost-benefit analysis" to the notion of conserving through regulation.⁷³ With Pinchot's help, the president pushed for industrial-like efficiencies in spending, management, and research that brought the work of conservation under well-trained officials.⁷⁴ Believing Congress too slow—that is, inefficient—in acting, Roosevelt appointed commissions without congressional approval to investigate environmental issues that he believed needed addressing by

Pinchot's trained managers. For several years he tried to gain autonomy in developing conservation policy by creating an independent funding structure for Pinchot's Forestry Service. Congress, believing that the president had overstepped his bounds with each new appointment and end runs around it, routinely rejected any of Roosevelt's plans that it could. Although Roosevelt had been successful in various initiatives, by 1908, Samuel Hays observed, "Congress had blocked most of that part of the conservation program which depended on legislative approval. In response, the administration took its case to the public" to generate national support for its efforts.⁷⁵

Roosevelt popularized what some saw as a federal takeover of individual and states' rights with a media event that even overshadowed the "Great Loop" tour. Late in 1907, he wrote what Edmund Morris termed a "posterity letter" inviting the states' governors, influential men from across the country such as newspaper editors, scientists, industrialists, Supreme Court justices, congressional members, academics, and others to attend an unprecedented national conference on conservation.⁷⁶ Roosevelt clearly articulated the urgency of the matter in that letter:

[There] is no other question now before the nation of equal gravity with the question of conservation of our natural resources, and . . . it is the plain duty of us . . . who are responsible to take inventory of the natural resources which have been handed down to us, to forecast the needs of the future. . . . It is evident the abundant natural resources on which the welfare of the nation rests are becoming depleted, and, not in a few cases, are already exhausted.⁷⁷

Although Roosevelt hearkened back to the notion of a divinely blessed environment with his reference to natural resources being "handed down," he quantified the natural wealth of the world at a time when most people saw it as infinite.⁷⁸ In doing so, he contextualized it as something that could be counted and thus also fall under the purview of progressive-minded people who believed in the scientific management of national affairs. Moreover, by inviting state governors to participate in his conference, he framed their participation as subordinate to the will of the federal government.

Even before Roosevelt's opening address of the conference, the pomp and circumstance communicated the importance of this event. At dinner the night before the conference, friends and foes alike—in politics, business, and in ideology—were purposefully seated next to one another to identify the nonpartisan nature of the event. The trappings of

a state dinner, with guests formally welcomed one-by-one by the president himself, awed the most jaded of observers.⁷⁹ Even the benediction immediately before the opening session the next day confirmed both the Christian and Scientific orientations on the matter:

The Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water . . . flowing forth in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley and vines . . . a land of olive trees and honey. . . . Now give us the strength of Thy Holy Spirit that we may go into this garden . . . and bring forth fruit in Thy service.⁸⁰

In other words, the prayer instructed the efficient harvesting of nature's bounty, not its willful destruction nor its sacrosanct preservation.

Roosevelt's speech would provide the plan for who would oversee that harvest. The president would affirm the need for scientific efficiency to guide conservation efforts. That efficiency, he argued, would come best from federal oversight.

Almost immediately in his Opening Address, Roosevelt identified those who would be capable of handling the conservation of the environment. He welcomed the "experts in natural resources and representatives of national organizations concerned in the development and use of these resources." These men had the expertise that the "average man" lacked: the "average man," demanding ever more from the environment, was likely "to grow to lose the sense of his dependence upon nature." In fact, the "average man" appeared no different from the "very primitive peoples" who "concern themselves only with superficial natural resources." Roosevelt credited the Scientific Progressives in this matter, labeling them as the group superior to that of the "average man" that provided the "knowledge and utilization" that ensured that the "hidden wealth of the earth be developed for the benefit of mankind."⁸¹ But managers of science and efficiency were not enough; they needed supervision. Thus, he outlined how the federal government, seemingly from the nation's origin, had been prescient regarding the needs of the environment.

According to President Roosevelt, the nation's forefathers had displayed the wise foresight to consider humanity's impact on nature. This appeared particularly remarkable since he noted that mining during the eighteenth century "was carried on fundamentally as it had been carried on by the Pharaohs." Despite relatively little use of the environment, and no reason to believe in its exhaustibility, America's forefathers still "exercised a wise forethought" in that regard. "Washington clearly saw that the perpetuity of the States could only be secured by union, and

that the only feasible basis of union was an economic one; in other words, that it must be based on the development and use of their natural resources." In fact, Roosevelt observed, various state conferences that had been convened by fledgling states like Virginia and Maryland to discuss interstate commerce on the waterways had eventually resulted in the Constitution. He grounded conservation, then, in the foundational contract of the nation, a covenant he alleged grew out of the "wise use of our natural resources." Specifically, he asked the audience to disregard "the question of moral purpose" and to agree that the "prosperity of our people depends directly on the energy and intelligence with which our natural resources are used."⁸² Not only did he promote wise oversight to safeguard primitive—that is, religious—orientations about the environment, he also substantiated the federal government's role in continuing to define that oversight as it had seemingly been doing since the beginning of the Republic.

The president returned again to the pioneer farmer, this time as an image to connect to the federal government. This American icon had demonstrated how the wise use of the environment had enriched the nation. "Everyone knows that a really good farmer," Roosevelt noted, "leaves his farm more valuable at the end of his life than it was when he first took hold of it." The farmer proved that foresight allowed him to "improve on nature only by putting the resources to a beneficial use." The federal government, like a farmer and "any right thinking father," worked to "leave the next generation the national honor unstained and the national resources unexhausted." Wise use, overseen by competent managers supervised by the national government, then, had become no different than the "duties of true patriotism" in service to the future of the country.⁸³

By most accounts the Governors' Conference proved a huge success. Patricia O'Toole concluded that the "governors left feeling like ordained sheriffs, eager to preach conservation and hell-bent on stopping crimes against Mother Nature."⁸⁴ The remarks of Roosevelt's Governors' Conference Address about duty may have energized his audience. In fact, the need for patriotic action served as the thread to synthesize the competing elements of Christian and Scientific progressivism.

PROMOTING ACTION AND CONSERVATION

Throughout his rhetorical career, Roosevelt celebrated both the need for Americans to demonstrate a strong moral sense and practical common sense.⁸⁵ Conservation had offered him the perfect topic for those issues.

For instance, during his "Great Loop" tour, he applauded a small college town audience for representing California's "industry and intelligence" in laying the "foundation of material prosperity" upon which the "superstructure of intellectual, moral, and spiritual well-being" could be built. But character and knowledge alone were not enough. "The first thing that the individual man has to do," he informed that same audience, "is to pull his own weight, to earn his own way, not to be a drag on the community."⁸⁶ For him, the body had to be active. To spur people's active engagement with environmental concerns, he attempted to create an overwhelming anxiety about it.

Roosevelt believed in the urgent situation surrounding the nation's resources. It proved to be a recurring theme in his discourse. In his Second Annual Message as governor of New York in 1900, he warned: "Unrestrained greed means the ruin of the great woods and the drying up of the sources of the rivers."⁸⁷ During his failed presidential bid as the Bull Moose Party nominee in 1912, he privileged conservation above all other matters, stating there was "no greater issue than that . . . in this country."⁸⁸ Roosevelt tended to amplify the consequences of nonaction to spur his listeners to act.⁸⁹ Speaking about national forests in 1905 in Washington, D.C., he called on a lethargic public to recognize that unless it safeguarded that resource, "disaster" for the "whole country" was "inevitable."⁹⁰

Attempting to generate angst about the viability of the nation's future resources, the president again employed a strategy unused by previous administrations. This time he offered an illustrated version of his 1908 Message to Congress. He attached photos that vividly demonstrated the catastrophic problems faced by China as a result of its lax attention to preserving its resources. According to him, those images showed the "appalling desolation, taking the shape of barren mountains and gravel and sand-colored plains, which immediately follows . . . the deforestation of the mountains." Along with those pictures, the president painted a chilling image of America's fate:

Denudation leaves naked soil; then gullying cuts down to the bare rock; and meanwhile the rock waste buries the bottomlands. When the soil is gone, men must go; and the process does not take long. . . . Short-sighted man . . . when he has destroyed the forests, has rendered certain the ultimate destruction of the land itself.

Without action, he concluded, America faced the same fate as other countries that had failed to prevent the destruction of their natural resources.⁹¹

Roosevelt wanted the American body to take action to protect the nation's resources through use. One such use coincided with the belief at the turn of the twentieth century that Americans needed to enhance their physical fitness. As stated previously, Christian Progressives believed that citizens' bodily enervation followed their moral decay and called for them to become more spiritually and physically active.⁹² Roosevelt took this line of argument one step further and designated the spiritually revitalizing wilderness as the preeminent place for a body to be active. Protecting game such as deer for hunters proved more beneficial than such animals' wanton butchering, as enough game would attract people into the wilderness. "True sportsmen," he declared in one of the books he wrote while in the White House, "shoot only in season and in moderation. . . . It is to be earnestly hoped that every American hunting or fishing club will strive to inculcate among its own members . . . [that] any destruction for the sake of making a record, is to be severely reprobated." An area preserved through wise oversight, such as in Colorado, could become a "permanent health resort and playground" for the American public.⁹³ The president's lengthy account of his trip to Yellowstone in his *Outdoor Pastimes of an American Hunter II* provided a model for the type of physical activity he wanted the citizenry to embrace. He wrote of the energy he felt while seeing and tracking a diversity of game. He expressed his joy at the freedom he received from horseback riding, hiking, and camping. He appreciated the struggles he had to endure with snowstorms, cliffs, and icy streams. He wrote about the active life necessary for a man to be masculine:

Every believer in manliness and therefore in manly sports, and every lover of nature, every man who appreciates the majesty and beauty of the wilderness and of wild life, should strike hands with the far-sighted men who wish to preserve our material resources, in the effort to keep our forests and our game beasts, game-birds, and game-fish—indeed, all the living creatures of prairie and woodland and seashore—from wanton destruction.

These adventures not only epitomized the type of masculinity he had reveled in his entire life, but they also spoke to the masculinity necessary to protect the nation through wise use of the environment. As he mentioned, strong men needed to join with wise men to form a democratic partnership and preserve the wilderness for people from all walks of life in his and in succeeding generations.⁹⁴

Roosevelt idealized those "strong men" by relating them to America's combatants. He highlighted the urgency of conservation by linking it to the nation's most active citizens—its soldiers. They represented the

epitome of the active body. His strategic choices frequently aligned conservation and war. For example, in his celebrated “New Nationalism” speech in Osawatomie, Kansas, soon after leaving the White House, he claimed that “short of the actual preservation of its existence in a great war,” America faced the “great central task of leaving this land even a better land for our descendants.”⁹⁵ Creating a parallel between war and conservation allowed him to borrow the soldier’s popularity as a means to spark the public’s imagination about its responsibilities regarding the environment. Throughout his “Great Loop” tour while traveling in California, for example, he repeatedly congratulated the soldiers of the Civil War for fighting for the nation’s development. “You fought for the future,” he congratulated the veterans in attendance at the state’s Capitol, and he reminded the rest of the audience to keep its “gaze fixed likewise on the days that are to come after us” to “keep the waters; keep the forests.”⁹⁶ Likening conservation to the wartime exploits of America’s heroes provided advocates of Scientific and Christian progressivism a means to reconcile on the issue. According to Roosevelt, Civil War soldiers had shown the people of Santa Cruz, California, the feats needed to pass the “supreme test” in preserving the nation; it would be similar robust action needed to preserve the “wildernesses as a heritage . . . for the sake of the nation hereafter.”⁹⁷ Patriotism embodied both a practical and moral stance on war and now emphasized the type of bodily activity that all Americans would need to exhibit to safeguard the nation’s resources.

CONCLUSION

Regardless of how much more his presidential successors may have done, Theodore Roosevelt’s institutional accomplishments to protect the environment were remarkable. Over the course of several years, he established national monuments and created national parks.⁹⁸ He engaged other administrative practices such as the “crowded hour,” which involved naming scores of new forest preserves across several states in one day.⁹⁹ He spurred the states’ governors to begin organizing committees that would oversee the development of statewide safeguards of natural resources. Cutright noted that the governors’ actions helped the conservation movement “to survive the various reverses it suffered later with periodic shifts in the political horizon.”¹⁰⁰

However, Roosevelt’s greatest undertaking may have been his rhetorical campaign—both as a writer of natural history and as a political advocate with his “bully pulpit”—to elevate conservation at a time

when a myriad of other problems had captured the public's attention and the progressives' vision. To that end he employed the two major ideologies surrounding the Progressive movement. Scientific Progressives believed that Christian Progressives simply contemplated morality without practically trying to infuse its tenets in day-to-day life. Christian Progressives disagreed with the intellectualism of Scientific Progressivism that wanted to remake human behavior into something more managerially and mechanistically predictable.¹⁰¹

Roosevelt co-opted both progressive positions and established the tenets of his rhetorical leadership—character and competence. In doing so, his discourse helped to chart the course of national policy regarding conservation. He shaped moral character around the human responsibility to fulfill Divine Will in service to protecting future generations. The nation's children, and their children, became the focus. This supplanted the notion that the environment needed to remain in an untouched state for spiritual or aesthetic reasons. Thus, he countered the religiously appealing position of the Transcendentalist movement and its popular advocates such as John Muir. Roosevelt also shifted the debate from practical efficiency in the workplace to the national government's role in overseeing the commonsense use of the environment. He argued that controlled use by experts actually extended the longevity of finite resources. In the process he elevated government-sponsored environmental specialists and administrators to positions of power—positions that would likely minimize anxiety within the business community since the latter would be assured that their profits from natural resources would continue longer than initially imagined.

Roosevelt placed his life on display as a means to attract the nation's attention. He invited the media to follow him on his public lectures, thereby transforming his life into an arm of his public relations' campaign. For example, after delivering an Arbor Day lecture to children, the *Washington Post* obligingly gave it front-page coverage with the headline "President for Trees."¹⁰² Despite his hunting tendencies, the media showed him as a benign force in nature. When the media learned of the ex-president's African safari, one famous cartoon showed him sitting casually on a stool reading a book while surrounded by wild animals.¹⁰³ Employing the media, he demonstrated rhetorically how character, competence, and action were necessary to promote conservation into national prominence. Finally, rather than focus only on character or intellect, he brought attention to his physical prowess as a marker of national identity—a muscular sort of martial masculinity—as a critical aspect of conservation. An active body was needed to attend to and appreciate the challenge that the environment posed. This martial theme

connected protection of the environment to a sort of patriotism, in turn making the simple act of going to a national park a symbol of serving one's country.

Some of Roosevelt's rhetoric and his antics were not without their flaws. He tended to confound his allies. His work to conserve animal species, such as attempting to establish a zoo to breed buffalo, seemed undercut by his vocal demands to shoot one while on his first trip out west. Or, when trying to bring attention to the need for water conservation, the president traveled down the Mississippi River on a steamboat so that he could go on a two-week bear-hunting trip to Louisiana. Even his friends could not understand how Roosevelt reconciled calling for animal protection when he was an avid hunter himself. His passion for hunting, its seeming contradiction with his calls to protect the environment, and news stories about this paradox probably drew some attention away from his overarching message.¹⁰⁴

Roosevelt's rhetorical legacy may not have survived completely intact into the twenty-first century. With the downturn in church affiliation and the rise of atheism over the last several decades, the notion of moral character as a solution to the nation's troubles may find less resonance with contemporary audiences.¹⁰⁵ Likewise, with the distrust of government at all-time highs, coupled with confusion over the impact of global warming on the nation's environment, commonsense objectives are harder to promote.¹⁰⁶ And with decreasing numbers of younger visitors to the national parks, the notion that Americans would use the preserved areas to energize their "manliness" appears less likely.¹⁰⁷ At the very least, contemporary America would do well to remember Roosevelt's observation about the interrelation between the environment and the public: "If we are a sensible people, we will make it our business to see that the process of extinction is arrested."¹⁰⁸

NOTES

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2. Quoted in *ibid.*, 14.
3. See William K. Wyant, *Westward in Eden: The Public Lands and the Conservation Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 28; Elmo R. Richardson, *The Politics of Conservation: Crusades and Controversies 1897-1913* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 3.
4. Douglas Brinkley, *The Wilderness Warrior: Theodore Roosevelt*

- and the Crusade for America (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009), 154–155.
5. Quoted in Timothy Egan, *The Big Burn: Teddy Roosevelt and the Fire That Saved America* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2009), 68.
 6. *Ibid.*, 69–70.
 7. Edmund Morris, *Theodore Rex* (New York: Random House, 2001), 519.
 8. Brinkley, *The Wilderness Warrior*, 755.
 9. Theodore Roosevelt, *An Autobiography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), 402.
 10. Egan, *The Big Burn*, 10.
 11. Frank E. Smith, *The Politics of Conservation* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966), 87–88.
 12. Paul R. Cutright, *Theodore Roosevelt the Naturalist* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), 166. Hereafter cited as *Naturalist*.
 13. See Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3–39.
 14. Roosevelt's rhetoric can be said to follow Donald C. Bryant's observation that rhetoric functions to adjust "ideas to people and people to ideas." See "Rhetoric: Its Functions and Its Scope," in *Contemporary Rhetoric: A Reader's Coursebook*, ed. Douglas Ehninger (Glenview: Scott, Foresman, 1972), 26.
 15. Maureen A. Flanagan, *America Reformed: Progressives and Progressivisms 1890s–1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 31.
 16. Sean D. Cashman, *America in the Age of the Titans: The Progressive Era and World War I* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 39–40. For the characterization that public office holders benefited from delivering favors at this time, see also Nell I. Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877–1919* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987), 8.
 17. McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*, 7–8; Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 79.
 18. John W. Chambers II, *The Tyranny of Change: America in the Progressive Era, 1890–1920* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 34.
 19. Painter, *Standing at Armageddon*, 44–49; see also Flanagan, *America Reformed*, 7–8; and Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, 88–90.
 20. Chambers II, *The Tyranny of Change*, 3, 81.

21. McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*, 28.
22. Flanagan, *America Reformed*, vi.
23. See Painter, *Standing at Armageddon*; McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*; Cashman, *America in the Age of the Titans*; Chambers II, *The Tyranny of Change*; Flanagan, *America Reformed*; and Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955).
24. Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 5.
25. J. Michael Hogan, introduction to *Rhetoric and Reform in the Progressive Era: A Rhetorical History of the United States*, ed. J. Michael Hogan (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2003), 6:x.
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27. David B. Danbom, *“The World of Hope”: Progressives and the Struggle for an Ethical Public Life* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 53.
28. *Ibid.*, 78.
29. *Ibid.*, 113.
30. *Ibid.*, 119.
31. Chambers II, *The Tyranny of Change*, 69.
32. Danbom, *“The World of Hope,”* 124.
33. *Ibid.*, 89.
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36. H. W. Brands, *TR: The Last Romantic* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 164, 171.
37. Cutright, *Naturalist*, 58.
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39. Paul R. Cutright, *Theodore Roosevelt: The Making of a Conservationist* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 5–8; Cutright, *Naturalist*, 7.
40. Cutright, *Naturalist*, 28.
41. See, for example, Theodore Roosevelt, *The Works of Theodore Roosevelt*, National Edition (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1926), volumes 1–5.
42. Wyant, *Westward in Eden*, 41–43.
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44. Richardson, *The Politics of Conservation*, 18–19.
45. While some scholars note that Woodrow Wilson could be credited with establishing the notion of the rhetorical presidency since he

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46. Quoted in Jeffrey K. Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 4, 95–96. The scholarship on the rhetorical presidency is extensive; some examples include Mary E. Stuckey, *The Presidency as Interpreter-in-Chief* (Chatham: Chatham House, 1991); Martin J. Medhurst, ed., *Beyond the Rhetorical Presidency* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1996); Vanessa B. Beasley, "The Rhetorical Presidency Meets the Unitary Executive: Implications for Presidential Rhetoric on Public Policy," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 13 (2010): 7–35; Mel Laracey, "The Rhetorical Presidency Today: How Does It Stand Up?," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 39 (2009) 39: 908–931; Dorsey, ed., *The Presidency and Rhetorical Leadership*; Mary E. Stuckey, "Establishing the Rhetorical Presidency through Presidential Rhetoric: Theodore Roosevelt and the Brownsville Raid," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 92 (2006): 287–309; Shawn J. Parry-Giles and Trevor Parry-Giles, "Collective Memory, Political Nostalgia, and the Rhetorical Presidency: Bill Clinton's Commemoration of the March on Washington, August 28, 1998," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 86 (2000): 417–437.
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 53. Patricia O'Toole, *When Trumpets Call: Theodore Roosevelt after the White House* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 33.

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63. See Morris, *Theodore Rex*, 486.
64. Roosevelt, “Forestry and Business,” 104.
65. Brinkley, *The Wilderness Warrior*, 817.
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FOUR

See America First!

The Aesthetics of Environmental Exceptionalism

ANNE MARIE TODD



January 25, 1906, was another foggy day in Salt Lake City.¹ A headline in the *Deseret Evening News* reported “cars collide in the heavy fog.”² The bigger headline that day was news of city and state officials and entrepreneurs “arriving from every direction”³ to attend the See America First conference. Sponsored by the Salt Lake City Commercial Club, the conference was convened to respond to a report that American tourists spent nearly two hundred million dollars abroad.⁴ Fisher Sanford Harris, founder and secretary of the club, called upon American business and political leaders to help reverse the “growing intensity of the European vacation fad,”⁵ which he warned would place an “unceasing drain upon the resources of the country.”⁶ Harris’s call for conference participation was met with great interest: he reported receiving copious mail from citizens across the country in support of the event.⁷ Two hundred delegates gathered for three days in Salt Lake City’s armory hall to launch the See America First movement to educate the American people about the grand American West and to assert America’s environmental exceptionalism.

Honorable Heber M. Wells, president of the Salt Lake City Commercial Club and former governor of Utah, welcomed the assembled entrepreneurs and politicians and laid out their charge “to devise a plan to divert at least a portion of the travel of Americans which now goes to Europe and other countries to their own country first.”⁸ The essential problem as seen by the conference planning committee was a paucity of

awareness among Americans about the western part of their continent. Wells lamented, "We possess scenic attractions surpassing those of any other portion of the world and that scenery and climate are assets capable of conversion into dollars and cents. . . . the failure of Americans to appreciate home scenery is due largely, though not entirely, to a lack of knowledge of these attractions."⁹ The conference was a publicity event, orchestrated to enlighten Americans about the value of their scenery.

The conference sought to reclaim the country's wilderness aesthetic, to revive an appreciation of the land that had been central to America's national identity just a century before.¹⁰ Nineteenth-century romantic landscape paintings like Thomas Cole's *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm*¹¹ resonated with citizens seeking confirmation of their great national landscape.¹² At that time, romantic images of the American landscape were a popular source of patriotism and "cultural nationalism."¹³ Vistas of the American West reaffirmed the freedom of movement available to Americans, a stark contrast to the limited geographical and social mobility experienced in Europe. Landscape images "were also among the first popular native expressions of cultural nationalism in the early decade of the nineteenth century; the United States turned to Romantic images of nature as a source of patriotism."¹⁴ Landscape paintings reinforced the importance of America's unique natural heritage; they "promoted American scenery as the transcript of national character."¹⁵ Wilderness represented the grand ambitions held by Americans unconstrained by European social institutions. Such American exceptionalism was based on the natural environment. "Nature is the national past, the basis of the national identity, an infinite source of moral regeneration, and guarantee of the democratic constitution."¹⁶ Patriotic panoramas made the American landscape accessible, symbolizing the democratic values the nation held dear.

The conference's purpose was to inspire a national movement to discover America, and Wells assured his audience, "a band of intrepid spirits," of its success. He remarked on the outpouring of support from across the nation, "the almost unparalleled endorsement that has come from the magazine and newspaper press."¹⁷ Comparing the assembled men to the Founding Fathers, Wells pronounced the task of keeping American tourist dollars at home to be of the highest importance:

It is for you, delegates of this conference, to put this protest in plain English so that he who runs to the continent every year may read. It may not be necessary to frame a new declaration of independence, although we do hold these truths to

be self-evident—that when in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one portion of our people to dissolve a pernicious practice which compels them to pay tribute to another, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to see America first. And for this we are met.¹⁸

The See America First movement had a patriotic sense of purpose and was fueled by a zealous belief in the supremacy of the beauty of the American landscape, and, importantly, the value of the countryside in the promotion of tourism. The conference was a rhetorical event, a moment for persuasion: delegates addressed the American public, espousing the virtues of American scenery for the purpose of inspiring action.

At the end of his remarks opening the conference, Wells pledged to his audience that America was listening: “While experience has seemed to demonstrate that the protest we voice at this conference is but as a cry in the wilderness, it has today this added significance, that it has taken root—that the loud reveille sounded from so many mountain tops has been heard in the valleys, and east and west and north and south have answered back the call.”¹⁹ Like many speakers, Wells sprinkled his rhetoric with natural metaphors and environmentally evocative phrases; America’s scenery was the backdrop of the conference. Speaker after speaker extolled the virtues of the American scenery, including Yosemite, Yellowstone, the Grand Canyon, the Columbia River, Niagara Falls, the Great Salt Lake, the Great Lakes, and the Mississippi. These descriptions supported the proclamation of the movement’s principles—that access to America’s mighty canyons, mountains, and forests was an essential component of American patriotism. Speakers sought to “plant this patriotic proposition in the hearts of the American people to such an extent that no man can grow up within the confines of the American territory without understanding that his first duty to himself and his country is to know that country.”²⁰ Speeches focused on America’s “crown jewels,” establishing the importance of iconic aesthetic landscapes in promoting national consciousness. The rhetoric of the See America First conference constructed an environmental exceptionalism based on the grandeur of America’s landscape.

According to the published record of the conference, which laid the groundwork for the rhetoric of the movement, Wells’s benediction “electrified the convention and evoked a wave of enthusiasm that only subsided after the orator had repeatedly bowed his thanks.”²¹ All of the conference speakers echoed his patriotic spirit with public declarations of support and admiration for the conference purpose. The conference

proceedings, featuring approximately fifteen speeches from various conference delegates, were republished in numerous venues. These speeches described and gave meaning to places that most Americans had not seen firsthand. The descriptions and exultations of these speeches demonstrate the power of public address to construct an American environmental exceptionalism based on a shared understanding of the national landscape.

This chapter focuses on conference speakers' use of sublime rhetoric to, as Christine Oravec observes, "evoke emotional responses toward nature, to confirm aesthetic or ethical beliefs about nature, and to call attention to particular landscapes for settlement, tourism, or preservation." The sublime molds and shapes our national responses to our environment and is "an integral part of the way we perceive nature, act with reference to it, and construct its relationship to ourselves."²² Oravec argues that sublime discourse is marked by three rhetorical strategies: exaggerating natural features, fostering emotional attachment, and engaging in self-reflexivity.²³ First, I introduce the sublime aesthetic and then analyze how the conference speakers used each of these three strategies. I conclude with the importance of the See America First conference for understanding the role of public address in promoting America's environmental exceptionalism.

THE SUBLIME AESTHETIC

We experience place symbolically and thus rhetorically. "National culture teaches Americans to experience certain places in their homeland rhetorically—to encounter for themselves those places as potent symbols of a concept of national community they are to claim as their own."²⁴ Through our appreciation of the land, we establish a rhetorical connection to place. Gregory Clark explains, "*Land* becomes *landscape* when it is assigned the role of symbol, and as symbol it functions rhetorically" reflecting "the attitudes and aspirations of a national culture."²⁵ Our national rhetoric about natural places constructs an environmental aesthetic.

We may describe aesthetics broadly as sensuous knowledge and perception of beauty.²⁶ In his *Poetics*, Aristotle posited art as a means of representation and communication.²⁷ Like ethical terms, aesthetic terms are invoked with the purpose of eliciting a certain response.²⁸ Aesthetic terms evoke an emotional reaction—we feel pleasure, optimism, or other sentimentality toward a concept represented in words or images. Environmental aesthetics encompass a broad sense of the world at large.²⁹

Environmental aesthetics considers the role of place in how we interpret experience and rests on the assumption that the world's environments offer much to appreciate.³⁰ Our aesthetics emerge in our contemplation of natural settings, both our grand and everyday environs. "Appreciation for beauty in nature has led to concern for its preservation and continuity."³¹ An environmental aesthetic necessarily involves an ethical sense of beauty: a sense that one must act to preserve the value of the environment.

Environmental aesthetics explains the evocative nature of Nature: emotional, romantic, sublime. Christine Oravec describes the sublime as a continuum from realist depictions of the pictorial to expressions of a wilderness aesthetic that is abstract and metaphorical. Oravec notes that the sublime is exceptionalism based on "the very existence of patriotic sentiment to the physical beauty of the landscape."³² Images of Glacier National Park's alpine meadows and Yosemite's enormous rock formations symbolize America's unique landscape and national heritage.

EXAGGERATED NATURAL FEATURES

The first aspect of the sublime is the exaggeration of characteristics of a place for the purpose of representing a landscape in a certain way. "Sublime representations can include blurring, exaggeration of detail, and compositional elements such as foreground, middle ground and frame."³³ Such exaggeration may be a shift in perspective, blurring details so that landscapes are rendered more familiar, or alternatively, more exotic and unknown. In fact, the power of the sublime often lies in the inability to comprehend the enormity of a landscape. "The sublime experience depends on the feeling of terror or fear in the face of the sublime object."³⁴ Such emotional reactions to sublime representations afford a distance from the object itself. "The sublime had always signified a general lack of verisimilitude [or] realism because of its distortion of the facts of the scene and its use of hyperbole for effect."³⁵ In exaggeration, sublime rhetoric confronts human vulnerability and fears of irrelevance by representing land as landscapes, imbuing them with rhetorical significance for human observers.

Delegates at the See America First Conference emphasized the superlative status of America's environment. After lunch on the first day of the conference, L. G. Monroe, of the Spokane Chamber of Commerce, read the Conference Preamble to declare formally the purpose of the conference. The Preamble would be published in numerous pamphlets and magazines. Monroe invited America to:

Come with me into the recesses of the Rocky Mountains, viewing en route the masterpieces of the Creator's handiwork from the wondrous Niagara, through the stupendous chasm of the Royal Gorge, over the Great Continental Divide to the renowned groves of the Yosemite, the thrilling scenes of the Yellowstone, the pastoral quaintness of the California missions nestling in real Arcadian simplicity in rich colored orange groves, the giant ice clad peaks that fringe Puget Sound, or the balmy shades of the Columbia. Come and commune with Nature.³⁶

The descriptors in this passage elevate America's scenery. To experience American wilderness is a thrilling experience: the awesome mountains are as inspiring as the calm shady groves. The Preamble established the conference premise that America's landscape is an artistic achievement, one that should be explored, considered, and appreciated.

Above all, America's scenery was grand. Tourists would be impressed by the "volume of a Niagara, the height of a Mount McKinley, [and] the depth and vastness of a Grand Canyon."³⁷ Speakers confirmed that size matters. In fact, the second day of the conference was largely devoted to lengthy comparisons of America's scenery with Europe's natural features. America was "the greatest country in the world, where the states are as large as European countries."³⁸ Throughout the conference, speakers made absurd comparisons that echoed Monroe's preamble: "The states west of the Mississippi, almost without exception, offer mountain for mountain, valley for valley, river for river and lake for lake with Europe's most famed scenery."³⁹ Meanwhile the Rocky Mountains were said to be fifty times the size of the Swiss Alps. Through exaggeration, the conference rhetoric amplified the American landscape to be larger than life. Such sublime rhetoric endeavored to make American scenery more prominent in the American consciousness so that when making travel plans, Americans would choose to go west instead of across the Atlantic.

Numerous conference delegates spoke on good authority that Europe's scenic attractions were paltry compared to the jewels of America. Among those boasting of Europe's meager offerings, only one orator spoke from experience. A few speakers admitted they were simply repeating hearsay: Governor Albert Mead of Washington acknowledged that he spoke "perhaps a bit boldly because I know but very little about Europe."⁴⁰ Many offered their ignorance as patriotic. Wells explained, "Speaking personally, I have never been to Europe. . . . Yet I am not ready for Europe. I admit that Paris offers its allurements, but I have not yet beheld the natural bridges of San Juan County, of my own fair

state, and so the Champs Elysees will have to wait.”⁴¹ Many orators dismissed the magnificence of Europe as overstated and concurred that the majesty of America’s scenic wonders would ameliorate any “loss of national pride that comes through belief in the existence of better conditions of any sort elsewhere in the world.”⁴² In lieu of eyewitness accounts, delegates offered patriotic rhetoric, passionately pronouncing the aesthetic supremacy of America’s environment.

Speakers used evocative rhetoric to convey the grandness of the American landscape, and many tried to describe what they implied was beyond description. Mr. Monroe attempted to characterize the Rocky Mountains:

From Panama to the Arctic run these mountains in long, dim distance, “like a caravan that never passes by, whose camel backs are laden with the sky.” One wild confusion of American Alps run these, thousands of miles north and south, until the awful range plunges beneath the sea in the Aleutian Islands that are but the fins of the sunken range. This enormous American earth-wrinkle, so long and hundreds of miles in width, can never be touched in survey by half a dozen generations, and the blessed Alps of Europe could hopefully be lost among our legions of peaks.⁴³

To convey the grandeur of the land, speakers acknowledged the fruitlessness of attempts to understand the scope of the physical majesty of the continent. America’s landscape stretched into infinity, impossible to fully grasp. Yet, the speakers urged, the beauty of dramatic landscapes compelled them to try.

Local officials and entrepreneurs were quick to stress the priceless aesthetics of the landscape. “Americans should recognize the value of the priceless heritage of scenic splendor and beauty and subordinate the sordid claims of commercialism to the dictates of a loftier conception.”⁴⁴ These patriotic speeches defended the movement’s goals, preempting critiques of tourism as a profitmaking enterprise, arguing that appreciation of America’s natural inheritance was the highest ideal. The Preamble avowed the moral foundations of the meeting:

It is true that real lovers of scenery protest against its depreciation by artificial veneer, and the complaint is made that most of the old world has been “smoothed over” and “fixed up,” so that much of its freshness and beauty has vanished. Profiting by this knowledge, we would not divert any primeval paradise of

its God-given grandeur, nor belittle the infinite by the proximity of the finite. On the contrary, we would direct our efforts to the highly important movement for the protection and preservation of natural scenery, guarding the sublime from defacement and prostitution to advertising and commercial purposes.⁴⁵

The conference promoted the protection of sublime scenery from overdevelopment, using patriotic appeals to offset the obvious commercial benefits of developing tourist routes in the west. Speakers argued that theirs was a higher purpose, namely, to urge Americans to see America and experience natural wonders for themselves.

Mr. Louis Pratt of the Tacoma Chamber of Commerce described the sublime experience of the magnificent sunsets in Tacoma: "When the dying day bestows its last kiss upon the mountain top of the contiguous territory of the United States, it bathes in splendor the peak of that majestic mountain that towers above the city of Tacoma, Washington."⁴⁶ Speakers invoked the sense of smallness inspired by these outsized mountains, trees, and canyons. The unbounded beauty of the western continent dwarfed the human settlements and offered daily inspiration. Such sublime rhetoric acknowledges the minuteness of human existence and suggests an emotional response to firsthand experience of this beauty.

EMOTIONAL APPEALS

The second aspect of the sublime is emotional appeal: descriptions of the environment designed to cultivate emotional attachment to particular places. Sublime rhetoric is intended to

evoke emotional responses toward nature, to confirm aesthetic or ethical beliefs about nature, and to call attention to particular landscapes for settlement, tourism, or preservation. Indeed, we still employ conventions of the sublime today, in our written discourse as well as in our pictorial representations of nature, to mold and shape our responses to our environment.⁴⁷

Written description and visual rhetoric promote an aesthetics of scenery in which landscapes become "visually attractive and enriched with sentimental associations."⁴⁸ And so, scenery "becomes a commodity" as tourists "value the kind of scenery which has been aesthetically validated in paintings, postcards and advertisements."⁴⁹ Sublime rhetoric describes a natural scene with "special adjectives (wonderful,

stupendous, dreadful, profound) . . . metaphors, personification, catalogs of features, broken diction, exclamations, shifts into present tense, second-person address.”⁵⁰ The specific language used to describe the environment highlights the aesthetically appealing features of natural scenery.

The purpose of the conference was to make Americans aware of the beautiful scenery that existed west of the Mississippi, and so speakers used poetic rhetorical descriptions to entice audiences. Conference propaganda exhorted American tourists to be inspired by the emotional experience of traveling across the country.

See her in her grandest moods where phenomenal forces are engaged in their constructive and destructive work. Penetrate the wilds where the workshop of Nature invites you to revel in the abandon and grotesquerie of undisturbed creation. Go with bounding heart and tingling brain to absorb the grandeur of scenery and worship at the shrine of Nature where your heart offerings of gratitude will arise like incense into the spires and recesses, into the cathedral-like crags and sky-vaulted spaces resounding with the echo of never ceasing cascades whose tumultuous chorus swells in constant diapason, soaring and receding in obedience to the gentle breezes that fan these sylvan cloisters.⁵¹

Descriptions like this peppered conference speeches, emphasizing an emotional connection to the national environment. Speakers advocated tourism of America’s environment to arouse the senses and nurture a reverence of Nature’s divine glory.

The goal of the See America First Conference was to engage the national consciousness. One speaker even described the “waves of sentiment that will be disturbed by the falling of this pebble that you are dropping today.”⁵² Metaphorical language and vivid description invoked an attachment to the national landscape that, as recorded in the conference transcript, inspired fervent patriotism among conference delegates. John C. Cutler, governor of Utah, received an enthusiastic ovation after he congratulated the delegates for their “patriotism and zeal for the promotion of the growth of America.” He confirmed the altruistic motivations of their pursuit: “No man is selfish whose single desire is to benefit his country and its citizenship.”⁵³ Speakers concurred on the need to “appeal to patriotism to pave the way for a better understanding of vitally important conditions.”⁵⁴ Salt Lake City organizers hoped that such public affirmations of patriotic attachment to the land would

wield “influencing power of force that will make for the future greatness” of the nation.⁵⁵ The environmentally evocative public address of the See America First conference aimed to inspire the American people to cultivate an emotional attachment to the national landscape.

Tourists were patriots. This was the message of publicity pamphlets disseminated to tourist destinations, travel hubs, and business organizations nationwide. One pamphlet declared “See America First!” to be

the war cry of every true American. The phrase has the real patriotic ring that thrills the heart. It fires the blood like the appeal of a modern Paul Revere, exhorting all citizens to rally to the banner that leads them to the canyons, crags, lakes and rivers of their own country.⁵⁶

Recalling the revolutionary spirit of the nation’s founding, delegates launched a new war of independence, one in which citizens were liberated from Old World oppression and free to explore the new frontier. Such a “spirit of patriotism . . . will make our nation greater than it has ever been.”⁵⁷ Through patriotic support of America’s natural heritage, tourists would realize America’s environmental exceptionalism.

The environmental aesthetic of the sublime appeals to the national imagination and American sense of place. The purpose of the See America First Conference was to energize patriotism and foster a sense of national identity through “attachment to local and national ecological icons.”⁵⁸ Iconic environmental landmarks, places like the national parks, have “collective, public meaning through the rhetorical power of identification.”⁵⁹ The patriotic aesthetic of the conference draws upon national pride in beautiful scenery to cultivate an emotional attachment to the nation’s spectacular vistas. Tourists fulfill a patriotic duty based on a sense of obligation to see and know the national landscape.

SELF-REFLEXIVITY

The third aspect of sublime rhetoric is self-reflexivity used to establish a certain perspective on nature. Sublime rhetoric presents a certain view of the landscape; environmental description allows observers to appreciate the landscape and acknowledge their part in it. Such positioning leaves “the observer feeling both within a scene and also outside of it, viewing the scene (and reflexively, the self) from a higher or more distant (and morally outstanding) perspective.”⁶⁰ Sublime rhetoric communicates

more than the scene; it represents a broader sense of what it means to be human. This self-reflexivity is at the heart of the patriotic attachment to the national environment. Seeing one's self as part of a broader community can inspire a sense of exceptionalism that incites the national consciousness.

Sublime images function actively—they frame a landscape with human expectations and desires.⁶¹ According to Oravec,

Everyone who has been a tourist has experienced this self-reflexive effect of scenic representation. We travel to see the sights that we have become familiar with in pictures or descriptions, and we are less than satisfied if our preconceptions are confirmed. Oddly enough, however, it is often the scenery, not the representation, that dissatisfies us.⁶²

Images of places we have never seen often construct our expectations. In a broader sense, “the sublime convention acts as a screen, or a projection of human preferences upon the natural scene.”⁶³ Sublime rhetoric offers not only a perspective on the environment but also a mirror into a speaker's sense of self. How we represent our surrounding environment explains a lot about how we see ourselves.

The conference speakers used sublime rhetoric to enlighten Americans about scenic appreciation and, in doing so, improve their character. The Preamble explained,

The knowledge of our own wealth of scenery possessed by Americans generally today is an indefinite and often erroneous character. People realize the majesty of our mountains, the vastness of our valleys and the pleasing prospect of our plains in a certain way, but it is not vital, tangible, real knowledge to them. Hence the need of education.⁶⁴

The general lack of knowledge of America's beauty pointed to significant flaws in the character of its people. The conference speeches argued that tourism would enhance the dispositions of Americans and thus strengthen the integrity of the nation.

Speakers at the See America First Conference reasoned that tourism was a patriotic goal for communities “united by ties of kinship and geographical proximity.”⁶⁵ Wells, Monroe, and others argued that such tourism would not simply benefit local communities but would serve the broader interest of the nation. In this way, they assured their fellow

Americans that the movement “was conceived in no sordid spirit of local self-advertisement.” Rather, See America First was “bigger and grander than any mere locality . . . conceived in the interests and for the benefit of all America.”⁶⁶ National-mindedness would come through the wisdom acquired by traveling, supporting American democratic ideals such as freedom of movement and freedom of opportunity.

Through tourism, Americans would become aware of their country and thus of themselves. The nation would be “served by hearts made finer through contact with Nature in her most sublime and beautiful aspects.”⁶⁷ The conference pamphlet urged Americans to: “Get into the open where you can observe the achievements of the Great Architect and worship his handiwork by mountain torrents and traverse silent paths that for centuries have been untrodden by foot of man.”⁶⁸ This rhetoric aimed to compel tourists to recognize the aesthetic value of a pristine wilderness and argued that to experience America’s environment was to reflect on divine creation.

Thus, the sublime provides an argument for wilderness preservation. The conference promoted careful development to facilitate appreciation. Mr. Monroe recounted: “I have stood in America where, at a single glance, I saw twenty such waterfalls at once.” He noted with awe that, “within a few miles of where we now stand, up yonder gorge, the lofty cliffs have scores of them for playthings.” He lamented that “the dwellers here about pass them with only pleasant comment, and sometimes allow their rare beauty to be seriously marred by the woodman’s ax,” and he encouraged residents of the host state to consider that “there are waterfalls here whose scenic beauty are worth more to this state than she could possibly estimate.”⁶⁹ The emotional attachment derived from experiencing America’s natural wonders inspired a reflexivity about American responsibility to appreciate their natural heritage.

The conference catchphrase caught on and “awakened a nationwide interest in America’s wonder works of nature.”⁷⁰ The See America First League, formed after the conference, organized promotional tours by freshly appointed tourism officials and published a plethora of propaganda, including magazines featuring “news” of the American West and pamphlets, postcards, and other advertising ephemera devoted to promoting western tourism. The conference inspired decades of travel discourse. A book entitled *See America First* (1922) offered a scenic narrative of Atlantic and Northeastern states⁷¹ that echoed the conference goal: “To visit foreign lands is not our real need, for if we fail to see the common beauty everywhere about us how much can we hope to find in a strange land?”⁷² The conference cultivated a shared environmental aesthetic that formed the foundation for preservation discourse about

the importance of the country's wilderness for national identity and national progress.

CONCLUSION

In *See America First*, we find a patriotic-aesthetic response that relied on the "existence of patriotic sentiment to the physical beauty of the landscape."⁷³ Such sentiment resonates today. Director Ken Burns's (2009) PBS documentary, *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*, is testament to the continued relevance of patriotic attachment to America's landscapes. The sublime rhetoric of the See America First Conference offers two lessons for our understanding of the sublime in environmental public address.

First, the See America First Conference demonstrates the importance of a rhetorical moment to inspire decades of discourse about national scenery. The final resolution of the See America First Conference prophesied: "The inauguration of this movement shall be cited in history as one of the most momentous events in American progress."⁷⁴ With this goal, and a keen eye toward publicity, conference organizers heralded the launch of a movement, later publishing a pamphlet reprinting Wells's welcoming remarks for the purposes of "spreading the gospel" of See America First.⁷⁵ The pamphlet's introduction read: "With a stroke that resounded across the continent, the keynote of American travel was launched!" It told Americans of the conference's success: "Three days of unselfish labor was incorporated in a concrete programme of action calculated to bring about results in harmony with the suggestions offered by the best orators and publicists of the Nation."⁷⁶ The pamphlet announced the importance of the conference as a rhetorical event and affirmed the role of oratory in national discourse.

The lasting influence of the conference rhetoric illustrates the importance of sublime rhetoric in promoting connection to place. For decades, See America First propaganda urged Americans to appreciate the characteristics of life and land across the national countryside. This doctrine resonated for decades. In 1957, Betty Lou Points published *America the Beautiful: A Popular Guide to Travel in the United States and Its Possessions for Everyone Who Wants to See America First*.⁷⁷ "How do your friends live in their home states? What are people talking about? What is the most important for you to see in the U.S.A.? . . . Each state has its distinct flavor, famous landmarks, and treasures awaiting the discovery of the traveler."⁷⁸ Americans developed patriotic attachments to the countryside by traveling and talking about their experiences. The

sublime shaped the rhetoric of this movement. The speakers' embellished descriptions of natural wonders inspired appreciation and stewardship of American landscapes.

Second, the See America First Conference demonstrated the role of public address in promoting America's environmental exceptionalism. The See America First Conference used public address to convey the sublime and the "unconscious beneficial influence of [America's] grandeur, its majesty and its pride" through "closer communion with nature, the great mother of us all."⁷⁹ Speakers constructed the national landscape through rhetoric—oral soliloquies to America's environment inspired patriotic fervor. Through the "power of the pulpit," the conference sought to launch a movement of Americans who would get "near to nature's heart" and find "tongues in trees, books in running brooks, sermons in stones and good in everything."⁸⁰ Through public address, the conference constructed a sublime aesthetic, in much the same way as Transcendentalist writers and speakers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman.

While American nature writers still have a place in American college and high school curricula, the potential of rhetoric to awaken emotional attachments of our environment has changed. In an age of digital media, stunning photos of the nation's beautiful places are widely available online. We share images of vacation scenery on social networks while professional photographers publish jaw-dropping photos of America's natural wonders. These digitally processed photos enhance natural features in a way characteristic of the sublime, but their ubiquity changes the exceptionalism of our national environment. As American landscapes become familiar in photographs of the places conference speakers described—Yosemite, Yellowstone, the Grand Canyon, the Columbia River, the Great Salt Lake—these places become less exceptional.

This conference placed great faith in the influence of sublime rhetoric—the power of words to move people, to inspire self-reflection and environmental stewardship. The See America First Conference reminds us of the importance of rhetoric and public address in civic discourse about our environment and invites us to further consider the way the sublime has changed in contemporary digital discourse.

NOTES

1. Fog had gripped the Salt Lake Valley for days, and would continue for another week. Utah Historical Daily Weather Almanac, <http://www.pgjr.alpine.k12.ut.us/science/james/almanac.html>.

2. "Cars Collide in Heavy Fog," *Deseret Evening News*, January 25, 1906. January 25 1906.
3. *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, January 25, 1906.
4. See America League, *See America First Conference* (Logan: Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, 1906).
5. Quoted in L. G. Monroe, "Preamble," in *See America First Conference*, 37.
6. Heber M. Wells, "Introduction & Welcome," in *See America First Conference*, 5.
7. See America League, *See America First Conference*.
8. Wells, "Introduction & Welcome," in *See America First Conference*, 9–10.
9. Monroe, "Preamble," in *See America First Conference*, 35.
10. John Rennie Short, *Imagined Country: Society, Culture and Environment* (London: Routledge, 1991); Eric Kaufmann, "'Naturalizing the Nation': The Rise of Naturalistic Nationalism in the United States and Canada," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40.4 (1998).
11. A member of the Hudson River School, Cole himself remarked, "The painter of American scenery has indeed privileges superior to any other. All nature here is new to art." Hans Huth, *Nature and the American: Three Centuries of Changing Attitudes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 46. Cole's writings supported what his fellow Americans saw in his paintings. In his "Essay on American Scenery," he wrote that his country "has features, and glorious ones, unknown to Europe. The most distinctive, and perhaps the most impressive, characteristics of American scenery is its wildness." Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 4th ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 81.
12. Kaufmann, "'Naturalizing the Nation'"; Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 78; Short, *Imagined Country*.
13. Angela Miller, "The Fate of Wilderness in American Landscape Art: The Dilemmas of 'Nature's Nation,'" in *American Wilderness: A New History*, ed. Michael Lewis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 92.
14. *Ibid.*
15. John Opie, *Virtual America: Sleepwalking through Paradise* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 53.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Wells, "Introduction & Welcome," in *See America First Conference*, 5.

18. *Ibid.*, 14.
19. *Ibid.*, 12–13.
20. *Ibid.*, 31.
21. See America League, “See Europe If You Will, but See America First,” ed. Library of Congress (Denver: Carson-Harper, 1906), 5.
22. Christine Oravec, “To Stand Outside Oneself: The Sublime in the Discourse of Natural Scenery,” in *The Symbolic Earth*, ed. James Cantrill and Christine Oravec (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 58.
23. Oravec, “To Stand Outside Oneself.”
24. Gregory Clark, *Rhetorical Landscapes in America: Variations on a Theme from Kenneth Burke* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 5.
25. *Ibid.*, 9, 13.
26. Alan Goldman, “The Aesthetic,” in *Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, ed. Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes (London: Routledge, 2001).
27. Aristotle, “De Poetica,” in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941).
28. Alfred Jules Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York: Dover, 1952), 114.
29. Allen Carlson, “Environmental Aesthetics,” in *A Companion to Aesthetics*, ed. David Cooper (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 428.
30. Carlson, “Environmental Aesthetics”; Allen Carlson, “Environmental Aesthetics,” in *Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, ed. Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes (London: Routledge, 2001); Allen Carlson, *Aesthetics and the Environment: The Appreciation of Nature, Art and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2002); Allen Carlson, *Nature and Landscape: An Introduction to Environmental Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).
31. Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker, “Introduction,” in *Ecological Prospects: Scientific, Religious, and Aesthetic Perspectives*, ed. Christopher Key Chapple (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), xi.
32. Christine Oravec, “Conservationism vs. Preservationism: The ‘Public Interest’ in the Hetch Hetchy Controversy,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70 (1984): 445.
33. Julie Corbett, *Communicating Nature: How We Create and Understand Environmental Messages* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2006), 168.
34. Kevin Michael Deluca and Anne Teresa Demo, “Imaging Nature: Watkins, Yosemite, and the Birth of Environmentalism,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 17.3 (2000): 249.

35. Oravec, "To Stand Outside Oneself," 59.
36. Monroe, "Preamble," in *See America First Conference*, 4–5.
37. *Ibid.*, 6.
38. Betty Lou Points, *America the Beautiful: A Popular Guide to Travel in the United States and Its Possessions for Everyone Who Wants to See America First* (New York: Greenwich Book Publishers, 1957), 1.
39. Monroe, "Preamble," in *See America First Conference*, 38.
40. Albert E. Mead, "Address," in *See America First Conference*, 17.
41. Wells, "Introduction & Welcome," in *See America First Conference*, 10.
42. Monroe, "Preamble," in *See America First Conference*, 36.
43. *Ibid.*, 8.
44. *Ibid.*, 40.
45. *Ibid.*
46. Pratt, "Address," in *See America First Conference*, 60.
47. Oravec, "To Stand Outside Oneself," 58.
48. Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Briatin, 1760–1800* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), vii.
49. *Ibid.*
50. Oravec, "To Stand Outside Oneself," 66.
51. See America League, "See Europe If You Will, but See America First," 5.
52. Pratt, "Address," in *See America First Conference*, 60.
53. John C. Cutler, "Address," in *See America First Conference*, 13.
54. Monroe, "Preamble," 6.
55. *Ibid.*, 23
56. See America League, "See Europe If You Will, but See America First," 3.
57. Pratt, "Address," in *See America First Conference*, 60.
58. Steven Slaughter, "The Republican State and Global Environmental Governance," *The Good Society* 17.2 (2008): 28.
59. Clark, *Rhetorical Landscapes in America*, 150.
60. Corbett, *Communicating Nature*, 169.
61. Oravec, "To Stand Outside Oneself," 61.
62. *Ibid.*, 60.
63. *Ibid.*, 59.
64. Monroe, "Preamble," in *See America First Conference*, 39.
65. *Ibid.*, 34.
66. Wells, "Introduction & Welcome," in *See America First Conference*.
67. Monroe, "Preamble," in *See America First Conference*, 36.
68. See America League, "See Europe If You Will, but See America First," 4–5.

69. Monroe, "Preamble," in *See America First Conference*, 38.
70. *The National Rotarian: Boston*, May 1912.
71. Orville O. Hiestand, *See America First* (Whitefish: Kessinger, 2004 [1922]).
72. *Ibid.*, 3.
73. Oravec, "Conservationism vs. Preservationism," 446.
74. Metcalf, "Address," in *See America First Conference*, 108.
75. The pamphlet was not copyrighted for the purposes of facilitating free distribution.
76. See America League, "See Europe If You Will, but See America First."
77. Points, *America the Beautiful*.
78. *Ibid.*, 3.
79. Pratt, "Address," in *See America First Conference*, 60.
80. Monroe, "Preamble," in *See America First Conference*, 41–42.

FIVE

A Call to Partnership, Health, and Pure Fire

A Vital Vision of the Future in Aldo Leopold's "The Farmer as a Conservationist" Address

MELBA HOFFER

One our faith and one our longing,
To make the world within our reach
Somewhat better for our living
And gladder for our speech.

—John Greenleaf Whittier



From John Muir's turn-of-the-century aesthetic/preservationist appeals, to the alarms rung by Rachel Carson on harmful pesticides with *Silent Spring* in 1962, twentieth-century environmental advocacy has achieved considerable success in spite of monumental cultural and political odds. Aldo Leopold has been one of modern conservationism's most prophetic and consistent voices. Because of its singular emphasis on conservation as a moral and cultural issue, his virtue-based approach to conservationism has earned him a prime place in environmental history. Leopold pressed the cause of environmentalism with a firebrand orator's intonations and a philosopher's moral sensibilities. Regarded as the father of wildlife ecology, Leopold believes a true culture of conservation is possible only when private landowners, schools, government agencies, universities, farmers, and individuals in a society understand conservation as a "positive exercise of skill and insight, not merely a negative exercise of abstinence or caution."¹ For this reason, Leopold avoids using either extremist doomsday or purely aesthetic appeals that sometimes characterize the rhetoric

of other environmental advocates. Instead he invites civic engagement with conservation as the ultimate intellectual and practical act of public health and self-liberation. Leopold's message of conservation engenders in its audience burning curiosity, pride, attentiveness, enthusiasm, and affection. Aristotle described the epideictic genre of rhetoric as stimulating voluntary passions, actions, and strivings toward a virtuous character, and in this way Leopold's environmental rhetoric fits within that ancient tradition. Appeals to virtue, then, coupled with a vision of the future where man is living in reciprocal harmony with the land, are the foundations of an environmental message made of equal parts reasoned scientific argument and formidable motivational passion.

PLANTING THOUGHTS

Aldo Leopold was born in Burlington, Iowa, on January 11, 1887. Though he is heralded as a central figure in the American conservation movement, very little has been written about his extraordinary ability as an orator.² As a boy, Leopold's study of birds had a pronounced effect on his perception of the natural world, and concentrating on them trained his eye to focus on even the most fleeting phenomena, while identifying them forced him to hone his perceptiveness. His passion for the natural world was fueled in no small part by his father, Carl Leopold, a naturalist with an adventurous passion for the outdoors.³ Leopold's literary talents were nurtured by his mother, Clara Leopold, who introduced young Aldo to philosophical and literary writing.

As a young man he enrolled in the Yale Forest School, the first graduate school of forestry in the country. There, Leopold developed more than his scientific mind; he developed crucial insights into the importance of oral advocacy. Curt Meine, one of his biographers, documents Leopold's growing interest in public speaking in Leopold's correspondence to his mother. These letters were peppered with astute comments on various aspects of his education, including lectures he attended daily. In one letter Leopold describes being impressed by a Native American speaker whom he saw as a great wordsmith. Leopold was particularly taken with one expression the speaker used: "Nature is the gate to the Great Mystery."⁴ These powerful words resonated with Leopold's developing philosophy. In another letter to his mother Leopold tells her about a lecture he attended in which the speaker was ineffective. The subject of the speech was Abraham Lincoln, and Leopold judged that the speaker was "not very good" in his delivery.⁵ He criticized the speaker's high-pitched tone as incongruent with the forcefulness and gravitas of the

subject of the speech. Leopold was discovering the importance of the arrangement of words in a speech as well as the need to deliver his message in a suitable and persuasive way. They were lessons that became invaluable for Leopold's own rhetorical style.

Leopold graduated from Yale with a master's degree in 1909. Yale played a central role in the shaping of the early American conservation movement in the 1800s and in the 1900s, especially with the establishment of the Yale Forest School. Gifford Pinchot was instrumental in setting up the Yale Forest School that Leopold attended and the first American to receive training in forestry in Europe. A contemporary of John Muir and Franklin D. Roosevelt, Pinchot was named first chief of forest service by Roosevelt, and he became an opponent to Muir in the conservation/preservation split.

Leopold joined the U.S. Forest Service where, by 1912, he was supervisor of the million-acre Carson National Forest. Leopold's abilities as a rhetor began to take shape early in his career. In 1914 his unique talent was recognized when he was placed in charge of District 3's recreational policy in Albuquerque, New Mexico. His new position took him on investigative and speaking tours across the region to drum up support for game conservation. In the spring of 1917, as the United States formally entered World War I, the Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce came to recognize his speaking abilities and offered him the paid position of secretary. The Chamber of Commerce was struck by Leopold's outstanding organizational skills as well as his ability to communicate with business owners in a direct and concise way about wartime resource management. There is no question that Leopold's powerful speeches were fueled by his extensive administrative and research endeavors. In 1919, as the war wound down and word came from Washington that the forest service was returning to peacetime plans, Leopold was offered and accepted the position of assistant district forester in charge of operations. It was the second highest position in a district that spanned twenty million acres in central southern Arizona and New Mexico. Having accumulated significant administrative experience, at the age of thirty-seven, Leopold went back to Wisconsin to further his passion for research. In 1924, he accepted the position of associate director of the U.S. Forest Products Laboratory in Madison. During his tenure in government positions, conducting scientific research, and teaching at the University of Wisconsin, he wrote over 350 articles on scientific research and policy matters. He was also an advisor to the United Nations on conservation issues. At the time of his death in 1948, Aldo Leopold was at the height of his powers. According to Meine, who wrote a seminal biography of Leopold: "In his writing,

he was still exploring the possibilities of his voice, and of his evolving philosophy.”⁶

THE FARMER AS A CONSERVATIONIST

As a student of history, Leopold once said, “No important change in ethics was ever accomplished without an internal change in our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affections, and convictions.”⁷ So, when asked to address the University of Wisconsin’s Farm and Home Week in 1939, Leopold crafted a speech entitled “The Farmer as a Conservationist” that proclaimed the core values of a true conservation ethic. Leopold spoke to an audience of farmers and private landowners who were primarily engaged in conservation for economic reasons. Thus, his overall goal was to change the way his auditors related to their land; to challenge the rampant utilitarian discourse that portrayed land to these private owners only as a “bank account.”⁸

In his speech, Leopold worries that many farmers have embraced an abstract cultural ideal in which ownership chiefly benefits the owner rather than society as a whole. Leopold recognizes this false proprietary ideal as problematic, even as he hopes that it might change over time with shifts in culture and a new language of ownership. In the foreword of his most famous book, *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold warns that “conservation is going nowhere because it is incompatible with the Abrahamic concept of land.” He goes on to offer an alternative to what he sees as an outdated and detrimental concept of owning: “We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity that belongs to us. When we see land as community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.”⁹

Leopold believes environmental problems stem from people not living well on the land. Therefore, conservation is not about managing land but, instead, managing landowners. The Leopoldian challenge to individual ownership was, at the time of the speech, and is now, achievable only if land uses are coordinated on large spatial or geographical scales. Contemporary Leopold scholars still promote this view. Minor adjustments are not enough. “People need to change their ideas about what land is for.”¹⁰ Rather than thinking about ownership as isolated and isolating, landowners must come to realize that “nature is an interconnected whole, one parcel fully linked to the next.”¹¹ Since lands differ physically in their slopes, soils, vegetation, and structures, activities on the land should take these differences into account. For this reason, leading Leopold scholar Eric T. Freyfogle asserts, that to remain legitimate,

landownership needs norms to take on new shapes as communal values and circumstances evolve.¹² In short, Leopold believes the activities an owner carries out on private land ought to depend in part on the natural features of the land.

In “The Farmer as a Conservationist” speech, Leopold considers three other pressing issues. First, he wants to challenge the idea that conservation is an exercise in restraint only; that property owners conserve land best by not defiling it. This view is still commonly held. Typically, when one thinks of conservation, it is of things one ought not to do (e.g., do not litter, do not pollute, do not contaminate, do not waste). In contrast, Leopold understands that humans play a central role in conservation, yes, but a positive one, contributing intellectual fire and skill in this exciting enterprise. For Leopold, conservation is an act of self-liberation. Landowners must free their minds from the tyranny of capitalism and inquisitively observe what the land needs to achieve a healthy balance. Leopold’s appeals to virtue recur throughout his writing up to, and including, *A Sand County Almanac*. Curiosity, attentiveness, and enthusiasm are offered as traits of character a person (especially a farmer) must have in order to obtain an ecological conscience.¹³

Second, Leopold is troubled by the idea that economic incentives are enough to promote good land management. The thought that a government hundreds, sometimes thousands, of miles away could know, or even care, what a specific tract of land needs Leopold thinks absurd, especially considering the government’s tendency to supply market demands at the exclusion of other considerations. Instead, Leopold believes that the virtues conducive to successful conservation are pride and affection for the land.

Finally, Leopold scrupulously delivers his conservation message without appeals to apocalyptic and doomsday scenarios. Apocalyptic scenarios are common in contemporary rhetoric and sometimes used by environmental leaders. Barry Brummet has explored contemporary apocalyptic rhetoric that urges audiences to take political and social stances.¹⁴ At the center of apocalyptic rhetoric is the idea that an audience might be persuaded by a given argument if the rhetor emphasizes the profound consequences of intervening or not intervening to prevent catastrophe. There are often negative consequences for rejecting a call to action made by a speaker; however, what distinguishes apocalyptic rhetoric is its strong emphasis on the unusual and devastating scope of the ultimate result. In his speech Leopold says, “Prudence never kindled a fire in the human mind; I have no hope for conservation born of fear.” To illustrate this point, Leopold likens conservation to the human drive

for innovation: “Our present skill in the care of mechanical engines did not arise from fear lest they fail to do their work. Rather was it born of curiosity and pride of understanding.”¹⁵ Leopold is convinced that lasting conservation is impossible without active participation by private landowners. We must rid ourselves of the misconception that conservation is solely the work of government. Leopold lambasts this view by stating: “Government cannot own and operate small parcels of land, and it cannot own and operate good land at all.”¹⁶

Although Leopold rejects fear appeals to promote conservation, he does not shy away from denouncing the detrimental economic repercussions of bad land use. Leopold biographer and environmental studies scholar Julianne Lutz-Newton quotes Leopold on critical deficiencies in conservation programs:

In Wisconsin, as in the Southwest, private landowners often used their lands in ways that degraded them. In addition to the consequences of lost fertility and depleted resources, such land misuse was “actually creating a cash liability for the taxpayer.” It imposed economic burdens on citizens when private lands depended on public help to repair or make up for ruined land or when misused land was abandoned with unpaid taxes, as it often was, and the costs of government ownership and restoration shifted onto the taxpayers’ shoulders.¹⁷

Other contemporary scholars show Leopold was ahead of his time in calling attention to the intersection between property rights and environmental advocacy. Although the negligent actions of private owners continue to be largely absent from public and environmental discourse, such issues are as pressing today as they were on that February day in 1939 when he delivered his speech. Peterson and Horton have found that one reason landowners perceive themselves as outsiders when listening to the rhetoric of endangered species management is that they feel environmentalists and regulators fail to ground it in local cultural practices.¹⁸ Thus, foreshadowing the findings of contemporary scholars—like Eric Freyfogle, Jason Shogren, Christopher Rodgers, and Eve Endicott, among others—Leopold understands that lasting conservation requires the direct involvement from private landowners.¹⁹ In “The Farmer as a Conservationist,” Leopold aims to ignite the curiosity of landowners and elicit their participation, especially that of farmers. He says: “It is the individual farmer who must weave the greater part of the rug on which America stands.”²⁰

TURNING THE SOIL

“The Farmer as a Conservationist” is a rhetorical achievement of both form and content. The speech begins with the Socratic technique of defining important terms. “Conservation means harmony between men and land. . . . When land does well for its owner, and the owner does well by his land; when both end up better by reason of their partnership, we have conservation. When one or the other grows poorer, we do not.”²¹ Leopold opens the speech with an unequivocal and concrete definition of conservation. He also reframes conservation from a utilitarian and instrumental perspective to one of cooperation and reciprocity. That is to say, instead of constantly thinking about what people can get from the land, we need to shift our concerns to what the land needs us to give to it. When conservation is done correctly, he believes, it is a positive exercise in skill, an intellectual achievement as well as a good deed. Furthermore: “Conservation, then, is keeping the resource in working order, as well as preventing over-use. Resources may get out of order before they are exhausted, sometimes while they are still abundant. Conservation, therefore, is a positive exercise of skill and insight, not merely a negative exercise of abstinence or caution.”²²

Leopold defines the process of land destruction by linking it to the prevailing view of land as “bank account.” This perspective views land as a “soil bank,” where resources are currency and land destruction means overdrawing on those resources. He chalks up this view to “ruthless utilitarianism.” Thus, against this view, he offers conservation as an expression of “skill and insight.” While most scientific and economic appeals can be said to be grounded in utility insofar as their focus is on the benefits of behaving more ethically, Leopold and his contemporaries extend the concept of utility in conservation by defining it “broadly to include aesthetics and quality-of-life issues as well as bread-and-butter needs.” Human utility, one contemporary scholar says, “is no doubt the central factor defining good land use.”²³

Leopold closes his speech with an engaging and meticulous illustration of land health. The concept of health or land health is the base on which the entirety of Leopold’s environmental philosophy rests and therefore takes on special importance in this speech. One might say that Leopold hopes to make “land health” what Richard Weaver calls a “god term” as “diversity,” “equality,” and “inclusivity” are “god terms” in other social matters.²⁴ Therefore, it was of utmost importance to paint a clear picture for the audience of exactly what “land health” is. In the speech he defines land health as “the capacity for the self-renewal” of

soils, waters, plants, and animals. By offering a palpable, sensible, and attainable explanation of “land health,” Leopold aims to stimulate the audience’s imagination. He does this because he believes that promoting conservation is as much about “planting thoughts” as it is about planting anything else. To this end, he offers an idealistic vision of “owning,” expressed as a detailed set of instructions for caring for a typical tract of land in the Corn Belt. He begins by defining the health of the land as its fertility. He then he drives home the idea that life on a farm is anything but dull. Leopold invites his audience to think about the “drama in the red barn, the stark silo, the team heaving over the hill, the country store, black against the sunset.”²⁵

The concept of land health also has ethical dimensions. A land health ethic, especially as it is presented in this speech, is premised on the need for curiosity and affection for land. It posits that “the landscape of any farm is the owner’s portrait of himself.” For this reason: “The future farmer would no more mutilate his creek than his own face.”²⁶ In sum, we have a moral obligation to maintain the “wholeness” or integrity of a tract of land. Leopold recognizes in the speech that this comparison is exaggerated. He understands that varying degrees of alteration of nature are inevitable to make land inhabitable by humans. However, by making this comparison, he points the audience toward the skills needed to make such alterations a product of “good conservation, good taste, or good farming.”²⁷

Having reviewed the salient structural features of Leopold’s speech, attention can now be turned to its remarkable content. First, the speech contains a remarkable variety of argument types and evidence. This should not be surprising given that Leopold was as much a student of philosophy as he was a scientist and public official. The speech features arguments by example, by sign, by analogy, by cause, and an abundance of motivational arguments. When illustrating the predominance of the “bank account” view of land, he offers clear evidence of resources that are being drained irresponsibly without concern for how these resources can be replenished. As concrete examples of this practice, he discusses “the eroding farms of the cornbelt,” northern forests, farm woodlots, and deer, among others. Arguments by sign are used to support his claims about the alarming rate at which farm ponds were being drained at the time of the speech. He explains that on the christening of Wisconsin, the area featured hundreds of ponds, of which ninety-nine were drained. He says, “If you don’t believe it, look on the original surveyor’s plot of your township.”²⁸

Perhaps most effectively, Leopold uses an argument from sign regarding the bog-birch to show how oftentimes things that appear

insignificant have important ecological functions. The bog-birch, he claims, is a small, seemingly uninteresting little bush that could be on anyone's property, though we may fail to notice it. It does not flower, nor does it yield any kind of fruit for either bird or beast to eat. Also, it does not grow into a beautiful tree that is pleasing to the eye. This little bush, it seems, does no good or harm at all. Leopold sums up his description of the bog-birch tree as follows, "The perfect nonentity in bushes; the complete biological bore."²⁹

"But is it?" he asks. Midway through the speech he tells the story of how he once followed the tracks of a group of starving deer and he realized that the tracks led him from one bog-birch to another. Upon closer inspection, he noticed the tips of the bush had been eaten off while scores of other bushes in the area were left untouched. In addition to feeding the deer, the bog-birch provides sustenance for other species, Leopold explains. One year, in the middle of a blizzard, he saw a flock of sharp-tailed grouse feeding off the bog-birch buds when they were unable to find their usual grain or weed seeds. Here, visual cues provide evidence to support the claims of a much more complex and multifaceted ecological function of the bog-birch bush than what a first glance might reveal.

Leopold also makes effective use of arguments from cause. In his explanation of land degradation, Leopold points directly at the commodification of land, ruthless utilitarianism, and even the regimentation of popular ideas as causes for the resulting environmental predicament. As an alternative, he offers a snapshot of man living in harmony with land as an incentive and motivation for the audience to embrace conservation. "Conservation implies self-expression in that landscape, rather than blind compliance with economic dogma."³⁰ For this reason, "Subsidies and propaganda may evoke the farmer's acquiescence, but only enthusiasm and affection will evoke his skill."³¹

In many ways, Leopold was an Enlightenment thinker. He understood the importance of rational appeals and carefully crafted a speech that met the highest standards of reason and focused emotion. Indeed, what makes this speech unique is its powerful combination of rational and emotional appeals. Underlying his motivational arguments are a priori insights into the nature of our being. He argues, for example, from the premise that our interdependence with the land is inescapable. This feature is the common foundation for all life on the planet. Whereas philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and Aristotle begin their ontologies by pointing to the ability to reason and use language as distinctive and privileging features of the human species, Leopold identifies the human rootedness in land as the species' most essential feature; one shared with

all living species. Thus, instead of focusing on the supremacy humans ought to enjoy resulting from their “specialness,” Leopold shifts the emphasis to the responsibilities to which shared dependency commits humans as caretakers of the land. This warrant runs through his entire body of work.

Finally, Leopold scholars comment on the expert use of literary devices such as metaphor that make “The Farmer as a Conservationist” an effective speech. For this reason, I will not focus on that aspect of the content of the speech at length. Instead, I will share a sample of these astute observations. Julianne Lutz Newton, most notably, remarks on Leopold’s frequent use of metaphor throughout the speech. “He tended to employ mechanistic language when addressing land technicians and farmers who manipulated parts of nature for human benefit and tinkered with tractors.”³² She also notes how he uses more than one style of metaphor in the same essay while always adapting the metaphors to his audience. Freyfogle applies this very insight to the “Farmer as a Conservationist” address. Leopold incorporated into the speech mechanical metaphors that would ring true with the audience. These metaphors served to help the audience understand that land is susceptible to abuse, malfunction, and destruction when used thoughtlessly. Freyfogle explains:

Leopold’s farm audience knew all about machines and what it took to keep them functioning. To this audience it was rhetorically effective to speak of the land as a mechanism, even though Leopold knew the comparison was imprecise. As for farmland, it got out of order when livestock grazed in woodlots, when waterways were unduly drained or straightened, and when soil was so abused that it no longer performed its physical and biological functions.³³

Another effective use of metaphor is evident when, near the middle of the speech, Leopold compares land to the human body. He does this to draw attention to the wholeness that exists in nature.

It seems to me that the pattern of the rural landscape, like the configuration of our own bodies, has in it (or should have in it) a certain wholeness. No one censures a man who loses his leg in an accident, or who was born with only four fingers, but we should look askance at a man who amputated a natural part on the grounds that some other is more profitable.³⁴

When Leopold uses the language of amputation, likening it to removing features of a natural landscape, he is speaking in ecological terms. In other words, he is not referring to individual members of any given species of plant or animal life; he is speaking strictly in terms of the survival of species as such. As an ecologist he is committed to species survival, but this commitment should not be mistaken for an animal rightist's objection to the destruction or harming of individual members of a species. Ultimately, Leopold recognizes that changes in the landscape are often inevitable and permanent to make room for human habitat and enterprise. In other words, while human expansion is a fact of life, ecological considerations must be a big part of our collective decision-making process if we hope to inhabit the planet in perpetuity.

AN INVITATION TO PURE FIRE

Leopold's brand of conservation calls for intellectual and emotional engagement as much as it does for physical action. His passion is contagious. It is no wonder that Susan Flader and Baird Callicott called the essay as a "masterpiece."³⁵ Whether one is merely sympathetic to conservation issues or deeply committed to them, Leopold's words have the effect of reinforcing our intuitions (and convictions) about the rightness of caring for the land. His language fluctuates between technical and colloquial while his enthusiasm never wanes. He has genuine insight into long-term conservation and does not mince words in presenting his view to the public. His commitment to conservation is evident, not just in his words but in his lifelong dedication to ecological science.

"The Farmer as a Conservationist" reflects the pillars of Aldo Leopold's broader ethical and ecological thinking. The different parts of the speech encapsulate a deeper, more expansive part of his philosophy developed in later works. A good speech, in many ways, does precisely that: it stimulates the audience interested in the topic, it encourages their imagination, and it whets the audience's appetite for further, more in-depth information on a subject. Leopold's critique of commodification, invitation to partnership and community, call for an integrated approach to conservation, and overall conservation goal of land health are key features of his body of work.

At the core of Leopold's environmental philosophy is a strong critique of the commodification of land. Specifically, he rejects subsidies, and other economic incentives, as the proper way to attract farmers

and others to conservation—though undeniably this approach has been effective in protecting some ecologically sensitive lands. Lutz Newton observes that: “The government is not around while the things that matter happen. If decent land use had to be bought by government intervention on an ever-increasing scale, projected Leopold, it would mean ‘the end of private landownership, the end of government solvency, and the end of the present economic system.’”³⁶ Leopold thinks that a system based solely on how a land could profit its owner would be hopelessly out of balance. He explains that every parcel of land has plant and animal life that are native to that area and are embedded in a specific set of interrelationships. This is why the “let Uncle Sam do it” approach does not work. It has a tendency to ignore and even eliminate parts of the land that make up the whole since they have no monetary value. Furthermore, even if the government did care about keeping nature’s balance, it would have to be more of a hands-on effort rather than some bureaucrat shuffling papers in Washington who has never seen the land. Leopold brings up this concern in “The Farmer as a Conservationist” by juxtaposing subsidies versus education as incentives for good land use. On this question he identifies education as the most critical part of a culture of conservation. For Leopold, though economic incentives can achieve some acquiescence from private owners, true conservation is only possible when landowners possess skill and an understanding of land’s mechanisms.

Leopold himself once joined the conservation bandwagon that sought salvation in incentive programs that paid landowners to act responsibly. But within a few years, the sobering results came trickling in. “Incentive programs worked crudely and haphazardly, and old habits returned when money stopped.”³⁷ Since our moral intuitions result from cultural traditions and social processes, we must start by “readjusting them to bring property rights into closer alignment with the public good.”³⁸ This means, as stated earlier, that government does have a role to play in long-term conservation without, however, being solely responsible for it. In legal terms it means that people ought to begin to take into account the natural features of landscapes as they make land-use decisions. For example, a wetland is not the same as a dry field in ecological terms, and “property law should not treat the two land types alike.”³⁹ Making this shift in property law might prove to be a great hurdle. Perhaps the biggest challenge for the conservation movement is encouraging legislators to update property laws to include private owners in conservation efforts. There is benefit for private owners in keeping their lands healthy, and when property rights trump conservation laws, they curtail the positive liberties of the majority.⁴⁰

Another pillar of Leopold's conservation thought introduced in "The Farmer as a Conservationist" is an integrated approach to conservation. Landowners must come to see conservation in an integrated ecological way. Freyfogle offers an example of Leopold's call to combine different types of conservation in a single tract of land:

Many animals wisely use the land itself to protect themselves from temperature extremes; human building designs can do the same, taking advantage of the earth sheltering to provide protection from cold and heat. Grazing and browsing animals keep the land's fertility cycles intact by returning their wastes to the very soil that nourished their food; again, people could take lessons from nature's simple yet elegant ways of keeping the soil fertile.⁴¹

Rather than taking a fragmentary approach to conservation, advocates must begin to take into account this interconnection as they create new narratives about property that replace the old ones. A successful approach to conservation, for Leopold, is one that "fuses economic and aesthetic land uses in the same acre."⁴² Leopold believes that a virtue-based rhetorical approach emphasizing prudence, a utility approach focusing on maintaining the land's productivity, and a "pure fire of intellect" must be combined to generate true cultural change. A greening of the land begins by reevaluating and revaluing how individual parts fit together into harmonious wholes, particularly when it comes to individual landowners.

AN INVITATION TO COMMUNITY

Leopold also believes that from an ecological perspective, the owner of a land parcel really owns not a distinctly bounded piece of nature but "a stock certificate" in a common biota. The term "biota" is one that Leopold adopted later in his life and it means individual ecological communities comprised of people, plant life, animal life, and landscapes. A landowner, therefore, must first be willing to update the outmoded liberal ideal of independence that has been a staple of American culture in favor of a definition that more accurately captures the essence of human embeddedness in landscapes. Lutz Newton explains this part of Leopold's thinking: "Unless they [*landowners*] understood and accepted responsibility for community welfare, conservation would falter and so would the human enterprise."⁴³

In other words, individuals stand to liberate themselves by challenging the tyranny of the market, commercial exploitation, and its demands for constant growth as an end in itself. Leopold makes a direct reference to this idea in the speech. He talks about the tendency of ideas to become “dictators.” He recalls that in World War II autocrats fashioned political ideologies that became unquestioned orthodoxy. In his mind, “The saving grace of democracy is that we fastened this yoke on our own necks, and we can cast it off when we want to, without severing the neck.”⁴⁴ Thus, lasting conservation requires both the ability and desire to utilize critical thinking skills.

Equal to the importance of critical thinking for good land use, Leopold adds good communication. Leopold thought it crucial for citizens to come together, through communication, to develop policies that protect and redress problems with soil, water flows, biological diversity, and the integrity of ecological systems. Still, while specific issues like drainage, erosion, soil degradation, run-off pollution, and other issues need work, above all, the land ethic aims at “respecting the land’s carrying capacity, preserving its beauty, and guaranteeing health in perpetuity.”⁴⁵

Communication skills, then, are necessary for long-term conservation politically and also ethically. Leopold’s land ethic is based upon the concept of a healthy land, which is already imbued with interpretation and human meaning. To be sure, the type of communication implied by this ethic does not make use of language, outside of its important call to speak of other biotas as communities, but instead relies on mutually beneficial interactions with land (preserving its fertility to the degree than we can). Thus, the idea of land health is already infused with the concern for preserving the self-renewing capacities of the land so that it may sustain the greatest level of biodiversity and facilitate the survival of its citizens, including, of course, human beings. The end goal of a proper land ethic is a shared duty that reflects “the existence of an ecological conscience, and this in turn reflects a conviction of individual responsibility for the health of the land.”⁴⁶ It is up to citizens and lawmakers to negotiate, to work out the specific meaning of local healthy lands and human communication, and to engage in processes of political deliberation. Cultural revaluation is also essential to a land ethic. The land ethic is neither a misanthropic ethic (against people) nor a biocentric one (human interests equal to nonhuman interests).

Leopold builds his conservation framework by focusing on the relationships of interdependence that characterize the land and its inhabitants. Leopold posits the role of ethics as “community instinct in the making” and pushes forward with a symbiotic model of community that replaces free-for-all competition with cooperative and ethical mechanisms. He explains:

All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. His instincts prompt him to compete for his place in that community, but his ethics prompt him also to cooperate (perhaps in order that there might be a place to compete for).⁴⁷

The type of ethical communication and political deliberation described here teaches people that they are born into a sociocultural universe where values, moral commitments, and existential meanings are presumed and negotiated. For Leopold, presuming these relationships of interdependence in which human beings operate is not enough. People must create a new “community instinct” that self-consciously works within the constraints of their interrelated nature to reach not just for the flourishing of a single community within this ecosystem but for the health of the land overall. Leopold sums up this idea most clearly in *A Sand County Almanac* when he says:

An ethic, ecologically, is a limitation on freedom of action in the struggle for existence. An ethic, philosophically, is a differentiation of social and anti-social conduct. These are two definitions of one thing. The thing has its origin in the tendency of interdependent individuals or groups to evolve modes of cooperation.⁴⁸

CONTRIBUTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL DISCOURSE

The concept of land health described in “The Farmer as a Conservationist” is the crown jewel of Leopold’s ethical and ecological thinking. Thus any analysis of this speech should conclude by highlighting this singular and lasting contribution to environmental discourse. Leopold described healthy land as “stable,” by which he does not mean to suggest that natural systems are static. Instead, he means that in the more specific sense land retains its ability to cycle nutrients effectively and, therefore, maintains its soil fertility. In other words, healthy land is much like a healthy human body when it is given the proper balance of nutrients and the ability to restore itself. To do that, the land needs to have “integrity,” comprised of the biotic parts necessary for this nutrient cycling to take place. Leopold uses “stability” and “integrity” in tandem as a shorthand expression for “land health.”⁴⁹

Leopold believes that a thing is right when it preserves the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community, and with this simple moral maxim, he provides a compass with which to appraise the rightness or wrongness of our relationship to the land. Another important aspect of

“land health” is its emphasis on disabusing us of the idea that “we are free to discard or change any part of the land we do not find ‘useful’ or intelligible for that matter (such as flood plains, marshes, and wild floras, and faunas).”⁵⁰ In “The Farmer as a Conservationist,” Leopold illustrates this point by telling the story of the bog-birch.

“Land health,” as an ethic and conservation approach, reflects the dynamic and broad set of contexts in which conservation provides ethical norms to adjudicate the needs of one individual versus the needs of the collective. Of course, land health depends on the knowledge that human beings can collectively acquire an understanding of the various relationships of interdependence that are at play in any given ecosystem. And, it is critical to make the distinction that while Leopold values scientific knowledge of the land, the type of knowledge he promotes is a practical, hands-on knowledge that all citizens can cultivate. Leopold refers to this type of knowledge simply as skill, and skill for Leopold comes from:

A careful attentiveness to the land and from a readiness to respect nature’s equal management role. Skill arose within a person who possessed a lively and vital curiosity about the workings of the biological engine, a person inspired by “enthusiasm and affection.” These were the human qualities requisite to better land use.⁵¹

In evaluating “land health” as an overall conservation goal, we must appreciate the role of virtues such as enthusiasm, curiosity, affection, and knowledge as concepts, not only applicable to our relations to other human beings but desirable for good communication as well. Thus, Leopold’s use of epideictic rhetoric is deployed to stimulate our striving toward a virtuous character that poses a distinct alternative to the ecosystem function approach to conservation. Instead, “land health” is centered around individuals seeking a deep knowledge of self (and its relation to land) that does not shy away from recognizing human limitations. As Barbara Willard puts it in her own analysis of Leopold’s thought, “The idea of agency, or selfhood, allows humans to both impact and be impacted by the natural world.”⁵² In other words, for Leopold it is inconceivable to have a category called “the many” without the biotic community working in symbiosis, in cooperation, as a definitive, explicit priority. Our human livelihood is rooted in the principle that we have inescapable claims not just on one another but on the land, which cannot be renounced except at the cost of our humanity.

NOTES

1. Aldo Leopold, "The Farmer as a Conservationist," in *The River of the Mother of God and Other Essays*, ed. Susan L. Flader and J. Baird Callicott (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 257.
2. Leopold biographer Curt Meine has noted Leopold's efficacy and power as a speaker. More recently Brown and Carmony have made mention of this aspect of Leopold's contributions as well. Still, the majority of Leopold's scholarship focuses on his written work not his ability as an orator.
3. Curt Meine, *Aldo Leopold: His Life and Work* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 27.
4. *Ibid.*, 35.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, 523.
7. Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), 210.
8. Leopold, "The Farmer as a Conservationist," 256.
9. Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, viii.
10. Eric T. Freyfogle, *Why Conservation Is Failing and How It Can Regain Ground* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 26.
11. Eric T. Freyfogle, *The Land We Share: Private Property and the Common Good* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2003), 27.
12. Eric T. Freyfogle, *Bounded People, Boundless Lands: Envisioning a New Land Ethic* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1998), 149.
13. Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, 210.
14. Barry Brummet, *Contemporary Apocalyptic Rhetoric* (New York: Praeger, 1991), 117.
15. Leopold, "The Farmer as a Conservationist," 257–258.
16. *Ibid.*, 260.
17. Julianne Lutz Newton, *Aldo Leopold's Odyssey* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2006), 148.
18. Tarla R. Peterson and Horton C. Choat, "Rooted in the Soil: How Understanding the Perspectives of Landowners Can Change the Management of Environmental Disputes," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 81.2 (1995): 141.
19. For more on Shogren, Rodgers, and Endicott, see Jason Shogren, "Efficient Decentralized Fiscal and Environmental Policy: A Dual-Purpose Henry George Tax," *Ecological Economics* 65.3 (2008): 569–573; Christopher P. Rodgers, *The Law of Nature Conservation: Property, Environment, and the Limits of Law* (Oxford:

- Oxford University Press, 2013); Eve Endicott, *Land Conservation through Public/Private Partnerships* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1983).
20. Leopold, "The Farmer as a Conservationist," 260.
 21. *Ibid.*, 255.
 22. Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, 257.
 23. Freyfogle, *Why Conservation Is Failing*, 147–148.
 24. Richard M. Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric* (Davis: Hermagoras Press, 1985), 212 ff.
 25. Leopold, "The Farmer as a Conservationist," 263.
 26. *Ibid.*, 263.
 27. *Ibid.*, 259.
 28. *Ibid.*
 29. *Ibid.*, 261.
 30. *Ibid.*, 263.
 31. *Ibid.*, 258.
 32. Lutz Newton, *Aldo Leopold's Odyssey*, 219.
 33. Freyfogle, *Why Conservation Is Failing*, 89.
 34. Leopold, "The Farmer as a Conservationist," 258–259.
 35. *Ibid.*, 255.
 36. Lutz Newton, *Aldo Leopold's Odyssey*, 259.
 37. Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, 106.
 38. Eric T. Freyfogle, *On Private Property: Finding Common Ground on the Ownership of Land* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007), 113.
 39. Freyfogle, *Bounded People*, 137.
 40. Freyfogle, *The Land We Share*, 219.
 41. Freyfogle, *Bounded People*, 235.
 42. Leopold, "The Farmer as a Conservationist," 213.
 43. Newton-Lutz, *Aldo Leopold's Odyssey*, 259.
 44. Leopold, "The Farmer as a Conservationist," 259.
 45. Freyfogle, *Bounded People*, 274.
 46. Freyfogle, *Why Conservation Is Failing*, 22.
 47. Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, 113.
 48. *Ibid.*, 202.
 49. Freyfogle, *Why Conservation Is Failing*, 23.
 50. Freyfogle, *The Land We Share*, 22.
 51. Freyfogle, *Why Conservation Is Failing*, 90.
 52. Barbara Willard, "Rhetorical Landscapes as Epistemic: Revisiting Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*," *Environmental Communication* 1.2 (2007): 225.

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“Conserving not scenery as much as the human spirit itself”

The Environmental Oratory of Sigurd Olson

C. BRANT SHORT



Sigurd Olson is one of the greatest environmental advocates of the twentieth century. His role in defining and guiding the American conservation/environmental movement cannot be overstated. Often considered the voice of conservation during the pivotal public battles and legislative victories of the 1950s and 1960s, he was president of two national organizations during these years (the Wilderness Society and the National Parks Conservation Association) and served as a consultant to the National Park Service and the Department of Interior on environmental issues. He is most well known for numerous books and essays, published from the 1950s until his death in 1982, that inspired thousands of readers, many of whom had never viewed nature from a philosophical perspective. Coming from a humble background, Olson “earned a reputation as one of the most dedicated outdoorsmen, outspoken environmentalists, and prolific nature writers of this century.”¹ Writing that “many of us regarded him as a paramount guru of the modern environmental movement,” biologist William Cunningham called Olson’s lasting legacy “his eight books, which sold, altogether, more than 300,000 hardcover copies and won many honors and awards, including the John Burroughs Medal, the highest honor in US nature writing.”² Indeed, Olson “is the only person to have received the highest honors of four leading citizen organizations that focus on the public lands: the Izaak Walton League, the National Wildlife Federation, the Sierra Club, and the Wilderness Society.”³

Like many social movement leaders, Olson combined multiple skills and talents. He was an organizer, serving in various leadership roles in several national environmental groups. He was an advocate, articulating visions for educated readers in his best-selling books. He was a public figure, appearing in magazines, testifying before Congress, and working with legislators and federal land managers. He was also a public speaker who regularly addressed professional audiences. Unlike many social movement speakers, Olson did not use oratory to promote protest and activism. His presentations were usually constructed for members of the conservation and land management community and delivered in specialized forums. Although he sometimes tried out new ideas in his speeches that later found a permanent place in his books, Olson's speeches were independent texts that revealed a different side to his role in transforming the conservation movement of the 1940s and 1950s into the environmental movement of the 1960s, 1970s, and beyond.

In this essay, I discuss the rhetorical dimensions of Olson's major conservation speeches, beginning with a speech from 1950 and ending with a 1972 address. I believe that Olson's speeches were unlike those of other conservation leaders, who relied upon scientific data, quantitative evidence, and policy analyses in the rhetoric. Instead, Olson offered a transcendent vision of nature, often centered upon the ordinary, as a means of inspiring his listeners. He left the deliberative rhetoric of policy to others in the movement. Toward that end, Olson used his own life as a template for challenging his audiences to reconstruct their own identity. Initially, I review Olson's legacy for the environmental movement and discuss his role as a public speaker. Next, I consider the concept of reconstitutive rhetoric and its utility to examine speakers who defy conventional models. Finally, I examine the function of Olson's oratory in helping to transform the conservation movement of the 1950s into the environmental movement of the 1960s and beyond.

SIGURD OLSON'S LEGACY AND ORATORY

Scholars, popular writers, and activists from many different orientations agree that Olson was a major figure in the American environmental movement.⁴ Roderick Nash, author of one of the foundational books in environmental history (*Wilderness and the American Mind*), was asked to identify a "favorite" author that he discussed in his book. He responded:

I loved the writing of Sigurd Olson, whose passion was for the canoe trails of the voyageurs in Minnesota and western Ontario.

Occasionally during graduate school I would sneak in a trip to the Quetico-Superior country and think about Olson’s understanding of the compelling lure of the “old ways” of wilderness travel. Olson and [Aldo] Leopold explain the appeal of wilderness as well as any American writers.⁵

Born in Chicago, Olson moved to rural Wisconsin as a youth and grew up in small towns throughout the state. His father was a minister in the Swedish American Baptist Church and the family moved often. Olson’s father told his two sons that there were only three appropriate choices for a career: the ministry, teaching, or farming. He knew teaching was the only choice of the three that fit his values and dreams. Olson attended Northland College and later transferred to the University of Wisconsin, where he received his bachelor’s degree. He taught high school biology and geology in northern Minnesota and later attended the University of Illinois, where he earned a master’s degree in ecology, writing his thesis on timber wolves and coyotes. He was a promising researcher who was recruited by Aldo Leopold to the University of Wisconsin’s doctoral program in ecology. Olson was conflicted about pursuing a career in teaching or turning to research. He turned down Leopold’s offer and became a junior college teacher and dean in Ely, Minnesota, where he stayed until 1947 when he resigned to pursue nature writing and to work in conservation organizations.

Olson had always wanted to write about nature but not from a scholarly vantage. He had been producing essays and short stories since his early twenties, but he had limited success. He did not like writing adventure essays (even though he published a number of newspaper columns on hunting and fishing trips) and failed in his attempts at fiction. Besides writing and teaching, he also was an outdoor guide in the 1920s and 1930s, supplementing his teaching salary by summer guiding into the Boundary Waters area of Minnesota and Canada.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s he assumed leadership positions in the Izaak Walton League and the National Parks Association, and in the 1960s he became president of the Wilderness Society. Olson was one of the leading figures in the conservation movement’s great victory in 1956 in which conservationists prevented a dam from being built in a national monument in Utah.⁶ He was also instrumental in helping win the eight-year battle to get the Wilderness Act of 1964 passed and implemented.⁷ He worked with many national leaders in the 1960s and 1970s to get environmental legislation passed, and he continued to write best-selling books about nature and wilderness. He finally achieved success in his writing as well. In 1956, after years of little success, Olson published his first book, *The Singing Wilderness*, a series of essays about

his interactions with nature. He discussed his book idea with Howard Zahniser, executive secretary of the Wilderness Society, who was enthusiastic about the project and recommended that Olson contact Rachel Carson's literary agent, Marie Rodell. Olson wrote to Rodell, who agreed to represent Olson and sold several of the essays to popular magazines such as *Sports Illustrated*. The book was submitted to at least three publishers, finally receiving a contract from Alfred Knopf. It made the *New York Times* best seller list and ultimately sold over seventy thousand copies. Backes described the positive response the book generated and concluded that the book's success "cemented the Wilderness Society's decision to add Olson to its governing council in 1956."⁸

Although not a celebrity, among the environmental community Olson became an icon who presented a view of nature that was compelling and inspirational. Backes wrote, "What separated Sigurd Olson from most disciple producers was his gentleness and warmth, which made him a master of diplomacy and drew affection from all quarters."⁹ Speaking on his father's one hundredth birthday in 1999, Robert Olson observed that although he came from humble origins, Sigurd Olson was a best-selling author who "became for a while the most admired man in the conservation world."¹⁰

Olson spoke regularly during his years as a leader in the conservation movement. His speeches, however, were typically presented to professional audiences, not the general public. As a result, Olson addressed audiences already well versed in environmental concerns and policy initiatives. Assuming the role of "first among equals" as a speaker, Olson was able to construct speeches that went beyond affirming existing attitudes and beliefs. His goal was less about attitude change and more about presenting a new view of nature for his audiences to consider. As a nationally recognized conservationist in the 1950s and 1960s, Olson had a positive ethos for audiences who knew about his leadership roles, read his articles and books, or who embraced the organizational values he espoused. He had little need to build his credibility for most audiences who were eager to hear his words.

Olson was considered by many to be a charismatic person who inspired trust, respect, and even love from the people he met and addressed. He viewed speechmaking as a necessary part of leadership and not his primary goal as an advocate for nature; he thought of writing books as the highest calling for sharing his thoughts with others. Early in his career, he discovered his ability to inspire others through the spoken word. After speaking in favor of wilderness during a public hearing in 1932, Olson wrote in his journal, "Somehow I have the power of conveying my enthusiasm to others, particularly men. I can make

them see and feel what I see and feel of the out of doors.”¹¹ Olson’s deep and melodic voice made his delivery distinctive and memorable.¹² Many observers noted his ability to create a sense of security and comfort with his vocal quality. Backes writes that there was “something in his bearing—a combination of gracefulness, poise, confidence, and an engaging voice—that had a strong effect on people.”¹³

Olson’s eloquence as a speaker was shaped in part by his ability to embrace all dimensions of conservation. In pre–World War II America, I believe that three diverse groups were part of the evolving conservation movement. Although membership among the groups certainly overlapped, different groups of people were drawn to conservation in the 1920s and 1930s. First, there were traditionalists, drawn by their love of nature and belief that preservation of wild places and creatures was essential to the human psyche. These adherents of John Muir embraced a *spiritual* view of nature and believed in the healing powers of the wild. Second, there were the outdoor recreationists who hiked, skied, hunted, fished, canoed, and saw nature as a place for leisure and reconnecting to the nation’s frontier experience. This group held a *material* view of nature, seeing its values in terms of how humans could use the natural world in both tangible and immediate ways. Third, there were the ecologists, scientifically trained biologists who sought to understand how human activity shaped the natural world. This group adopted a *scientific* view of nature.

As Olson grew in stature as a leader in the conservation movement and shared his views in speeches, essays, and books, it became clear to his audiences that he embraced all three traditions in his own life and each contributed to his evolving conception of nature and wilderness. He believed in the spiritual benefits of wilderness, initially following his early life as the son of a Baptist minister and later incorporating the ideas of philosophers and theologians from other orientations. Comfortable discussing God and accepting some form of a deity, Olson occasionally quoted scripture but clearly rejected Christian fundamentalism. In addition, he was also a back-country guide for recreationists in his early adulthood and he enjoyed hunting and fishing his entire life. In the many times he wrote of fishing, he emphasized the taking of only as many fish as were needed for sustenance. He loved outdoor recreation and died while cross-country skiing near his home. Finally, Olson was an ecologist who taught natural science for nearly three decades. His master’s thesis has been recognized as one of the first efforts to create a theory of ecology and resulted in Aldo Leopold’s effort to recruit Olson as a doctoral student in ecology. Olson often cited Leopold’s “land ethic” in his own writings and speeches in the 1950s and promoted Leopold’s vision

of seeing the natural world from a less human-centered orientation. After he left academia in the late 1940s, Olson served as chief ecologist for the Izaak Walton League and regularly participated in national meetings of ecologists. By holding active and public membership in all three groups (preservationists, recreationists, ecologists), Olson had both legitimacy and substance when he called for unified public action in regard to conservation issues. As a result, his ethos as an orator was likely unmatched by any other of his contemporaries who were often linked to one of the traditional strands of conservation.

Olson's speeches differ from classical models of public persuasion. He used personal stories of his own encounters in nature as lessons for others. Moreover, he eschewed argumentation that centered upon claims and evidence, instead turning to quotations from philosophers, writers, and artists for his support. He assumed an inherent interest in his topic by audience members by virtue of their attendance at his speeches, and as a result he rarely utilized conventional structural devices such as introductions, previews, transitions, or conclusions. Knowing that his audience had gathered to hear his views of conservation and nature, Olson could "preach to the choir" and focus upon inspiration and motivation. In this manner, the individuals who joined together in Olson's presence were offered a vision of the environment that gave them an opportunity to reconstitute their identity. They entered the transaction as interested stakeholders in protecting the environment, and by listening (and likely agreeing) with Olson's vision of nature they left the speech as adherents to a cause that was larger than passing legislation.

RECONSTITUTIVE RHETORIC

Maurice Charland observed that "rhetoric's audience is both ideal and contingent: ideal because it is presumed to possess universal capacities; contingent because these are contained within some structure of motivation that has at least in part a situated character." It is important, he continued, to note that rhetoric is not addressed to members of the audience as individuals: "As Aristotle makes clear, rhetoric is not directed toward developing proofs for particular individuals. Rhetoric is directed toward an audience of many."¹⁴ In this way, individual listeners assume a new identity simply by virtue of being part of the collective audience. Charland challenged critics to "consider the possibility that the very existence of social subjects (who would become audience members) is already a rhetorical effect." He claimed that traditionalists have tended

to privilege the freedom of individuals to embrace or reject messages that may promote a given ideology. In contrast, the “process by which an audience member enters into a new subject position is therefore not one of persuasion” wrote Charland. “It is akin more to one of conversion that ultimately results in an act of recognition of the ‘rightness’ of a discourse and of one’s identity with its reconfigured subject position.” In this way, ideology becomes “material because subjects enact their ideology and reconstitute their material world in its image.”¹⁵

Constitutive rhetoric presents a vehicle to assess social movement leaders who have enjoyed rhetorical success for their cause, yet in practice have ignored, and at times even repudiated, many of the norms associated with effective persuasive speaking. These speakers approach communication from a different vantage and challenge rhetorical critics to consider alternative models of persuasion. John Hammerback and Richard Jensen have examined this phenomenon in the rhetoric of Cesar Chavez as well as Robert Parris Moses. They conclude that speakers like Chavez who “employ messages designed to fundamentally change the lives of their listeners” provide a powerful case study for critics. Hammerback and Jensen continue:

In such case rhetoric appears to redefine or *reconstitute* rather than merely persuade their audiences. Reconstitution requires auditors to adopt an altered identity and often to seek out a new way of life. In this way the born-again Christian, the cult member, the newly converted political zealot, and many others see themselves as different in fundamental ways from their former selves. They have experienced something more profound than a mere change in belief or attitude.¹⁶

They acknowledge that public persuasion using traditional approaches may change a listener’s view of his or her own character and that persuasion may inform one’s reconstitution. However, they conclude that rhetoric designed with the distinct goal to “change the character of the auditor . . . differs significantly from that of most persuasion and calls forth a particular set of rhetorical means.”¹⁷ Drawing upon the theoretical work of Frederick Antczak, Kenneth Burke, and Wayne Booth, Hammerback and Jensen construct a model of reconstitutive rhetoric that has three components for critics: the first persona, the substantive message, and the second persona.

The *first persona* consists of the audience’s collective view of the speaker’s personal qualities. The speaker’s life story becomes paramount

to the listener, and the speaker's personal qualities help create a sense of identification between speaker and listener. Moreover, the first persona is reinforced when face-to-face communication defines the interaction.¹⁸

The *substantive message* is reinforced by the ability of the rhetor to embody his or her ideas through personal life experiences. In other words, the speaker and the speaker's ideas become indistinguishable. As Hammerback and Jensen observe, "Such embodiment can occur explicitly and obviously, as when rhetors claim that they have lived out the principles advocated in their message, or are demonstrably living out these principles."¹⁹

The final component of the model, the *second persona*, focuses upon the speaker's ability to "redefine audiences and to induce them to take on and act out aspects of a new way of life."²⁰ Some speakers point out these ideal qualities directly and emphatically, but more often the qualities are implied and offered as an alternative to embrace. As the authors observe: "The second persona presents audiences with an altered identity so that they can more easily bring to the surface their own qualities necessary to accept, adopt, an act out the rhetor's substantive ideas, personal qualities, and agenda for action."²¹

OLSON'S CONSERVATION ORATORY

I review seven speeches that Olson presented between 1950, six years before his first book was published and he became a national figure, and 1972, when he was honored for a distinguished national career at his alma mater, Northland College. These speeches have been disseminated in books and on a website managed by Olson's biographer, David Backes.²² After identifying the major themes in these speeches, I then consider how the speeches collectively affirm rhetorical reconstitution and explain Olson's role in presenting a new identity for the environmental community.

"CONSERVATION APPEAL" (1950)

In March 1950 Olson spoke to the fifteenth North American Wildlife conference and focused much of his address upon the need for conservation groups to use mass communication to engage the general public. He said that Americans "did not feel the relationship of conservation to their lives and never will until writers bridge the gap. This cannot be done until the writers themselves feel deeply about it." Because Americans are

a nation of procrastinators, Olson continued, they will hope for the best until catastrophe strikes. And when forced, he continued, “we plunge in with everything we’ve got and usually win out in the end. But it is a dangerous formula and some day it might fail.” Olson offered a number of examples of media disinterest in telling the real story of conservation and their focus upon superficial stories that lacked depth. The solution, according to Olson, was to use the “inherent capacity of children to find delight and enjoyment in simple and natural things. With adults who have lost it, it means trying to recapture the old receptiveness, but with children it is merely a question of how to use it to best advantage.” He noted that many adults had a sense of nostalgia for nature that had to be reinvigorated and transformed into a “vibrating and real” sense of the awe and wonder. He concluded:

No child need be told of the wonders of the out-of-doors. This sense of living awareness until killed by dry statistics and uninspired teaching may be the surest approach. Conservation must first be interpreted in the only way a child can really understand, not through facts, or logic, or reason but through the senses and emotions. Failure to recognize this premise and the opportunity of developing permanent enthusiasm may be lost.²³

“THOSE INTANGIBLE THINGS” (1954)

This speech was presented at the annual meeting of the Izaak Walton League in Chicago. Olson was serving as the league’s ecologist as well as completing his first year as president of the National Parks Association. His first, and most influential, book was finished by 1954 but not published until 1956.²⁴ Olson articulated a theme that dominated his speaking and writing for the next twenty-five years, the importance of seeing nature as an intangible, yet describable, value. He opened by agreeing that nature advocates “talk about the practical considerations of conservation, and they are important, too. We know that we cannot embark on any conservation program entirely on theory. Back of all concrete consideration, however, are always other factors we call intangibles.”²⁵ Olson listed several definitions of conservation and, agreeing with Paul Sears, endorsed the following: “Conservation is a point of view. It is a philosophy and a way of life.” But for Olson, the “good life” of modern society encompassed use of natural resources and economic wealth for some groups, but not all. He recalled an experience flying into New York City and looking down on the “miles and miles of tenements and

slums and that is Brooklyn.” How did the residents of slums participate in the “good life”? When past societies failed to understand the impact of a given way of life upon the natural world, they disappeared. “What happened to those ancient peoples?” Olson asked. “They mistreated the land, their forests, and their waters, and thereby lost their way of life. They failed to recognize the intangibles before it was too late.”²⁶ Olson continued to describe in vivid detail a variety of places he had visited (Crater Lake, Oregon; a little trout stream; a river in Germany; pack trip in Montana) and concluded, “It is hard to place a price tag on these things, on the sounds and smells and memories of the out of doors, on the countless things we have seen and loved. They are the dividends of the good life.”²⁷ This stands in stark contrast to the typical view of the “good life” in 1950s America: a good job, a home, a car, and a happy family. Olson concluded by noting that much of his time was spent in attempting to preserve wilderness regions of the United States. But the preservation had to be more than saving “physical resources” for future generations to use for a particular way of life. There is a “hunger, a need in the American people to renew their associations with unspoiled nature.” The goal of conserving water, forests, soil, and wildlife will result in the “conservation of the human spirit.”²⁸

“THE MEANING OF WILDERNESS” (1958)

In May 1958 Olson addressed the Utah Academy of Sciences at Brigham Young University. He covered many of the same ideas as in earlier speeches in his effort to help audiences see conservation as more than simply preserving wilderness for future generations. He used the speech to address the contemporary hunger people had for a wilderness experience and the challenges many faced in satisfying this need. He noted that in 1957 over fifty-five million people visited the national parks and forty million visited the national forests. Describing typical tourist activities, Olson cited picture-taking, buying stickers for cars and velvet pillows for their homes, and many taking but a few minutes to observe nature. In an apparent twist of sarcasm, Olson said:

They stand on the porticos of their chalets or motels or leave their cars, may even hike the enormous distance of nearly one hundred feet to get a view. They stand there, take a swift look as one man did last spring when I was at Grand Canyon and after glimpsing the South Rim and its changing shadows and colors, after five minutes said, “Well, Mom, this is it. Let’s get out of here.”

Yet, Olson turned this stereotypical tale of tourism around. “Don’t make fun of those people. They’re in a hurry—we’re all in a hurry,” he continued. That tourist was likely driving from Grand Canyon to Salt Lake City and wanted to arrive in time to visit the Mormon Temple grounds. Most importantly, “something happened to that man when he took that swift look at the Grand Canyon, something he would remember as long as he lived.”²⁹ Olson ended his speech by asking about a life devoid of nature. “Surely we can live without it—we can live under almost any conditions for we are very inventive and ingenious.” But Olson continued, asking if it is enough to simply exist. “Does not life, if it is to be a happy one, necessitate space, living room, human dignity, the intangible values that give people happiness?” Perhaps adapting to the location of the speech, Brigham Young University, Olson concluded with scripture: “The prophet Isaiah said a long time ago, ‘Woe unto them who build house to house and lay field to field lest there be no place where a man may be placed alone in the midst of all the earth.’”³⁰

“THE SPIRITUAL ASPECTS OF WILDERNESS” (1961)

In 1961 Olson addressed the Seventh Biennial Wilderness conference, sponsored by the Sierra Club. Olson had been preparing a philosophical book on nature and had read ten books between December 1959 and February 1960 and typed sixty pages of notes and paraphrases. These books found their way into this speech and clearly shaped his growing focus upon spiritual conceptions of nature.³¹

Olson opened by quoting Henry David Thoreau’s famous dictum: “In Wildness is the preservation of the World.” He then turned to the crux of his speech: contemporary people were adopting a “mechanistic” view of the world and assuming that science will solve all problems. But in abandoning the “ancient verities” of life and an “appreciation of intangible values,” modern humans were cutting the roots of their spiritual life and experiencing insecurity and unrest. Olson then advanced two common themes that recurred in his speeches. First, he pointed out that most people have short memories and forget that human history represents almost nothing on the scale of Earth’s history. If the four-billion-year history of Earth were compressed into twenty-four hours, Olson noted, humans would have emerged at 11:45 p.m., and the machine age would have represented one second of time. Second, Olson described his awe when flying and attempting to envision the United States before any humans, let alone Europeans, had emerged. Olson used these two themes to challenge his audience to reconceptualize their own understanding of time and place. Olson then offered a long story in

which he recalled his experience as a back-country guide. He described the powerful tonic of a week in the backwoods. He recalled business executives who forgot their stress, enjoyed their camping colleagues, and began to listen, smell, and observe the natural world differently. Olson concluded:

These were the spiritual dividends, hard to explain, impossible to evaluate, that brought them back time and again. While they thought they came for fishing or sheer adventure, and companionship of such forays into the wilds, what they really came for was to experience the deep and abiding satisfactions of primitive living under natural conditions.³²

For Olson, this hunger for the wilderness manifested itself in some very concrete statistics: thirty-five million Americans bought hunting and fishing licenses in 1960 and almost seventy million Americans visited national parks and forests. This represented a “nation-wide movement in search of things that seem to be missing in our present way of life.”³³

If people were to “forget and root out entirely any desire for wilderness” and allow “our engrossment with comfort and urban living technological progress to completely erase our need for it [wilderness],” Olson argued, “then I fear for America.” The “real significance of wilderness is a cultural matter,” he continued. It is “far more than hunting, fishing, hiking, camping or canoeing; it has to do with the human spirit.” Most importantly, he concluded, “what we are trying to conserve is not scenery as much as the human spirit itself.” It is wilderness that will allow humans to bridge the gap between older values and human needs and the “strange, conflicting ideologies of the new era of technology.”³⁴

“THE CONSERVATION ETHIC AND THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE” (1963)

Olson served as a consultant to the National Park Service and often addressed meetings of this agency. He was extremely popular among park service personnel because of his speeches. “He was better at giving a keynote talk to conservationists than anyone I ever heard,” recalled Ted Swem, “probably because he was so knowledgeable and always seemed to sense what was needed for a particular occasion.”³⁵ Backes contends that an October 1963 presentation to National Park Service personnel is “perhaps the most important speech of Sigurd’s life, and when he stepped down from the podium, many in the audience had tears

in their eyes.”³⁶ Unlike other speeches presented by Olson, this was an impromptu address. He did not prepare a formal speech for this conference and had planned to respond to the presentations made by others. Instead, he found himself defending the mission and leadership of the National Park Service.³⁷ The impetus for Olson’s speech came from an address by John Carver, John Kennedy’s assistant secretary of the interior, who argued that the park service was rigid and unresponsive to changing times. Carver used the term “mystique” to criticize the traditions of the park service. According to Backes, the audience of park service professionals was furious, and Olson responded in a twenty-minute address that some believed “saved the day.”³⁸ Olson defended the notion of “mystique” and argued that it really meant “devotion, dedication, and faith.” He praised park service employees for their dedication to the public good, attributing it to his belief that men and women have spiritual needs that can be fulfilled in a national park. Humans “must recover some of the past” and they “must experience the thing which is deep in [their] consciousness, the thing that a million years’ slow evolution from the past has made it what is it.” It is the national park system, Olson continued, where people can retreat and satisfy this need to embrace nature. Olson ended with a powerful statement of praise for the park service: “In places such as this you preserve eternal perspectives, and I can think of no higher occupation, no higher goal, no higher aspiration that that to which this group here is dedicated—preserving the silent sanctuaries and the eternal perspectives which can be found here.”³⁹ Backes noted that Olson’s speech was so inspirational the acting NPS director sent a transcript of the speech to all park service employees at Christmastime as a way of repudiating Carver’s attack upon the NPS and “adding to Sigurd’s glowing reputation among Park Service employees.”⁴⁰

“THE SPIRITUAL NEED” (1965)

Addressing the Ninth Wilderness conference in San Francisco in April 1965, Olson continued his effort to share a transcendent view of wilderness with his audience. He repeated several key themes from his earlier speeches and books, stressing the inherent human need for nature. He also repeated the importance of time and reminded listeners that humans have had little time on the earth historically. In this speech, he turned to the significance of environmental awareness and the ability to discern meaning in seemingly ordinary and simple events. If humans learn to seek meaning, there will be “burning instants of truth when everything

stands clear. It may come as slow realization after long periods of waiting. Whenever it comes, life is suddenly illumined, beautiful, and transcendent. All of us have known such moments but seldom recognized them at the time or comprehended their meaning."⁴¹ He recalled some of these moments of insight in his life and the resulting sense of "wonder and deep contentment, a certain feeling of wholeness, and fulfillment as though I needed nothing more." It is the ability to find natural places, he concluded, that fulfills the collective spiritual need for wilderness and creates moments of insight and knowledge.⁴² This idea of a wilderness epiphany helped Olson illustrate how people might satisfy their own spiritual hunger in returning to nature. It explained the experience of those individuals who encounter nature and "speak of oneness and unity with life and the universe, of the eternal essence, the perception of reality."⁴³ As he continued to write and speak, Olson kept expanding his central idea of a spiritual connection, and in this speech he offered awareness, perception, and insight as important outcomes for those who embraced nature with a broadened view of place and time.

"THE CHALLENGE OF THE NEW FRONTIER" (1972)

In October 1972, Northland College in Ashland, Wisconsin, dedicated the Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute. Olson addressed the meeting and focused upon another idea that he wanted to develop, the notion of the frontier as a common human experience. He observed that with the end of the American frontier, "something seems lost, and we are like a people who have no sense of direction or purpose. We flounder and wonder where to turn." But in the past decade, Olson continued, a new attitude was emerging, one that rejected the physical frontier and sought a new way of looking at the earth and its resources. At present, he concluded that,

we are on the verge of making the greatest decision of all, a change in the goals and philosophies that brought about the present ecological crisis, a complete realignment of our relationship to the earth, a man-land ethic that hopefully will recognize our responsibilities and stewardship.⁴⁴

Olson discussed the dilemma of progress, weighing affluence and industrial growth against "further degradation of living conditions, beauty against ugliness, silence against noise and clamor, open space against crowding, natural rhythms against speed and tension." In addressing

these tensions, he reminded his audience that there is more at stake than wilderness and a beautiful place. It is about the “survival of the civilization we have built and perhaps the survival of man. Other civilizations have died and passed into oblivion.” He repeated the phrase the “prophets of doom” in scripture and in science and concluded: “People laugh at our prophets of doom as they laughed at those of old, but we have only to study the land where past civilizations have died to realize it was not war or pestilence that brought about their end, but the unwise use of land, the destruction of forests.” Olson ended his pessimistic description of the future with “the challenge of the new frontier.” Humans must accept the premise that population growth must be controlled, that new priorities must guide use of resources, and that technology and knowledge must be used to preserve and not destroy the earth. Olson continued:

It is wholeness we are seeking, the feel of the earth and natural rhythms forgotten in our busy lives. Are not the intangible values of a life closer to nature and its rewards what we are actually searching for and missing? Are they not in the last analysis the substance of that lost American dream?⁴⁵

Olson used the frontier to turn his audience’s perspective from the past to the future. He claimed that it is always exciting to think about frontiers and their challenges. But a “nation without a frontier is stagnant, without life or spirit.” But instead of spending its time and energy recalling the glories of the American frontier experience, the audience needed to turn to the present environmental crisis and look to the frontier of solving such problems before it is too late.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Sigurd Olson changed the people who read his books and who heard his speeches in very significant ways. Former Minnesota governor Elmer Andersen observed: “Sig conveyed a religious fervor and a depth of conviction that no one else I know succeeded in generating. Others could win adherence; he produced disciples.”⁴⁶ His son Robert agreed, noting that if Sigurd Olson is “remembered for a thousand years, it will be as the defender and definer of the wilderness or, as one writer wished to put it, ‘The Evangelist of the Wilderness.’”⁴⁷ This ability to transform audience members and give them a new orientation toward the world is explained by the concept of reconstitutive rhetoric.

In review, reconstitutive rhetoric features three elements: *the first persona* (the audience's view of the speaker), *the second persona* (the speaker's construction of the audience), and the speaker's *substantive message*. When a speaker merges personae and message in a text, notes John Hammerback, the audience may "animate their latent qualities" and "reorder their qualities of character and thereby alter their self-definition." The "synergistic interaction of message and personae creates multiple and overlapping layers of identification" in transforming the audience.⁴⁸ Olson's speeches exemplify the power of reconstitutive rhetoric to offer auditors a new identity that builds upon their existing worldview but that can enlarge and/or intensify an individual's core values. Olson's speeches help listeners "animate their latent qualities" by using shared interests, ideals, and/or experiences as a touchstone for growth. Olson's ability to connect his own experiences in nature to ancient traditions of humans trying to define themselves through the wilderness challenged his listeners to use their own experiences to identify and pursue a larger goal.

In terms of the *first persona*, Olson's audience members were unified in support of conservation and environmental values by virtue of attending a forum in which Olson would speak. It is safe to assume that in most cases, the vast majority of his audience had a positive view of his intent, credibility, and experiences. As a result, Olson's *substantive message* turned from reinforcing his audience's existing commitment to conservation and environmental policies to presenting a transcendent view of nature that linked past, present, and future conceptions of nature in a context of humility, universality, and spirituality. Olson's frequent use of his personal experiences in the wilderness, quotations from philosophers and historians, and references to scripture, affirmed his passion for looking at nature as more than a single commodity. He wanted his listeners to look beyond their special interests, whether it might be recreation, economic development, or science. Finally, in terms of the *second persona*, Olson's conception of his audience presented humans in the mid to late twentieth century as being presented a final call to action. In his view, auditors had to view nature from an ecological vantage in which they found themselves at a crossroads. They were lucky enough to live in an age in which humans finally possessed both the knowledge and the ability to maintain viable and healthy ecosystems. But they had to act with clarity and immediacy. It was in their power to embrace nature as a complex, interdependent, and global system that must be understood on both a scientific and a spiritual plane. Efforts that centered only upon one plane would ultimately fail in Olson's view, and his audiences needed a sense of both. In this manner, Olson's environmental speeches

are powerful examples of reconstitutive rhetoric in which the speaker’s goal “renders the world of events understandable with respect to a transcendental collective interest that negates individual interest.”⁴⁹

In another examination of reconstitutive rhetoric and movement leaders, Jensen and Hammerback evaluated civil rights advocate Robert Parris Moses and concluded that Moses sought more than attitude change among his listeners:

Instead, audiences had to discover latent qualities in themselves and alter their identities. This rhetorical enterprise required an identification that transformed audiences, a process whereby the rhetor combines first persona, second persona, and themes, explanations, and arguments into a reciprocal and synergistic relationship that forms a message capable of reconstitution.⁵⁰

This description offers a clear explanation of Olson’s environmental oratory as well. He challenged his listeners to consider their own lifestyles and convictions regarding wilderness in a different light. Audiences were asked to move beyond traditional notions of wilderness preservation to see a transcendent quality in nature that required a fundamental reorientation of their worldview. Olson’s audiences were usually professionals who held a very clear view of the public lands, national forests, and national parks. But regardless of their perspectives and experiences, he challenged them to consider the “latent qualities in themselves” and respond to the natural world as reconstituted individuals. Although Olson is not as famous as his contemporaries Aldo Leopold and Rachel Carson, his impact may be more profound because of his ability to inspire such widespread changes in the conservation community through his leadership, his writings, and his speeches.

NOTES

1. Sanford E. Marovitz, “The Romantic Echoes of Sigurd F. Olson: Conservationist with a Fly Rod,” *The Old Northwest* 16.2 (Summer 1993): 107.
2. William P. Cunningham, “‘Listening to the Wilderness’: The Life and Work of Sigurd F. Olson,” *Ethics, Place and Environment* 3.3 (October 2000): 323–330.
3. David Backes, *A Wilderness Within: The Life of Sigurd F. Olson* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 316.
4. See Backes for many examples of Olson’s leadership. For a brief

- overview, see C. Brant Short, "Giving Voice to the Wild: The Rhetorical Legacy of Sigurd Olson and *The Singing Wilderness*," *Speaker and Gavel* 44 (2007): 46–49. Text available at http://www.mnsu.edu/cmst/dsr-tka/vol_44_2007.pdf.
5. Roderick Nash, "Interview," *Environmental History* 12 (April 2007): 401.
 6. The Echo Park controversy is one of the central events in redefining the conservation movement. See Mark T. Harvey, *A Symbol of Wilderness: Echo Park and the American Conservation Movement* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), for a detailed analysis of this event and several references to Olson's work in the crusade.
 7. The Wilderness Act of 1964 was one of the signature pieces of legislation that environmentalists championed in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Olson was forced to defend his support of the Wilderness Act in his hometown of Ely, Minnesota, when a number of locals attacked him for wanting to restrict access to recreation areas.
 8. Backes, *A Wilderness Within*, 255.
 9. *Ibid.*, 316.
 10. Robert K. Olson, "Sigurd F. Olson: The Man behind the Legend," speech presented April 4, 1999, at Ashland, Wisconsin. Text available at http://www4.uwm.edu/letscli/research/sigurd_olson/lpf/lectures/1999_sfo_man_behind_legend.htm.
 11. Olson, quoted in Backes, *A Wilderness Within*, 100.
 12. Backes, *A Wilderness Within*, 315, quotes Jean Packard whose husband Fred worked with Olson: "When I was working at American Airlines, [Olson] would call me at work when he came into town. When any woman would answer the phone she would practically swoon, and I got a long interrogation about who had that marvelous voice."
 13. Backes, *A Wilderness Within*, 315.
 14. Maurice Charland, "The Constitution of Rhetoric's Audience," *Proceedings of the Alta Conference on Argumentation* (1995): 12.
 15. Maurice Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the *Peuple Quebecois*," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73.2 (May 1987): 133, 142, 143.
 16. John C. Hammerback and Richard J. Jensen, *The Rhetorical Career of Cesar Chavez* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 45.
 17. *Ibid.*, 45.
 18. *Ibid.*, 51–52.
 19. *Ibid.*, 52.

20. Ibid., 53.
21. Ibid., 54.
22. Some of Olson’s speeches were published in various books in the 1960s and 1970s. Backes collected Olson’s major speeches and made them available on his Sigurd Olson website. In 2001, Backes published an edited collection of selected articles and speeches authored by Olson. See Sigurd F. Olson, *The Meaning of Wilderness: Essential Articles and Speeches*, ed. David Backes (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
23. Sigurd Olson, “Conservation Appeal,” speech presented March 1950, Washington, DC. Text available at http://www4.uwm.edu/letscli/research/sigurd_olson/speeches/index.htm.
24. See editorial note, Olson, *The Meaning of Wilderness*, 84.
25. Ibid., 85.
26. Ibid., 87–88.
27. Ibid., 90.
28. Ibid., 91.
29. Sigurd Olson, “The Meaning of Wilderness,” speech presented May 1958, Provo, Utah. Text available at http://www4.uwm.edu/letscli/research/sigurd_olson/speeches/index.htm.
30. Ibid.
31. Backes, in Olson, *The Meaning of Wilderness*, 108.
32. Olson, *The Meaning of Wilderness*, 113.
33. Ibid., 116.
34. Ibid., 118–120.
35. Quoted in Backes, *A Wilderness Within*, 302.
36. Backes, *A Wilderness Within*, 304.
37. See *ibid.*, 302–305
38. Ibid., 304.
39. Olson, “The Conservation Ethic and the National Park Service,” speech presented October 1963, Yosemite National Park. Text available at http://www4.uwm.edu/letscli/research/sigurd_olson/speeches/index.htm.
40. Backes, *A Wilderness Within*, 305.
41. Olson, *The Meaning of Wilderness*, 142.
42. Ibid., 143.
43. Ibid., 142.
44. Sigurd Olson, “The Challenge of the New Frontier,” speech presented October 1972, Ashland, Wisconsin. Text available at http://www4.uwm.edu/letscli/research/sigurd_olson/speeches/index.htm.
45. Ibid.
46. Quoted in Backes, *A Wilderness Within*, 315.

47. Robert K. Olson, "Sigurd F. Olson: The Man behind the Legend."
48. John Hammerback, "Creating the 'New Person': The Rhetoric of Reconstitutive Discourse," *Rhetoric Review* 20.1/2 (Spring 2011): 20.
49. Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric," 139.
50. Richard J. Jensen and John C. Hammerback, "'Your Tools Are Really the People': The Rhetoric of Robert Parris Moses," *Communication Monographs* 65 (June 1998): 138–139.

SEVEN

“What’s wrong with a little emotion?”

Margaret E. Murie’s Wilderness Rhetoric

ELIZABETH LAWSON



In spring of 1974 Margaret E. Murie (1901–2003) sat on the mossy rocks of San Juan Island fretting over an upcoming speech to the graduating class of Jackson Hole High School. As she later told them, “I pondered a good deal over this talk. Why do you want a commencement speaker anyway? What can I say from which you may keep and cherish even ten words?”¹ This was an effective strategy in focusing their attention. Which words would they remember and why? She chose fourteen words that a friend had spoken privately when she was forty, and now, thirty-two years later, she passed them along in a public setting: “If all is right within me, nothing that happens to me can be wrong.”² She corroborated these words with personal stories and references, including quotations from a James Michener commencement speech, a song by Phil Ochs, and a letter from her son Dr. Martin Murie. Yet her real ambitions went far beyond moralizing or memoir. “Now I’m sure,” she declared, “you didn’t expect me to get through a speech without mentioning wilderness . . .”³ Indeed, advocacy was the primary motive for all her public discourse. She argued tirelessly that the most enduring human values, body and soul, and the opportunity to be right within oneself could only be achieved through a commitment to preserving wilderness.

Margaret E. Murie’s rhetoric depicted wilderness, not as an ideal place set apart from humankind but as an arena for human freedom. Over an intense thirty-year period of public speaking, she defended wilderness before diverse and challenging human audiences, becoming

through hard-won experience uniquely suited for the task. After the death of her biologist husband Olaus (1889–1963), she continued the work of wilderness advocacy alone, speaking to dude ranchers, birders, park superintendents, women writers, youth groups, and congressional committees. In 1998, when she was ninety-six, President Clinton presented her with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, recognizing that hers had become an iconic voice.

Many others have paid tribute. Verlyn Klinkenborg in his *New York Times* obituary editorial titled “Margaret Murie’s Vision” wrote that “her zeal and her belief in the idea of wilderness made it possible for many other people to believe in it and defend it zealously, too.”⁴ Klinkenborg describes her as a “natural resource.” More recently, in *The Quiet World: Saving Alaska’s Wilderness Kingdom, 1879–1960*, Douglas Brinkley commented,

Mostly it was Mardy Murie’s ability to motivate people and hold them accountable by her steadfast decency of spirit that set her apart. To know Mardy was to love her: she was deeply humble, with eyes sharp but innocent, always elevating others to conscientious endeavor, never worried whether she got her due credit.⁵

Brinkley’s words underscore Murie’s ability to connect with her audience. Terry Tempest Williams in her foreword to the 1997 edition of Murie’s book *Two in the Far North* declared: “She is a woman who has exhibited—through her marriage, her children, her writing, and her activism—that a whole life is possible. Her commitment to relationships, both personal and wild, has fed, fueled, and inspired an entire conservation movement. She is our spiritual grandmother.”⁶ The title “grandmother of conservation” adhered. Jonathan Waterman in his 2005 book *Where Mountains Are Nameless: Passion and Politics in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Including the Story of Olaus and Mardy Murie* entitles his prologue, wherein he movingly describes Murie’s last days and death, “The Great Grandmother.”⁷

Although Murie never studied rhetoric, her life and civic engagement exemplified the ancient ideal of the public speaker whose discourse grows out of life in a democracy.⁸ What was her community? How did wilderness become part of it? How did she persuade audiences to save it, crafting unique speeches for each occasion? Murie drew strength and authority from her formative experiences in Alaska during the 1920s and 1930s and her work with Olaus in the wilderness movement of the 1940s and 1950s, developing firm ideas, an engaging persona, and a

vivid sense of language. She had started keeping a diary as a young girl and continued even during arduous field trips with Olaus. Like other influential naturalists, including Charles Darwin, she used her diaries and field notes as source material for subsequent literary works, including her debut memoir, *Two in the Far North*, portions of which first appeared in *The Living Wilderness* in the late 1950s.⁹ The book became extremely popular and is still a favorite on Goodreads, a website where readers post names of favorite books. It provides a valuable record of the experience that gave Murie her rhetorical authority; it also reveals how the process of composition enabled her to review her experiences and find the right words to describe both scenes and thoughts that would later appear in her speeches.

A speaker needs presence, or bodily authority, and Murie had it in spades. Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca discuss the importance of a rhetor’s presence in *The New Rhetoric*. They write, “Presence acts directly on our sensibility.”¹⁰ Understood here is the corollary that sensibility is the filter through which opinions emerge. Murie possessed a myriad of personal qualities that gave her persuasive power over a broad audience. Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline Palmer in their work on “the discourse of environmental hysteria” argue that environmentalists who offer apocalyptic visions, for example, a “silent spring,” or a “population bomb,” and their opponents may be inciting an unstable seesaw of reactionary rhetoric. They write: “Though such rhetoric meets well the need to build and support communities of advocacy, it fails to meet the continuing need for dialogue, deliberation, and consensus-building.”¹¹ Analysis of Murie’s speeches shows how deftly she combined emotion and a multifaceted persona to persuade: in conversation with one and all.

EARLY LIFE IN ALASKA

The first sentence of *Two in the Far North* is: “A nine-year-old girl can see and hear a lot.”¹² The simple wisdom of this statement echoes throughout the book. Born in Juneau, she moved to Seattle, and then Fairbanks, after her mother remarried. She made a few trips to the Outside (as the Lower 48 were known) to attend Reed College for two years, but she became the first woman graduate of the Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines (now the University of Alaska Fairbanks) with a degree in business administration. Some of the most telling parts of *Two in the Far North* are the stories of her travels over rugged landscapes. At fifteen she started spending summers with her father and her

new half-brother in Prince William Sound, where her father ran a fish cannery. This was a year or two before the railroad arrived, and most travel was accomplished by Yukon sled, drawn by either dogs or horses. Scheduled to leave on the last trip before the spring breakup of river ice, she endured five days of strenuous, nighttime travel. Wrapped in wolfskin robes, she held on to the careening sled as the driver fought to get over the innumerable rivers before the trail became too soft—"only in the dusky hours would the trail hold up."¹³ At one of the roadhouses, an old Irish barnman observed while fixing up her bunk, "Noticed your lips are pretty chapped. If you haven't got any salve with you, rub some wax from your ears on 'em—that'll help."¹⁴ Such practical survival skills were part of Murie's training. Roy, the driver tucking her into the sled of a fresh driver, who looks intimidated at taking responsibility for a young woman, says, "This one's special. She likes tough trips. Had a lot of fun back there, swimmin' the Delta. Don't need to worry about her!"¹⁵

Murie's initiation into the wilderness beyond the wild Fairbanks of the late 1910s began on her honeymoon trip as field assistant to her husband, Olaus, who was being sent by the Biological Survey to the mouth of the Yukon to study waterfowl nesting habits and caribou migration. Married to Olaus on August 19, 1924, at 3:00 a.m. on the banks of the Yukon, she began her education in wildlife study. Although never the professional in charge of expeditions, never the one presenting the scientific reports, she supported and observed it all. In her narrative of this trip, Murie calls it "our first chapter in the wilderness."¹⁶ She is enchanted by her work as field assistant to a naturalist:

What delightful discoveries can be made beneath a mossy stump or under the dense mat of water rushes! I had never seen a mousehole before; the unknowing eye is unable to see. In addition to his main assignment, studying the life history of the caribou, Olaus was interested in learning all he could about the distribution of several species of meadow vole, the red-backed mouse, the bog lemming, and the brown lemming. I had never known there were so many kinds of mice; I had only known the kitchen-cupboard ones. Nor had I known that these were true wild animals, which ranged throughout the wilderness and belonged there, nor that at the time there was not much known about the distribution of the various species. So everywhere Olaus traveled he set out mouse traplines! I learned that to the scientist these little creatures are interesting and important, for they have a relationship to bigger creatures and to the land and are part of the great chain of life.¹⁷

Murie watches Olaus skin the little creatures and take plaster casts of their footprints. (He never traveled without plaster in his pocket.) As he drew and made notes, she made notes. As she made the connection between the domestic mouse and the wild mouse, she understood something about the human domesticated by civilization versus the human in the wild.

The honeymoon continues, and Olaus has occasion to skin bigger creatures as well. He leaves her for several days in a small tent with three large caribou skins drying near the fire. Her job is to stoke the fire and keep turning and spreading the caribou hides (this includes arranging little sticks between their hooves) so that they are in perfect condition for shipment to a museum, all this in subzero conditions as Olaus makes his way to the summit of a mountain across a river to make further caribou observations. She has no reading material, except the recipes on the labels of the milk cans and one sheet from a magazine used as wrapper for a ham. She makes diary entries but does not write the truth in them. Finally, overcome with worry over Olaus’s safety, and perhaps also the closeness of the caribou hides, she crawls into her sleeping bag and begins a crying session that lasts until his return. That is her moment of truth: “So far as I knew, our life was to be one long field trip; this I had known and been eager for. But I had never faced the fact that sometimes I would have to stay behind in camp, and wait for darkness, and wonder. I must learn to trust, to wait serenely.”¹⁸ But there is little that is serene in field tripping by dogsled over tough sedge tussocks, dog fights that tumble the whole team into a pile, and encountering treacherous overflow, which can send a sled plunging into icy water in forty-below weather. Murie is thrown off the sled twice, the second time against a tree head down. Olaus digs her out, finding her laughing rather than broken “in little pieces” as he feared.¹⁹ But Murie admits to crying at points where she has been tested to her physical limits, and in each instance Olaus tells her that he too feels like crying, but they will make it. Food is a very important reward at the end of a full day. She is always the cook. On the trip described earlier, their physical exertion is rewarded by caribou chops and Jersey Creams (a type of biscuit popular at that time).

There would be other field trips with Olaus to northern Alaska, providing core experiences that Murie would draw on throughout her speaking career. These were not encounters she observed rendered in a painting or a photograph or read about in a poem or story. She knew them deeply, in every cell in her body. Preserving wilderness meant preserving experience, of a kind that could only occur in the wild and that should be available to all humans. Readers of *Two in the Far North* will remember this passage describing the end of their honeymoon trip:

Out across the snow-covered tundra, a snowy owl sits calm and inscrutable on a birch stub, the startling, beautiful ghost of the Arctic. Behind his whiteness the western sky is shell-pink. Words can never tell the peace, the strength, the triumphant beauty of this land. Then very soon the sky is midnight blue and fully spangled with stars, and the moon is rising brighter and brighter behind the pointed trees. In the north a flicker of green and yellow; then an unfurled bolt of rainbow ribbon shivering and shimmering across the stars—the Aurora. The dogs begin to speed up; we must be nearing a cabin; yes, there it is, a little black blotch on the creek bank. The air is cold and tingling, fingers are numb. A great dark form flops slowly across the trail—a great horned owl, the speaking spirit of the wilderness.²⁰

Here, through simple alliteration and evocation of shapes and movements, she skillfully makes the landscape with all its inhabitants come alive for the reader. In composing these words, Murie made a prophetic connection. She would try to become the “speaking spirit of the wilderness,” the translator of its intangibles. Wilderness was just one word, inadequate to explain the host of sensations, experiences, and complexity of ideas that lay beneath the surface of its ten letters.

MIDDLE YEARS: THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY

After years of fieldwork Olaus resigned from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1946 to become director of the Wilderness Society. Murie refers to herself as “secretary” and “staff consultant” during the period of his directorship. They worked closely with conservation leaders like Howard Zahniser, who in 1956 wrote the first draft of the Wilderness Act, which was finally passed in 1964 after sixty-five rewrites and eighteen public hearings.²¹ However, the Muries had been active in the Wilderness Society since its founding in 1935 by activists like Robert Sterling Yard, Bob Marshall, Aldo Leopold, and Benton MacKaye. They were there at the beginning, and Murie was listening and making friends as she served lemonade and cookies.

Standing before a hearing on the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge Wilderness on May 2, 1967, in Burns, Oregon, Murie lamented: “People do not understand the Wilderness Act.”²² She might just as well have been saying, “People do not understand wilderness.” The act stipulated that 160 natural areas needed to be studied for wilderness designation over a ten-year period. Once studied, there were hearings, and Murie

appeared at them. In trying to defend real wilderness areas, she made an emotional appeal in order to connect with people who did not carry the kind of bodily experience that she did. At the Malheur hearing she spoke of her visit to the area:

Standing there listening, trying to identify the many bird calls that came to our ears from all directions, in the perfectly natural setting these creatures belonged in, was a different, and complete memorable experience. This is the kind of experience we hope our people can have in this great United States for a long time to come.²³

Clearly, a “complete” experience for Murie meant sharing an undisturbed abiotic landscape rich with other species.

Murie had learned to value physical exertion on the honeymoon trip to the Yukon. In her 1959 testimony before the Eighty-sixth Congress on behalf of the Arctic Wildlife Range, she stressed the need for wild places where humans could exercise their bodies, to include all their muscles and all their senses. Modern American civilization seemed to her to be turning young people into “robots and automatons and weaklings,” but she predicted in this speech that “there are going to be increasing numbers of young people, and older ones, who will need and crave and benefit from the experience of travel in far places, untouched places, under their own power.”²⁴ Indeed, her prediction has come true as more and more colleges offer Outdoor Recreation majors and courses in wilderness immersion.²⁵ She had described this idea in a passage from *Two in the Far North*. Mardy and Olaus view the Sheenjek River from a mountaintop:

Gazing at such a scene, through half-closed eyes, from a mountain top strikes through to your inmost heart. The place, the scene, the breeze, the birdsong, the fragrance of myriad brave burgeoning mosses and flowers—all blend into one clear entity, one jewel. It is the Arctic in its unbelievably accelerated summer life. It is also the personal well being purchased by striving—by lifting and setting down your legs, over and over through the muskeg, up the slopes, gaining the summit—man using himself. This wondrous mingling of weariness and triumph and sudden harmony with the exquisite airs, the burgeoning of life of the bird and plant world of the tops, is part of the “glad tidings,” surely, which John Muir meant when he said: “Climb the mountains and get their glad tidings.”²⁶

The theme of “man using himself” exemplifies her thought that wilderness is a place for humans, not a pristine habitat from which humans should be excluded. In fact, she and Olaus took their infant son Martin on the Old Crow River expedition soon after their honeymoon trip, encountering wilderness’s dark side, horrific clouds of mosquitoes. The young parents prevailed through ingenuity, love, and energy, derived from the wilderness itself, Murie would probably say. She ends her statement at the 1959 hearing with these words: “I feel so sure that, if we are big enough to save this bit of loveliness on our earth, the future citizens of Alaska and of all the world will be deeply grateful. This is a time for a long look ahead.”²⁷ Her use of the word “bit” is artful litotes in the context of discussion at the hearing over the figure of nine million acres. For many opponents of the wildlife range, the size was simply too “gigantic” to sound reasonable; Senator Robert Bartlett of Alaska, who presided over the hearing, expressed misgivings at the size of the withdrawal. Murie’s suggestion that nine million acres is just “a bit of loveliness” undercuts the labored emphasis on counting acres according to a standard that no one really had the chops to defend—except perhaps Murie because she had been there. She knew that size was important. Humans had to have space, freedom, and solitude in order to be wild.

Eventually Murie came up with a list of wilderness values that would be easy for audiences to understand and remember. The Northwest Wilderness Conference repeatedly requested her to be their keynote speaker. In 1970 they asked that she give a resume of the “wilderness concept in action” in the United States. This time she came ready with facts, figures, and grim statistics: in 1926 there were seventy-four tracts with fifty-five million acres, which had dwindled by 1961 to nineteen tracts with seventeen million acres. Her thorough overview, including a full chronology of names and dates, showcased her professional, scholarly understanding of the data. In this speech she lists five values of the wilderness concept: 1) for space “to avoid overproximity,” 2) for scientific study, 3) for watershed protection, 4) for physical recreation, and 5) for spiritual nourishment for humans. In later speeches she would add a sixth value—for the preservation of native peoples.²⁸ This kind of list was useful but did not get at the complexity she wanted to convey.

Near the conclusion of this speech to the Northwest Wilderness Conference she makes an observation about the seemingly paradoxical nature of what she is trying to articulate:

This is my concept of wilderness and why man and the ecosystem need it. But most important, to my mind, is that the deep benefits to a man of being in the wilderness are proportional to

the absence of evidence of man in that wilderness. This is the unimaginably precious and potent quality.²⁹

Trying to argue pro-human values in the context of absence-of-human presence is a rhetorical conundrum, something that she struggled to find appropriate words for. She was a humanist, always hoping, as historian Douglas Brinkley wrote, to “elevate others,” and she believed that this elevation of character was possible through wilderness experience in unique ways that were just as important as those provided by civilization through books and music, for example.

Murie especially stressed character-building and aesthetics in speeches to young people, whom she sought out, and who frequently in turn found their way to her doorstep in Jackson Hole. In a September 1968 speech entitled “Youth and the Future of American Wilderness,” where she had been asked at the last minute to stand in for Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, she quotes a line from his book *My Wilderness* about nature building “strength and character competitively.”³⁰ In another speech given to an audience in Spokane, Washington, she describes her extensive work and conversations with young people. She says:

We all need to learn that aesthetics must not any more be just a high-flown, poetic, vague, non-practical kind of word. We need this word every day; we need to get used to it, not be ashamed or self-conscious about it; we need it in our homes, in our streets, along our highways, in our parks, in ourselves. Beauty. Man needs it. Youth knows it.³¹

This passage illustrates her direct, refreshingly down-to-earth style. In an untitled and undated speech, probably from her late period because she harkens back to her very early life in Juneau, she says,

The ages were at work in this strong and vibrant place. It has come through the ages from glaciers to tourists, to growing towns, but what else? Ocean, bays and inlets, glaciers, forests, tidal pools, flowers, deer and bear, mink and marten, eagles and whales, seals and sealions [*sic*], Indian villages, totem poles, salmon streams, waterfalls, mines and towns, and above all, mountains. We need to keep them all.³²

This was also part of her aesthetics—an appreciation for a diversity of landscapes, cultures, and other species. Her aesthetics are inclusive, and

generous. She was not opposed to towns, or tourists; she argued for a balance to which wilderness was essential.

In her later speeches in the early 1980s, when she herself was over eighty, she addresses wilderness values that do not necessarily make a good list. On June 18, 1983, in a speech to the Wyoming Outdoor Council Annual Meetings, she says: “Nobody seems to be able to put many words to it, but there it is—an intangible thing—free, often melodious, intriguing, pricking our curiosity, and lifting us out of ourselves and away from the petty nagging concerns of every day.”³³ Earlier, she had used the phrase “an individual freedom” to refer to the condition in which humans would find themselves when freed of “overproximity.”³⁴ She believed that humans could heal themselves in wild places. In another 1983 speech entitled “Is there any hope?”—crafted, she said, after perusing her thirty-three years of “wilderness files”—she came up with something new, “wilderness needs wilderness,” and something old, from Thoreau, “in wildness is the preservation of the world.”³⁵ It was all coming down to preservation of habitat, Murie felt, as she continued to fight off encroachments on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). Perhaps this is one of her most poignant statements. Nearing the end of a long life, she feared for the vitality of wilderness. She told her audience that “we cannot create more wilderness.”³⁶

Much later, accepting the Robert Marshall Award in 1986, she moved way beyond the list, arguing that “wilderness is limitless in meaning and larger than personalities and politics and ambitions.”³⁷ She quotes the phrase “the profound mysteries that only wilderness provides” from an essay by Paul Oehser honoring Benton MacKaye.³⁸ We can add “mystery” to the list of words that Murie uses to characterize her wilderness concept. In fact, most mysterious of all is the fact that humans need wilderness even if they don’t go there. She quoted lines from Edward Abbey’s *Desert Solitaire* to introduce this notion.³⁹ Just as she loved wilderness as literal place, she loved wilderness as idea. Insofar as humans are intellectual beings, as well as physical beings, they need ideas in their heads that conjure up life-sustaining images. She felt “wilderness” as “idea” could do that.

THE LATER YEARS: MURIE AS RHETOR

Audiences responded positively to Murie’s message because she affected their core sensibilities on many levels and through many points of connection. One photo from the honeymoon of 1924 shows her wielding

a twelve-foot saw cutting wood, one leg up on the sawhorse. She is smiling sweetly. When Howard Zahniser introduces her in 1959 to the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Senate Subcommittee of the Eighty-sixth Congress on behalf of S. 1899, a bill to authorize the establishment of the Arctic Wildlife Range, he simply identifies her as Mrs. Murie. Senator Bartlett amplifies Zahniser’s introduction: “

You said correctly that Mrs. Murie has engaged in field expeditions to Alaska. But, as a matter of fact, she has done more than that, because she was raised in Fairbanks, Alaska, and we were school-mates in a far-off day when neither of us suspected there would be any controversy about the wilderness areas.⁴⁰

He articulates the sense of shock that many felt over the fact that wilderness had become synonymous with controversy, and he shows that Murie had established authority as a well-known resident of Alaska, part of a vast and threatened community. Now Alaska had ignited a debate that connected it to the rest of the country, and she would prove that she could serve up words as well as firewood.

Unaffected as a speaker, she often described how her speech had been constructed without worrying that she might appear as an ordinary person rather than a sophisticated “expert.” This strategy proved effective in gaining the trust and sympathy of audiences. Bringing three hundred park superintendents to their feet over a speech is no small feat. On October 27, 1977, she was asked to speak at the National Park Service Superintendents’ Conference at Rocky Mountain National Park. Having lived thirty-one years in Grand Teton National Park, she said, gave her some right to reminisce about personal experience with ten different superintendents. She describes how she conducted a little survey in preparation for her talk to the superintendents. A “group of young people” happened to be visiting her. She asked them what they would say in her position, and they replied not much because superintendents are “just typical Bureaucrats, aren’t they?”⁴¹

True to her heartfelt approach, she said she asked herself what was her idea of a “typical Bureaucrat” and relayed this to her audience:

And my ideal Bureaucrat, my ideal park Superintendent, is a person of enormous heart and enormous patience and love for people, who senses the feelings of staff and of the public but who also, like young James Crossley, has a rod of steel up his spine, but above all, who knows the enormous importance to all of us of the National Park System and the national park ideal.⁴²

Her thorough knowledge of the background of her subject is evident in her conclusion, in which she reads a fairly long excerpt from “The Preliminary Report on the Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Big Trees,” written by landscape designer Frederick Law Olmsted in 1865 on the occasion of Yosemite becoming a state park. Olmsted writes of “the duty of preservation” and notes that “it is an important fact that as civilization advances, the interest of men in natural scenes of sublimity and beauty increases.”⁴³ Murie realized that while the national park/wilderness movement had grown out of the leisure provided by civilization, it was now endangered by civilization’s need for resources. She tells a story about an encounter with a district ranger. Having lived through the great bitterness that arose over the enlargement of Grand Teton National Park, she was doing her best to make everyone’s lives easier in the aftermath. When the district ranger joked that he needed a coconut cake in exchange for a form she had requested, she presented him with one two days later. She could mix cake batter as well as wield the saw. In this story she demonstrates that she practices what she preaches. She will honor the district ranger with a coconut cake if that’s what it takes to cement a relationship that she believes in.

Her concluding words to the park superintendents are stirring: “You are the guardians of the best in American life. Don’t be afraid to be proud of this, for you are really the keepers of the American dream.”⁴⁴ No wonder they stood up. This speech is seven pages, single-spaced, and required significant compositional energy (remember she was seventy-five at the time). By conducting her spontaneous survey and using its tension point (“the typical Bureaucrat” idea) she was able to incorporate real-life experience and create a narrative arc. Discursive, ruminative, full of stories, never allowing distance to develop between herself and the audience, she delivers speeches as if from the hearth, the hearth of the “great grandmother.”

This style, homespun, or perhaps “natural” is a better word, is characteristic of her persona and her speeches. In the beginning of a speech to the Trumpeter Swan Society in 1978, she greets them with these words: “Members of the Trumpeter Swan Society, I should now at this point say, ‘Hello,’ and walk out of the room.”⁴⁵ She unfolds for the audience the story of how she was struggling at home to craft a speech called “Women, Land, and Community” for an Anchorage audience, in the midst of serving food to five hungry grandchildren, when she found out she was on the program for the Trumpeter Swan Society meeting, to occur the day before the other talk. She thought she had agreed to simply stop in, not really give a speech. Murie was always feeding people, and she was always composing speeches. By sharing the image of

“the five hungry grandchildren” she invites the audience into her world, where she is juggling roles. She would serve up a speech to the best of her ability at the time, but she couldn’t spend all day polishing it. She was direct, because she had a lot of work to do. She didn’t walk out on the members of the Trumpeter Swan Society; she simply recycled words from a speech she had given them a few years earlier.

However, the “Women, Land, and Community” speech for the Women Writers Conference given the day after the Trumpeter Swan talk is comprehensive and shows considerable preparation in reading and research. It addresses the role of women in the westward movement and her feelings about her own story. She quotes from women’s diaries and narratives, from women who flourished and women who went mad. She establishes bonds with her audience in statements such as these: “I have always maintained that women who do not naturally feel comfortable living in the woods should not be blamed if they cannot be happy there.”⁴⁶ This statement speaks beautifully of a persona that was humble, never dogmatic. She did not have an agenda for a particular lifestyle that she thought others should emulate. She was too much of a realist and a truth teller to lay out an agenda for others to follow, except that of wilderness preservation of course. At the end of the speech she tells the story of a young woman who

wanted to know how I felt about wild land . . . was it friendly, or was it fearsome? Was this response, one way or another, inborn, inherited, or could it be cultivated? Hard for me to answer, for I had been fortunate; I cannot remember ever having any fear of the wilderness; I could not tell this young woman whether this feeling could be cultivated.⁴⁷

With simplicity and honesty she earns the trust of her audience. Each listener has the opportunity to engage in self-reflection about his or her own fear of wilderness. She would no doubt have argued that preserving wilderness was valuable in order that those who were fearful could study and understand that fear.

Gender roles were on Murie’s mind as she researched the material for this talk. She begins the speech this way: “I have recently re-read Vachel Lindsay’s poem about Johnny Appleseed, wherein all the animals and some of the birds, and one man crossed the Appalachians—he doesn’t mention any woman going along just then!”⁴⁸ That Murie had been an astute observer of gender roles throughout her life and could use her own effectively in her role as speaker is shown in her testimony before the Ninety-fifth Congress in hearings that concerned the inclusion

of Alaska lands in the National Park, Forest, Wildlife Refuge, and Wild and Scenic Rivers Systems that began on June 4, 1977, in Denver, Colorado. While she had introduced herself “as a woman” in her 1959 statement before the Eighty-sixth Congress, here, almost twenty years later, she has one, powerful, word to add to that phrase. She begins with a reference to “Sir Edmund Hillary of Mount Everest fame,” whom she had heard speak in New Zealand about “a big conservation problem.” He asked: “They accuse us of being emotional about this. I want to ask what’s wrong with [a] little emotion?” Murie then begins the body of her speech with the sentence “I am here before you today, gentlemen, as an emotional woman.”⁴⁹ Succinct and bold, this sentence was often quoted as her battle cry. She earned a standing ovation at the end of the speech.

Although she brandishes “Sir Edmund Hillary of Mount Everest fame” as a protective shield, the audience soon realizes it is a wily move before she drops the shield and bravely moves into her “emotional woman” versus “gentlemen” stance. However, the emotional woman is quite practical. The sentences following that initial use of “emotional woman” offer straightforward data that support her testimony as an expert witness—she traveled five times to the far northern Brooks Range, covering eleven areas under consideration in H.R. 39. At the end of the paragraph she restates her position: “I am only trying here to tell you why I, an emotional woman, but a woman familiar with Alaska, think they should all in their innocence and beauty be cherished.”⁵⁰ So, twice she has faced the audience as an emotional woman, proving her determination to make her points in that state. Whereas Olaus came before his audience as a “biologist,” she used the persuasive power of her own biology.

Then Murie launches into a plea for putting the last remnants of “wild country” into “an interest-bearing savings account,” revealing herself as an emotional woman who can also think in practical, economic terms. Travelers to and from the wilderness areas will supply the “interest.” Over and over she draws her audience’s attention to thinking about what the endgame will look like as depletion of species and resources continues, again prophetic, as Alaska took a huge economic hit in 2012 when the migration of king salmon failed.⁵¹ She concludes this short, pointed statement by posing a rhetorically powerful juxtaposition, that is, that “idealism” can be the “most practical course.” Idealistic and practical, she walked a rhetorical line of her own design. As the audience cheered, the record shows that Representative John F. Seiberling, the moderator, said: “I’m sorry, I can appreciate your feelings, but I must insist that we do not have any demonstration. I am

touched by the eloquence and obvious love of this land and we want to do what Mrs. Murie wants us to do.”⁵² He calls for a short recess. Surely, that is a fine tribute to a successful speaker. As in 1959, she is on the winning side. Based on these hearings, President Carter, in 1980, expanded the original Arctic Wildlife Range via the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act to create the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), totaling nineteen million acres. Many feel that the creation of ANWR was a stunning achievement for which Murie could take huge credit as the rallying voice for preservation. In 1959 she said that nine million acres was just “a bit of loveliness.” Apparently she had been persuasive. Now nineteen million acres had been set aside in the kind of savings account she believed would benefit humans for years to come.

Warmheartedness was also part of Murie’s persona. She often used the phrase “if I speak from my heart.”⁵³ Her use of the phrases “from the heart” and “as a woman” is both poignant and strong. In acknowledging certain qualities of love and gender, she reminded her audience of the biological basis of life on earth. She was always concerned with projecting her words “from the heart,” however difficult that might be, and she intuitively grasped the fact that a speaker can use his or her gender to add weight to an argument. Later, as she developed the habit of weaving in quotations from favorite writers, she often referred to Olaus’s pronouncement that “man is an animal” despite his sophisticated use of tools. That a woman, and quite a domestic woman at that, wanted with every breath to speak for wilderness was a strong selling point for her most passionate cause. Audiences believed her because she spoke from her experience, not as a theoretician.

Unassuming, down to earth, practical, idealistic, and warmhearted—these aspects of her persona or character infuse her rhetoric, as did a high proportion of other qualities she had in abundance—love of language and curiosity. The allusive style of her speeches is evidence of a woman who read widely, took notes, and kept files; but more than that, she thought deeply about both words and ideas. In her “Dude Ranchers are Influential People” speech of 1970 she makes allusions to the following: Henny Penny, Denis Hayes (Earth Day), Roger Hansen (director of the Colorado Open Space Conference), Robert Gomer (physicist), Olaus, Richard Reinhardt (author of *Out West on the Overland Train*), Dave Brower, Liz Hannum Smith, Channing Pollock (playwright), Shelley (poet), Tom Ball (Wyoming Outdoor Coordinating Council), Elton Trueblood (Quaker philosopher), and Phil Ochs (singer and songwriter). Entirely open about her methods in constructing a speech, she tells her audience that her quotation of Shelley’s line (“the contagion of the world’s slow stain”) came from an old, two-page *Reader’s Digest*

clipping that she came across while preparing her talk. Members of the audience could no doubt relate to someone who showed them how she found wisdom in a publication for a general audience. On the other hand, she could make allusions to lofty thinkers like John Stuart Mill and N. J. Berrill, author of what she describes as a “challenging book,” *Man’s Emerging Mind: The Story of Man’s Progress through Time*.⁵⁴ A Canadian marine biologist turned man-of-letters and philosopher, Berrill questions man’s place in nature. Murie quotes two long paragraphs from his book with this disclaimer: “I have criticized speakers who filled their speech with quotes. But in developing the topic which was given me, how could I keep from quoting some of the powerful words of others?”⁵⁵ She took a free-spirited approach to composition, mingling passages from favorite poems and songs with hardcore remarks about depletion of resources.

This love of language for its power, cadence, and music stayed with her throughout her life.⁵⁶ Murie and her family rarely took field trips without a book or two. She wrote in her diary entry of May 30, 1961, as she and Olaus are camping near Lobo Lake in Sheenjek trying to get through a storm: “We tried to read; Olaus tried to sleep. I read aloud a few of Henry James’s incalculably involved sentences in *The Ambassadors*, which should have put him to sleep.”⁵⁷ When Olaus and their son Donald went to New Zealand, she put several books in their backpack. Donald read *The Pickwick Papers* to Olaus in their tent, as floodwaters surrounded them.⁵⁸ They read their way through wilderness landscapes. Murie would give the Jackson Hole graduating class of 1974 a short list of “little material things” that were important. Point number 1 was: “Your language: The English (or should I say American?) language can be beautiful. It is NOT, as too many of us are speaking it today. I call your attention to ‘uh, uh,’ and ‘like,’ and ‘you know.’ And I object to the growing use of ‘that’ in all places instead of ‘who’ or ‘which.’ And we are lazy and sloppy in enunciation where we should be crisp and clear.”⁵⁹ Point number 2 was: “Books. Love them. Don’t leave them behind when you leave school.”⁶⁰ Point number 3 was: “Appreciation of the world around you,” which she elaborated upon as “wild natural beauty.”

Many other lovers of wilderness, from Thoreau to Muir to Edward Abbey, have found the obligation to write, and speak, of their appreciation of wilderness. Murie was one of these. While she almost always uses direct experience rather than academic knowledge as the substrate of her speeches, Murie’s most vivid descriptions, composed almost as translations of her experience in wilderness, are found in her books. Some of these descriptions she quoted in her speeches. Finally, though, in her last statement before Congress, in 1983, when she appears to testify against

the Stevens hunting bill, an encroachment upon ANWR, she draws on her honeymoon experience again:

I would like to add that my reasons for opposing this bill are, in part, quite personal. One of the parks which would be opened to hunting by it is especially near and dear to my heart. In 1924, I spent my honeymoon in what is now the Gates of the Arctic National Park, so the area naturally holds very special memories for me. The haunting beauty of the Brooks Range, the pristine alpine lakes, the abundant wildlife, all combine to make Gates of the Arctic one of the most spectacular places in the world. I described in *Two in the Far North* a night I still recall vividly, when I stood and watched silently as a steady stream of caribou—bulls, cows, calves, yearlings—bathed in the bright golden light of the Arctic night, returned to their range. I thought then as I do now: that those animals and their fellow wild creatures are the rightful owners of that land.⁶¹

Like a landscape painter in the Hudson River School tradition, she places a powerful image before her audience, hoping that her emotion will stir their emotions. Using a honeymoon as evidence to oppose a hunting bill takes the confidence of a long life. That was her most valuable experience and she used it. The Stevens hunting bill was not passed.

CONCLUSION

In one of her later speeches—“End or Beginning?”—on the occasion of receiving the National Audubon Society Award, Murie questioned in front of her audience what she had accomplished in her lifetime:

Yes—I’ve written letters to congressmen, and to forest supervisors and to national park superintendents: I’ve testified at hearings, attended a lots of meetings, made a lot of speeches. I’m on the council of the Wilderness Society. . . . I’ve written some books, travelled in some wilderness, but a lot of other people have done all that. I have also . . . served a lot of tea and made bushels of cookies. But what does that all add up to?⁶²

It all added up to successful advocacy. She repeated here what she told the class of 1974 at the Jackson Hole High School about being right with oneself, and she says:

I am still curious. And at this late stage in my life I have been trying, for my own satisfaction, to analyze what is happening on this beautiful water planet. Who are we? Why are we here? What are we doing right—what can we do about what we are doing wrong?⁶³

Clearly, the most important work that Murie felt she could do was to take on the role of public speaker. Her life experience, character, love of language, curiosity about life, and concern for its future gave her the kind of rhetorical power that could influence congresses and nourish a great movement. Near the end of Murie's career, noted naturalist Barry Lopez observed: "She has a grandmother's poise, a lover's fire, a spouse's allegiance, a curandera's wariness about Congressional platitudes. When she is gone, the land will break down in tears."⁶⁴ She earned the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and numerous other awards, because she gave her voice to a cause that she believed could enhance humans' views of their own potential. She told the Jackson Hole Class of 1974, "There is no limit to the growth of the human soul."⁶⁵ While this might be taken by some as a platitude, she did not speak these words in that vein. As always, these were words from her heart. She spoke as someone who had tested this idea against her experience and found it to be true. Audiences grew to look to her for a steadfast message, delivered with intelligence and sanity. They knew her as an ordinary person who stood before audience after audience because she felt her topic was important. She believed that wilderness experience made civilized people more aware, alive, and free. Some still hear the echo of Representative Seiberling at the 1977 congressional hearing in Denver: "we want to do what Mrs. Murie wants us to do."⁶⁶

NOTES

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EIGHT

Rachel Carson's War of Words against Government and Industry

Challenging the Objectivity of American Scientific Discourse

MICHEL M. HAIGH AND ANN MARIE MAJOR



Two days after American biologist and writer Rachel Carson died, the *New York Times*' April 16, 1964, editorial characterized her as "one of the most influential women of our time." Her book *Silent Spring* provided the American public with an understanding of the hazards of pesticides.¹ Published on September 27, 1962, by Houghton Mifflin, *Silent Spring* was the fourth book Carson had authored, the first three having earned her an international reputation as a writer with a talent for translating complex scientific knowledge into literature for public consumption. Carson's *The Sea Around Us* earned the National Book Club Award and the distinguished John Burroughs Medal for outstanding natural history writing in 1952.² American author and conservationist Terry Tempest Williams described Carson as "a towering example within American democracy of how one person's voice can make an extraordinary difference both in public policy and in the minds of the populace."³

There was a contentious debate over *Silent Spring*'s publication, including an article in *Business Week* accusing Carson of "attacking" pesticides and the chemical industry and inciting a public "storm of controversy."⁴ In response, the soft-spoken Carson told *Life* magazine she never intended to launch a "Carrie Nation crusade."⁵ *Silent Spring* evolved from her concern that "the next generation will have no chance to know nature as we do—if we don't preserve it the damage will be

irreversible.”⁶ Although a reticent public speaker because of her shy demeanor, on December 5, 1962, Carson delivered a nationally televised speech at the Women’s National Press Club. Knowing that cancer would leave her final work without a defender, Carson understood that public address was a weapon to wage war on the chemical industry and expose its goal to deny the public access to critical scientific information. Before a national audience, Carson said, “Scientific truths were being compromised.”⁷ She said the agricultural industry was concealing scientific information from the public “to serve the gods of profit and production.”⁸ In that speech, she provided examples of the harmful effects of pesticides and provided justification for the content, purpose, and sources in *Silent Spring*.

A month later, on January 8, 1963, Carson addressed the Garden Club of America. This speech marked a transformative moment when the once-reserved public speaker understood her power in altering the environmental agenda. Through these speeches, Carson created a political agenda to encourage grassroots involvement and bring scientific knowledge to the American public.

In this chapter I examine two pivotal speeches and explore how Carson used rhetoric in *Silent Spring* to exemplify feminist philosopher and scientist Evelyn Fox Keller’s concept of dynamic objectivity.⁹ For Keller, dynamic objectivity is the lens through which humans understand their world. According to Killingsworth and Palmer, static objectivity is the separation of subject from object in the traditional science of knowing.¹⁰ They argue Carson’s book differed from other critiques of pesticides at the time, because her prose through dynamic objectivity mediated her readers’ understanding of their biological connection with the natural world.¹¹

Carson’s *Silent Spring* was not the only book published that emphasized the danger of pesticides and the emerging concept of ecology. Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter William F. Longgood’s book *The Poison in Your Foods* and social ecologist and anarchist Murray Bookchin’s *Our Synthetic World* paralleled her argument.¹² However, Killingsworth and Palmer argue it was Carson’s use of dynamic objectivity in *Silent Spring* and her use of prophetic ethos that led to the malicious attack on her science from the chemical industry and some government scientists. Carson called into question the overuse of pesticides and the need for ethical and moral decision-making regarding their use, which Killingsworth and Palmer contend triggered anti-environmentalist hysteria from the scientists who denounced her work. At the September 1962 meeting of the American Chemical Society, Nutrition Foundation director Dr. C. Glen King accused Carson of inciting public hysteria.¹³

In this chapter's close textual analysis of Carson's discourse, her speeches are examined within the context of Professor H. Lewis Ulman's study of the intersection of rhetoric, science, and the environment, a political crossroads situated between scientists' static objectivity and the dynamic objectivity of environmental and nature writers. In differentiating scientific writing from American nature writing, Ulman characterizes nature writing as an "ethical interpretation [that] foregrounds the ethos or moral character of interpreters—in this case, both writers and readers."¹⁴ Carson transformed nature writing into popular culture as a *New York Times* best-selling author. Her focus on the moral and ethical issues of pesticide use draws on Aristotle's concept of *eudaimonia* or "substantive good," that is, the greater human good.¹⁵ Traditionally, scientists have relied on objectivity to remain distanced from their subject of study. Ulman argued the third-person reliance on static objectivity and data inferences conveys an unrealistic detachment in American scientific endeavors.¹⁶ It is Ulman's belief that nature writing rests at the borderlands where rhetoric, politics, ethics, science, and culture collide.¹⁷

In structuring her speeches, Carson relies on the rhetorical jeremiad, or what Rosteck and Frenz label the "political jeremiad," wherein the audience is warned of the impending doom of environmental destruction.¹⁸ Through the rhetorical jeremiad, Carson defined the spiritual teaching of the balance of nature and provided scientific evidence of how the U.S. chemical industry had whitewashed the negative effects of pesticide overuse. She concluded her arguments urging her audience to question authority and engage in grassroots politics to pressure government and industry scientists into formulating sound pesticide policies that would ensure life on the planet for future generations.¹⁹

This chapter applies Ulman's rhetorical concepts of persona, ethos, pathos, and judgment. Persona focuses on an audience's perceptions of a rhetor that establishes expectations for the message. In environmental rhetoric, the speaker's credentials as scientist are judged in terms of his or her adherence to the greater social good in his or her pursuits.²⁰ Ethos, as defined by Ulman, refers to how audience members consider the sincerity of the rhetor's argument. He argues audience expectations are based on prior knowledge but can be changed by the rhetor's discourse employed in a particular situation. Judgment is where audience members must not only discern the credibility and authority of the speaker, but they must consider their own situational connection to the argument. It is the emotional connection, or pathos, that drives the general public to understand the importance of the impact of pesticides and chemicals on human health. If the testimony is conflicting, audience members may "resolve the conflict by judging the character of the expert witnesses."²¹

CARSON'S EARLY LIFE INFLUENCE

Carson's early love of nature and science provided her with the background to become one of the most influential science writers of the twentieth century. Her initial passion at the Pennsylvania College for Women was writing until she took a biology course in her sophomore year. She chose biology as her major during her junior year and earned a bachelor's degree in biology in 1929.²² Carson's ultimate goal was to earn a doctorate from Johns Hopkins University following the completion of her master's degree in zoology with a specialization in marine ecology in 1932,²³ but financial and family circumstances prevented her from continuing her doctoral studies in 1934. Her first part-time job in 1935 demonstrated her passion for disseminating science information. She began working for the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries, which later became known as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, where she wrote a radio series called "Romance under the Waters."²⁴ The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service hired her full-time in 1936 as a junior aquatic biologist. She was one of the first two women hired by the bureau.²⁵

CARSON'S EARLY INTERESTS IN PESTICIDES

Carson's interest in toxic chemicals and pesticides began long before she started drafting *Silent Spring* in 1958. As early as 1932, she set out collecting materials about the impact of selenium and other naturally occurring poisons in public drinking water. Her employment at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service made her privy to information that the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center was embarking on the "most extensive controlled experiments ever undertaken as to the effects of DDT [dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane, an organochlorine insecticide²⁶] on wildlife."²⁷ In 1945, Carson corresponded with *Reader's Digest* editors proposing a story on the Patuxent experiments with DDT. The *Reader's Digest* editors argued pesticides were not a "palatable" topic for their readers.²⁸ Although frustrated by the editors' decision, Carson continued to collect materials on pesticide use.

SILENT SPRING

Segments of *Silent Spring* had been printed in the 1962 summer issues of *The New Yorker* before the book was published in late September.²⁹ Criticism of the book began long before it reached bookstore shelves and American readers. The American Chemical Society and the National

Agricultural Chemicals Association launched a public relations campaign to discredit Carson's book and reputation starting in 1961. One of her critics, Dr. Thomas H. Harris of the Department of Agriculture, told Walter Sullivan of the *New York Times* that Carson's denunciation of DDT was "one-sided" and DDT was essential as an insecticide to feed America's growing population.³⁰ Some of the milder charges from the chemical industry claimed Carson had selectively presented "isolated case histories" of pesticide misuse.³¹ *New York Times* reporter John Lee wrote that chemical companies did not act carelessly and were not "money grubbers."³² Lee quoted E. M. Adams, Dow Chemical's assistant director of the biochemistry research laboratory, who said: "I think Miss Carson has indulged in hindsight. In many cases we have to learn from experience and often it is difficult to exercise the proper foresight."³³ Carson had expected the book to be controversial. She "took many of her critics in stride,"³⁴ but she had little patience for people who argued against the book without having read it.

For example, a review in the September 1962 issue of *Farm Journal* warned America's farmers: "You're accused of poisoning food."³⁵ Nowhere in the book's 297 pages did Carson state farmers were poisoning America's food supply with pesticides. However, Richard C. Davids wrote: "We at *Farm Journal* believe that all of our readers should be forewarned of the storm that will break next month when the book appears as a book-club selection, and as a paper-back, along with a TV spectacular."³⁶ Davids argued the government was concerned by Carson's emphasis on the dangers of pesticide use without discussing the benefits such chemicals had brought to American farming (e.g., more efficient food production). Davids assured his readers that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration sources believed Carson was "indulging in pure speculation," claiming insecticides and herbicides belong to a radiomimetic group of chemicals that "may lead to disease" and genetic mutation.³⁷ However, the *Farm Journal* article did not mention the increasing concern among scientists about insects developing resistance to DDT and other pesticides, something Carson discussed in chapter 16 of *Silent Spring*. Carson's sources included research published in the *American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*, the *Annual Review of Entomology*, and the *Journal of Economic Entomology* providing strong evidence of DDT resistance among insects.³⁸

WOMEN'S NATIONAL PRESS CLUB SPEECH

Carson was able to argue against the "misinformation" being presented to a national audience when she delivered a nationally televised speech at

the Women's National Press Club (WNPC). The speech allowed Carson to respond to opponents before a national audience. *Chicago Tribune* reporter Bazy McCormick Tankersley³⁹ summed up Carson's persona:

A most self-contained and, at the same time, the least assertive little woman approached the microphone. . . . she addressed herself to this group as if she was [*sic*] a guest speaker in a classroom. There was almost an element of the clergy in her approach. . . . Whatever the circumstances, she always seemed to have the situation, and herself, under firm control.⁴⁰

In the WNPC speech, Carson responded to her opponents by citing news reports discussing how a number of reviewers were attacking *Silent Spring* without having read the book. She refuted attacks claiming she incited public hysteria.⁴¹ Ulman's concepts of ethos and judgment are easily identified in Carson's WNPC speech.⁴² Carson argued with reason. Her speech didn't rely on pathos but rather used ethos and logos.

Carson quoted from news sources affirming opponents were condemning the book without reading it:

My text this afternoon is taken from the *Globe Times* of Bethlehem, Pa., a news item in the issue of October 12. After describing in detail the adverse reactions to *Silent Spring* of the farm bureaus in two Pennsylvania counties, the reporters continued: "No one in either county farm office who was talked to today had read the book, but all disapproved of it heartily."⁴³

Carson then read an editorial from the *Bennington Banner* stating: "The anguished reaction to *Silent Spring* has been to refute statements that were never made."⁴⁴ Carson was able to reference media sources to add to her persona as a scientist. By using these examples, she defended her persona-in-context as a scientist—she was competent and responsible when writing, but her opponents were not competent or responsible in their attacks against the book, because their arguments against the book were not founded on fact because they had not read the book. She asked her audience to question the believability of her critics. Carson wanted the audience to make an informed decision before passing judgment on her arguments and *Silent Spring*; the audience needed to "resolve the conflict by judging the character of the expert witnesses."⁴⁵

Carson continued her speech by outlining the chain of events leading up to the publication of *Silent Spring* before shifting the focus of the speech to address the challengers' personal attacks. Critics were

arguing Carson was a “hysterical woman.” Gartner stated: “Detractors attempted to discredit her work by labeling her a ‘hysterical woman.’”⁴⁶ They attempted to undermine Carson’s credentials as a scientist by saying she had presented inaccurate information, using terms such as “fanaticism,” “emotionalism,” and “insufficient documentation.”⁴⁷

In a September 1962 article, *Time* magazine accused Carson of being “hysterical” and “overemphatic” and concluded:

Many scientists sympathize with Miss Carson’s love of wildlife, and even with her mystical attachment to the balance of nature. But they fear that her emotional and inaccurate outburst in *Silent Spring* may do harm by alarming the nontechnical public, while doing no good for the things that she loves.⁴⁸

Carson’s calm, articulate, and reserved demeanor resonated with her audience and confirmed she was far from hysterical. Her “quiet manner, her subdued voice and curiously uninflected speech, gave an impression of reserve . . . her delivery was always calm and matter-of-fact.”⁴⁹ This persona is the opposite of “hysterical,” as hysteria “contains a measure of defensiveness, worry, and pathos.”⁵⁰ Her opponents argued about Carson’s character and not her science. Her words bolstered her persona and ethos and allowed her audience to make their own decision about her arguments. Carson told her audience: “I am a ‘bird lover—a cat lover—a fish lover’—a priestess of nature—a devotee of a mystical cult having to do with the laws of the universe, which my critics consider themselves immune to.”⁵¹

Carson did not dwell on the personal attacks. She was not one to draw attention to herself and did not enjoy the fame that came with being a best-selling author. Instead, Carson addressed the comments that *Silent Spring* was one-sided, lacked sources, and was unsupported by scientific facts. Dr. Robert White-Stevens, of the Research and Development Department of American Cyanamid Company, was quoted as saying: “The major claims of Miss Rachel Carson’s book, ‘*Silent Spring*,’ are gross distortions of the actual facts, completely unsupported by scientific, experimental evidence, and general practical experience in the field.”⁵² Carson responded to his criticism by discussing more recent scientific examples of pesticide poisoning, some of which she learned about through the mail her readers sent.⁵³

Carson refuted her opponents who questioned her inadequate sources or use of outdated examples by discussing recent cases of pesticide use in the news. She credits several news publications and the Associated Press in her speech, relying on news sources to support her

work. After Carson makes the audience question the reviews of the book because some are opposing the book without reading it, she makes them question the opponents who disparage her character and credentials, and then she makes them question the concern of using outdated examples of pesticide use in *Silent Spring* by offering more recent examples. Throughout the speech she is providing the audience with factual content to debunk the fiction. Ultimately, she is challenging the audience to decide for themselves who to believe—her critics or her. As Carson states:

Now, I would like to say that in *Silent Spring* I have never asked the reader to take *my* word. I have given him a very clear indication of my sources. I make it possible for him—indeed I invite him—to go beyond what I report and get the full picture.⁵⁴

Carson points out the reviewer from *Time* accused her of *name-dropping* by citing her sources. Additionally this reviewer questioned the sources Carson used in the book. Carson emphasizes words and phrases and makes an exclamation in her response to this accusation. Carson bolsters her persona and ethos. She states:

To identify the person whose views you are quoting is, according to this reviewer, *name-dropping*. Well, times have certainly changed since I received my training in scientific method at Johns Hopkins! My critic also *profoundly disapproved* of my bibliography. The very fact that it gave complete and scientific references for each important statement was extremely distasteful to him. This was *padding* to impress the uninitiated with its length.⁵⁵

Carson tells the audience she provided fifty-five pages of detailed references so readers could consult the references themselves and form their own opinions. Carson said the extensive references were one reason the criticisms about the book being “one-sided” were incorrect. “You cannot do this if you are trying to conceal or distort or to present half truths.”⁵⁶

After justifying her extensive reference list, she addressed the claim she was wrong when she stated chemical manufacturers supported university research examining chemicals. Carson argued it was important for the public to know when research was funded by industry so they could then question the validity of the findings. She was very “matter-of-fact” in her rebuttal and stated: “Now this is just common knowledge

and I can scarcely believe the reviewer is unaware of it, because his own university is among those receiving such grants.”⁵⁷ She once again urged the audience to come to their own conclusion: “But since my statement has been challenged, I suggest that any of you who are interested make a few inquiries from representative universities. I am sure you will find out that the practice is very widespread.”⁵⁸ Carson then continued her pattern of providing evidence by citing specific, recent examples of articles published in the *Journal of Economic Entomology* that included statements that the university research was indeed sponsored by the chemical industry.

After refuting the claim that she was wrong about funded university research, she focused the remainder of her speech by answering the question, “When the scientific organization speaks, whose voice do we hear—that of the science? or of the sustaining industry? It might be a less serious situation if this voice were always clearly identified, but the public assumes it is hearing the voice of science.”⁵⁹

She argued the public needed to question the information being disseminated. They needed to practice media literacy and ask questions about the sources being cited when discussing scientific issues. She provided an example of how the public might examine a committee report by questioning who was on the committee, with whom the members are affiliated (business/industry or academia), and what conclusions the committee reached. She supports her argument by using a recent example of the National Academy of Sciences Committee. Carson then explains to the audience that there are three types of people included in the committee examining pesticides on wildlife: supporting agencies, government agencies, and scientific societies, all of which have different interests. The question is are they looking out for their own interests or the public’s interests? “The supporting agencies are presumably those who supply the hard cash. Forty-three such agencies are listed, including 19 chemical companies comprising the massed might of the chemical industry.”⁶⁰ Carson bolsters her position by quoting the conclusion reached by the *Atlantic Naturalist* reviewer who said the final committee report was “written in the style of a trained public relations official of industry out to placate some segments of the public that are causing trouble.”⁶¹

Carson concluded her speech by stating that the criticism for *Silent Spring* calls into question how scientific knowledge is communicated to the public. Carson said:

Is industry becoming a screen through which facts must be filtered, so that the hard, uncomfortable truths are kept back and

only the harmless morsels allowed to filter through? I know that many thoughtful scientists are deeply disturbed that their organizations are becoming fronts for industry . . . here the tailoring, the screening of basic truth, is done, not to suit a party line, but to accommodate to the short-term gain, to serve the gods of profit and production.⁶²

Carson then suggested her audience—professionals in the field of communication—or the media should be the ones to communicate accurate, scientific knowledge to the public by asking the hard questions and judging the findings with an understanding of what the industry gains from the research outcomes. Carson used the speech at the WNPC to refute the criticisms about *Silent Spring*. She did so using recent exemplars, citing credible sources, and making strong, logical arguments. Carson not only addressed a national TV audience; she was able to demonstrate the media had shirked their responsibilities by distributing misinformation about *Silent Spring*. She stressed the idea that the media and the public need to ask questions about scientific research before they can pass judgment on scientific issues. One month after the WNPC speech, Carson traveled to New York to receive the Schweitzer Medal from the Animal Welfare Institute. The next day, January 8, 1963, she delivered her speech to the Garden Club of America (GCA), where she invited her audience to join the “battle” to change America’s environmental policy of “reckless” and unwarranted use of potentially toxic pesticides.⁶³

GARDEN CLUB OF AMERICA SPEECH

For Carson, the Garden Club speech was a crucial opportunity to ask GCA members to join her as opinion leaders in the mission to ignite grassroots efforts to reform pesticide policies. Though defensive of the attacks on her credentials in her WNPC address, Carson assumed an offensive position in the GCA speech and conveyed her persona to her listeners that political and economic forces in America were obstructing change in pesticide policies. Her charge was bold in the aftermath of Senator Joseph McCarthy’s witch hunt to uncover un-American activities in the 1950s.

In her opening remarks, Carson recounted her ten-year relationship with GCA members and acknowledged having received the club’s Frances Hutchinson Medal for her conservation work as a nationally recognized author. With these remarks, Carson employed persona as a means of establishing a common history and connection with her

audience: "Through your interest in plant life, your fostering of beauty, your alignment with constructive conservation causes, you promote that onward flow of life that is the essence of our world."⁶⁴ Her use of the political jeremiad in praising GCA members for their work in conservation and adhering to the ideal of the balance of nature led to her grave concern for how their efforts were being destroyed by "forces careless of life or deliberately destructive of it."⁶⁵ In appealing to her audience's recognition of her credentials, or her ethos, Carson assured her audience that her fear was not of pesticides but "the reckless use of chemicals so unselective in their action that they should more appropriately be called biocides."⁶⁶

In her suggestion of the "ideal place" outlined in the political jeremiad, Carson told her audience that her quest was a "battle for a sane policy" for controlling unwanted species, whether that is in the growing of crops or the controlling of potential pests such as mosquitoes spreading malaria. It is here that Carson described the delusional state of industry scientists, who had charged her with inciting public hysteria. She told of colleagues who held positions in science and industry, many of whom had privately supported her position yet feared retaliation for questioning accepted scientific practices. Carson's indictment of agriculture and industry's wrongful "authoritarian control" underscored her disdain for positivist static objectivity, an ideal psychologist Ernest Schachtel argued was based on an obsessive-compulsive desire for control and emotional disengagement.⁶⁷ For Carson, a sane policy was one where subject and object were not severed, where dynamic objectivity provided scientists, policymakers, industry representatives, and the public with the means to achieve decisions in the best interest of the survival of all life. This was the persona that she asked her audience to judge.

The chemical industry's increasing paranoia about any criticism or questioning of its practices was heightened when, on June 20, 1950, the U.S. House of Representatives voted unanimously to establish a committee charged with investigating "the nature, extent, and effect of the use of chemicals and synthetics in the production and packaging of food products."⁶⁸ Carson had followed the committee hearings during 1950 and 1951 and the resulting 1954 Miller Pesticide Amendment. Industry and government scientists were alarmed further by ornithologist Robert Cushman Murphy's lawsuit to prohibit state and federal agencies from the aerial spraying of DDT on private lands. Cushman Murphy and Carson shared a long history as colleagues. When the trial began in February 1958, Carson followed the proceedings with keen interest. *New York World-Telegram and Sun* reporter William Longgood covered the trial and, in February 1960, authored *The Poisons in Your Food*.⁶⁹ At

the April 12, 1960, meeting of the directors of the Manufacturing Chemists' Association held in New York City, members of the Food Additives Committee recommended retaining the public relations firm Glick and Lorwin to counter Longgood's book.⁷⁰ The association's actions underscore concerns about the power of public hysteria; as Killingsworth and Palmer noted, "Hysteria itself contains a measure of defensiveness, worry, and pathos."⁷¹

In their analysis of environmental hysteria through the lens of *Silent Spring*, Killingsworth and Palmer drew on psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud's study of female hysterics, pointing out that these women were intelligent and often burdened by ill fathers.⁷² Hysteria develops in response to their repressed anger toward the father and their rejection of marriage to remain caretakers and maintain a sense of independence. The female hysteric's masculinized unconscious feeds her sense of powerlessness and leads to neurosis. The authors argue hysterics "anticipate ecological activists in many ways, most notably perhaps in their use of end-of-the-world scenarios, such as the famous prologue to *Silent Spring*, entitled 'A Fable for Tomorrow.'"⁷³ Perhaps Carson's rhetorical use of that small town where birds ceased to sing was reminiscent of the abandonment in her childhood by a father unable to provide for his family and prone to illness.⁷⁴ After all, Carson had to forsake earning a doctorate at Johns Hopkins to financially support her father, mother, sister, and nephew.

Contrary to industry charges that "Hurricane Rachel" stirred a controversy,⁷⁵ Carson asked her audience to understand that *Silent Spring* neither ushered in the war against the "reckless" use of pesticides nor did it end the war. What Carson understood that her critics in industry failed to understand was that "*Silent Spring* was neither the beginning nor the end" of the environmental debate. DDT had become a public issue in the 1940s with many news stories expressing concern over the dangers of its use. One of many *New York Times* stories warned: "DDT will kill almost, if not all, cold-blooded animals if the concentration is sufficiently high."⁷⁶ *Silent Spring* highlighted isolated incidents of toxic effects such as dieldrin, and Carson reported poisonings in East St. Louis, Sheldon, Illinois, and Norfolk, Virginia. A health officer told the *Norfolk Virginian-Pilot* reporters that the Agriculture Department's dieldrin application methods were *guaranteed* safe. The newspaper reported the official as saying: "A child would have to eat the roots of the grass to get the poison."⁷⁷ Investigating reporters witnessed the application by "seeders, blowers and helicopters," the same "safe" methods that had killed hundreds of birds in the Illinois communities.⁷⁸ Carson argued the Norfolk health officials were simply deceptive in their statements to

the press. It is at this point in the GCA speech that Carson called on her audience to employ Ulman's judgment.

Agricultural colleges and pesticide manufacturers were distributing propaganda to news reporters and medical and health professionals to assure the public of pesticide safety.⁷⁹ What concerned Carson was that this propaganda was the work of industry organizations masquerading as "objective" scientific organizations holding forth the public's best interest.⁸⁰ Carson asked her audience what it would take to change the system and warned: "Let us hope it will not take the equivalent of another thalidomide tragedy to shock us into full awareness of the hazards."⁸¹ Ideally, for Carson, in terms of political jeremiad, the public will raise questions instead of "merely acquiescing in whatever spraying programs are proposed."⁸² Public and state governments had begun calling for better legislative control. She noted citizen groups, including the Pennsylvania Federation of Women's Clubs and the National Audubon Society, were taking up the pesticide issue. Carson believed public interest groups would keep pesticides on the national agenda. Her hope was that her audience would understand its connection to the pesticide issue as an aspect of rhetorical judgment.⁸³

Carson told her audience the absolute authority of agricultural agencies was a "fundamental wrong" in the system. She maintained one government agency is not capable of making decisions for competing interests required to protect the environment and public health. As an example, Carson referenced the U.S. Court of Appeals decision in the case of Long Island residents opposed to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's spraying of private lands with DDT to control the gypsy moth. The decision gave citizens a procedure to use the courts to prevent unsound government decisions impacting public health.

Though progress had been made in court decisions, Carson believed the war demanded "public vigilance and public demand for correction of abuses."⁸⁴ For Carson, government and industry elites were limiting public access to scientific information and were distorting information through industry propaganda. Chemical trade associations produced and distributed pamphlets for distribution to physicians' offices and other public health organizations for use in responding to public questions about pesticides. Carson vehemently argued that generating propaganda in the name of public health was not the business of trade associations. Nor did she believe that control was limited simply to information. To her Garden Club audience, Carson pointed out recent income tax legislation allowing business to deduct lobbying expenses, a tax advantage enjoyed by the chemical industry yet not available to nonprofit organizations such as the GCA. In fact, Garden Clubs risked losing their

tax-exempt status as a result of “substantial” lobbying activities where substantial was not defined in the tax code.⁸⁵

As she ended her speech to the members of the Garden Club of America, Carson admonished them to be vigilant about the concentration of power, especially in terms of what was taking place at universities where corporate chemical manufacturers were underwriting research projects. Carson had a key concern with conflict of interest in the name of science and public health. She asked her audience to judge the intersection of culture, ethics, politics, rhetoric, and science. As she closed her speech to the GCA membership, her words poignantly expressed concerns about the “power of the academic-industrial complex.”⁸⁶ Her words evoked those of U.S. president Dwight D. Eisenhower, who in his 1960 farewell speech warned of the power vested in the military-industrial complex.⁸⁷ For Rachel Carson, the key question was “Who speaks?—And Why?”⁸⁸

CONCLUSION

Despite accusations characterizing Carson as “a priestess of nature” and “devotee of a mystical cult,”⁸⁹ Carson remained steadfast in her search for the scientific truth about the impact of pesticides. She struck a nerve, and a hysterical one at that, among high-ranking government and industry personnel, including former U.S. secretary of agriculture Ezra Taft Benson, who in correspondence to President Dwight D. Eisenhower questioned: “Why [is] a spinster with no children was so concerned about genetics? . . . [She was] probably a communist.”⁹⁰ The WNPC and GCA speeches, the two most pivotal and public speeches during her short life, demonstrate Carson elicited what Killingsworth and Palmer labeled anti-environmentalist hysteria from her critics.⁹¹ In the WNPC speech Carson stated a number of American scientists feared that “a spirit of lysenkoism” was taking hold of American agriculture. Her reference to the Soviet horticulturist Trofim Lysenko, a promoter of pseudoscience in place of genetics, turned the tables on those who accused her of communist leanings.⁹²

Of Carson’s work, Professor Lisa Sideris wrote: “Human silence was complicit in the more profound silencing of nature that Carson dreaded. Only by breaking the silence—the reticence of government agencies and chemical companies—could humans avert the silencing of nature.”⁹³ Carson saw her public speeches and the book’s controversy as a means to avert the silence about pesticide use and include the public in dialogue. Environmental scientist Jane Lubchenco pointed out Carson’s

understanding of dynamic objectivity, that subject and object cannot be separated as science informs how people understand the world, and “personal and political decisions will of course be based on a wide variety of factors, including values, economics, social pressures, politics and more, but those decisions will be better if they are informed by the most current and credible scientific knowledge.”⁹⁴ Lubchenco’s words reflect Ulman’s characterization of nature writing as an ethical interpretation, one that asks Carson’s listeners to consider the ethos and pathos of the war on nature and come to judgment about the importance of grassroots action to invoke the ideal place of the political jeremiad, where public action is necessary for repentance and reform.

Carson raised moral arguments in her speeches including the “overvaluation or exclusive focus on economic goals and pursuits” and the human “war on nature.”⁹⁵ Critics of *Silent Spring* argued the decision to use pesticides was between public health and prices. These arguments were assailed in the media, and Carson spent time in both the WNPC and GCA speeches refuting these criticisms. For example, one article in *U.S. News & World Report* stated: “Today’s American housewives have the widest choice of fruits and vegetables, and meats and dairy—at prices to fit their budgets.”⁹⁶ The use of the word “housewives” once again showcased Carson, by contrast, as an unmarried woman. Carson spent little time refuting the claims against her gender in either speech, though clearly her critics were “mostly men, mostly white, and mostly affiliated with some bureaucratic institution.”⁹⁷ Carson wanted the focus of the *Silent Spring* debate to be about science, not gender. She chose to refute the criticism and statements that were faulty. These could easily be proved false by testimony, fact, and published reports, whereas prejudicial attacks on gender were judgmental, rather than factual, errors.

Perhaps the biggest difference between the two speeches was the call for action. Carson spent a little time in the WNPC speech discussing funded university research and the need for her listeners to question science. However, she spoke at length in the GCA speech urging her audience to action. Carson prepared the speeches with her audiences in mind. She challenged the media to make a difference in the WNPC speech because journalists could write about science. She focused more on the impact industry and government could have on individuals during the GCA speech because these opinion leaders could band together to start a grassroots movement. Whatever the audience, Carson was consistent in using logic, examples, and updated information.

Carson died in 1964, fewer than two years after *Silent Spring* was published. Her health kept her from making public appearances, but she was able to respond to critics by using her pen, the weapon that

had incited the war against her. More than fifty years have passed since *Silent Spring* was published, yet scientific information often remains obscured from the public as a result of the adherence to what Keller labels static objectivity. Few scientists today are willing to challenge the theories that have captured the interest of those scientists who wield power. Cornell University professor David Pimentel stated: "It is long past time to reduce the use of pesticides and to apply them in a judicious manner that will benefit farmers, the environment, and the public, as Rachel Carson advised many years ago."⁹⁸ Pimentel added that the United States spends \$8 billion on pesticides per year, but the cost to the environment and public health is estimated at about \$11 billion per year. He also argued that the widespread use of pesticides had led to the development of pesticide-resistant insects, weeds, and plant pathogens.

In 1987, the American Chemical Society published a book called *Silent Spring Revisited*, recognizing the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of Carson's book. Their book examined what had happened in the areas of law, science, economics, and public understanding of pesticide use. The editors asked: "Was Rachel Carson right? In many respects, yes. In her time, the environment was relentlessly assaulted by a society hoping for total control. . . . Many of Carson's predictions about environmental toxicity, human health effects, water contamination, and waste site problems have proved correct."⁹⁹ Carson questioned whose voice the public hears in these debates? Are these the voices of science or of the "sustaining industry." It is perhaps Killingsworth and Palmer's "discourse of environmentalist hysteria" that awakens a response of pathos from those Keller describes as drawn to "the promise of a cool and objective remove from the object of study."¹⁰⁰

Silent Spring was a turning point for Carson in her life and career. Carson's public battle against pesticides turned inward as she received news from her cardiologist, Bernard Walsh, that she needed bed rest until her angina was under control. In February 1963, radiologist Dr. Ralph Caulk told her she had more tumors. With that news, Carson began radiation for bone cancer. For the most part, Carson's public career ended as she fought cancer again. Few admirers knew she had been ill with cancer prior to the publication of the book. In the weeks following her speeches to the WNPC and GCA, Carson wrote a letter to her friend Dorothy Freeman, reflecting:

It seems strange looking back over my life, that all that went before this past decade seems to have been merely preparation for it. Into that decade (with a little stretching back to 1951) have been crowded everything I shall be remembered for. And

most of the sorrows, tragedies, problems and serious illnesses too have been crowded into that period.¹⁰¹

Carson's life work and her two most public speeches provide support for Ulman's argument that nature writing remains in the borderlands, where the rhetorical conflict will continue among those who propose to argue about the future of ecology and cultural, ethical, political, and scientific conflicts.

NOTES

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NINE

Mortification and Moral Equivalents

Jimmy Carter's Energy Jeremiad and the Limits of Civic Sacrifice

TERENCE CHECK



On February 2, 1977, barely one week into his term as president, Jimmy Carter donned a cardigan sweater and sat next to an open fire in the White House library in his first television address to the American people. While many eastern states struggled with a cold wave and shortages of heating fuel, the new president urged the development of a national energy strategy emphasizing conservation and sacrifice from citizens. Within ninety days, Carter announced, his administration would complete a bill and present it to Congress.

In the weeks that followed, Carter and his advisors hammered out the details of the energy policy and then unveiled it as part of a campaign that *Newsweek* proclaimed was “extraordinary even for this most public of presidents.”¹ In April, Carter made the decision to deliver the energy message in two additional speeches on April 18 and April 20, 1977. The three energy speeches represent the most sustained effort in history by an American president to focus the attention of the nation on energy policy. As *Time* put it, the two April speeches were part of a public relations campaign on the energy crisis that was “the most intensive effort by a U.S. President, in or out of wartime, to rally the nation behind a common cause.”² Reflecting on the key moments of his term in the White House, Carter himself singled out the April 18 speech as “one of the most important of my presidency.”³

Despite the significance of these addresses, no scholar has published an extensive analysis of them.⁴ Scholars who have studied Carter’s

energy policy rhetoric have focused their attention on the July 15, 1979, "Crisis of Confidence" speech Carter delivered later in his presidency.⁵ This omission is due in part to the perception that Carter was a lack-luster public orator. Richard W. Leeman writes, Carter's "public speaking regularly failed to move the public, emotionally or politically."⁶ Yet Carter enjoyed strong public support early in his presidency and was considered at the time to be "a master of the symbolic act."⁷ As the April speeches approached, Richard Steele of *Newsweek* recognized that the situation would present Carter with "the greatest test of his powers of moral suasion,"⁸ but many felt the new president was up to the task. "Building a national sense of urgency about the energy situation will take considerable powers of persuasion," admitted the writers of *Time*. "But then, Jimmy Carter seems as adept at using the bully pulpit of the presidency to persuade people as anyone since Teddy Roosevelt and his distant cousin Franklin."⁹

In each of these early energy speeches, Carter utilized a rhetorical form familiar to American audiences. David E. Nye points out that American political discourse in the 1970s "had a paranoid style that could be traced back to seventeenth-century sermons."¹⁰ These political sermons condemned citizens for straying from the principles of a celebrated past and argued that as a result, society would suffer decline and disaster. Speakers delivering these sermons stressed the need for urgent action so that followers could redeem their community and fulfill their promise as a chosen people. Rhetorical scholars refer to this recurring form as the jeremiad, an address that highlights the promise, decline, and redemption of society. While many orators have utilized the jeremiad in single rhetorical acts, Carter presented his jeremiad fragmented into the three speeches during the first hundred days of his presidency. The February 2 fireside chat emphasized the promise of the American covenant, the April 18 speech bemoaned the decline of American society and warned of grave consequences if behavior was not altered, and the April 20 speech outlined action steps that would lead to the redemption of the country. As a group, the three speeches invoked a rhetorical tradition meant to rescue a community from calamity. As Carter himself put it in the April 18 speech, the nation's fight for energy independence was a test of the "character of the American people."¹¹ This essay contends that President Jimmy Carter delivered his early energy speeches as a jeremiad to communicate successfully the scope of the energy crisis to the American people. However, Carter's appeal to civic sacrifice had several limitations, given constraints posed by public perceptions of fairness and reciprocity. Moreover, the features of the jeremiad itself inhibited meaningful structural changes. This essay reviews the features of the

American jeremiad, describes the rhetorical situation leading to Carter's speeches, and examines the outcome and implications of Carter's oratory.

THE AMERICAN JEREMIAD

The rhetorical genre of the jeremiad is derived from the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah, who lamented the failure of the people to adhere to the covenant of Moses, and who warned of the impending catastrophe of Israel's fall.¹² In the colonial America of the late 1600s and 1700s, a rhetorical form emerged that would later be called the "Puritan jeremiad." Orators and writers at the time used this form to deliver political sermons that provided members of the community with guidance on issues related to religion and public life.¹³ Richard L. Johannesen notes a typical four-part pattern of the Puritan jeremiad: 1) The people have sinned because they have failed to keep their covenant with God; 2) As a result of these failings, God is inflicting punishment on the people; 3) The rhetor urges the people to repent their sins and return to foundational values; and 4) The people can restore their relationship with God as the chosen people.¹⁴ The Puritan jeremiad assumed that God had chosen the people to perform a mission, and that crisis was an opportunity for a community to fulfill its destiny and establish a new golden age.

Over the years, the jeremiad has become secularized, as public rhetors have utilized its features without specifically invoking God or arguments based on faith or religion. In contemporary American society, the American dream now serves as the grounding for arguments within the jeremiad, with more weight given to the American civil experience.¹⁵ The secular jeremiad is widespread in contemporary society, and several scholars have studied the genre and its features.¹⁶ James Jasinski and John M. Murphy have identified three major *topoi* of the secularized American jeremiad: promise, decline, and redemption.¹⁷ Similarly, communication scholar A. Susan Owen has noted three rhetorical functions in the jeremiads of American literature and public address: to name the covenant or special people, to decry the decline of society, and to visualize redemption through a return to the values or behaviors of a valorized past.¹⁸ Recently, scholars have noted the prevalence of this rhetorical form in environmental texts and have dubbed it the "ecological jeremiad," with features similar to those found in other secular American jeremiads.¹⁹ While some scholars have noted Jimmy Carter's tendency to employ sermonistic rhetoric,²⁰ appeals to piety,²¹ and arguments based on mortification and self-sacrifice,²² Carter's early energy speeches remain to be examined in light of the tradition of the jeremiad.²³

CARTER CONFRONTS THE ENERGY CRISIS

Despite the Arab oil embargo in 1973, neither President Richard Nixon nor President Gerald Ford adopted a national energy policy, and neither had been able to persuade Congress to enact significant energy legislation.²⁴ Congress was reluctant to address the problem, given that a widespread segment of the voting population would bear the cost of reform. Citizens had not provided lawmakers with much incentive to act, since most people had accepted higher prices rather than reduce fuel consumption.²⁵ Although the embargo created fears of shortages, by the mid-1970s consumers “returned to their wasteful ways, refusing to believe that there was an energy problem as long as gasoline was flowing out of pumps at the service stations.”²⁶

Energy policy had not been much of a campaign issue in the 1976 presidential election, so it came as a surprise when Carter first mentioned his intention to develop a comprehensive national energy policy at a briefing on December 9, 1976.²⁷ During the transition period, Carter met with numerous officials, including his former commanding officer, Admiral Hyman G. Rickover, the architect of the U.S. nuclear submarine fleet, who urged him to make energy policy a top domestic priority.²⁸ Carter himself began to realize that national security was at stake. In 1973, the United States was importing 35 percent of its oil, but when he took office in 1977, that figure had risen to almost 50 percent, or about nine million barrels a day.²⁹ Shortly before his inauguration, Carter determined to change the nation’s energy habits even if it cost him another term in office.³⁰

Carter’s own background helped him appreciate the dimension of the nation’s energy problems, as he viewed the resolution of the energy crisis as both a technical challenge and a moral imperative. Kevin Mattson has noted that Carter had a split personality when it came to comprehending and explaining policies. He was a rational engineer who relished technical challenges, but he was also a moralist whose born-again Christian faith influenced his views on public policy.³¹ As an engineer, Carter found “the intricacies of energy questions less intimidating than previous Presidents,” since the process of identifying and solving the energy crisis was “essentially non-ideological—an engineering exercise.”³² As a Christian, he saw the presidency as an opportunity to promote the public good.³³ An aide recalls Carter’s position at the time: “With his moral fervor, he had little patience with the normal political tendency toward a policy of drift, opportunism and irresponsibility.”³⁴ Carter felt that wasting energy was nearly sinful, and that sacrifice and restraint was necessary so that energy resources would be available to future generations.

Events early in his presidency helped convince Carter that action on energy was both necessary and feasible in the short term. When Carter took the oath of office in January 1977, the nation was gripped by a record cold wave that created widespread shortages of natural gas. Since natural gas provided the energy for half of the nation's homes and 40 percent of its industries, those shortages forced the closing of hundreds of schools and businesses. At one point, every school in Pennsylvania was closed; over four hundred thousand workers were laid off in Ohio alone; and ten states declared energy emergencies.³⁵ *Time* succinctly summarized the scope of the calamity: "Never before in this century had the nation been so much at the mercy of its weather. Man, animal and machine in many parts of the country were immobilized under a heavy blanket of snow and ice."³⁶

Reacting to the situation, Carter asked Congress to pass the Emergency Natural Gas Act, which gave him the authority to allocate natural gas to areas of greatest need. Carter recognized there was a political solution to natural gas shortages. In the 1950s, Congress had placed a low ceiling on the price that companies could charge when they transported gas across state lines. As a result, companies had an incentive to sell in the state where the gas was produced, creating the potential for shortages in nonproducing states if demand rose. The Emergency Natural Gas Act gave Carter the power to declare a natural gas emergency and take two temporary actions: order interstate gas pipelines to move gas from surplus to shortage areas, and waive price controls on gas to encourage producers to move more gas to northern states.³⁷ Carter presented the legislation to Congress, and lawmakers agreed to bypass the normal committee process so that it could be ready for his signature in less than a week.³⁸ It was an encouraging sign for the new president and his party. As the *New York Times* opined, "Democrats in Congress savored the prospect of the new President showing the country fast action by a Government whose executive and legislative branches are again controlled by the Democratic Party."³⁹ The episode reinforced for Carter the importance of energy as a domestic issue, but it also raised unrealistic expectations about the willingness of Congress to move quickly on future energy proposals.

On the same day he signed the natural gas bill, February 2, 1977, Carter delivered his "fireside chat" to the American public. It was his first address to the nation since his inaugural, and the speech went through at least four drafts by White House speechwriters.⁴⁰ At the time the talk was scheduled, Carter had not planned on giving as much emphasis to energy policy, but the cold weather and the signing of the natural gas legislation elevated the issue's salience. Carter adopted an informal and conversational tone in the speech and became the first

American president to make an official appearance before the nation wearing a sweater. This was done not “merely for the warmth it provided but rather to underscore the informality of his fireside chat and to put across his message of energy conservation.”⁴¹ Tom Wicker of the *New York Times* called the sweater “a nearly perfect touch.”⁴² Asking for sacrifice from both private companies and the American public, Carter urged his audience to keep their thermostats at sixty-five degrees in the daytime and fifty-five degrees at night and promised the nation a National Energy Policy by the spring of his first year in office.

For help with the details of the plan, Carter turned to his advisor James Schlesinger, who had substantial clout as the former chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, head of the Central Intelligence Agency, and secretary of defense under Republican administrations.⁴³ To minimize political opposition, Carter pursued a comprehensive national energy plan rather than separate bills. The White House believed Congress would approve a larger bill in the national interest, even if it contained components distasteful to individual lawmakers. The president also imposed a ninety-day deadline on Schlesinger to complete the proposal and asked his team to work in secrecy, so that special interest groups would have less opportunity to scuttle its provisions before the administration announced details to the public. Carter wanted to present a plan quickly, in part because the natural gas shortage had convinced him that immediate action was necessary, and because he believed Congress would act if the exigence was compelling and the timing right. In terms of *kairos*, Carter was convinced that it was a fitting moment to present a proposal to address the needs of the situation, as opinion polls demonstrated his “astounding rise in standing with the public.”⁴⁴ Historian Erwin C. Hargrove notes: “Carter’s style was first to build a bold plan and then try to sell it, and he also wished to get the jump on Congress and introduce his big initiatives early.”⁴⁵ Carter recognized the quick timeframe and secrecy would not permit him to confer extensively with members of Congress about the plan’s details. “Nevertheless,” he wrote later in his memoirs, “I felt that the urgency of the issue required such quick action on my part. The plan needed to be completed without delay if Congress was to decide the matter during the first year.”⁴⁶

As the deadline for the plan neared, the White House announced that Carter would deliver two major primetime addresses on the topic. Initially, the major television networks did not think the April 18 speech warranted interruption of programming, but Carter intervened and convinced them to broadcast the address.⁴⁷ Ultimately, Carter delivered the Oval Office address to a nationwide television audience of eighty million people. One White House aide described it as the “sky is falling” speech,

since its main purpose was to convince a skeptical public that a problem existed.⁴⁸ This would be followed by a speech to Congress two days later on April 20, in which Carter would describe the details of the energy proposal to lawmakers. Some of the highlights included a gasoline tax, a gas “guzzler” tax on larger automobiles, taxation of domestic crude to raise prices to world levels, federal control of intrastate gas sales, incentives for nuclear- and coal-generated electricity, and measures to promote alternative energy, conservation, and energy efficiency.⁴⁹ The two speeches would be part of an unprecedented presidential media blitz, in which Carter would dominate national television “perhaps more than any President before him.”⁵⁰

“THE MORAL EQUIVALENT OF WAR”

The three energy speeches of February 2, April 18, and April 20, 1977, were a set of firsts for Carter: his first televised address to the nation, his first address from the Oval Office, and his first address to Congress, respectively. Although each of the speeches was a complete jeremiad, it is best to study them as a group, since each address emphasized a different feature. The February 2 fireside chat was a rededication to the promise of America, as Carter appealed to historic values of efficiency and unity. While Carter also stressed these themes in the April addresses, he used the April 18 speech to bemoan the wastefulness of contemporary American society and warned of impending disaster if the nation did not reform its ways. Finally, although each of the energy speeches concluded with a message of hope, Carter presented the specific steps of redemption in his address to Congress on April 20.

A speaker using the jeremiad will remind audiences that they are a chosen people with a glorious past. “There is something especially American in the kinds of changes we have to make,” Carter told citizens in his April 18 address. “We have been proud, through our history, of being efficient people.”⁵¹ The jeremiad is a calling “to return to foundational values and to live out the faith embodied in their communities’ highest ideals and founding moments.”⁵² Speakers provide audiences with an opportunity to avert disaster by adopting the practices and values of a venerated past, usually by invoking cultural precedents to demonstrate the promise of renewed faith. Throughout American history, jeremiads have aided social cohesion by relating “the frequently unsettling signs of the times with familiar myths that, amid rapid change, preserved Americans’ traditional self-image.”⁵³ Often rhetors employing the jeremiad will identify luminaries or texts of great cultural significance.

In American secular jeremiads, speakers recall frequently the Founding Fathers and the Revolutionary War or Lincoln and the Civil War, but other key moments in American history can serve as moral exemplars. In his energy speeches, Carter's point of mythic reference was to World War II and to the period at the turn of the century when Americans practiced the "gospel of efficiency."⁵⁴ Carter concluded his February 2 fireside chat with an explicit reference to World War II. Deploring that Americans "have lost faith in joint efforts and mutual sacrifices," he recalled "another difficult time in our nation's history when we felt a different spirit." The Second World War, Carter reminded his audience, was a "dark and frightening" time when "the challenge of fighting against fascism drew us together." Carter then insisted that the nation was "ready for that same spirit again" because people are now willing "to trust one another."⁵⁵ Carter's reliance on the shared cultural memory of the Second World War illustrates a common purpose of the jeremiad. Andrew R. Murphy and Jennifer Miller write that: "Jeremiads illuminate a yearning for unity, for recapturing a lost essence or original condition and for the reappropriation of that unity in fractious times."⁵⁶ Carter's choice of WWII as a touchstone for American collective sacrifice stems from the widely shared cultural myth of the war as "an exemplary era of American national unity."⁵⁷ Carter's reference in the speech to WWII as a model of communal sacrifice anchored the appeals to an idealized past. So when Carter stated in the Oval Office address on April 18 that "other generations of Americans have faced and mastered great challenges,"⁵⁸ and when he said in the conclusion to his April 20 speech that Americans have "met challenges before and our nation has been the stronger after the challenge was met,"⁵⁹ it is likely that audiences were capable of completing the enthymematic links to WWII.

While Carter was informal and understated in the fireside chat, he became somber in the April 18 address as he turned his attention to his argument about society's decline. He made clear the transition from promise to decline as he warned audiences in the introduction that he was about to have "an unpleasant talk" with them about the energy crisis: "The energy crisis has not yet overwhelmed us, but it will if we do not act quickly."⁶⁰ The jeremiad calls for the rhetor to condemn in detail the fallen state of the community, especially by cataloging the sins of the people and their consequences. Although the symptoms of decline are often framed in economic terms, the orator presents "a distinctly *spiritual* diagnosis of the contemporary problem and its solution: Society has turned away from its fundamental religious values and is showing symptoms of cultural illness."⁶¹ For Carter, the sin was waste and inefficiency. "Ours is the most wasteful nation on earth," said the president

in the April 18 address. “We waste more energy than we import. With about the same standard of living, we use twice as much energy per person as do other countries like Germany, Japan and Sweden.”⁶² The consequences of this wasteful way of living would be grave, warned the president. If the nation failed to implement the necessary steps to reduce dependency on foreign oil, Americans would pay more for imported oil, become vulnerable to disruptions in oil supply, live in fear of embargoes, watch as jobs were lost, yield to pressure to plunder the environment, and be compelled to develop a crash program to build more nuclear power plants. According to Carter, unless “profound changes are made to lower oil consumption,” in a decade’s time the world would demand more oil than it could produce. Continuing his complaint about the status quo, Carter predicted dire consequences absent action: “The most important thing about these proposals is that the alternative may be a national catastrophe. Further delay can affect our strength and our power as a nation.”⁶³

The April 18 speech was a pivotal moment in Carter’s energy jeremiad, because the administration faced widespread criticism about the nature and severity of the problem. Public opinion polls taken before Carter announced his energy program found that at least half the American public did not believe there was an energy crisis or felt that oil companies had manufactured it.⁶⁴ As Carter’s press secretary Jody Powell put it, the first barrier was “convincing people that the energy problem is not what someone else is doing to us, it’s what we’re doing to ourselves. People will be looking for the easy way out.”⁶⁵

The jeremiad creates a sense of urgency, usually in the form of an appeal to act quickly to forestall impending calamity. Johannesen writes in his frequently cited article on the jeremiad: “Present societal ills or the crisis situation at hand are depicted as urgent, as requiring action, redemption, and reform before it is too late, as representing the verge of impending doom, and as a sign of the breaking commitment to the fundamental principles of the American Dream.”⁶⁶ Carter’s April speeches, in particular, are laden with apocalyptic statements combined with pleas for decisive action. For example, in the April 18 address he stated: “If we fail to act soon, we will face an economic, social and political crisis that will threaten our free institutions. But we have another choice. We can begin to prepare right now. We can decide to act while there is still time.”⁶⁷ Carter’s declaration on April 18, that the nation faced the “moral equivalent of war,” a phrase he borrowed from philosopher William James at the suggestion of Admiral Hyman Rickover, probably was the most well-remembered call to action in the three early energy speeches.⁶⁸ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue that Carter’s

war metaphor “was not merely a way of viewing reality; it constituted a license for policy change and political and economic action.”⁶⁹ The metaphor as part of the jeremiad had the potential to unify the nation around the commander-in-chief and function as a forewarning, presenting the audience with an opportunity to act before it was too late.⁷⁰

While the jeremiad chronicles the symptoms of decline, it also contains a call for repentance and the opportunity for renewal if society returns to foundational values. A speaker deplores the sins of a community and appeals for the return to basic values and traditions as a means of averting catastrophe. Ronald H. Carpenter explains: “A Jeremiad’s urgency and timeliness are pertinent primarily to those readers who perceive themselves as a chosen people confronted with doom unless they atone by returning to their former ways and ideals.”⁷¹ The jeremiad includes a prophetic vision of an ideal future provided to the community as a reward for their repentance and their willingness to fulfill civic obligations, usually based on shared sacrifice and mortification. Kenneth Burke writes that sacrifice is a form of mortification that fulfills the cathartic function of expiating unwanted guilt and involves a symbolic or literal killing of the self.⁷² Writing about Burke’s theories, sociologist Hugh Dalziel Duncan glosses mortification as a “punishment of an ‘unruly’ aspect of the self.”⁷³ Carter’s call for citizens to waste less energy through efficiency and conservation was a prominent appeal in all three of the energy speeches. In the fireside chat, Carter explained: “Some of these efforts will also require dedication—perhaps even some sacrifice—from you.”⁷⁴ In the Oval Office address, Carter warned that his plan would “demand that we make sacrifices and changes in every life. To some degree, the sacrifices will be painful—but so is any meaningful sacrifice.”⁷⁵ The appeal to redemption culminated in the April 20 address when Carter said conservation was a “matter of patriotism and commitment.” The sacrifices the president called for would “not be easy” and would “demand the best of us, our vision, our dedication, our courage, and our sense of common purpose.”⁷⁶

In a jeremiad, the speaker combines the call for repentance with a vision of the good life, a promise of a better future if the audience heeds the warning and adopts the necessary sacrifices. John Opie and Norbert Elliot explain the jeremiad is “used to obviate potentially dissimilar views and thus, provide a positive message of hope.”⁷⁷ The crisis at hand becomes an opportunity for the community to establish renewed faith in its civic culture through the completion of a difficult task or test. In his speeches, Carter combined a condemnation over depleted energy resources with an optimistic view of a future altered by a renewed commitment to conservation and efficiency. In the conclusion to his address

to Congress, Carter admitted that his plan would be a “test of our basic political strength and ability. But we have met challenges before, and our nation has been stronger for it . . . I am confident that together we will succeed.”⁷⁸ By making this appeal to unity with reverence for past ideals that guide the nation through fractious times, Carter completed the essential features of the energy jeremiad. Collectively, Carter’s three energy speeches appealed to the promise of the nation as measured by its exemplary moments, a lament for the decline of a community, and an opportunity for redemption through shared civic sacrifice.

RHETORICAL ASSESSMENT AND IMPLICATIONS

The immediate public and press reaction to Carter’s early energy speeches was generally positive. After the fireside chat, “millions of viewers had gained the impression of a president who was confident and realistic and in command of his job.”⁷⁹ The *Boston Globe* called it a “powerful presidential event, moving in its simplicity and significant in its reiteration of his goals.”⁸⁰ A *New York Times* editorial said the president’s performance was “masterful” and predicted that Carter’s “hold on public opinion will be formidable.”⁸¹ Congressional Democrats were enthusiastic about Carter’s performance.⁸² The *Washington Post* called Carter’s delivery “smooth and convincing,” with the new president demonstrating that he “understands the symbolic nature of national leadership.”⁸³

Carter had predicted his approval ratings would fall by ten to fifteen points once the details of his proposal became known, yet an ABC News/Harris poll taken after the April speeches showed the president’s approval had actually risen three points. James Reston wrote of the April 18 address that Carter “sounded like Winston Churchill on the eve of the Battle of Britain.”⁸⁴ One analyst compared the April 20 address to Congress with prominent speeches by John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson.⁸⁵ Another writer remarked that the energy speeches were a key feature of “the most strenuous and successful week” of Carter’s young presidency.⁸⁶ The speeches generated little acrimony, even from the president’s political opponents.⁸⁷ Carter continued to enjoy high approval ratings for weeks after the April addresses. A Gallup poll released on May 22, 1977, showed that 66 percent of the public approved of the way Carter was doing his job.⁸⁸ Wrote *Washington Post* columnist Joseph Kraft in May: “He stands extraordinarily high in personal popularity in general approval polls. Republicans and Independents like him as well as Democrats do.”⁸⁹ At first, it seemed the jeremiad had been an apt choice

for Carter, as his "Roosevelt style was warmly received by the public, and he was applauded for providing strong, clear leadership in an area that his predecessors had largely avoided."⁹⁰

In addition to bolstering Carter's own ethos, the energy speeches had convinced a growing number of Americans that the energy crisis was real. An ABC News/Harris poll in March 1977 showed strong support for conservation: by 92 to 96 percent most Americans thought they had been wasteful in their use of energy.⁹¹ An impressive 86 percent of the public agreed with him that the energy shortage was serious, and Americans overwhelmingly supported most provisions of his plan. Moreover, the widespread skepticism about the energy crisis had been replaced by a growing realization that federal action was necessary, since Carter "had captured the public's attention and convinced a vast majority of Americans that the nation's energy shortage was genuine and steadily growing worse."⁹² After listening to the April 18 address, North Carolina's democratic governor James B. Hunt declared: "If anyone has any doubts of a crisis, they must be blind and deaf. That was the most carefully reasoned statement of an immense problem that I've ever heard."⁹³

However, despite the enthusiastic response to Carter's speeches, the energy legislation stalled in Congress. The House, under the leadership of Speaker Tip O'Neill, moved quickly to form an ad hoc committee to consider Carter's proposals and passed the energy measure relatively intact in August 1977. But the legislation languished in the Senate, which broke the plan into six individual bills that became easier targets for industry and special interest groups. The energy plan "encountered far more serious difficulties in the Senate," remembered Carter, "where the energy industry lobbies chose to concentrate their attention."⁹⁴ After long delay, the Senate approved a gutted version of Carter's proposal, and after further compromise reconciling the House and Senate versions, Carter finally signed an energy bill on November 10, 1978, nineteen months after he initially proposed it.

There were a number of reasons why Carter failed to get his original legislation passed without significant modifications. Carter took his case to the public first, based on the premise that effective presidents in the late twentieth century utilize their persuasive abilities to influence the citizenry whose support influences Congress.⁹⁵ While this approach minimized the influence of special interest groups, it also alienated potential allies in Congress who felt left out of the process. Garland A. Haas observed: "Many members of Congress of both parties were greatly aroused by the fact that the program had been developed almost entirely in secret by James Schlesinger and his technocrats. Congress was not

consulted or even informed about what to expect.”⁹⁶ Schlesinger even kept the details from key administration officials, until they insisted on being included.⁹⁷ Carter’s energy proposal also lacked a constituency to support it, making it “a hard test of the ‘public goods’ approach to policy.”⁹⁸ The legislation was controversial because it called for sacrifices from both consumers and industry, meaning it “had something for everyone to hate.”⁹⁹ Carter later wrote in his memoirs, “When I declared the energy effort to be the moral equivalent of war . . . it was impossible for me to imagine the bloody legislative battles we would have to win before the major campaign was over.”¹⁰⁰

Further, it was difficult for Carter to sustain public support for his energy proposals, given the widespread perception that sacrifices were not equally shared. George Klosko refers to this as the “fairness thesis,” which posits that one’s obligation to sacrifice is based on the perception of the behavior of others. If people believe they are making disproportionate sacrifices or that others are not participating in the shared burden of sacrifice, then efforts to induce individual behavior change will be difficult. Studies of voluntary energy conservation measures have shown that a major barrier to such efforts is “the fear that the burden will not be equally shared. . . . People are willing to tighten their belts a few notches only if they can be sure everyone is.”¹⁰¹ In his energy speeches, Carter tried to address this concern by stressing the fairness of his proposals. In the April 18 speech he said: “But the sacrifices will be gradual, realistic and necessary. Above all, they will be fair. No one will gain an unfair advantage through this plan. No one will be asked to bear an unfair burden.”¹⁰² However, these assurances were not enough to overcome the suspicions of people who worried that the plan would unfairly burden those who could least afford it. Polls conducted after Carter’s April 20 address confirmed a widespread public belief that the proposal discriminated against certain members of society.¹⁰³ Carter had the dual task of convincing Americans that the energy crisis was real and that his plan was fair, a task that demanded “skills of rhetoric and public persuasion that President Carter . . . has not shown.”¹⁰⁴

Carter’s appeal to self-sacrifice was also hindered by what marketing researchers label the “relevant attitude.”¹⁰⁵ That is, consumers may hold pro-conservation attitudes on a general level, but this belief does not translate into meaningful behavioral change. Even as public opinion polls showed widespread support for Carter’s conservation measures, there was worrisome resistance to many of the specific provisions involving financial sacrifice. For example, Carter presidential advisor and pollster Patrick Caddell noticed that 60 percent or more of the public opposed gas tax increases.¹⁰⁶ There were also indications the public

was less apt to implement conservation measures that impaired their personal comfort. After Carter asked Americans in his fireside chat to keep their thermostats set at sixty-five degrees, a Louis Harris poll for ABC News found that only 8 percent of Americans were honoring the request on chilly days, while 64 percent had their thermostats set at over seventy degrees.¹⁰⁷ It is difficult to persuade people to voluntarily sacrifice when they have to forego personal benefits, or when they have to endure sacrifices over long periods of time when no danger emerges.¹⁰⁸

As for his use of the phrase “the moral equivalent of war,” Carter was not the first president to use a war metaphor to advance his domestic agenda. For example, Lyndon Johnson declared a “war on poverty,” only to discover the rhetorical hazards of heightening public expectations of victory.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, Carter’s war metaphor may have led citizens to anticipate a quick resolution to the energy problem, when in fact reducing consumption requires lifelong changes in behavior. Unlike an actual war, Carter could not point to specific victories and battles won, and he could not isolate a specific adversary other than people’s own habits and impulses. After the addresses, the satirist Russell Baker warned that Carter was in danger of losing the war quickly unless he could produce “a more blood-curdling enemy than the energy crisis.”¹¹⁰ Carter also failed to convince Americans that conservation would be an effective weapon to fight the war. Shortly after the fireside chat, James Reston of the *New York Times* pointed out that appeals for voluntary sacrifice were “hardly a ringing call for action equal to the problem.”¹¹¹ Looking back on the era, Craig Allen Smith and Kathy B. Smith argue that Carter “failed to persuade the public that they were armed with the weapons needed to fight a moral equivalent of war.”¹¹² Further, by framing his campaign in terms of war, Carter emphasized the features of lament and promise but gave less attention to the prophesy of opportunity and the vision of a good life that would follow. James Fallows, one of Carter’s speechwriters, warned in a November 5, 1977, memo to the president: “I think we have to offer people a ray of hope somewhere on the horizon . . . we have had the moral equivalent of war without the moral equivalent of the hope of victory.”¹¹³

Perhaps the single greatest detriment to Carter’s use of the jeremiad as a rhetorical vehicle was its failure to question social practices and norms at a time when such an examination was needed. Numerous scholars have discussed the inability of political jeremiads to inspect structural flaws. John M. Murphy maintains that “the jeremiad deflects attention away from possible institutional or systemic flaws and toward consideration of individual sin.”¹¹⁴ This is because the jeremiad offers a remedy for a troubled present in the established ideals of the past,

offering archetypal heroes and celebrated moments as guideposts for individual reforms, not larger economic or political changes. While some felt Carter had delivered an “unmistakable message that the time had come for some elemental transformations in the American way of life,”¹¹⁵ others noted perceptively that the measures in the energy plan “were far milder than those suggested by the apocalyptic terms in which he couched the crisis in his Monday-night address to the people, and that their mildness would neither rally the country nor solve the energy dilemma.”¹¹⁶ The president’s energy proposals were not “half as stringent as Carter led the nation to expect,”¹¹⁷ and followed the “counsel of deep caution and extreme gradualism.”¹¹⁸ Carter’s proposals called for conservation and investment in renewable energy, but they also pushed for greater coal and nuclear production, while reaffirming economic growth as a dominant value.¹¹⁹

In his post-presidency, Carter reflected, “In looking back on the ‘moral equivalent of war’ against energy waste and excessive vulnerability from oil imports, I see nothing exhilarating or pleasant. It was a bruising fight, and no final, clear-cut victory could be photographed and hung on the wall for our grandchildren to admire.”¹²⁰ Early in his term, Carter made the decision to elevate the energy crisis as his top domestic policy concern, and he adopted the American jeremiad, with its attention to promise, decline, and redemption, as his chief rhetorical tool in promoting the legislation to the public. While the early energy speeches helped bolster his public approval initially, the moral condemnation of societal sin and the calls for mortification inherent in the jeremiad seemed ill-suited for the legislative battles after the speeches. Rowland Evans and Robert Novak observed:

The President is inclined to moralize on issues that, far from being moral, are matters of practical politics. . . . Upgrading conventional political questions to the status of good vs. evil is still an ingrained habit for Carter, but one that has not helped his energy program and could do him more harm in the future.¹²¹

In addition, Carter’s use of the jeremiad made it difficult to seriously consider structural changes, because his speeches focused so heavily on promoting individual reform through voluntary conservation.

The failure of Carter’s jeremiad to generate meaningful policy reforms in the 1970s also reveals some of the limitations of the genre in addressing contemporary problems related to energy production and consumption. Craig Allen Smith and Kathy B. Smith contend that one of the political dysfunctions of presidential jeremiads is their tendency to

“inhibit dissent and significant social change.”¹²² They cite Franklin D. Roosevelt’s first inaugural address as an example, arguing that Americans had lost faith in the free market at the time, but that Roosevelt’s jeremiad preserved capitalism as an economic ideal. Similarly, jeremiads that valorize the American Dream as a civil religion fail to interrogate the effects of consumerism and materialism on the natural environment. Further, as Smith and Smith point out, the jeremiad disconnects problems from their solutions, diminishing the range of options available to address environmental problems. By limiting the agency of the audience to individual acts of self-sacrifice, the jeremiad functions to deflect collective efforts and systemic change.

Carter turned to energy policy again later in his term when he delivered the famous “Crisis of Confidence” speech on July 15, 1979. While the speech would be known as the rhetorical signature of his presidency, it maintained its focus on individual reform that Carter had rehearsed in the early energy addresses. As the nation struggled with a weak economy and crisis abroad, Carter lost his bid for a second term in a landslide defeat in 1980. Today, in light of the growing need for energy, as well as the perils of climate change, it seems doubtful that similar appeals in political jeremiads will bring about substantive changes in environmental policy.

NOTES

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TEN

Lois Gibbs's Rhetoric of Care

Voicing a Relational Ethic of Compassion, Inclusivity, and Community in Response to the Toxic Disaster at Love Canal

KATIE L. GIBSON



The community of Love Canal was established in Niagara Falls, New York, around a toxic waste dump that was filled with twenty-two thousand tons of hazardous chemicals by the Hooker Chemical Company. Alon Tal reports: “Hooker’s industrial complex, located on the banks of the Niagara River, generated prodigious quantities of waste.”¹ Hooker dumped carcinogens, chemicals that cause birth defects, and other dangerous substances in an old canal, covered the waste, and sold the land to the local board of education for a dollar—stipulating that Hooker Chemical Company would not be held responsible for future problems caused by the waste.² Shortly after, the Ninety-ninth Street Elementary School was built on top of the landfill and the suburban neighborhood of Love Canal was developed surrounding the contaminated site.

Lois Gibbs gained national attention as an environmental leader in the wake of the toxic waste disaster at Love Canal. Gibbs moved to Love Canal with her young family in 1972. Her son began attending the Ninety-ninth Street School in 1978 and soon developed a number of medical problems and began having epileptic seizures. Around the same time, residents in homes close to the elementary school also began reporting problems—chemicals were leaching into basements, grass was starting to die, and pets were becoming ill.³ Fearing that toxic contamination was the cause of her son’s health problems, Gibbs requested the

transfer of her son to a different school. When the superintendent denied her request for a transfer, Gibbs began knocking on doors, asking her neighbors to sign a petition demanding the school's closure. Conversations with her neighbors led Gibbs to discover that the consequences of toxic exposure in her community were much more severe and widespread than she initially believed: "Over half the women had miscarried before the end of their pregnancies. During a five-year period, 56 percent of the children had birth defects. Residents described a terrifying menu of diseases that affected all ages, but especially the young. And there were unexplained deaths."⁴ In response to these findings, Lois Gibbs organized her neighbors and formed the Love Canal Homeowners Association to demand that the government take action to evacuate and relocate the residents of Love Canal.

It would take two years before the residents of Love Canal were relocated. The Love Canal Homeowners Association staged pickets, demonstrations, and rallies to gain national attention for their cause, and Lois Gibbs soon became a household name. Midway through the campaign, Lois Gibbs was invited to speak to Congress.

Undeterred by advice to go back to her kitchen, she is coached in public speaking by her brother-in-law, and becomes a noisy irritant to Governor Carey, the State Health Department and many legislative committees. As a guest on the Phil Donahue television show, she travels to Philadelphia and argues with the mayor of Niagara Falls on national television. Finally Gibbs appeared at hearings in Washington, DC and eventually meets with President Carter.⁵

This chapter explores Gibbs's congressional testimony, presented to the House Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations on March 21, 1979. Pointing to Gibbs's influence, Diane Hope explains: "In spite of being vilified as the original hysterical housewife, Gibbs made Love Canal, toxic dumps, and the connections between environment and community health a national issue. Like Love Canal, the place, Lois Gibbs, the person, became a highly charged symbol in public discourse."⁶ I argue that part of the success of Gibbs's rhetoric was her ability to skillfully voice an ethic of care. An ethic of care is a relational approach to moral reasoning that is grounded in the values of compassion and interconnection. Feminist scholars argue that care ethics challenge the values of abstraction and autonomy that shape an ethic of justice; an ethic that many feminists claim is guided by patriarchy. Gibbs's congressional testimony confronts this ethic of justice, which routinely guides the moral

decision-making of the state and excludes women like Gibbs from public places of power. I argue that Lois Gibbs's ethic of care—expressed in a rhetoric of compassion, inclusion, and community—legitimizes the voices of everyday citizens in public decision-making and bolsters the significance of grassroots citizen action. The relational ethic animating Gibbs's testimony calls for a transformed government—a government more responsive, inclusive, and accountable to a diverse citizenry. This chapter demonstrates how Lois Gibbs's rhetoric of care advances a relational feminist ethic that confronts patriarchal assumptions and establishes important rhetorical commonplaces for the environmental movement in the United States.

TOXIC WASTE ACTIVISM AND AN ETHIC OF CARE

Toxic waste activism has been led and organized largely by women.⁷ Despite this fact, Phil Brown and Faith Ferguson argue that gender and the fight against toxic hazards are rarely analyzed together in gender or environmental studies. In response to this desideratum, Brown and Ferguson published an exploratory study titled "Making a Big Stink: Women's Work, Women's Relationships, and Toxic Waste Activism" that explores the role of gender in women's activism against toxic waste. One important conclusion that they draw is that toxic waste activism is grounded in and shaped by an ethic of care.⁸ While the authors survey dozens of activists and make a compelling argument, this chapter seeks to extend their observations about the role of care in toxic waste activism by investigating the rhetorical features of an ethic of care and demonstrating the persuasive appeal of this rhetoric through a study of one of the most prominent voices in the movement—Lois Gibbs. Ultimately, this chapter responds to the need for more studies of gender in environmental studies and investigates the important persuasive functions of a rhetoric of care in toxic waste activism.

An important body of work emerged in the 1980s that described a feminist ethic—an approach to moral reasoning that offered an alternative to the traditional focus on justice. Carol Gilligan's groundbreaking work *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* was one of the earliest to theorize an alternative ethic of care.⁹ Gilligan and other feminist scholars argued that an ethic of justice reflected a masculine bias and that its exclusive focus on abstract rationality and personal autonomy failed to account for the ways that many girls and women are socialized to interpret and negotiate moral problems.¹⁰ Marilyn Friedman explains: "Moral norms about appropriate conduct,

characteristic virtues and typical vices are incorporated into our conceptions of femininity and masculinity, female and male. . . . Justice and rights have structured male moral norms, values and virtues, while care and responsiveness have defined female moral norms, values, and virtues.”¹¹ An ethic of care was conceptualized as an equally legitimate form of moral reasoning that was rooted in feminine socialization and deeply connected to the practices of mothering and caregiving.

Scholars soon began thinking about an ethic of care as a feminist practice—as a way of giving voice to relational values of interdependence and community to challenge the oppression often justified by patriarchal reasoning. Indeed, these feminist scholars argued that an ethic of care could be transformative and had the possibility to shift thinking about important issues such as war and peace, domestic violence, and the environment. Dean Curtin, for example, theorized that an ecological ethic of care could transform how people understand their relationships with animals and the environment.¹² The present study of Lois Gibbs’s congressional testimony extends this line of argument and demonstrates how Gibbs’s rhetoric of care provides a powerful warrant for citizen action and environmental responsibility.

Theories of care and feminist ethics are not without critics. One of the most persistent criticisms is that care ethics is essentialist. Critics argue that early theories of care failed to account for the diverse experiences of women and girls and romanticized mothering in a way that failed to account for the ways gendered experiences are shaped by race, age, class, and sexuality.¹³ Contemporary care ethicists have responded to these claims and are generally more careful to account for difference in experiences of women and girls while still emphasizing socialization trends and cultural patterns that may shape gender development and moral reasoning. Other critics have charged that care ethics reinforce gender stereotypes and undermine the value of women’s autonomy and self-sufficiency. Care ethicists have also responded to these critiques. In particular, more recent theories emphasize that a perspective of care is not innate to women but results from gender socialization. Contemporary care theorists acknowledge that men can and do practice ethics of care, and many acknowledge that perspectives of care and justice are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, a growing number of feminist scholars now claim that a productive ethic of care must incorporate aspects of a justice perspective that are important and necessary to moral reasoning. Communication scholar Lynn O’Brien Hallstein responds to a number of these criticisms and advances a revised ethic of care that is grounded in feminist standpoint theory.¹⁴ She explains:

The revisioned ethic of care is a moral standpoint that is grounded in communication and dialogue among constructed and differing subjects. Consequently, it is inclusive. Furthermore, it entails the specific characteristics of traditional caring—responsiveness, sensitivity to others, acceptance, and relatedness—while simultaneously accounting for and correcting the three primary problems of the traditional ethic of caring: the exclusion of men from caring, the inability to utilize reasoning when caring, and the difficulty of using rationality when showing care.¹⁵

O'Brien Hallstein's emphasis on standpoint reiterates that an ethic of care emerges from social position—not biology. Understanding that a standpoint of care is *learned* adds transformative potential to an ethic of care—opening up an alternative to an ethic of justice that may be embraced by women and men alike. Indeed, this chapter investigates how Lois Gibbs's rhetoric of care advances an alternative moral standpoint that challenges a justice perspective and models a different way of thinking about environmental responsibility that may be embraced by *all* citizens—women and men, caregivers, legislators, community leaders, and grassroots activists.

“WE ARE THE FIRST, BUT WE ARE NOT LIKELY TO BE THE LAST.”

While Gibbs's testimony evidences the reasoning and rationality traditionally expected in the halls of Congress, I argue that she simultaneously gives voice to a standpoint of care through a rhetoric of compassion, inclusivity, and community. A rhetoric of compassion gives voice and value to the daily experiences of everyday people and everyday lives. Joan Tronto writes:

To think of the social world in terms of caring for others radically differs from our present way of conceiving of it in terms of pursuing our self-interest—Because caring emphasizes concrete connections with others, because it evokes so much of the daily stuff of women's lives, and because it stands as a fundamental critique of the abstract.¹⁶

While an ethic of justice is often abstract and depersonalized, Gibbs's rhetoric of compassion is localized, particular, and personal.

The second key feature of Gibbs's standpoint of care is a rhetoric of inclusivity. A rhetoric of inclusivity seeks to accommodate diverse interests and validates the participation of those traditionally excluded from democratic processes. An ethic of care is grounded in inclusivity, and a responsiveness to others, which includes "deciding to focus on another, responding to others as a means of affirming their presence and value, and listening and observing carefully in order to discern what it is that another means by her or his behavior."¹⁷ Gibbs's rhetoric of inclusivity blurs the public/private divide that often anchors rhetorics of justice to validate her voice as legitimate and central to the democratic process.

Finally, a third rhetorical feature of Gibbs's focus on care is a rhetoric of community. O'Brien Hallstein explains, "This sense of interdependence requires a communicator to be aware of both his or her needs, desires, and perspectives, and those of the other, and, as a result, to privilege working together with others, acting cooperatively, or in relationship with others."¹⁸ While the values of separation and independence are deeply rooted in the natural rights tradition that shapes the ethic of justice, a rhetoric of community actively works against this separation to define personhood as relational. Gibbs's rhetoric of community reflects a relational perspective that fractures the belief in personal autonomy that other critics have identified with the justice perspective.

COMPASSION

While an ethic of justice is often abstract and depersonalized, a rhetoric of compassion gives voice and value to the daily experiences of everyday people and everyday lives. Gibbs's rhetoric of compassion is localized, particular, and personal—and grounded in her role and activities as a mother. Brown and Ferguson explain, "Most of these women activists are housewives, typically from working-class or lower middle-class backgrounds, and most had never been political activists until they discovered the threat of toxic contamination in their communities."¹⁹ Indeed, Gibbs opens her testimony to Congress by explaining that it was her concern for her children that motivated her Love Canal activism: "I became involved in this situation after discovering that toxic chemicals were buried two blocks from my home and that these chemicals could be aggravating my children's health problems, one of whom attended the Ninety-ninth Street School located in the center of the dump."²⁰ Gibbs's opening remarks follow a tradition of women's activism that privileges maternal identity and gives voice and value to personal experiences. "The image of a mother rising to the defense of her children

is an extremely powerful one," Brown and Ferguson remind us, and Gibbs skillfully privileges her voice and experience as a mother to lend legitimacy to her rhetoric of care and her call for a more compassionate government.²¹

Gibbs's testimony gives voice to the suffering of her community with a compassionate rhetoric drawn from her maternal persona. She details the effects of toxicity on the very young as she draws special attention to the miscarriages, birth defects, and crib deaths that have befallen the community of Love Canal.²² Gibbs's attention to the suffering of the young and unborn certainly bolsters her maternal identity and invites her audience to empathize with the residents of Love Canal. Sara Hayden argues: "The public sharing of the mothers' stories not only promotes empathy and interconnection, but also enables participants and audience members to understand these events in larger terms."²³ To be sure, Lois Gibbs's maternal persona is not only central in her call for compassion for the residents of Love Canal, it is also central to her overarching argument for government action, environmental protection, and care for the children of future generations.

While Gibbs's testimony draws attention to specific harms and personal experiences and invokes the suffering of her community, her rhetoric of compassion is bolstered as she directs specific criticism toward the government for a lack of compassion. As Gibbs moves through her testimony, her rhetoric demands that the suffering of the residents be included as part of the congressional record. While an ethic of justice calls for depersonalization and is often defined by the boundaries of facts and abstraction, Gibbs describes the *feelings* of her fellow residents. She states: "In the situation where people are exposed to a threat the magnitude of which no one understands, there are going to be many anxious moments. The residents have been very scared and emotional."²⁴ Gibbs's rhetoric of compassion not only demands that the losses, the misfortunes, and the feelings of the residents of Love Canal be acknowledged, but her voice of care also takes specific aim at the insensitivity of state and local authorities and calls for a more compassionate government. Gibbs recounts a poorly planned blood sampling event that was organized by the state in which hundreds of residents showed up at the same time: "No effort was made to separate the people waiting to have their blood drawn from those having it done. Screaming children coupled with high summer temperatures and overcrowded conditions resulted in an unnecessarily unbearable situation."²⁵ The concrete material conditions that Gibbs details here—the noise, the temperature, the overcrowding—help to build her case against the government's lack of compassion. She argues: "This general insensitivity has greatly polarized

the homeowners from the state. It is unfortunate that this situation has developed, because it could have been mostly avoided by better communication and the involvement of people who have had some experience working with people during difficult times.”²⁶ Lois Gibbs charges state and local officials with insensitivity and a lack of compassion. Her voice of care draws attention to the suffering of the residents of Love Canal and supports her argument for a more compassionate government.

Lois Gibbs’s call for compassion is a defining feature of her rhetoric of care. She demands that the suffering of the residents of Love Canal receive a public hearing and disrupts the call for depersonalization and abstraction that follow from an ethic of justice. Instead, Gibbs’s rhetoric is rooted in the personal and the particular and is anchored to her role as a mother. The significance of Gibbs’s maternal performance and its persuasive possibility should not be underestimated. Hayden writes about the power of maternity at the Million Mom March: “As participants in the Million Mom March bring their maternity to the public stage, they transform their commitment to their children into a commitment to all children, enacting what Ruddick refers to as the extensive potential of maternity.”²⁷ Lois Gibbs’s congressional testimony enacts the extensive potential of maternity—her concern for her children and attention to the suffering of the families of Love Canal support her call for a more compassionate government that will protect all families from environmental disaster and demonstrate more care for the children of future generations. Diane Hope calls attention to the personal and localized nature of Lois Gibbs’s rhetoric: “As Gibbs moved out from her house and into places of power, she continued to report her anger, determination, and tactics in the voice of the neighbor next door.”²⁸ Lois Gibbs’s rhetoric of compassion certainly emerges as the voice of the mom next door—localized, particular, and personal. Gibbs disrupts the boundaries of a justice perspective to give voice to the suffering of her community and to demand a more compassionate government.

INCLUSIVITY

The second key feature of Lois Gibbs’s ethic of care is a rhetoric of inclusivity. An ethic of justice is shaped by the boundaries of universal principles and abstract rules—and often results in a logic of exclusion that limits participation in moral decision-making to experts and authorities. Conversely, a rhetoric of inclusivity seeks to accommodate diverse interests and validates the participation of those traditionally excluded

from democratic processes. Brown and Ferguson claim, "In their efforts to understand the hazards and to draw attention to the consequences of toxic exposure, these women activists come up against power and authority in scientific, corporate, and governmental unwillingness to consider their claims or address their concerns."²⁹ Gibbs's rhetoric of inclusivity blurs the public/private divide that often anchors rhetorics of justice to validate her voice as legitimate and central to the democratic process. Her account of the events at Love Canal demonstrates her agency and illustrates her right to participate in moral decision-making and public policy at the highest levels. Gibbs's rhetoric of inclusivity also functions as a powerful call for citizen action more broadly—as an argument that ordinary citizens *belong* in public places of power.

Gibbs's testimony calls for a more inclusive and transparent government. Her rhetoric highlights the failures of a government out of touch with its citizens and details how the residents of Love Canal were repeatedly excluded from decision-making processes by state and local officials. Gibbs explains: "Because of the fear of panic, the state did not know how far to involve the residents in the decisions and the findings that were made. And officials did not inspire confidence in the residents, which made matters worse."³⁰ Gibbs's testimony charges that a lack of transparency and a failure to include and to communicate with the residents of Love Canal plagued state and local efforts to manage and respond to the environmental disaster effectively. According to her testimony:

Another problem was the flow of information to the residents. With so many people afraid that their health was at risk, it would have greatly alleviated the fear of the unknown to have someone accessible to the residents who could answer their many questions. All that was really available was a "hot-line" to Albany.³¹

Gibbs's reference to the "hot-line" to Albany punctuates her claim that state and local officials failed to communicate openly and directly with the residents of Love Canal. Instead, Gibbs paints a picture of a government preoccupied with "secrecy" and insistent upon undermining the democratic participation of local citizens like her.³² She explains:

There were also many instances where neither the residents nor our representatives were invited to meetings held by state officials, during which decisions were affecting the future of

the residents were being decided [*sic*]. We were often told that we were not “professionals” and that we would disrupt the ability of people to speak freely. These closed-door meetings fostered mistrust, confusion, and gossip about the concern of the health department for the residents. These feelings were further perpetuated when information on the health and environmental studies were held back from the homeowners and our representatives.³³

An ethic of justice casts the concerns and experiences of everyday people as “disruptions” to the task of moral decision-making. The demand for universal principles and abstract rules legitimates the voices of expert authorities and sanctioned officials while undermining the value of ordinary citizens and insisting upon their exclusion.

A logic of exclusion animates the ethic of justice, which is particularly gendered in cases of toxic waste activism. Brown and Ferguson contend: “Authorities typically deny the need for action, largely on the basis that as women, particularly as housewives, activists cannot possibly know or understand the issues.”³⁴ The public/private divide is not only used to undermine the value of personal experiences and everyday voices to the process of public decision-making, but it specifically calls voices of *women* into question: “Their efforts at mobilizing local communities to combat toxic hazards are often dismissed initially as mere collections of ‘housewife data’ gathered by ‘hysterical housewives.’ As housewives, they cannot do science (in the eyes of expert professionals), nor can they challenge the local political and corporate power structures.”³⁵ Lois Gibbs’s rhetoric of inclusivity blurs the public/private divide to challenge gendered boundaries for democratic participation and to insist upon the value of her voice to the democratic process. In the following passage, Gibbs details her efforts to track contamination patterns from the canal. Note how she presses forward to assert her competency and agency after being dismissed by state officials:

I went to the University of Buffalo and consulted with Dr. Charles V. Ebert, a soils specialist, who proved to be most helpful in describing and defining the location and characteristics of these streambeds. In mid-September I mentioned what I was finding to state authorities, and they referred to my efforts as “useless housewife data.” Working with Dr. Beverly Paigen, a cancer research scientist from Rockwell Park Memorial Institute, I looked at the nature of the health effects found along the streambeds. The association between the health effects and the locations of

the old streams was quite high, so I then looked at the available evidence on chemical contamination along the streambeds.³⁶

Lois Gibbs's testimony documents the state's attempt to exclude and dismiss her participation in sorting out the extent of toxic exposure at Love Canal. Undermining the state's gendered logic of exclusion, she presses on to demonstrate her expansive knowledge of environmental science and her unwavering commitment to participate in the process. Alon Tal explains: "Her ability to maintain the authenticity of a 'local citizen activist,' while displaying competency in the science and general jargon of Washington's environmental policy, is remarkable and shows the versatility that is so critical for environmental advocates."³⁷ Gibbs effectively blends compassion and rationality and models an approach to moral decision-making that necessitates *both* values. Her rhetoric effectively demonstrates what communication scholar O'Brien Hallstein argues—that an ethic of care does not exclude reason and rationality.³⁸ Gibbs's rhetoric of inclusivity documents the competency and the agency of ordinary residents to assert the validity and importance of everyday voices in the democratic process. She argues: "It is striking that it was the homeowners with our limited resources and personnel—not the health department—who initiated these efforts to further define the extent of the health effects and chemical contamination resulting from Love Canal."³⁹ Gibbs bolsters the agency and credibility of everyday citizens in the democratic process as she asserts how the judgment of state and local officials was proven faulty time and time again. Indeed, her rhetoric argues that rational and responsible decision-making necessitates the inclusion of a diverse range of voices.

Gibbs's rhetoric of inclusivity blurs the public/private divide that often anchors rhetorics of justice to validate her voice as legitimate and central to the democratic process. Ultimately, Gibbs's rhetoric not only demonstrates her own agency and illustrates her right to participate in moral decision-making at the public level, but serves as a broader argument to validate the participation of those traditionally excluded from democratic processes. Brown and Ferguson explain: "The process of coming to understand themselves as knowers is an important means by which women toxic waste activists empower themselves to act as forces for change in their communities."⁴⁰ Reflecting on Gibbs's transformation in the public sphere, Diane Hope remarks, "Even as she is initially motivated by her role as a mother, she moves beyond the silence of the housewife to community organizer and public watchdog. Initially throwing off a confining identity, Gibbs inspired [others] to do the same."⁴¹ Ultimately, Gibbs's rhetoric of inclusivity disrupts the logic

of exclusion common to discourses of justice. Instead, her rhetoric of inclusivity affirms that ordinary citizens *belong* in public places of power and stands as a powerful call for citizen action.

COMMUNITY

A rhetoric of community is a third feature that defines Lois Gibbs's voice of care. While the values of personal autonomy and independence are deeply rooted in the natural rights tradition that shapes the ethic of justice, a rhetoric of community actively works against this logic to define personhood as deeply relational. Gibbs's testimony advances a powerful relational ethic that defines people as interrelated and accountable to future generations. Ultimately, Gibbs's rhetoric of community—the idea that we are interrelated and connected to those who come next—provides a compelling warrant to support her plea for government action and environmental responsibility.

Lois Gibbs's testimony avoids the language of rights and rules in favor of responsibility and relationships. Brown and Ferguson explain that toxic waste activism is grounded in an ethic of responsibility: "In addition to clearly voicing a call to action based on justice, women toxic waste activists give credence to their claims based on a belief in the necessity and importance of caring and a recognition of interdependence." Their analysis continues: "They find the actions of nonresponsive polluters and agencies wrong and requiring redress not simply because these actions violate their rights as citizens and members of a larger polity, but also because these actions violate a moral imperative of caring and responsibility."⁴² The ethic of responsibility that emerges in Lois Gibbs's testimony is interwoven with her rhetoric of compassion. Gibbs's testimony models a sincere care for her neighbors—and she calls on the government to demonstrate the same concern. Here she criticizes state and federal agencies for dodging their responsibility to her community after the disaster at Love Canal:

The most difficult obstacle to relieving the problems at Love Canal has been "being the first." Neither the state nor federal agencies who could help were responsible for the situation. And neither wanted to take financial responsibility for cleaning it up. Arguing between state and federal authorities over who should pay for what expenses has continued since the first discovery of contamination.⁴³

Gibbs's testimony paints a picture of a government radically detached from the suffering of its citizens. Against the backdrop of personal suffering that she paints, this arguing between state and federal authorities is cast as a deeply problematic failure of responsibility to its citizens.

There is a profound sense of interconnection that underpins Lois Gibbs's testimony to Congress and strengthens her voice of care. In the concluding paragraphs of her speech she argues that we are accountable for the health and well-being of future generations: "First of all, it is apparent that a means for responding to environmental incidents such as Love Canal must be provided by the federal government." She continues, "We are the first, but we are not likely to be the last. Something must be done."⁴⁴ Ultimately, Lois Gibbs frames her testimony to Congress on behalf of all those who will come next. While the values of personal autonomy and independence that guide an ethic of justice obscure this sense of connection and community, Gibbs's memorable line, "We are the first, but we are not likely to be the last," demands that the government's efforts to guard against and plan for environmental disasters—and the moral decision-making that guides these efforts—be rooted in the values of community and interconnection. Adding emphasis, Gibbs frames her own statement through a lens of interconnection: "I have tried to limit my comments because the stories could go on forever, as even today is part of still another story."⁴⁵ Wrapping up her testimony, Lois Gibbs reminds her audience that her speech to Congress and the actions of the House subcommittee are responsible to a community much broader than Love Canal.

Lois Gibbs's rhetoric of community challenges the discourse of justice that routinely shapes the decision-making of the federal government. Gilligan explains that a voice of care may function to confront core assumptions that are deeply woven into U.S. culture. Through the lens of care and connection, Gilligan suggests, "psychological separations that have long been justified in the name of autonomy, selfhood, and freedom no longer appear as the *sine qua non* of human development but as a human problem."⁴⁶ To be sure, Gibbs's rhetoric of community frames the ambivalence of a government preoccupied with dodging responsibility and detached from the suffering of its citizens as deeply problematic. In the closing line of her testimony, Gibbs pleads: "I ask that you do what you can for us and do what you must to prevent what has happened at Love Canal from ever happening again."⁴⁷ Gibbs's rhetoric privileges the relational values of responsibility and interconnection. Her relational ethic voices an obligation to community much broader than her own and demands accountability to future generations.

CONCLUSION

Beyond her success in winning the relocation of 833 families from Love Canal, Lois Gibbs's congressional testimony resulted in critical environmental legislation. Gibbs's plea on Capitol Hill is widely recognized for its influence on the Environmental Protection Agency's creation of the Superfund—a government program that taxes the chemical and petroleum industries to provide resources to respond to environmental disasters like Love Canal and to clean up abandoned hazardous waste sites. Diane Hope argues that “Gibbs' continued influence is a testimony to the success of her rhetoric,” pointing to her ongoing activism and central role in the fight for environmental justice.⁴⁸ In 1981, Gibbs founded the Center for Health, Environment, and Justice and continues to serve as its executive director.⁴⁹ The center has provided training and assistance to over eleven thousand grassroots organizations—and continues to support the actions of ordinary citizens in the environmental health movement.

This chapter extends the observations of Brown and Ferguson about the role of care in toxic waste activism by explicating how rhetorics of compassion, inclusivity, and community combine to form an ethic of care in Lois Gibbs's congressional testimony. Commenting on Gibbs's important influence, Ralph Nader writes: “At Love Canal, with the nation watching, Lois proved that an ‘average’ person could become empowered enough to change not only her life, but the lives of others.”⁵⁰ Indeed, the power of Lois Gibbs's rhetoric of care is that it challenged the logics of exclusion and separation at the core of the ethic of justice that routinely shapes public discourse. Instead, Gibbs's rhetoric of care validates the voices of everyday citizens and asserts that the everyday voices of ordinary citizens *belong* in public places of power. This chapter demonstrates how Gibbs's rhetoric of care functions as an argument for citizen action. Hope writes, “Gibbs' experience and that of others at Love Canal set the mark for grassroots community organizing by women who were first and foremost wives and mothers and created the agenda for the burgeoning environmental justice movement.”⁵¹ To be sure, Gibbs's rhetoric affirmed the experiences and the knowledge of women like her and set forth a relational logic that welcomed women into the environmental justice movement and bolstered their agency.

The study of Lois Gibbs's congressional testimony demonstrates how an ethic of care may function as a feminist practice to challenge the logics of patriarchy. These patriarchal logics—of abstraction, exclusion, autonomy, and separation—function as powerful warrants to maintain and justify environmental neglect.⁵² Ecofeminists argue that

patriarchal logics perpetuate the oppression of women *and* the environment. Although ecofeminism is a diverse movement that encompasses a wide variety of perspectives, Karen Warren argues that at its core, ecofeminism is grounded in an ethic of care. She explains that ecofeminism “involves a shift from a conception of ethics as primarily a matter of rights, rules, or principles predetermined and applied in specific cases to entities viewed as competitors” to an alternative ethic that “makes a central place for the values of care, love, friendship, trust, and appropriate reciprocity—values that presuppose that our relationships to others are central to our understanding of who we are.”⁵³ Lois Gibbs's 1979 congressional testimony stands as an early defense of this ecofeminist insight.

This chapter draws attention to the gendered dynamics of environmental activism and calls for more scholarly attention to how care rhetoric may shape campaigns for environmental justice. An ethic of care can certainly function to transform public discourse. Lois Gibbs's rhetoric of care gives voice to the relational values of interdependence and community—challenging patriarchal reasoning and modes of oppression. Feminist scholars maintain that an ethic of care may shift thinking about important issues such as war and peace, domestic violence, and the environment.⁵⁴ This chapter demonstrates how Gibbs's congressional testimony enacts a maternal politics that shifts the very boundaries of environmental discourse. Brown and Ferguson explain:

The traits and experiences of women who become toxic waste activists are not theirs simply because they are women who live in proximity to toxic waste hazards; rather, they conceptualize their action, both for themselves and a wider public, out of the meaning of womanhood, and especially of motherhood, in our culture.⁵⁵

Diane Hope notes that following Gibbs's introduction to the national stage, traditional *topoi* of domesticity—children, nurturing, health, and community—“slowly entered the mainstream of environmental discourse.”⁵⁶ Gibbs's rhetoric of care results in a different discourse than a rhetoric of justice—it asks different questions, it legitimates different evidence, it welcomes different voices, and it encapsulates different responsibilities. This relational vantage point—that may be embraced by men and women alike—provides fruitful rhetorical ground for the environmental movement in the United States—it gives voice to the experiences of everyday people, it welcomes ordinary people into places of public power, and it privileges interconnection and accountability to a

community larger than our own. Gibbs's rhetoric of care and her bold defense of the values of compassion, inclusivity, and community may be one of her greatest contributions to the environmental movement. In the end, it is this relational logic—a logic that bolsters the agency of the citizen-activist and understands personhood to be deeply interconnected—that propels the environmental justice movement forward and provides advocates for environmental justice with powerful warrants to persuade.

NOTES

1. Alon Tal, *Speaking of Earth: Environmental Speech That Moved the World* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 58.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, 59.
5. Diane Hope, "The Rhetoric of the Autobiographical Voice in Women's Environmental Narratives: Lois Gibbs' *Love Canal: My Story* and Sandra Steingraber's *Living Downstream: An Ecologist Looks at Cancer and the Environment*," in *The Environmental Communication Yearbook*, ed. Susan L. Senecah (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004), 94.
6. Hope, "Women's Environmental Narratives," 91.
7. Phil Brown and Edwin J. Mikkelsen, *No Safe Place: Toxic Waste, Leukemia, and Community Action* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Sherry Cable, "Women's Social Movement Involvement: The Role of Structural Availability in Recruitment and Participation Processes," *Sociological Quarterly* 3 (1992): 35–47; Michael R. Edelstein, *Contaminated Communities: The Social and Psychological Impacts of Residential Toxic Exposure* (Boulder: Westview, 1988); Celene Krauss, "Women and Toxic Waste Protests: Race, Class and Gender as Resources of Resistance," *Qualitative Sociology* 16 (1993): 247–262; Adeline Gordon Levine, *Love Canal: Science, Politics, and People* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1982).
8. Phil Brown and Faith Ferguson, "Making a Big Stink: Women's Work, Women's Relationships, and Toxic Waste Activism," *Gender and Society* 9 (1995): 157.
9. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).
10. Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

11. Marilyn Friedman, "Beyond Caring: The De-Moralization of Gender," in *Justice and Caring: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics*, ed. Virginia Held (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 62, 64.
12. Dean Curtin, "Toward an Ecological Ethic of Care," *Hypatia* 6 (1991): 60–74.
13. Sarah Lucia Hoagland, "Some Thoughts about Caring," in *Feminist Ethics*, ed. Claudia Card (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1991).
14. Lynn O'Brien Hallstein, "A Postmodern Caring: Feminist Standpoint Theories, Revisioned Caring, and Communication Ethics," *Western Journal of Communication* 63 (1999): 32–56.
15. *Ibid.*, 43–44.
16. Brown and Ferguson, "Toxic Waste Activism," 145.
17. Gibbs, "We Are the First, but We Are Not Likely to Be the Last," in *Speaking of Earth: Environmental Speeches That Moved the World*, ed. Alon Tal (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 64.
18. Brown and Ferguson, "Toxic Waste Activism," 161.
19. *Ibid.*, 145.
20. Gibbs, "We Are the First," 64.
21. Brown and Ferguson, "Toxic Waste Activism," 161.
22. Gibbs, "We Are the First," 70.
23. Sara Hayden, "Family Metaphors and the Nation: Promoting a Politics of Care through the Million Mom March," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89 (2003): 204.
24. Gibbs, "We Are the First," 67.
25. *Ibid.*, 71.
26. *Ibid.*, 69.
27. Hayden, "Family Metaphors," 209.
28. Hope, "Women's Environmental Narratives," 95.
29. Brown and Ferguson, "Toxic Waste Activism," 146.
30. Gibbs, "We Are the First," 67.
31. *Ibid.*, 69.
32. *Ibid.*, 72.
33. *Ibid.*, 68.
34. Brown and Ferguson, "Toxic Waste Activism," 147.
35. *Ibid.*, 160.
36. Gibbs, "We Are the First," 69.
37. Tal, *Speaking of Earth*, 62.
38. O'Brien Hallstein, "A Postmodern Caring," 43–44.
39. Gibbs, "We Are the First," 70.
40. Brown and Ferguson, "Toxic Waste Activism," 154.
41. Hope, "Women's Environmental Narratives," 94.
42. *Ibid.*, 154.

43. Gibbs, "We Are the First," 65.
44. *Ibid.*, 71.
45. *Ibid.*, 71.
46. Gilligan, "In a Different Voice," xiii.
47. Gibbs, "We Are the First," 72.
48. Hope, "Women's Environmental Narratives," 96.
49. Lois Gibbs's use of the term "Justice" in the name of her organization should not be confused with the ethic of justice that she challenges in her congressional testimony. As evidenced by her rhetoric of care, it is clear that Gibbs's conceptualization of justice as a generalized value is rooted in the relational values of compassion, inclusivity, and community.
50. Lois Marie Gibbs, *Love Canal: The Story Continues* (Stony Creek: New Society, 1998), xiv
51. Hope, "Women's Environmental Narratives," 92.
52. Curtin, "Ecological Ethic of Care," 60.
53. Karen Warren, "The Promise and Power of Ecofeminism," *Environmental Ethics* 12 (1990): 141, 143.
54. Sarah Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989); Curtin, "Ecological Ethic of Care."
55. Brown and Ferguson, "Toxic Waste Activism," 161.
56. Hope, "Women's Environmental Narratives," 90.

ELEVEN

Frank Church's Natural Place in American Public Address

Light Green Orations That Saved "The River of No Return Wilderness"

ELLEN W. GORSEVSKI

I never knew a person who felt self-important in the morning after spending the night in the open on an Idaho mountain-side under a star-studded summer sky.

—Frank Church, quoted in Sara Dant,
"Making Wilderness Work: Frank Church
and the American Wilderness Movement"¹



Although it remains obscure for most Americans, especially compared to famous natural landscapes such as Yellowstone National Park, Idaho's Frank Church–River of No Return Wilderness (RNRW) is just as spectacular, and it is much larger in size than Yellowstone. As a result of tireless campaigning by environmentally conscious state politicians like Senator Frank Church of Idaho, the RNRW was established by Congress in 1980 as the largest official wilderness area in the Lower 48 states. Historian Sara Dant calls Frank Church "one of the most important and underappreciated participants in the politics of the American wilderness movement."² Church was so instrumental in securing recent additions to preserved natural spaces in the American West that, following Church's death in 1984, his colleague in the United States Senate, Idaho senator Jim McClure, successfully lobbied Congress to rename the wilderness, prefixing "Frank Church" to the RNRW. Today many outdoor enthusiasts affectionately call this magnificent wilderness area the "Frank."³

This case study examines Church's oratory as influential, moderate environmental rhetoric, which I term "light green" environmental discourse. Church's light green rhetoric proffers lessons for environmentalists today who face a similarly challenging rhetorical situation that is rife with pressures to roll back tenuously held environmental concerns in favor of "dirty" energy initiatives presented by advocates of many industries that are destructive to the precious few remaining wilderness areas in the United States. Among the most destructive industries are coal and minerals mining as well as gas and oil drilling operations. The wilderness preservation gains Church was able to make were profoundly connected to his oratorical prowess, a valued skill, which amid today's hurly-burly of decidedly nonoratorical text messages and choppy emails is often underestimated but which remains a vital tool in the savvy environmentalist's repertoire.

Retrieving and valuing the orality in oral history of preservation efforts in Idaho and the American West suggests the importance of understanding lands originally occupied by the indigenous peoples of the Americas, from whose cultural valuation of nature and landscapes we can learn.⁴ As human recorders and physical records of oral history are subject to the ravages of time and the impermanence of all things, oral historian Debbie Lee reminds us of the ticking clock for caches of "primary materials" of environmental history of the American West, which are often "stored randomly . . . partially eaten by mice," that remain in Forest Service and other small government offices throughout the West.⁵ Recovering both indigenous and postcolonial green voices from such precious, time-sensitive documents in the historical record is a vitally urgent mission for environmental scholars and activists today.⁶

Among the voices for environmental moderation raised on behalf of preserving wilderness in the United States from 1960 to 1980, Frank Church is a significant figure who merits greater attention outside of Idaho. Church spent nearly twenty years of patient lobbying, strategizing, and coalition-building to assemble disparate, jigsaw-puzzle pieces of wilderness so as to ultimately create the larger RNRW.⁷ His painstaking efforts are evident in his Senate speeches, which reveal his critical understanding of the need to use a moderate, light green rhetoric to unite opposing stakeholders with divergent interests.⁸ His speeches reflect his tireless efforts to build moderate consensus and enable factions to see their shared goals, and to make difficult decisions to retain wilderness for posterity.

This chapter explores exemplary early texts of Church's oratory to preserve Idaho's threatened wilderness lands for future generations. In appreciating Church's public address, ranging from formal to informal

settings between hearings in Washington, D.C., and town halls in Idaho's back country, two key questions are posed: First, how was Church able to use light green language as an effective means to address Idaho's myriad arch-conservative political factions, which favored using the lands for development, including logging, mining, and ranching, and convince conflicting groups to set aside massive land spaces instead? Second, considering the environmental nadir from the 1960s to the 1980s, when—much like today—natural preservation was benighted with an onslaught of coal, oil, and gas industries' incursions, how was Church able to persuade federal and nationwide factions to save Idaho's extraordinary wilderness for generations to come? This study discusses Church as an award-winning orator who contributed his significant rhetorical skills in the service of great American environmental preservation, from his sparkling eloquence in vigorous debates leading up to and following the passage of the 1964 Wilderness Act to his final years in the Senate, culminating with his victory in 1980 in Congress by safeguarding the RNRW.

This discussion proceeds by first offering a brief sketch of Church's background, focusing on his political advocacy for preserving Idaho's increasingly developed and imperiled back country areas in light of the environmental politics during his four continuous terms as U.S. senator from 1957 to 1980. This biographical, political, and environmental backdrop will be followed by an overview of the challenges Church faced and the rhetorical tropes that he employed to address those obstacles. Next, I analyze representative speeches Church gave before the U.S. Senate. His goal was to persuade his colleagues to set aside building blocks of the RNRW. In particular, this study focuses on three speeches designating Idaho's Sawtooth and White Cloud mountains in bills on April 28, 1966; on August 11, 1970; and on March 30, 1971. Also, as a dénouement, I conclude by appreciating his epideictic comments at the signing of the RNRW Act on July 23, 1980. The chapter concludes by emphasizing Church's significance and role among other leading green voices as political and cultural figures in American rhetorical history of the mid- to late twentieth century.

FRANK CHURCH AND HIS BELOVED IDAHO WILDERNESS:
BALANCING INDUSTRY AND JOBS WITH NASCENT
ENVIRONMENTALISM

Frank Church was born in 1924 in Idaho, where he grew up relishing activities like hunting, fishing, horseback riding, and camping in his state's stunning scenic places. At the same time, Church was a strong

student with loquacious qualities, as evidenced in 1941 at Boise High School, where he won the American Legion National Oratorical Contest.⁹ His college years at Stanford University were interrupted by military service in World War II. Starting in 1943, he was posted in Burma, China, and India as a military intelligence officer; this would be an experience that would later inform his political activism in the U.S. Senate for reform of unethical and illegal practices prevalent during the civil rights era and throughout the years of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. He graduated from Stanford, where he also went on to earn a law degree in 1950. His legal studies were put on hold by a diagnosis of cancer, cured by undergoing radiation treatments, which were fairly new and experimental at the time.

After marrying Bethine Clark in 1947, he worked as an attorney in Boise, and they had two sons, Forrest and Chase. Bethine Clark's own ranching family was headed by a political patriarch, Chase Clark, who had served as Idaho's governor. Under the influence of the "Clark family 'machine,'" Church joined the Democratic Party and became increasingly politically active.¹⁰ By 1956, at the age of thirty-two, he was elected to the U.S. Senate and was at that time the youngest senator ever to serve. His successful election shocked even political master strategists and Washington, D.C., insiders like Lyndon Johnson, who was then Senate majority leader.¹¹

By 1961, Church found himself embroiled in environmental politics and congressional debates over the Wilderness Act.¹² According to Kevin Marsh, an environmental historian of the Pacific Northwest, the Wilderness Act was the brainchild of Howard Zahniser, who founded the Wilderness Society. The Wilderness Act, featuring as it does the word "wilderness," reflects "a complex set of modern meanings," including nature idealistically conceived of as "wild" and untrammelled by human influence. In practical terms, the Wilderness Act "legally classified . . . wilderness areas" that were defined "either by the Forest Service before 1964 or by Congress afterward."¹³ Rhetorically speaking, while wilderness can never be "a place of pure nature," Marsh asserts the "value . . . it promotes [is] biological diversity and ecological integrity" while also allowing for "a large economic sector in nonmotorized recreation," such as backpacking and river rafting.¹⁴ In short, the Wilderness Act was a marriage of convenience formed by political and economic forces. When the Wilderness Act finally passed in 1964, it established a national system for "protection for federal lands that barred most forms of development and the use of motorized vehicles from designated areas and . . . a ten-year public review process for protecting . . . [other wilderness areas] in the future."¹⁵ By increasing congressional oversight of public

lands and reducing Forest Service autonomy, the Wilderness Act also facilitated far greater public input over public lands at a time when the environmental movement was rising¹⁶ and thereby put a great deal of pressure on congressional representatives like Church.

Church was sandwiched between his personal conviction that wilderness areas ought to be preserved and his desire to support economic interests as well. Church believed natural landscapes could be restored in areas where preexisting timber roads could be demolished and clear-cutting of timber was reversible, while allowing for reasonable, small-scale usage in some places by the economic interests of Idaho's timber, mining, and ranching industries. Church's son, Forrest Church, described the scene during Church's years in the Senate, recalling that his father "tilted at one windmill after another" to fight for "the Wilderness bill and the Wild and Scenic Rivers bills . . . and made his mark on history."¹⁷ Frank Church's political savvy was matched by his ability to collaborate with and obtain concessions from disparate groups ranging from ranching and mining interests to environmental groups such as Idaho's own Greater Sawtooth Preservation Council (GSPC)—the latter being a significant inspiration and support base for Church—and a national environmental organization, the Sierra Club. Among Frank Church's papers from 1969 is a U.S. Senate Memorandum, and, scrawled in Church's own handwriting is a note to one of his aides, "Tommy: I want this report saved for closer study."¹⁸ Clearly, Church paid attention to his constituents, especially since the GSPC had done careful economic studies of land use with data that Church could use in his efforts to work with the many stakeholders in the region.

Some politicians, like Presidents Richard Nixon and George W. Bush, evinced strong skills in networking and making closed-door deals, but usually they lacked public speaking finesse. Other politicians, like Lyndon Johnson and Frank Church, possessed both the personal character and the ability to maneuver behind the scenes while presenting the most polished and persuasive speeches in public. Larrey Anderson, a conservative lobbyist, witnessed Church giving "two speeches in two different parts of Idaho" on the same day in 1974.¹⁹ Anderson remembered Church's first speech was "at a college in liberal northern Idaho. He banged on the podium and, in his stentorian voice, promised the . . . audience that he would do whatever it took to protect the newly granted woman's right to choose under *Roe v. Wade*. The crowd . . . went wild."²⁰ Anderson then followed Senator Church to his next speech in "conservative . . . eastern Idaho," where Anderson was dismayed to find that Church would make a political 180 degree turn: "Church clutched the edges of the dais. Tears swelled in his eyes as he told the

audience how precious were the lives of the unborn. The audience was emotionally enthralled by his oration.”²¹ This anecdote reveals Church’s ability as an orator and as a politician sometimes to waffle and tell audiences what they wanted to hear about specific, controversial issues. Church’s ability to be a political and rhetorical chameleon so as to forge compromise would often “infuriate” progressive environmentalists as much as his conservative constituents.²² As portrayed in historian Sarah Dant’s detailed account of Church’s “shrewd” practice of environmental politics, Church could use his charming interpersonal communication skills and then ably use an oratory of “compromise” to bring bickering factions together in public, especially for environmental bills such as the Endangered American Wilderness Act of 1978.²³

Among the various Senate committees that Church served on, he was notably a member of the Select Committee on Government Intelligence Activities. He also chaired the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, which uncovered major abuses of power, including FBI harassment of civil rights leaders, entrenched CIA-Mafia links, and intelligence agency interference with and influences on the U.S. press and media, among myriad other problems. Church actively criticized U.S. intelligence excesses and cover ups, including the controversial FBI and CIA involvements in life-threatening targeting of civil rights leaders Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and in the murder of Fred Hampton of Chicago’s Black Panther Party. His path-breaking model for effective congressional review of sensitive U.S. operations in the international context has been cited as a model for addressing U.S. intelligence failures and excesses following the events of 9/11.²⁴

Church’s son, Forrest Church, contended that on founding principles, Frank Church’s oratory could be both historically reverent and prescient.²⁵ Church’s political connections and support led to higher aspirations than the Senate. Beyond his successful politicking to preserve wild places, especially in America’s West, Church narrowly missed the opportunity to run for U.S. president in 1976. Despite Church’s strong showing in the primary season, the Democratic Party instead chose Jimmy Carter to be its official candidate. In Church’s speech to announce his bid to run for U.S. president on March 18, 1976, he chose an unorthodox site for his announcement: it was held in Frank Church’s grandfather’s former mining community, which had become a ghost town. Church’s speech reflected the immediate concerns following the Watergate era, concerns that remain relevant in the post-9/11 era:

Our tragedy in recent years springs from a leadership principally motivated by fear. Our Founding Fathers were a different breed. They acted on their faith, not their fear. They did not believe in fighting fire with fire; crime with crime; evil with evil; or delinquency by becoming delinquents. They set themselves against the terrors of a totalitarian state by structuring a government that would obey the law. They knew that the only way to escape a closed society was to accept the risk of living in an open one.²⁶

Church's iconoclastic and unusual choice of an abandoned mining town in Idaho as the locale for this speech, and its ample references to American founding patriots' courage in facing social and political oppressions, is characteristic of the style and substance of his political oratory in general and his "light green" environmental speeches in particular. The long since "bust" mining town locale was a direct link to "his heritage, to the mining village that, during its boom years, his then 16-year-old grandfather and namesake had called home."²⁷ Also, out of respect for his own constituents, Idaho voters, and the industries such as mining where Idahoans made their livelihoods, Church often met with local officials and citizens at meetings in such remote places. The siting and locales Church chose helped symbolically to situate his light green environmental rhetoric.

But Church's dual connection with locals in Idaho and with larger national interests back in Washington, D.C., often put him at odds with everyone. In part because of Church's vote to allow the United States to cede over to Panama the highly symbolic Panama Canal, and also because "Church's outspoken views made him a lot of enemies . . . in 1980 [he] was defeated in his attempt to be elected to the Senate for a fifth term."²⁸ Turner believes that Church's loss of his Senate seat occurred as part of a "sea change in national politics" that swept Ronald Reagan and other conservatives into office.²⁹ After leaving the Senate, Church served at the United Nations as a U.S. delegate to the Twenty-first General Assembly. He then worked at a Washington, D.C., law firm. Finally, following a year-long battle with pancreatic cancer, he died on April 7, 1984. He was buried in his hometown of Boise, Idaho. The sizeable archives of documents spanning his political career are housed at the Frank Church collection at Boise State University, which contain the orations analyzed in this chapter. The previous introduction has covered Church's background and significance to American politics broadly and to green politics specifically, including characteristics of his light green rhetorical style. The next section of this chapter provides salient

rhetorical history information to contextualize the discursive field that Church faced and adeptly addressed in his oratory to preserve Idaho's wilderness areas.

“COMMIES” AND “CROPS OF TREES” VERSUS “ECOLOGY”:
ANTI- AND PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL TROPES
OF THE 1960S AND 1970S

The political constraints against passing environmentalist legislation that Frank Church faced in 1961 as a young senator were expressed in the prevalent Cold War discourses of the day. Red-baiting critics of wilderness conservation used polarizing terms. Dant found that Idahoans complained that Church's environmental stance had a whiff of “communism,” while simultaneously they opined about class issues that would allegedly limit land usage in Idaho to “a handful of millionaires and bird watchers”; meanwhile, logging interests admonished Church that “timber is a crop,”³⁰ a stance that today is disavowed by most responsible forest managers. In contrast, presently the timber industry, national and private forest interests alike, advocate forest biodiversity as a defense against the ravages of forest fires, insect infestations, and other problems affecting the health of forests.

Church chose a reasoned middle way to combat these discursive and symbolic challenges. To counter allegations that an environmentalist stance was alien to Idaho, or could be likened to communism, he reminded Idahoans that “ordinary” citizens and their descendants would benefit most from preserving Idaho's wild, scenic places. To offset complaints that timber or other industrial development might be too severely curtailed if his proposed bills came to pass, he deftly incorporated industrial code language ensuring “multiple use”³¹ and developmental benefits to a variety of economic interests in the state. And if that rhetorical strategy ever failed, Church often quickly reminded his constituents that he supported the Second Amendment, the right to bear arms, so that hunters and even far-right-leaning militia audiences could rest easy that they at least held guns in common as a sacred term.³² Also, conveniently for Church, his environmental plans to propose “national recreation areas” went by the acronym of NRA, an acronym that doubly harkened to Frank's support of conservative gun toters and their typical affiliation with the National Rifle Association.

D. T. Kuzmiak has also emphasized that the American environmental movement was bolstered by President Kennedy's support of “conservation . . . in the appointment of Stewart Udall as Secretary of the Interior.”³³ A rhetorical counterweight to discourses linking conservation

to communism, Udall's book, *The Quiet Crisis*, strengthened terms used to further establish conservation as a respected science and as a patriotic duty for which all Americans ought to be concerned; Kuzmiak affirms Udall's book "remains a landmark in modern environmental thinking."³⁴ During President Johnson's administration, Lady Bird Johnson "made Beautify America her special cause," and environmental groups like the Environmental Defense Fund lobbied to address river and coastal pollution.³⁵ Maintaining America's military primacy during the Cold War was matched by this national and international public relations offensive that helped popularize support for preserving America's scenic beauty.³⁶

To promote a vast "national park" status for designated wilderness areas was a political nonstarter. It would have set off rhetorical alarm bells because "park" status would have signaled to business interests to lobby hard against such a sweeping protected status for coveted lands. So, by 1966, Church's strategy was to compartmentalize smaller, specific areas of wilderness with double terms as a hedged bet, "National Recreation Area" and "National Park" designations in the short term, so that in the long run he could achieve the larger, greater goal of attaining park status for much larger, contiguous wilderness areas.³⁷ Designating crucial areas in Idaho under the "recreation area" status allowed for multiuse sharing by both industry and recreation users. The multiuse "recreation area" status was a light green compromise acceptable to timber, ranching, and mining industries and to Idahoans and tourists interested in activities like hunting, fishing, rafting, and canoeing.³⁸ That year Church's Senate bills proposed to create the Sawtooth National Recreation Area as well as a Sawtooth Wilderness National Park. Thus Church, gradually and along with allies in the Senate such as fellow Idaho senators McClure and Jordan, along with Senator Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota and Senator Clinton Anderson of New Mexico, created iterative and layered bills, each of which catered to concerns and interests on opposite ends of the political and conservationist spectrum: "These Democrats built bipartisan support" with Republicans, something that is noticeably absent today.³⁹ Over time and incrementally, these many overlapping bills designated Idaho's natural spaces as places of national and international significance.

As part of this long-term strategy and quite controversially, the young Senator Church blocked hydroelectric dam proposals that would have irrevocably harmed his cherished River of No Return in central Idaho, an ecologically sensitive spawning habitat for salmon. The legislation Church set in motion "eventually became the national Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968, which protected . . . the Salmon River from dam development."⁴⁰ Situating Church's discursive resources within the development of environmental rhetoric of the time, by 1971,

environmentalist Barry Commoner had expanded the word “ecology” to denote a profound interconnectedness of all living and material entities and systems in nature.⁴¹ As I explore later, while eschewing or minimizing use of typical environmentalist rhetorical terms such as “ecology” in his speeches, Church tended to use specific, poetic natural imagery that referenced such higher ecological principles, while he also used terms that maintained a politically expedient, accommodationist framework for economic interests.

In stark contrast to polls and data-drenched environmental discourses that have become prevalent since the 1990s, during the 1960s and 1970s, Church tapped into what historian James Turner has characterized as “national values—patriotism, spirituality, outdoor recreation, and a respect for nature—and the responsibility of the people and the government to protect them.”⁴² Church used themes prevalent in writings of iconic American literary figures such as Aldo Leopold, John Muir, and Henry David Thoreau, whose discourses praised the connection between humans and wilderness.⁴³ Further, Church chose a rhetorical framing consistent with “a populist tradition” that praised “the idea that wilderness belongs to everyone.”⁴⁴ Church’s word choices veered between the poetic and the practical, between the sublime of nature and the mundane, job-driven existence of the local Idaho voter and the political machinations of fellow congressmen whose support Church needed to pass a cascade of environmental bills he sponsored or supported across his years in the Senate.

The economic, political, and rhetorical forces faced by Frank Church and his contemporaries have been articulated by rhetorical scholar James Crosswhite. Crosswhite has critiqued the interpretations of conceptual dualisms inherent in the term “wilderness” that other scholars, such as William Cronon or Val Plumwood, have observed.⁴⁵ Crosswhite asserts that Cronon sees “activism of wilderness preservationists as naïve,” because Cronon uses a strict constructionist interpretation of wilderness as being mutually exclusive of any human appearance in or usage of lands characterized by the term “wilderness”; also, Crosswhite points out Plumwood’s feminist interpretative proposition that if wilderness, like “virginity,” is “sacred,” then other places—along with indigenous dwellers of such places—not receiving such designation must necessarily merit “exploitation” and a cultural forgetting of colonial processes inflicted on nature and its human and animal inhabitants.⁴⁶ Crosswhite emphasizes that the late twentieth century was a time of experiential and philosophical change in prevalent conceptualizations of wilderness, which has important rhetorical considerations. Crosswhite finds in the rhetorical debates surrounding “wilderness” as a term an evolving

process whereby not only new meanings were attributed to wilderness but also a new kind of “wisdom” arose about environmental practices and histories.⁴⁷ Kevin DeLuca has also taken issue with Cronon’s position, noting that wilderness preservation and environmental justice are two separate things, since the former is concerned with nonhuman aspects of nature while the latter is more attuned to humans acting within natural landscapes.⁴⁸ As we shall see, Frank Church’s “light green” orations feature evidence of this rhetorical process of evolving environmental reasoning and awareness.

This section has summarized salient aspects of the rhetorical situation Church faced in using environmental oratory and some of the rhetorical strategies Church used to invite disparate audiences to consider his proposals. His orations encompass the challenges requiring Church’s pragmatic “coalition-building” approach that would last throughout his Senate service.⁴⁹ The next section provides an analysis of exemplars of Church’s environmental rhetoric through representative speeches showcasing Church’s environmental oratory.

ORATORY TO SAVE IDAHO’S WILDERNESS: FRANK CHURCH’S LIGHT GREEN SPEECHES

By all accounts, Frank Church was both admired and hated for his ability to get opposing parties, such as loggers, ranchers, farmers seeking irrigation rights, and environmentalists from scruffy backpackers to slick Sierra Club representatives, into one meeting and enable them to work out their differences by pointing out the issues they all held in common. In conservative Idaho, Church periodically faced threats of bodily harm for his stance, which, although it was moderate at best, was seen by factions supporting development as too progressive and environmental.⁵⁰ His personal touch and courageous leadership in such meetings was also reflected in the public debates in which he engaged and bills he introduced with more formal flourishes on the Senate floor, which was literally and symbolically 2,500 miles away from rural areas Church represented, such as Grangeville, Idaho.

1966: THE SAWTOOTHES OF IDAHO BILLS

One speech that is characteristic of Church’s eloquent, light green oratory, and which downplayed all the “back-room” persuading and tense meetings leading up to it,⁵¹ was his presentation on April 28, 1966, to

the U.S. Senate of two separate but interrelated bills to preserve Idaho's Sawtooth mountain ranges. The Sawtooths were beloved by many outdoorsmen, especially American literary giant Ernest Hemingway, one of nearby Sun Valley's most famous residents. Church opens the speech with brief introductory statements containing the formalities of identifying the names of the bills, one of which "would create a Sawtooth National Park, while the other, in place of a park, would establish a Sawtooth National Recreation Area."⁵² Church then poetically describes the significance of the areas, saying, "Mr. President, this is the high country of south-central Idaho's fabulous wilderness—42 snowy peaks of more than 10,000 feet elevation, nearly 200 sapphire lakes, forests of spruce, fir, lodgepole and ponderosa pine. Perpetual snowfields melt into the sparkling headwaters of three major rivers, the Salmon, Payette and Boise." Through the use of vivid images of "snowy peaks," "sapphire lakes," and "sparkling . . . rivers," the audience is immediately invited to step into this imaginative paradise. The terms he uses here are evocative of the nineteenth century's great American conservationist writers like Henry David Thoreau and artists such as Albert Bierstadt, who painted sublime images of nature's magnificence. The speech text here is rich in imagery of awe-inspiring natural landscapes that continues to be used by environmentalists today.

Having thus established the connection between sublime American landscape in history and its continuum into the present, in the next paragraph, Church shifts to addressing the economic interests in the Sawtooth mountain range and its valley floors. Church thus connects nature to human activity within wilderness areas:

While these summits form a roadless wilderness region, 30 miles long and 18 miles wide, it is paralleled on the east by the Sawtooth Valley and Stanley Basin. Here, log-fenced pastures, white-faced cattle, scattered ranch houses and the roving Salmon River, provide an authentic western foreground for this magnificent mountain backdrop.

By using the Forest Service term, "roadless," Church here is adopting official terminology that presents wilderness as a place that is unique in being unaffected by modern development, such as the building of roads. Without roads the wilderness may be inferred by economic stakeholders to lack sufficient human intervention and presence. Church next unfolds a description right out of a John Wayne film, replete with all the visual clichés of the classic Western movie, including "log-fenced pastures," "cattle," and "ranch houses" which, as if to moderate the rhetoric of

roadlessness, he presents as being noninvasive by characterizing them as comprising “an authentic western foreground.” Church presents ranchers, as opposed to, say, Native Americans, as official or proper dwellers of Idaho’s natural landscapes such as this. In this subtle, indirect way, the cattle ranching industry is thus addressed and reassured as an audience that Church respects. To broader audiences, ranchers are here presented in benign, pastoral terms that make no mention of European stock, “white-faced cattle” as being what they actually are: an imported, invasive species that has long contributed to problems like overgrazing, loss of native plant and wildlife, and destruction of sensitive riparian zones along rivers.

Ever a politician, Church famously fence-straddled. So first he addressed and portrayed his ranching constituents in glowing terms. Next, for the delicate balancing act of meeting opposing stakeholders’ interests, Church moves to hail the nonranching sector of Idaho, its outdoor enthusiasts and national tourists, saying,

An increasing tide of visitors, drawn by the magnet of the jagged snowcaps, vacation and fish in the lower lakes and along the rivers. Back-packers climb trails to the high country, revel in the remote beauty of snow-fed lake and stream, and “sightings” of wildlife ranging from antelope to mountain goat.

In this descriptive passage, the tourism industry and its participants are thus invited by Church to be satisfied that their presence is welcome in the Sawtooth wilderness and that their interests in preserving habitat for both wildlife and for humans foraging into the back country will be maintained. In contrast to the opening, descriptive passages that maximize the scenery while minimizing the role of humans within that scenery, in this passage Church uses a series of action verbs that emphasize the vigorous activity of humans within the proposed wilderness areas. People come here to “vacation and fish.” “Back-packers climb” and also “revel in the remote beauty” while catching “sightings” of wild animals, “antelope to mountain goat,” which are known for their ability to run, climb, and leap gracefully. By merging human and wildlife activities, and by portraying them as being naturally intertwined in the proposed wilderness areas, Church invites audiences of European American recreationists (but not Native Americans), to participate in visiting and appreciating nature’s wonders in this landscape.

Next, Church makes a shift to connect his own participation in environmental and preservationist politics by establishing his connection to great Americans who fought to conserve and set aside wilderness areas.

He links “Many Idahoans and government officials” together in their shared belief that “this most rugged and pristine area . . . [is] more than worthy of inclusion in our national park system.” Church reminds audiences: “Bills proposing the creation of a Sawtooth National Park have been introduced in Congress by the distinguished Senator James P. Pope and the late, great Senator William E. Borah.” In naming such congressional luminaries from Idaho and noting the Congress’s inability to pass the bills, Church implies that the time to pass the bills is long overdue. Also, pointing to the past, Church bids the audience to recall that “early Idaho legislatures memorialized Congress urging such a park.” In addition, he notes the “executive interest . . . [in] these magnificent mountains since the administration of Woodrow Wilson.” In reiterating the past and its echoes in the present time, he creates a sense of urgency in finishing this paramount task, which was begun much earlier in American history and, by this time, had spanned two preceding generations.

Church then shifts the focus of his speech to the dual purpose of his proposing bills for both a national park status and a national recreation area status established for the Sawtooth wilderness. He explains the distinction between the “proposed national park,” which would encompass “380,000 acres of land” that would be off limits to industrial activities and to hunting, and the “national recreation area,” which instead would support “multiple-use activities” such as “hunting, mining, lumbering and grazing.” In this way, Church’s dual proposals form the crux of the balancing act to accommodate the diverse interests of the stakeholders in the state of Idaho and nationwide. Church contends that “both plans would preserve the scenic approach to the mountains by preventing unsightly development of the valley sections . . . and the national recreation area through local zoning regulations.” Then he offers the president and members of Congress a choice of supporting either bill, rather than both. Having a choice between these two options creates an incentive for politicians to perceive the “national recreation area” plan as the one that is amenable to both business and recreational activities and is, hence, most politically expedient.

What followed this speech were years of hearings to record and consider the testimonies from Idaho’s numerous stakeholders to the proposed wilderness lands. Also, environmental impact studies and Forest Service data were added to the complicated preservation picture. By 1968, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act had passed, which was a major victory for Frank Church, especially since it included sections of the Salmon River for protection. This victory also supported Church’s vision to expand, in piecemeal fashion, federal protection for the mountainous wilderness areas surrounding the Sawtooths, which featured the

brehtaking White Cloud and Boulder mountains. With the zeitgeist of the rising environmental movement and landmark events such as the first ever Earth Day in 1970, Church and his compatriots were emboldened to urge for more land areas to be set aside and even to curtail and postpone some mining incursions.

1971: THE SAWTOOTH-WHITE CLOUD BILL

In 1971 Church's colleague, Senator Len Jordan, opined, "We have been striving since 1966 to adequately preserve and manage this outstanding area in south-central Idaho, which is now being subjected to the heavy pressures of real estate speculation and modern-day development. Time is of the essence."⁵³ Thus, while Jordan and Church were fending off expansion of timber and mining interests, the new threat of bland, suburban, and tourist housing developments burgeoned, and it remains a critical issue in Idaho today. The two Idaho senators joined forces once more to propose the Sawtooth-White Cloud Bill, which Church would introduce in a speech before the Senate on March 30, 1971.⁵⁴ Church begins the speech by noting its chief difference from previous bills that had been introduced to designate the Sawtooths for preservation, which is that this particular bill would "temporarily withdraw certain national forest land in the State of Idaho from . . . [mining operations]," among "other purposes." Church reiterates the overarching goal of the bill "is to preserve and protect the scenic, historic, pastoral, fish and wildlife, and other recreational values of the Sawtooth Mountains and . . . the nearby White Cloud and Boulder Mountains." The brave stance of preventing any new mining activities represents Church's light green rhetoric by his addition of the qualifier "temporarily," which is put forth at the outset of the speech. The proposed bill, Church offers, would also "designate" a new

Sawtooth Primitive Area, 201,000 acres of spectacular alpine-type peaks, lakes, and evergreen forests, as part of the national wilderness preservation system; provide for a 5-year moratorium on new mining entries, and direct the Secretary of the Interior to prepare a comprehensive plan for establishing a national park in the uplands of the area.

Church anchors the "peaks," "lakes," and "forests" within the comforting aegis of "the national wilderness preservation system" that is ably managed by Secretary of the Interior Rogers Morton. However, while

Church shows the bill is staving off any “new” mining, he does not mention that the continuation of preexisting mining operations will be allowed. Such a maneuver of stated and unstated compromise is characteristic of Church’s light green rhetoric. That concession to the mining industry upset environmentalists and wilderness organizations that sought greater protection. Also, Secretary of the Interior Morton would prove to be a far weaker proponent of environmental preservation than his predecessor, Secretary Udall.

Church explains the location of the “proposed national recreation area” is one that is convenient to tourists traveling in from other states and even foreign countries because it “would be located 40 miles north of Idaho’s internationally known Sun Valley resort, and 75 miles east of Boise, the State’s largest metropolitan area.” Having thus explained the fairly mundane purpose and strategic location of the proposed wilderness area, he then waxes poetic. Church describes the “natural sweep of the Sawtooth valley and the beauty of the mountains are inseparably linked.” He offers the sublime, physical aspects of the landscapes, “five large lakes, numerous smaller lakes, the Salmon River with its abundance of both salmon and trout,” are conveniently connected to human activities occurring in “beautifully situated campgrounds, splendid sites for winter sports developments, and a spacious setting for hiking and horseback riding” that occur in this “uncrowded . . . area.” Thus, once again, Church echoes the nineteenth-century writers and painters of images of sublime natural landscapes, with the difference that in Church’s updated, twentieth-century version, there are greater interactions between sublime landscapes and human activities to occur within that dramatic natural scenery.

Next, Church reassures the descendants of “pioneer” ranching families, whom he identifies as holding “7 percent of the proposed NRA [as] privately owned,” that “the purpose of this bill is not to eliminate these” private lands “but rather to prevent unsightly subdivision of the valley.” Having satisfied these constituents’ concerns that their lands would not be forfeited or, worse, confiscated, Church then returns to a sublime poetic mode, albeit one that is presented via Hollywood iconography of “dramatic mountain ranges, colorful lakes and picturesque valley ranchlands,” which he characterizes through very similar verbiage as those he had used in his earlier, 1966 speech previously covered. Here, in 1971, Church echoes his earlier depiction, saying:

Whiteface cattle and bands of sheep graze behind log fences, against a backdrop of distant ranch houses and green forests which ascend to jagged and snowcapped peaks. At the junction

of these valleys is the old “cow town” of Stanley, sprawled like a western movieset at the foot of the mountains.

By introducing here the term “western movieset,” he makes his description more overtly modern, which also may be interpreted to serve as a means to reiterate European descendants’ interpretations of land usage. By making the direct reference to Hollywood’s portrayal of the West, indirectly American Indians are removed from the painterly scenes in which they once appeared during the nineteenth century. By the twentieth century, American Indians were forcibly relocated from their ancestral lands and fixed onto Indian reservation lands. Church then reiterates that “the intent of this legislation . . . [is] to preserve the town of Stanley, and the valley ranches, with their authentic western appearance.” While making allowances for private landowners to work within “standards for the use, subdivision and development” of their lands, any such changes would only occur “in a manner which is not in conflict with the purposes of the act” to maintain the sort of Hollywood, “authentic western” scenery to which Church refers. Thus, in Church’s light green oratory, it appears that primarily the interests of white ranchers’ uses of the wilderness take precedence over other constituents.

While worrying that “commercial development now threatens the valley and adjacent foothills,” Church goes on to connect to the Sawtooths the area that is less well known to people outside of Idaho, namely, “the White Cloud Mountains,” which he says, “have undergone mineral prospecting and pre-development that could jeopardize their fragile ecology.” By using the environmentally resonant word “ecology,” in direct connection to activities being done in the area by the mining industry, Church announces his affiliation for and concerns he shares with environmental groups such as the Sierra Club or Idaho’s own GSPC. He then provides a working window of time for environmentalists to gather their resources by saying: “This bill would provide a 5-year moratorium on all new forms of . . . mining.” Meanwhile, Church comforts mining industry audiences by asserting that the Forest Service, which had been historically lenient to mining industry incursions into park areas, would be the agency regulating the area.

Church then closed the speech by reasserting that the state of Idaho’s autonomy in rights and “jurisdictions” for “fishing and hunting” would remain in place as always. Finally, Church reminds the audience that “a Sawtooth National Recreation Area bill has twice been approved by the Senate,” implying that this new bill, likewise, ought to be approved. He also concludes by emphasizing that this new “proposal, however, has been considerably refined,” which he, along with “the other Members

of the Idaho delegation (Mr. McClure and Mr. Hansen) . . . believe . . . will have a good chance of favorable action in this session of Congress.” Church ended the speech by noting its association with prior, favorably received bills, simply adding the suggestion that this one was an improvement that merited even greater positive reception because it was more “refined” and better addressed the sticking points of the various stakeholders to the wilderness.

Church, his colleagues and supporters inside of Congress, along with lobbying efforts by a range of organizations, such as “Church’s coalition of . . . supporters includ[ing] ranchers, local citizens and private landowners, the Idaho Outdoor Association, the Sierra Club, the Idaho State Legislature, the Idaho Environmental Council, and even the timber industry,” were effective in pushing through this landmark legislation.⁵⁵ Sara Dant affirmed that by 1972 Frank Church “successfully capped a 12-year campaign to protect central Idaho’s rugged Sawtooth and White Cloud mountains as a national recreation area.”⁵⁶ Church’s many constituents breathed a sigh of relief. This achievement, however, spurred ever more focus on Forest Service interpretations of the laws, which Church and others found to be even too lenient to mining and other industries for his tastes. So, by 1978 Church was instrumental in pushing for the passing of the Endangered American Wilderness Act. At last, by 1980, he made his final push to preserve the RNRW.

1980: “THE FRANK” AS A LEGACY OF LIGHT GREEN RHETORIC

Over the intervening years in the decade of disco, Church would continue using light green rhetoric in working for incremental environmental land area designations, culminating in 1980 with his crowning achievement that would eventually bear his name, the assemblage of the patchwork of smaller wilderness area designations he and his motley coalition of supporters had attained over the years into a complete whole: 2.2 million acres in Idaho established in the River of No Return Wilderness (RNRW) Act, signed into law by President Carter. In his statement at the signing on that sweltering day in July, Church paraphrased Ralph Waldo Emerson, saying, “Surprised men and women will . . . be more in tune with the world when they return from The River of No Return Wilderness.”⁵⁷ Church injected his signature patriotic fervor into environmental preservation, beaming, “Because America was built up from the wilderness, the wilderness itself has shaped our character as a people. . . . We are strong . . . proud and inventive because of our

exposure to the exhilarations and dangers of living in a wild land.”⁵⁸ Church also gave a nod to his gamut of constituents: “conservationists and sportsmen are well represented at this ceremony, as are Idaho’s mining and lumber industries.”⁵⁹ Church recognized that “the fact that so many have come [over] 2,000 miles from Idaho to watch the president sign this bill demonstrates that it commands broad support in our state. It also proves that it is possible to work together to build a sound future for the generations which will follow ours.” Even in these brief, epideictic comments, Church evinced his light green rhetoric, which conjoined opposing views and stakeholders with a sense of patriotic duty and responsibility for those who would later be called upon to protect the wilderness.

CONCLUSION: FRANK CHURCH’S NATURAL PLACE IN AMERICAN PUBLIC ADDRESS

Between 1964 and 1978, Church’s environmental contributions can be linked to Congress passing bills protecting 134 wilderness areas.⁶⁰ Throughout his political career, in Church’s persuasive environmental oratory, identified here as “light green” rhetoric, combined industrial code words with the poetic license to wax effusively about the sublime natural landscapes he sought fervently to preserve. If his prolific record of success in environmental protection is any measure of his rhetorical efficacy, Church may be seen as a persuasive orator and politician. Yet, despite his environmental orations appearing regularly in *Vital Speeches of the Day* throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Frank Church’s wilderness preservation speeches have been somehow lost to most rhetorical critics. As of 2014, not a single recent article on Church has been published in any of the communication journals traditionally devoted to appreciating landmark orations, such as *Quarterly Journal of Speech*.⁶¹ Church’s impressive environmental legacy and his significance as a rhetor remains, with few exceptions, largely unknown to most researchers in public address.⁶² This dearth of rhetorical analysis of Church’s oratory is unfortunate, especially given that Frank Church “developed a coalition-building approach to federal wilderness designation that continues to serve as a powerful model well into the twenty-first century.”⁶³ Church’s wise strategy was reflected in his many light green orations, only a few of which were possible to consider in this chapter. Hence future studies into Church’s greater environmental record, and his rhetorical eloquence to advance and secure balance between ecological and human interests, remain to be done.

In comparison with traditional histories of environmental activism, examining the light green speeches of Frank Church offers an experiential vantage point from which to appreciate the unique benefits of orality. Debbie Lee avers that “orality . . . [has] the ability to preserve a sense of time and place. . . . [and is] vital to our representations of the land and its human history.”⁶⁴ Whereas historians can survey documentary evidence leading up to landmark environmental protections, and literary critics can appreciate great environmental writing, rhetorical critics can likewise interpret and value significant environmental speeches. Examining environmental orations helps us to capture the sense of urgency and of hope from orators like Church, who understood the seriousness of the stakes for present and future generations.

At the same time, in appraising Church’s rhetorical legacy, Church’s critics have noted pitfalls of compromises made to establish the RNRW, which have left some areas, particularly those which are rich in “deposits of gold, silver, copper, lead, tungsten, and cobalt,” open to challenge by lawsuits of mining industries trying to obtain mining access.⁶⁵ Also, in the speeches explored here, Church’s downplaying of American Indian interests begs inquiry. Church’s giving primacy to European-descended inhabitants of Idaho’s wilderness areas is an ethical problem demanding further study.

Another human-to-wilderness interactional concern is voiced by Jeff Wheelwright, a science and environmental writer, who laments that “as more people take advantage of better gear to travel deeper and stay longer [in the FC-RNRW] . . . they threaten to overwhelm the crown jewels of the backcountry.”⁶⁶ Thus assessing omissions, missteps, or perhaps too-deep compromises made in Church’s light green applications of environmental rhetoric may also help present-day and future environmentalists to avoid or minimize making similar errors of judgment in the perilous terrain of symbolic exchange on pressing environmental issues. Patricia Byrnes notes that the legacy of Frank Church’s RNRW continues to bring together a “wide variety of interests, including Idaho and national conservation groups, mineral companies, the physically challenged, Native Americans, and federal and state governments” to discuss and debate interpretations and applications of the legal parameters for wilderness preservation that Church was instrumental in establishing.⁶⁷ Today, the rhetoric and oratory of environmental activism must address increasingly complex constraints ranging from exorbitant and endless legal wrangling to effects on wilderness areas of global climate shifts. Beyond needing to address human factions in environmental debates, environmental activists also have to contend with external forces such as longer hot, dry seasons that exacerbate forest fires and insect infestations

in forests while also overheating water temperatures for highly sensitive river species, such as the already endangered salmon.

Exploring Frank Church's light green rhetoric also points to interconnections between an antiwar stance and environmentalist political activism. Many environmentalists recognize that the arms industry is toxic to both people and the planet. Although he had been a supporter initially, by the mid-1960s Church had become an articulate and ardent critic of the Vietnam War. Church was the architect of congressional acts that curtailed U.S. involvement there from President Lyndon Baines Johnson's administration through to President Nixon's.⁶⁸ Church's investigatory leadership presaged similar human rights challenges and issues being debated today in the post-9/11 era of the "global war on terror." So, while Church's progressive environmental rhetoric has been the focus of this particular study, there is room for future analysis of his antiwar rhetoric.⁶⁹ Church's oratory and political record indicates he respected democratic equality and sought to support human, animal, and biotic life forms and the preservation of both political and natural world systems on which all of these depend.

Importantly, the political gridlock in Congress during the first two decades of the 2000s has become a serious impediment to enforcing the tenuous environmental legislation that is already in place, and an even greater obstacle to introducing and passing brand new bills for environmental protection. Frank Church was a nonconformist, a light green voice, a source of inspiration, and a cautionary figure in understanding how to avert making too many concessions along the path to passing environmental legislation. Continued study of his environmental record of eloquent and persuasive oratory for wilderness preservation, as well as for curtailing military exploits, awaits future students and scholars of rhetoric, practitioners of environmental policy, and political activists.

NOTES

1. This statement also appears on Church's tombstone at his burial place in Boise, Idaho.
2. Sara Dant, "Making Wilderness Work: Frank Church and the American Wilderness Movement," *Pacific Historical Review* 77 (May 2008): 237.
3. Jeff Wheelwright, "Captive Wilderness," *Discover* 27 (August 2006): 42-49.
4. Debbie Lee, "Listening to the Land: The Selway-Bitterroot

- Wilderness as Oral History,” *The Oral History Review* 37 (August 2010): 235–248.
5. *Ibid.*, 239.
 6. Val Plumwood, “Wilderness Skepticism and Wilderness Dualism,” in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, ed. J. Baird Callicott and Michael Nelson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998).
 7. Similarly, Vanessa Beasley and Suzanne Daughton analyzed President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s environmental rhetoric, finding it was a politically astute campaign of democratic mediations and federal interventions. They argue Roosevelt’s conservationist public address and legislation served to appease constituents along the push-pull spectrum between economic development and environmental conservation. See Vanessa Beasley and Suzanne Daughton, “The President and the Reformer: Rhetoric, Politics and the Environment under Franklin Delano Roosevelt,” in *Green Talk in the White House: The Rhetorical Presidency Encounters Ecology*, ed. Tarla R. Peterson (College State: Texas A & M University Press, 2004).
 8. Some of Church’s critics argued that he was equivocal and strategically ambiguous, which he often was. On the other hand, that is the art of politics and compromise, which enabled Church to gather forward motion on his environmental bills in an otherwise typically contentious Congress that has long been influenced by lobbying from myriad special interests.
 9. Spartacus Educational, “Frank Church,” Spartacus.Schoolnet.co.uk, <http://www.Spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAchurf.htm>.
 10. Forrest Church, “Frank Church’s Quixotic Vision,” *The Nation*, <http://www.thenation.com/frank-churchs-quixotic-vision> (last modified June 13, 2006).
 11. Dant, “Making Wilderness Work,” 240.
 12. *Ibid.*, 240–241.
 13. Kevin R. Marsh, *Drawing Lines in the Forest: Creating Wilderness Areas in the Pacific Northwest* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 5–6.
 14. *Ibid.*, 6–7.
 15. James M. Turner, “‘The Specter of Environmentalism’: Wilderness, Environmental Politics, and the Evolution of the New Right,” *The Journal of American History* (June 2009): 125.
 16. Marsh, *Drawing Lines in the Forest*, 12–13.
 17. Forrest Church, “Frank Church’s Quixotic Vision.”
 18. Frank Church, “United States Senate—Memorandum” (written note on report by the Greater Sawtooth Preservation Council, Frank

- Church Collection, Boise State University, Boise, ID: 1969), MSS 56, Series 8.1, box 18, folder 44.
19. Larrey Anderson, "The Rise and Fall of Frank Church: A Lesson for Conservatives," *American Thinker*, http://www.americanthinker.com/2010/02/the_rise_and_fall_of_frank_church (last modified July 28, 2011).
 20. Ibid.
 21. Ibid.
 22. Dant, "Making Wilderness Work," 237.
 23. Ibid., 237–238.
 24. Christopher Hayes, "What the Public Doesn't Know about the Secret Program of Spying, Assassination and Torture Conducted by the US Government, and How Congress Once Exposed It and Can Investigate It Again," *The Nation* 289 (September 14, 2009).
 25. Forrest Church, "Frank Church's Quixotic Vision."
 26. Quoted in *ibid.* Frank Church's closing thought here is also embodied in Pericles's Funeral Oration.
 27. Forrest Church, "Frank Church's Quixotic Vision."
 28. "Frank Church," Spartacus Educational.
 29. Turner, "The Specter of Environmentalism," 134.
 30. Dant, "Making Wilderness Work," 242.
 31. Marsh, *Drawing Lines in the Forest*, 10.
 32. Anderson, "The Rise and Fall of Frank Church"; Dant, "Making Wilderness Work."
 33. D. T. Kuzmiak, "The American Environmental Movement," *The Geographical Journal* 157 (November 1991): 270.
 34. Ibid., 270.
 35. Ibid., 271.
 36. Indeed, the American model of a system of national parks and wilderness areas has been copied in countries around the world, such as India and South Africa, yielding both productive and problematic effects. For a positive spin, see Ken Burns and Dayton Duncan, *The National Parks: America's Best Idea* (Washington, DC: WETA and The National Parks Film Project, LLC, 2009), DVD. For examples of some of the problems with the national parks idea applied internationally, see Kevin Hannam, "Tourism Management Issues in India's National Parks: An Analysis of the Rajiv Gandhi (Nagarahole) National Park," *Current Issues in Tourism* 10 (2005): 165–180; Malcolm Draper, Marja Spierenburg, and Harry Wels, "African Dreams of Cohesion: Elite Pacting and Community Development in Transfrontier Conservation Areas in Southern Africa," *Culture & Organization* 10 (December 2004): 341–353.

37. Dant, "Making Wilderness Work," 251.
38. Paul Matthews, Amy Haak, and Kathryn Toffenetti, "Mining and Wilderness: Incompatible Uses or Justifiable Compromise?" *Environment* 27 (April 85): 12–25.
39. Turner, "The Specter of Environmentalism," 127.
40. Dant, "Making Wilderness Work," 253.
41. Kuzmiak, "The American Environmental Movement," 272.
42. Turner, "The Specter of Environmentalism," 126.
43. Bryan K. Walton and Conner Bailey, "Framing Wilderness: Populism and Cultural Heritage as Organizing Principles," *Society and Natural Resources* 18 (2005): 122.
44. *Ibid.*, 125.
45. James Crosswhite, "Rhetoric in the Wilderness: The Deep Rhetoric of the Late Twentieth Century," in *A Companion to Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism*, ed. Walter Jost and Wendy Olmsted (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006). See also Val Plumwood, "Wilderness Skepticism and Wilderness Dualism," in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, ed. J. Baird Callicott and M. Nelson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998); and William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness, or Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, ed. J. Baird Callicott and M. Nelson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998).
46. Crosswhite, "Rhetoric in the Wilderness," 379, 381.
47. *Ibid.*, 384.
48. Kevin DeLuca, "A Wilderness Environmentalism Manifesto: Contesting the Infinite Self-Absorption of Humans," in *Environmental Justice and Environmentalism: The Social Justice Challenge to the Environmental Movement*, ed. Ronald Sandler and Phaedra Pezzullo (Cambridge: MIT Press). See also Kevin DeLuca, "Truths, Evils, Justice and the Even of Wild(er)ness: Using Badiou to Think the Ethics of Environmentalism," in *The Handbook of Communication Ethics*, ed. G. Chesney, S. May, and D. Munshi (New York: Routledge).
49. Dant, "Making Wilderness Work," 269.
50. *Ibid.*, 261.
51. *Ibid.*
52. Frank Church, "The Sawtooths of Idaho," *Congressional Record* 112 (April 28, 1966; Washington, DC), S3294–S3295.
53. Len B. Jordan, "The 1971 Sawtooth-White Cloud Bill" (statement on the proposed bill, Frank Church Collection, Boise State University, Boise, ID: 1971), MSS 56, Series 8.1, box 19, folder 32.

54. Frank Church, "Sawtooth-White Cloud Bill," *Congressional Record* 117 (March 30, 1971; Washington, DC), S4066-S4068.
55. Dant, "Making Wilderness Work," 252.
56. *Ibid.*, 251.
57. Frank Church, "Statement at Signing of River of No Return Wilderness Bill" (typewritten speech cards, Frank Church Collection, Boise State University, Boise, ID: 1980), MSS 56, Series 8.1, box 30, folder 13.
58. *Ibid.*
59. *Ibid.*
60. Turner, "The Specter of Environmentalism," 128.
61. Marie E. Rosenwasser, "Six Senate War Critics and their Appeals for Gaining Audience Response," *Today's Speech* 17 (September 1969): 43-45.
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63. Dant, "Making Wilderness Work," 237-238.
64. Lee, "Listening to the Land," 240.
65. Matthews, Haak, and Toffenetti, "Mining and Wilderness," 14.
66. Jeff Wheelwright, "Captive Wilderness," *Discover* 27 (August 2006): 42.
67. Patricia Byrnes, "Thinking Things through in Idaho," *Wilderness* 56 (Spring 1993): 7.
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69. Hayes, "What the Public Doesn't Know."

TWELVE

“We will live to piss on their graves”

Edward Abbey, Radical Environmentalism, and the Birth of Earth First!

DEREK G. ROSS



On March 21, 1981, Edward Abbey stood in front of the Glen Canyon Dam in the bed of “Alphonso,” Ken Sanders’s flat black 1954 Chevy pickup¹ and delivered a speech titled, simply, “Remarks, Glen Canyon Dam, Spring Equinox 1981.”² Abbey’s speech, given just after activists unrolled three hundred feet of black plastic from the top of the dam to simulate a crack, marked the first public action of Earth First!,³ and galvanized the nascent, radical wing of the environmental movement.

Abbey’s speech is notable in a number of ways. First, its impact extended far beyond the seventy-five members of Earth First! gathered in front of the Glen Canyon Dam on that day. Filmmakers Christopher (Toby) McLeod, Glen Switkes, and Randy Hayes captured the event on 16-milimeter film with quarter-inch Nagra recording tape⁴ and later edited the film into *The Cracking of Glen Canyon Damn*,⁵ which was used as a marketing tool for the newly minted Earth First!⁶ Second, the speech is very short—a mere 1,643 words—yet metaphorically, anecdotally, and epigrammatically powerful.⁷ Third, Abbey drew upon the potency of the visual to emphasize his words. The most obvious example is the unraveling of three hundred feet of black plastic simulating a crack down the face of the dam, toward which he contributed \$200.00,⁸ but other elements also speak to his awareness of the force of visual representation. Last, research into Abbey’s life and writing suggests that the Abbey we see in front of the Glen Canyon Dam is a carefully crafted persona—perhaps more “Cactus Ed” than Edward Paul Abbey.

In this chapter I consider Abbey's rhetorical situation and the classical, rhetorical construction of his speech, as well as his use of metaphor and popular culture references, visual elements, and carefully crafted persona, to show how on March 21, 1981, Abbey rose as a folk hero to embody his multitudinous roles⁹ of "anarchist, activist, philosopher, and the spiritual founder of the environmental movement."¹⁰ In doing so, I consider Abbey's rhetoric and his construction of persona in order to provide suggestions for scientific, technical, and environmental communicators so that they may develop more effective public arguments.

In order to understand Abbey's speech, however, which draws upon the extensive troubled history of the Glen Canyon Dam to motivate his listeners to "oppose, resist, subvert, [and] delay" the work of "the empire," we first must turn to an examination of the Glen Canyon area and Abbey's biography.

GLEN CANYON

In 1922, representatives from the seven Colorado River Basin states (Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming), along with a representative from the U.S. Department of the Interior, negotiated the Colorado River Compact to mitigate disputes over usage rights to the river.¹¹ Unfortunately, "the flow numbers used in 1922 by the state delegates had been recorded during a few exceptionally wet years."¹² As Jacoby, Weatherford, and Wegner note:

Because little reliable data were available, or could be projected with any certainty . . . , the negotiators were unable to divide the river's flow either on the basis of irrigation potential or by virtue of a percentage formula that would assure each half of the basin a proportionate share of the annual flow.¹³

Concerns and disputes over water allocations, coupled with yearly variations in rainfall in the Southwest and varying seasonal flow rates, led to the Bureau of Reclamation's investigation into ways to manage the Colorado River.

In 1947, the bureau released a compendium of 134 of these potential river management projects titled *The Colorado River: "A Menace Becomes a Natural Resource."* Several ideas the bureau viewed as the most potentially useful were ultimately put together as the Colorado River Storage Project (CRSP).¹⁴ These projects included building a dam at Echo Park on the Green River. This area, however, fell within the

range of Dinosaur National Monument, which had been created in 1915 by President Woodrow Wilson and extended in 1938 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

On April 3, 1950, hearings related to the CRSP and the proposed dam at Echo Park, within Dinosaur National Monument, began. Controversy between the Bureau of Reclamation and numerous environmentalist groups erupted.¹⁵ In the same year, the bureau presented a plan for the CRSP, titled "Colorado River Storage Project and Participating Projects, Upper Colorado River Basin, December 1950,"¹⁶ to the Department of the Interior.

In January of 1954, the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs convened hearings on the Upper Colorado River Storage Project. In an effort to prevent the dam at Echo Park, David R. Brower, then executive director of the Sierra Club, gave testimony questioning the technical expertise of the Bureau of Reclamation's engineers in front of the House Subcommittee on Irrigation and Reclamation.¹⁷ On April 6, 1954, the bureau's report was referred from the assistant secretary of the Interior to the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs and ordered to be printed with illustrations as House Document 364, 83d Congress, 2d session.¹⁸ The first sentence of page one of the report, a statement by President Eisenhower from a March 20, 1954, press release, states, "I have today approved recommendations for the development of the upper Colorado River Basin."¹⁹

In 1955, faced with the inevitability of construction, Brower promoted a high dam at Glen Canyon as an alternative to the Echo Park site.²⁰ Brower's choice was not an easy one, but, along with the Council for Conservationists, the choice was made in order to protect Dinosaur National Monument and win an important environmental battle.²¹ Environmentalists soon came to regret their decision.

On April 11, 1956, the Colorado River Storage Project, including Glen Canyon Dam, was authorized by the U.S. Congress.²² Six months later, on October 15, President Dwight D. Eisenhower officially pressed a ceremonial telegraph key, thereby sending a signal to a technician standing ready at Glen Canyon, who then pressed the plunger that set off the first explosions at the new dam site.²³ Over five million cubic yards of concrete and ten years later,²⁴ Lady Bird Johnson dedicated the finished dam on September 22, 1966.²⁵ By the time the Glen Canyon Dam was finally completed, growing groups of environmentalists had begun to view its construction as a "tragic mistake."²⁶

Among those who viewed the construction of the dam as an affront to nature was Edward Abbey. Abbey's biographer, James Cahalan, writes, "Abbey had wanted to raft the Glen ever since first glimpsing it

in 1953, and he mourned its annihilation as early as May 16, 1956, in Arches.²⁷ In June of 1959, as construction was already underway on the dam, Abbey, along with Ralph Newcomb,²⁸ finally got his chance to float the stretch of the Colorado River flowing through the doomed canyon. This two-week trip was to be “one of the most formative experiences of his life,” and he would spend the rest of his life “raging against this ‘damn’ and ‘Lake Foul.’”²⁹

The “Lake Foul” to which Abbey refers is Lake Powell. Created by the Glen Canyon Dam, the lake (when at full pool) is 186 miles (299 kilometers) long with 1,960 miles (3,150 kilometers) of shoreline. The water is 560 feet (171 meters) deep at the dam when full. The lake is so large that it took seventeen years to fill.³⁰ This is the lake that covers Glen Canyon. Abbey laments the drowning of the canyon in *Desert Solitaire*:

I was one of the lucky few (there could have been thousands more) who saw Glen Canyon before it was drowned. In fact I saw only a part of it but enough to realize that here was an Eden, a portion of the earth’s original paradise. To grasp the nature of the crime that was committed, imagine the Taj Mahal or Chartres Cathedral buried in mud until only the spires remain visible. With this difference: those man-made celebrations of human aspiration could conceivably be reconstructed while the Glen Canyon was a living thing, irreplaceable, which can never be recovered through any human agency.³¹

The Glen Canyon Dam came to figure prominently in Abbey’s writings. His novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, first published in 1975, for example, begins with the destruction of the bridge spanning Glen Canyon, and the first chapter ends with the suggestion that the dam itself is the next target.³² An image of a broken Glen Canyon Dam³³ graced the original cover of his essay collection, *The Journey Home*, published in 1977.³⁴ For Abbey, the *construction* of the Glen Canyon Dam “came to symbolize the *destruction* of the West. From [his 1959 float trip on] Edward Abbey’s writing became a crusade. A crusade to save what was left.”³⁵

EARTH FIRST!

Abbey’s “Remarks, Glen Canyon Dam, Spring Equinox 1981,” have become known as “The Cracking of Glen Canyon Damn,” because of

the title given to the video of his speech that Earth First! used as an early recruitment tool during their Earth First! Road Show.³⁶ According to political scientist Martha Lee, the program included "speeches by [Dave] Foreman and songs by Johnny Sagebrush, as well as a film of 'The Cracking of Glen Canyon Dam.'"³⁷ Lee later notes that "the Road Show effectively achieved all of its goals."³⁸

Earth First! began with a small group of people who felt that "it was time for a new joker in the deck: a militant, uncompromising group unafraid to say what needed to be said or to back it up with stronger actions than the established organizations were willing to take."³⁹ Foreman, one of Earth First!'s cofounders, notes that the name was chosen "because it succinctly summed up the one thing on which we could all agree: That in in *any* decision, consideration for the health of the Earth must come first."⁴⁰ "No compromise in defense of Mother Earth" became the rallying cry for disenfranchised environmentalists fed up with the slow-moving bureaucratic change stemming from the environmental movement of the 1970s.

Though Abbey's *The Monkey Wrench Gang* directly served as inspiration for Earth First!,⁴¹ Abbey and Foreman only met face-to-face for the first time right before the Glen Canyon rally. While some work, such as Cahalan's, suggests that they met the day of the rally (March 21), writer, activist, and purveyor of rare books Ken Sanders puts their meeting at the night before. According to Sanders, Abbey made a rare phone call inviting Sanders out to the Lone Rock Campground just off of Lake Powell "for some kind of Spring rites" and to talk about the creation of an Ed Abbey Wilderness Calendar. As Sanders recalls,

A group of kind of longhaired rednecks with a Volkswagen bus with a big black blob [the roll of plastic] were blocking the way, and they were not very friendly to me. . . . We kind of had a pretty tense situation until later that evening when Cactus Ed himself showed up.

It was only after Abbey arrived that he learned that he was with Dave Foreman and Earth First!, who "gleefully informed [him] of their plans to drop a 300 foot plastic crack down the face of Glen Canyon Dam early the next morning."⁴² The event was successful.

On March 24, 1981, three days after the event, the Associated Press released a newswire headlined "Group Vows to Dismantle Glen Canyon Dam." In it, Earth First! was noted as calling for the dismantling of the dam, the "cracking" of the dam was described, Abbey was quoted

extensively, and Foreman articulated “the need for a militant wing of the environmental movement.”⁴³ In an article published seven months later, Foreman wrote:

The Glen Canyon Caper brought EARTH FIRST! an unexpected degree of media attention. Membership in our group has spiraled to more than a thousand with members from Maine to Hawaii. Even the Government is interested—according to reliable reports, the FBI dusted the entire Glen Canyon Dam crack for fingerprints!⁴⁴

A July 19, 1982, issue of *Newsweek* reported: “In the sixteen months since that prankish debut, Earth First! has grown both in numbers and ambitions.”⁴⁵ In a discussion of the impact of the event, Lee mentions articles in the *Rocky Mountain News*, the *Denver Post*, the *Arizona Republic*, and the *Daily Sentinel*, noting that the *Sentinel* message was “generally uncomplimentary.” The hostile coverage, however, only “served to reaffirm [Earth First!ers’] convictions.”⁴⁶ Christopher Manes, author of *Green Rage*, former Earth First! activist, and associate editor of the *Earth First! Journal*⁴⁷ writes:

The protagonists of the Earth First! movement realized the significance of their actions even at this early stage. “We knew we were making history,” said Mike Roselle [one of Earth First!’s cofounders] years later. “The cracking of the dam was not just a media stunt, it was the real birth of the radical environmental movement—a movement all of us felt *had* to be born if the natural world was going to survive.”

Manes notes that “for years after the event, Earth First! was known as the group that cracked Glen Canyon Dam,” and argues:

[The event] marked a shift from a rearguard strategy to protect wilderness to an affirmative attempt to roll back the artifacts of civilization, to *restore* the world to the point where natural processes such as the flow of rivers could continue. It was the opening shot in a battle between radical environmentalists and the foundations—concrete and spiritual—of industrial society.⁴⁸

Glen Canyon’s troubled history set the stage and Earth First! provided the impetus—but Abbey’s speech ignited a radical new kind of hands-on environmental activism: nonviolent ecotage.

“REMARKS, GLEN CANYON DAM, SPRING EQUINOX 1981,”
OR “THE CRACKING OF GLEN CANYON DAMN”

On March 21, 1981, we see a powerful coalescence of activity enabling a *kairotic* (timely or opportune) moment: a group of disenfranchised environmentalists ready for change meeting in front of a historically powerful monument to industrialization urged onward by the voice of the spiritual founder of radical environmentalism. Abbey appears to have been aware of the potential of the day: An analysis of Abbey’s speech suggests careful crafting to link his spoken words to his appearance and surroundings, and, as Philippon notes, while Abbey “spoke frequently to large groups, often without notes, . . . in this instance he prepared a written text, composed in longhand on the front of seven, yellow, letter-size pages, which he numbered in the upper right-hand corner.” The “remarkable” structure of his speech doubtless results from his numerous previous public appearances,⁴⁹ but also speaks to his education and familiarity with rhetoric and philosophy. This careful speech-crafting allowed Abbey the opportunity to create a fairly polished speech that draws on classical rhetorical structure and appeals, and with thoughtfully selected content.

Abbey’s speech follows a near-textbook pattern: an *exordium*, designed to intrigue the audience; *narratio*, in which he presents the facts of the case; *partitio* and *probatio* (divisions and proofs), the elements where he points out contested points and presents arguments supporting his narrative, elements largely built into the narrative component of his speech; *refutatio*, in which he refutes potential arguments; and a closing *peroratio*, in which he sums up his speech and stirs his audience to action. Along the way we see numerous uses of rhetorical figures, such as *protropes* (calls to action), *polysendeton* (use of conjunctions to create or alter rhythm), *antimetabole* (repetition of words in inverted order), *gradatio* (repetition of the last word of a clause as the first in the next as a way to emphasize magnitude), and *bdelygmia* (expressions of hatred or abhorrence), among others.

Abbey often recycled lines he felt to be effective in his writing,⁵⁰ and analysis of his March 21st speech shows many self-referential moments. In addition to this careful crafting and reuse of language, however, Abbey also adopted his public persona of Cactus Ed—a more dynamic, publically accessible “postmodern cowboy”⁵¹ than his private “shy and unassuming” demeanor.⁵² On March 21, 1981, we see Abbey’s Cactus Ed in full effect.

An examination of McLeod’s video shows a fully bearded Abbey dressed in a manner reminiscent of both the cowboys he championed

and the park ranger he periodically was. His pants are a forest green and belted with his signature buckle.⁵³ He is bundled in a gray-green parka. A blue shirt with wide collar opens to a bright red bandana bound with what appears to be a silver torque and tucked in as a kind of ascot. A khaki-colored cowboy hat with a leather and concho hatband completes the image. He holds his speech just above waist height, his posture upright, shoulders down and back, feet placed roughly shoulder width apart. He appears to be comfortable, yet commanding—a slightly scruffy rabble-rouser who is of the people. He reads from his notes, looking up at his audience from time to time, and his pace is measured. His stage, Sanders's 1954 flat black pickup, "Alphonso," completes the image.

Cactus Ed is one of the disenfranchised. Abbey's audience matches his appearance—puffy vests, jeans, jackets zipped and buttoned against the chill. The colors, with but a few exceptions, are earthy, muted tones—blues, greens, khakis. Abbey stands out against this crowd only because of his stage and his character—not because of his dress. He is not "talking at" this crowd—he is talking with them, as one of them.

As Abbey begins his speech, he establishes himself as someone with local knowledge: "It's nice to be back in Page! Pa-geé! Shithead county of Coconino county." His *exordium* utilizes an *ad populum* (to the people/of the people) approach of crowd appeal. "We are gathered here," he says, "to celebrate three important occasions." He lists "the full moon," "the arrival of the Spring Equinox," and "the imminent removal of the Glen Canyon Dam." This third piece, the removal of the dam, draws from Abbey's personal history, his known hatred of the dam, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, and other writings. He uses the Glen Canyon Dam as a source of argument, a commonplace, a way of bringing an audience to shared understanding. The commonplace of the dam, both physically and rhetorically, allows Abbey to develop an argument of opposition to industrialism, development, and big government.

Abbey's speech immediately moves to an anecdote drawing upon elements recycled from his existing work and the visual impact of the plastic crack on the face of the dam funded by Abbey and enacted by Dave Foreman, Howie Wolke, Tony Moore, Bart Koehler, and Louisa Willcox.⁵⁴ Abbey notes that "some of my born-again friends have been praying very hard lately for one little precision earthquake in this immediate vicinity." This line sharply resembles one from "The Second Rape of the West" (1975), in which Abbey writes: "We pray to God, my friends and I, for a little precision volcanism once again; nothing could do our Southwest more good."⁵⁵ The sentiment apparently stems from a late 1970/early 1971 trip taken by Abbey and his friend Jack

Loeffler. They got out of their truck near the bridge crossing above Lee's Ferry and Marble Canyon, near the Glen Canyon dam, and "knelt and prayed for an earthquake, hoping that the dam would collapse."⁵⁶ In this anecdote Abbey draws his audience into his speech through humor, metaphorical religious invocation, past writings and personal stories, and visual appeals.

Abbey amplifies the dramatic visual of the cracking of Glen Canyon Dam through the invocation of apocalyptic religious imagery: "The ground will shake and that dam will fall, crumble and go, and Glen Canyon Dam as an insult to God's creation, and if there is a God, he or she will soon destroy it, and if there isn't why we will take care of it one way or another, and if we don't then Mother Nature most surely will" (*sic*). His use of parallelism ("if there is," "if there isn't," "if we don't") sets up a rhythmic quality that acts to invigorate the audience.

Abbey draws upon repetitive parallel structuring throughout his speech. Early on, for example, as he outlines the potential rebirth of Glen Canyon, making "full use of the symbolic value of the Spring Equinox,"⁵⁷ he utilizes *polysyndeton* (repetition of coordinating conjunctions) to create the cadence against which his lyrical imagery rests: "These good news will certainly come to pass, the collapse of the Glen Canyon Dam is as inevitable *as* the rising of the moon, *as* the revival of Spring, *as* the flow of the rivers home to the sea" (emphasis added). The beginning of this phrase is also likely a reference to his novel *Good News*, published in 1980, which sets one of his recurrent heroes, Jack Burns, against a postapocalyptic Southwest.⁵⁸

As Abbey moves from *exordium* to *narration*, he offers two *pro-tropes* (calls to action). The first implies sabotage (which would later be reframed by monkeywrenching environmentalists as "ecotage"). He describes an idyllic undammed Glen Canyon, then says, "We prefer not to wait. We want immediate results." The implied suggestion here is that one takes a monkeywrencher's stance, which, as *The Monkey Wrench Gang* suggests, calls for the outright destruction of the dam. He is more direct, however, in his second call to action: "To then, therefore, the impatient and impetuous among you I say sign our petition to Congress demanding the prompt dismantling of Glen Canyon Dam." He continues:

Or, we are reasonable folk, we're willing to compromise, we too believe in balance, if they don't want to tear down the dam immediately, we'll be satisfied if they'll just open the gates and drain Lake Foul. . . . Drain it to the dregs, the bitter dregs, never mind all those sunken houseboats and cabin cruisers, the

skeletons of water skiers, the 50 million jars of fish bait and the 500 million empty beer cans. Time and the wind and the sun and the flood will scour clean this dreary muck coated spectacle of ruin, and restore it again in due course to the green and living wilderness and paradise that Glen Canyon once was only 19 years ago and will be again someday soon.

Here, he once again calls upon the inexorable power of nature to restore Glen Canyon to its former glory. In these lines, however, he offers “compromise,” an interesting word choice given Earth First!’s rallying cry of “No compromise in Defense of Mother Earth.” Abbey’s version of compromise appears to be intentionally ironic, however, given that the option he offers still results in draining the lake. In these lines we also again see Abbey’s penchant for *polysyndeton* (“Time *and* the wind *and* the sun *and* the flood”), as well as what appears to be a reference to the doxological *Gloria Patri* (Abbey’s “once was . . . and will be again” appears derivative of the *Gloria Patri*’s “as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be”). His words reinforce the sacred nature of the now-destroyed Glen Canyon and the inexorable progress—and hope—of nature.

Abbey’s invocation of “only 19 years ago,” which follows his use of religious language and imagery, draws his audience’s attention to the recent destruction of Glen Canyon. In so doing, Abbey utilizes the rhetorical benefits of *kairos*, the right moment in time to make an argument. What was lost was lost recently, perhaps within this audience’s lifetime. They may have just missed their chance to see the wonders he describes, but, as he suggests, if they act quickly they may yet get that chance again. He then reinforces the recent nature of the destruction: “Yes, it was in 1962 only 19 years ago that they closed the bypass tunnels of GC Dam and began the inundation of Glen Canyon, the place that only a few ever knew.” In addition to creating a sense of time, these lines also attack Eliot Porter’s memorial to Glen Canyon *The Place No One Knew*, published in 1963. The book’s title was controversial because, as Abbey reminds the audience, some people *did* know the canyon:

Perhaps a few hundred, a few thousand people were privileged to make that enchanted journey down the Colorado from Hite to Lee’s Ferry through this canyon that Major Powell named Glen. What those people saw was a living flowing river with its riffles and minor rapids nothing serious or difficult. It was in fact a trip that anyone could make on their own with any

kind of equipment. No need for professional guides, or outfitters. From cub scouts to little old lady in inner tubes [*sic*], with or without life jackets, with nothing but a highway roadmap anybody could do it.

In the original preface to *The Place No One Knew* ("The Exploration of Glen Canyon"), Eliot Porter writes, "I had heard Glen Canyon described, by those who planned to reserve that part of the river for hydroelectric power development, as an unspectacular, gently flowing stretch of the riffle unruffled by significant rapids."⁵⁹ The bureaucracy used this deprecating language as justification for building a dam. In the speech, however, Abbey uses it to remind his audience of the canyon's previous accessibility, thereby painting the canyon as gentle and innocent, language which sets the government up as an abuser, or as a rapist, which Abbey had more directly noted in his 1975 piece, "The Second Rape of the West."

At roughly his halfway point, Abbey builds the impression of a canyon full of life and beauty. "It was a living place," he writes. He gives a sense of immensity and abundance through a litany of life and repetition of the word "plus" and the phrase "all this":

Not only deer and lion, but also fox and beaver, coyote and big-horn, bullfrogs and gopher snakes, great horned owl and great blue heron, wood ibis, killdeer, sandpipers, hawks and eagles. Plus the ancient human history of the canyon, the hundreds of ruins, granaries, shelters and villages left by the Anasazi, and the priceless rock art of pictograph and petroglyph. All this you could have known in Glen Canyon, plus a scenic grandeur equal to if different from the Grand Canyon or Desolation Canyon, or Hells Canyon or Big Bend. All this plus the sweetness and adventure and wonder of an unspoiled wilderness. All this and much, much more.

From this affirmation of life and growth and beauty, Abbey moves his audience toward his *refutatio*, which serves to anticipate and refute an opponent's arguments. Here, Abbey invalidates potential arguments by painting a grim picture of an apocalyptic future:

Well they took it away from us, the politicians of Arizona, Utah, New Mexico, and Colorado in cahoots with the land developers, the city developers, the industrial developers of the Southwest, stole this treasure from us in order to pursue and

promote their crackpot ideology of Growth, Profit, and Power. Growth for the sake of power, power for the sake of growth. We can now see that Glen Canyon was merely a step towards the urbanizing, industrializing, and probably the militarizing of the American West.

By stating that “they took it away from us,” Abbey implies that nature is democratic—it belongs to everyone who does not seek to spoil it for gain. He uses metaphors of thievery, such as “took” and “stole,” to suggest that this taking—by members of the original 1922 Colorado River Compact in particular, and developers in general—was unjustified. His use of *antimetabole* (inversion of exact words in “growth for the sake of power, power for the sake of growth”) draws attention to the all-consuming, cancerous⁶⁰ nature of industrialism and development and builds his narrative toward a powerful anti-dam statement.

Abbey proclaims, “Surely no man-made structure in modern American history has been hated so much, by so many, for so long, with such good reason as Glen Canyon Dam.” This phrase, which, according to McLeod’s film, Abbey ends with a gesture toward the dam itself, recalls a phrase from Winston Churchill’s August 20, 1940, wartime speech made to the House of Commons. Churchill states, “Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.”⁶¹ Abbey invokes militaristic rhetoric here to inspire his audience to action—his progression from gentle canyon full of life belonging to all, to stolen property, to invocation of wartime rhetoric deliberately attacking industrial construction, delivered literally at the face of the dam, pulls visual and deliberative rhetoric and militaristic metaphor together to emphasize the urgency of his appeal. Abbey continues, mimicking his earlier litany of life with a litany of destruction:

The industrialization, urbanization, and militarization of the American West continues, more dams are proposed, more coal-burning and nuclear power plants projected, an MX system that would desolate much of Nevada and western Utah, more river diversion projects, more strip mining of our mountains, clear cutting of our forests, the misuse of water, the abuse of the land. All for the sake of short-term profit. All to keep the industrial military empire going and growing until it finally reaches the point when it must self-destruct and destroy itself. I predict that the military industrial state will eventually collapse, both here and abroad, whether capitalist, socialist, or communist, either by war or by internal contradiction.

In these lines we see Abbey invoking both the philosophy of Lewis Mumford and the allegorical/romantic human versus machines theme so prevalent throughout Abbey’s writing. For example, Abbey had written about the impact of the MX system on the American West in *Fire on the Mountain* (published in 1962),⁶² and the self-destruction of the military-industrial state serves as the backdrop for *Good News* (1980). As Killingsworth and Palmer write:

Abbey developed . . . an informal framework for action based loosely on a romantic allegory—the human versus the machine. In pursuing this theme, he rebels against the instrumentation, the rationalization, the bureaucratization of modern life as first described in Weber’s original portrait of the “iron cage” of instrumental rationality and as developed later in the major work of Lewis Mumford.⁶³

Much of Abbey’s anti-industrialist philosophy seems to have been shaped by Mumford’s work, whom Abbey described as “the one living American author who fully deserves the Nobel Prize for literature.”⁶⁴ In the prologue to volume 1 of *The Myth of the Machine*, for example, Mumford writes:

In terms of the currently accepted picture of the relation of man to technics, our age is passing from the primeval state of man, marked by his invention of tools and weapons for the purpose of achieving mastery over the forces of nature, to a radically different condition, in which he will have not only conquered nature, but detached himself as far as possible from the organic habitat.⁶⁵

By the epilogue of volume 2, Mumford concludes:

Fortunately there already are many indications, though scattered, faint, and often contradictory, that a fresh cultural transformation is in the making: one which will recognize that the money economy is bankrupt, and the power complex has become, through its very excesses and exaggerations, impotent.⁶⁶

We see this same progression—inevitable rise of industrialism followed by inevitable industrial collapse and resurgence of humanity—in Abbey’s speech, as well as many of his other works.⁶⁷

As Abbey begins to conclude his speech, he pulls again and again from existing works and authors. He notes that “all creatures great and

small, animal and plant, have the inherent, basic self-evident right to exist, to be, to live out their lives in their own manner to produce posterity and pursue happiness in their own individual ways.” These lines contain a likely reference to either Cecil Frances Alexander’s “Maker of Heaven and Earth (All Things Bright and Beautiful),”⁶⁸ or, alternatively, Alf Wight’s (James Herriot’s) book *All Creatures Great and Small*, first published in 1972⁶⁹ (or the British television show of the same name, which began airing in 1978).⁷⁰ Additionally, Abbey’s language recalls elements of the United States’ Declaration of Independence in his references to a “self-evident right” and the pursuit of happiness.⁷¹ The polysemous nature of his phrasing in this section is important as it allows audience members from different backgrounds to engage with his references toward a shared understanding of his mission. As the language could refer to a song, a book, a television show, and/or the Declaration of Independence, the phrase would almost certainly resonate, on some level, with the bulk of his audience.

After noting that “human life is a part and only a part of the great web of life, and that all life depends first and foremost upon the preservation of a livable earth,” Abbey asks: “What is the use of building a great city if you haven’t got a tolerable planet to build it on? Earth first!” The question is a rephrasing of Henry David Thoreau’s line—“What is the use of a house if you haven’t got a tolerable planet to put it on?—If you cannot tolerate the planet that it is on?”—from his letter to Harrison Blake (May 20, 1860), published in *Familiar Letters*.⁷² Thoreau had long been a hero of Abbey’s,⁷³ and the phrase thus serves as a fitting preface to the rallying cry (and budding organization), “Earth First!”

Following his invocation of Thoreau and acknowledgment of Earth First!, Abbey states that “the domination of nature leads to the domination of human beings,” which may refer to William Leiss’s *The Domination of Nature*, originally published in 1972. The book was fairly well known as important literature during the early years of the post-Earth Day/1970s environmental movement. Specifically, Abbey’s language is reminiscent of Leiss’s note that “if the idea of the *domination* of nature has any meaning at all, it is that by such means—that is, through the possession of superior technological capabilities—some men attempt to dominate and control other men.”⁷⁴

In his *peroratio*, the summing up and conclusion of his speech, Abbey again calls for action. After asking, “What to do?” he tells his audience to, “Oppose. Oppose the destruction of our homeland by these alien forces from Houston, Tokyo, Manhattan, Washington DC, and the Pentagon. And if opposition isn’t enough, we must resist. And if resistance is not enough, then subvert!” This abbreviated *gradatio* (use

of the last word of a clause as the first of the next to emphasize magnitude) draws his audience’s attention to the mission he sets out for them—a mission he repeats after reminding his audience once again of the imminent threat:

After 10 years of modest environmental progress, the powers of industrialism and militarism have become alarmed. The empire is striking back. So we must continue to strike back at the empire by whatever means available to us. Win or lose it’s a matter of honor. Oppose, resist, subvert, delay, until the empire itself begins to fall apart.

In his call to fight the empire, he draws from popular culture to invoke Lucas’s *The Empire Strikes Back*, released on May 21, 1980.⁷⁵ Given Abbey’s own characters, he likely felt a connection with the rebels fighting the cinematic evil Empire. This is not Abbey’s only reference to Lucas’s movies—in the version of “MX” published in *Down the River* (1984), he makes reference to “the military’s new *Star Wars* toys,”⁷⁶ a reference absent from the version published in *Rolling Stone* only three days before his speech.⁷⁷

Abbey’s advocacy of “strik[ing] back at the empire by whatever means available to us” draws from his own extensive research on anarchism and violence. In his master’s thesis, “Anarchism and the Morality of Violence” (1959), Abbey noted, “The more strongly our engineers, statisticians, industrialists and politicians strive to impose upon the world of man and nature their rigid scheme, the more radical and therefore the more dangerous will be the necessary revolt against them.”⁷⁸ He later writes:

Through revolution, directed by the appropriate ideals, these institutions [social, created by man] can be abolished and the original order of things restored. Therefore, revolution, meaning revolutionary violence, is justified. Reducing the argument to such simple terms, we appear to be dealing in absolutes—an absolute good, and [an] absolute evil. But there is nothing in the orthodox anarchist doctrine incompatible with the substitution. For these apparent absolutes, of the relative and the degree; *revolution can be justified on the grounds that it makes possible the transition from a state of relatively great injustice in human affairs to a state or condition or relatively minor injustice (or suffering, or disorder) in human affairs.* If the difference in degree is sufficient, in this view, then the midwifery of violence

is defensible. The difference in degree must be great, of course, for if it is not the use of violence [*sic*] means—now assumed to be in itself and evil—is not justified [*sic*].⁷⁹

Note that while Abbey advocates resistance and subversion, in his academic study of justifications of violence, the anarchists he studied (Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Sorel, Goldman, and Camus) “failed to justify violence.”⁸⁰ Hence his advocacy of opposition and subversion in a speech that could easily have been designed to provoke human-against-human violence. He stirs the crowd to action by calling on them to, “Oppose, resist, subvert, [and] delay,” but throughout his speech, he avoids language that calls for violent action, such as “fight” and “attack.” He even leaves “destroying” to God (early in the speech), and the military-industrial complex (toward the end).

As his speech closes, Abbey gives his audience hope and encourages enjoyment of nature and the outlasting of nature’s enemies. He concludes:

Enjoy the great American West, what’s left of it, climb those mountains, run those rivers, hike those canyons, explore those forests, and share in the beauty of wilderness, friendship, love, and the common effort to save what we love. Do this and we’ll be strong and bold and happy. We will outlive our enemies, and as my good old grandmother used to say, “We’ll live to piss on their graves.” Thank you.

Never one to avoid a story, his speech concludes with a line attributed to his grandmother.⁸¹ Abbey would never have met either of his grandmothers, or at least would not likely remember anything they used to say (at least from their own lips). Clara, his maternal grandmother, died in 1925, and Eleanor, his paternal grandmother, died within six years of Abbey’s parent’s marriage.⁸² As Cahalan notes, the grandmother reference is, in fact, borrowed from Abbey’s good friend John De Puy.⁸³ As a conclusion, however, it serves as an act of reported speech, designed to “[frame] information in a way that communicates effectively and creates involvement.”⁸⁴ The familial reporting serves as a colloquial way of sharing a “family” message, which aids memory by contrasting strongly with Abbey’s pithy (and antagonistic) statement of perseverance and strength: “We’ll live to piss on their graves.”

Pissing on their graves, for Abbey, may be somewhat less metaphorical than we’d initially expect. In his fifteenth journal (February 1974–October 1977) he quotes De Puy as saying, “I’ll live to piss on

your grave" to a young mocker.⁸⁵ Thus, the entire "as my good old grandmother" segment may be nothing more than Abbey utilizing a good friend's pithy language. Cahalan notes, however, that for Abbey outdoor urination served as a privacy test—"when [it] was no longer feasible, it was time to move on," and Abbey once told an interviewer, "If you can't pee in your own front yard, you live too close to the city."⁸⁶ Additionally, several sources, such as Christer Lindh's *Abbey's Web*, quote Abbey's advice on "how to overthrow the system," which includes the advice to "build your own cabin and piss off the front porch whenever you bloody well feel like it."⁸⁷ Abbey invokes this same cabin/porch imagery in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*.⁸⁸

For Abbey, outdoor urination was symbolic of freedom. To "piss on their graves," however, also indicates lack of respect. Rhetorically, "We'll live to piss on their graves" is an example of *bdelygmia*: "expressing hatred and abhorrence of a person, word, or deed."⁸⁹ Abbey's conclusion is humorous, sharp, shocking, and memorable, but also deeply symbolic. When the abhorred military-industrial complex has fallen apart and their enemies are dead, Abbey and his friends will once again have the freedom to enjoy the outdoors as they see fit.

SYNOPSIS

James Cantrill suggests that "our ability to preserve the environment depends on collective action."⁹⁰ Abbey's speech motivates this collective action through the metaphors and anecdotes he utilizes to convey a complex narrative of loss and hope, along with his use of the visual and his persona. As Philippon notes:

The text is remarkably well structured, suggesting that Abbey's previous public appearances had taught him how to craft an effective speech with ease. It also underscores Abbey's skills as not only a natural history writer (although he hated that label) but also a political activist (although he claimed not to be one), seeing how the speech moves effortlessly from a lyrical description of Glen Canyon to a stirring call to arms in defense of the American West.⁹¹

Abbey's speech invokes rhetorics of culture, environmentalism, institutionalism, and activism that ultimately motivated his audience to sign petitions, join organizations, and express their outrage.

The metaphors Abbey uses are carefully structured to portray the canyon as innocent, idyllic, and full of life. He draws upon numerous religious elements to suggest that while there is a metanarrative about the eventual and inevitable rebirth of the canyon, the listeners must act if they wish to see this rebirth in their lifetimes. He uses agonistic militaristic metaphors to show how the military-industrial state has raped the canyon and trampled the American West underfoot. These metaphors all intersect, creating metaphorical coherence and cross-metaphorical correspondence.⁹² The result is a metanarrative of the destruction of innocence and the potential of a postapocalyptic wasteland tempered by the hope that all of this can be avoided and the promise that nature will ultimately win. The audience is encouraged to outlast (and oppose) the temporary human machine that must ultimately fall to the triumph of nature.

Through a series of experiments on the effectiveness of exordial (introductory) techniques, Andeweg, de Jong, and Hoeken show that anecdotes promote an audience's willingness to listen to a speech. As they note, the anecdote "is not a story about the speaker or in which the speaker plays the main character. Instead, the story focuses on the subject matter and describes an incident or event that gets the attention of the audience."⁹³ Abbey's early prayer for a "precision earthquake" fits this description. The content is striking—when coupled with what DeLuca describes as an "image event,"⁹⁴ in this case, the "crack" on the face of the dam, the effect would be unforgettable.

An image event transforms the way people view their world.⁹⁵ These events subvert social ideologies and expectations by forcing viewers to reconceive the very nature of the elements that interact in their world. Greenpeace navigates tiny rubber boats in front of gigantic whaling ships. Earth First!ers bury themselves in roadways up to their necks. Environmentalists like Julia "Butterfly" Hill live in trees. These events, "crystallized philosophical fragments, mind bombs,"⁹⁶ strike at the public consciousness, causing viewers to rethink the way their world works. In this case, Earth First! cracks the Glen Canyon Dam.

Leary and Allen suggest that people are typically attuned to how others view them and strive to convey themselves as they believe will lead to desired outcomes.⁹⁷ Here, Abbey's Cactus Ed persona serves to catalyze image event and anecdote. Edward Abbey was above all else a writer (he considered himself a "working novelist")⁹⁸ who was privately "shy, somber, and self-conscious,"⁹⁹ yet publicly "racy and sardonic."¹⁰⁰ Cactus Ed was Abbey's larger-than-life "eco-cowboy"¹⁰¹ persona, which presented Abbey as "a spunky, independent outdoorsman and thinker"¹⁰² who could be "quite different from his private self."¹⁰³ In 1976, Abbey himself noted,

The Edward Abbey of my books¹⁰⁴ is largely a fictional creation: the true adventures of an imaginary person. The *real* Edward Abbey? I think I hardly know him. A shy, retiring, very timid fellow, obviously. Somewhat of a recluse, emerging rarely from his fictional den only when lured by money, vice, the prospect of applause.¹⁰⁵

The real Abbey we see in front of the dam may be an Abbey "lured by the prospect of applause" but also by his love for the American West and his hatred of the Glen Canyon Dam. His public persona lets him engage with his audience in a performance that both meets their expectations and inspires action. Indeed, Goffman's examination of performance and persona may help us understand how the Cactus Ed version of Abbey works.¹⁰⁶

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman notes, "When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them."¹⁰⁷ This impression allows the performer to productively interact with an audience. In the performance/interaction, the performer "knowingly and unwittingly projects a definition of the situation, of which the conception of himself is an important part."¹⁰⁸ Abbey-as-writer crafts a metaphorically and anecdotally rich speech designed to inspire action. The Earth First! audience, however, does not want to see a quiet writer reading—they want environmental polemic. The audience has come to this place for spectacle, for action. As Goffman notes, "When an event occurs which is expressly incompatible with [the] fostered impression [in this case, the audience expects the dynamic Abbey they have met through writings like *The Monkey Wrench Gang* and *Desert Solitaire*], significant consequences are simultaneously felt in three levels of social reality."¹⁰⁹

These three levels, personality, interaction, and social structure, can be taken as follows: if the audience "sense[s] a false note in the situation,"¹¹⁰ they may become disgruntled and dialogue fails. In this case, if Abbey's audience thinks Abbey is lying about his beliefs, the history of the dam, or any of the rest of it, they will cease to listen, so Abbey's Cactus Ed *looks* credible (like one of them), recounts known history, and speaks in a manner the audience associates with activism. Second, if the audience does not accept the performer's performance "as evidence of his capacity to perform [any] routine," then the performer's reputation fails.¹¹¹ Here, if the audience does not believe in Abbey's desire to destroy the dam and the empire and reclaim the American West, then their loss of faith leads to lack of action. Abbey's performance creates

a believable impression—he looks and sounds outdoorsy and virile, capable of performing the monkeywrenching and civil disobedience his books espouse. Last, if the performer fails in his performance, his own ego, identification with social groups, and self-conception may fail.¹¹² If Abbey cannot get the audience to believe in his sincerity and motivate his audience to action, he loses his ability to identify with (and interact with) the groups that he needs both as audience and activists.¹¹³ Abbey-the-writer can write the words to inspire, but the audience (and Abbey himself) needs the rough-and-ready, of-the-people Cactus Ed to complete the scene in front of the dam.¹¹⁴

This is not to say that Cactus Ed is purely fictional. Rather, Cactus Ed is Abbey's public face. His audience identification techniques indicate an effort to "self-symbolize," to "engage in public behaviors that indicate the possession of identity-relevant characteristics."¹¹⁵ Cactus Ed, then, appears to be a "desirable identity image," what Abbey "thinks he . . . *could and should be*."¹¹⁶ Cactus Ed fits Abbey's self-identification with the American West—in appearance and attitude, this writer from Indiana, Pennsylvania,¹¹⁷ becomes a Western postmodern cowboy capable of telling his story and motivating his audience through his public persona as much as through his words.¹¹⁸

In his speech, Abbey utilizes what Beason describes as the "signaled ethos," in which "the communicator's persona is moved to the forefront of the message."¹¹⁹ This allows the audience to connect the text of the presentation with the character of the presenter. Self-referential language, such as "I," "we," and "my" (eight such instances occur before Abbey even finishes his introductory anecdote), "carries with it the potential for audiences to discern something about a communicator's persona and be influenced by it."¹²⁰ Because Abbey fits in with his crowd,¹²¹ and identifies with his crowd,¹²² he can be seen as one of them, not as of the institution. This is perhaps the most effective element of his persona. As Peters, Covello, and McCallum show through their survey on perceptions of trust and credibility, "Defying a negative stereotype is key to improving perceptions of trust and credibility."¹²³ Abbey does not present in a suit and tie (his professor persona), nor does he present in his ranger's greens. Instead he blends in and becomes one of the disenfranchised.

When we put all of these elements together—Abbey's careful attention to the rhetorical construction of his speech; his use of metaphor, anecdote, and cultural references; and his application of persona, awareness of image, and use of performance; we are left with a brief yet dizzyingly complex instance in the history of radical environmentalism. Were all of these elements carefully planned? In some cases, yes, in

others, likely no. As experts and specialists from various fields have noted, however, expertise and practice enable rapid, often rhetorically savvy performance,¹²⁴ and this is likely what we are seeing on this day: an expert rhetor masterfully adapting to a moment in time.

CONCLUSION

In a 2012 speech on Ed Abbey, his friend Ken Sanders took a moment to pause, look off into the distance, and speak to Ed:

I got to tell you Ed, I don't know I mean, I don't know. I mean, I think I do know what you'd think of some of what's going on now, I'm just not sure that your old-school monkeywrenching, you know, burning down billboards, and wrecking bulldozers, is really going to have any impact anymore. Ed, the stakes, as always, have gotten more and more serious, and the issues have gotten, I think, more frightening.¹²⁵

Environmentalists have a lot more work to do. Scientific, technical, and environmental communicators would do well to consider lessons gained from Abbey's speech. Know your audience. Dress the part. Act the part. Use your environment. Carefully craft your message. Draw upon words and phrases that have worked for you in the past. Tell a story. Use powerful imagery. Use metaphors to create a message that is bigger than your speech. We can't all be Edward Abbey, but we all can play a little Cactus Ed.

NOTES

The author thanks Christopher (Toby) McLeod for his generous contribution of the unique transcript and Ken Sanders for his recollections. He is also grateful for the help provided by Sarah Stude and Jaena Alabi.

Segments of this chapter regarding the history of the Glen Canyon Dam were originally published in “Dam Visuals: The Changing Visual Argument for the Glen Canyon Dam.”¹²⁶

1. Ken Sanders, personal communication, February 24, 2012.
2. Daniel J. Philippon, “Edward Abbey's Remarks at the Cracking of Glen Canyon Dam,” *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 11 (2004): 161–166.

3. Daniel J. Philippon, *Conserving Words: How American Nature Writers Shaped the Environmental Movement* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 220.
4. Toby McLeod, personal communication, January 18, 2012.
5. *The Cracking of Glen Canyon Dam*, produced by Christopher McLeod, Glen Switkes, and Randy Hayes (Berkeley: Sacred Land Film Project, 1982), partially available at <http://www.sacredland.org/glen-canyon-damn/>.
6. Martha Frances Lee, *Earth First! Environmental Apocalypse* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 48.
7. The transcript used for this analysis was graciously provided by Christopher (Toby) McLeod, project director of the Sacred Land Film Project, one of the filmmakers who captured the footage eventually edited into the film *The Cracking of Glen Canyon Dam*. The transcript is from Abbey's speech, not his notes, and contains approximately 147 changes (insertions, deletions, and rephrasings) to the written version published by Philippon in 2004. I have corrected the transcript in places for spelling and punctuation problems (rarely) but only when these changes did not substantively alter the transcript. Christopher McLeod, Glen Switkes, and Randy Hayes's *The Cracking of Glen Canyon Dam* allowed visual analysis of the speech.
8. Christopher Manes, *Green Rage: Radical Environmentalism and the Unmaking of Civilization* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990), 6.
9. James Hepworth and Gregory McNamee, editors of *Resist Much, Obey Little: Some Notes on Edward Abbey* (Tucson: Harbinger House, 1989), offer an excellent snapshot of Abbey:

He was a deeply generous man, one of the most generous we have ever known: he was absolutely unsparring of his time, his money, his intelligence, himself. He thrived on thunderous argument, and, although God knows he could be gruff, he was never discourteous waging them. He inspired and influenced generations of writers, artists, ecologists, and desert rats. . . . He was always sharing some discovery or another, some new novel or painting or essay or mountain trail. He loved good cigars, difficult books of twentieth-century continental philosophy, discussions that went late into the evening, slow country tunes back-to-back with selections from Brahms and Mozart or from the composer he called his hero, Charles Ives. He was fond of thick, grilled, bloody steaks, although he hated the corrupt

ranching industry that thrives, subsidized by the American taxpayer, on our public lands. He despised fakery, cowardice, the usual pieties. He applauded deliberation, honorable action, the unfettered mind. He held little sacred, and he vigorously tested the convictions of his friends and opponents alike, probing, questioning, arguing. . . . Ed contained multitudes, and he will be remembered in as many ways as there are people who came to know him. (vii–viii)

10. Edward Abbey, *Confessions of a Barbarian: Selections from the Journals of Edward Abbey, 1951–1989*, ed. David Peterson (New York: Little, Brown, 1994), flyleaf.
11. University of Colorado at Boulder, *Western Water Assessment: The Challenge of Supply and Demand*, http://wwa.colorado.edu/colorado_river/law.html.
12. Jared Farmer, *Glen Canyon Dammed: Inventing Lake Powell and the Canyon Country* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999), 134.
13. Gordon C. Jacoby Jr., Gary D. Weatherford, and Judith W. Wegner, “Law, Hydrology, and Surface-Water Supply in the Upper Colorado River Basin,” *Water Resources Bulletin: American Water Resources Association* 12 (1976): 977.
14. Farmer, *Glen Canyon Dammed*, 134.
15. Jon M. Cosco, *Echo Park: Struggle for Preservation* (Boulder: Johnson Books, 1995), 30–41.
16. U.S. Congressional Serial Set, “Serial Set Vol. No. 11772 Vol. No. 8, 83rd Congress, 2nd Session, H. Doc. 364,” 332, http://docs.newsbank.com/openurl?ctx_ver=z39.88-2004&rft_id=info:sid/iw.newsbank.com:SERIAL&rft_val_format=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:ctx&rft_dat=12325EF1434AE540&svc_dat=Digital:ssetdoc&req_dat=0D1ACF8ED510FC2A.
17. Cosco, *Echo Park*, 68–79.
18. U.S. Congressional Serial Set, “Serial Set Vol. No. 11772 Vol. No. 8, 83rd Congress, 2nd Session, H. Doc. 364.”
19. *Ibid.*, 1.
20. Cosco, *Echo Park*, 85.
21. Bruce J. Weaver, “David Defeats Goliath on the Banks of the Delaware: Rhetorical Legitimacy and the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area Debate,” in *The Environmental Communication Yearbook*, ed. Susan L. Senecah (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005), 2:137.
22. U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, *Glen*

- Canyon Dam and Powerplant: Technical Record of Design and Construction* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970), 3.
23. Cosco, *Echo Park*, 91.
 24. David P. Billington and Donald C. Jackson, *Big Dams and the New Deal Era: A Confluence of Engineering and Politics* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 295.
 25. Russell Martin, *A Story That Stands Like a Dam: Glen Canyon and the Struggle for the Soul of the West* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1999), 275.
 26. Billington and Jackson, *Big Dams*, 296.
 27. James M. Cahalan, *Edward Abbey: A Life* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2001), 74.
 28. Abbey writes of Newcomb: “Ralph Newcomb—a genuine full-blooded human being, and consequently somewhat of an anachronism in modern commercial-atomic America. A kind of misfit, like I hope I am. . . . Huckleberry Finn Newcomb. One of the half-dozen people I really know and really like.” Abbey, *Confessions of a Barbarian*, 77.
 29. Cahalan, *Edward Abbey*, 73.
 30. U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, Upper Colorado Region, Colorado River Storage Project, *Glen Canyon Dam Quick Facts*, <http://www.usbr.gov/uc/rm/crsp/gc/gcFacts.html>.
 31. Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 152.
 32. Edward Abbey, *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (Salt Lake City: Dream Garden Press, 1999), 11–16.
 33. Jim Stiles first penned the image of a blown-up Glen Canyon Dam and gave it to Ed in 1975. Cahalan, *Edward Abbey*, 167. Abbey’s first response on seeing the image was to say, “It’s Floyd Dominy Falls!” Jim Stiles, “A Few Words of Praise for a Reluctant Hero,” *The Zephyr*, <http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com/blog/2012/01/29/ed-abbey-birthday-january-29-1927-he-would-have-been-85-years-old-today-an-essay-by-stiles-on-abbey-from-1999/>. (Dominy was the head of the Bureau of Reclamation from 1959–1971 and built many dams on the Colorado River, among them the dam at Glen Canyon.)
 34. Edward Abbey, *The Journey Home: Some Words in Defense of the American West* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1977).
 35. *Edward Abbey: A Voice in the Wilderness*, directed by CreateSpace (Canyon Productions, 2010), 13:28; emphasis added.
 36. As described by Lee, who quotes from the *Earth First! Newsletter*

- 1.6, the Earth First! Road Show was “a three month tour of the United States that was intended to ‘spread public awareness of Earth First!, help organize EF! affiliates throughout the country, recruit more EF! members, and, especially, pull EF! members together and get their ideas.” Lee, *Earth First!*, 48.
37. “Johnny Sagebrush” was Bart Koehler’s stage name. Koehler was a founding member of Earth First! Manes, *Green Rage*, 4. At one point, he served as the Wyoming representative for the Wilderness Society. Dave Foreman, *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior* (New York: Harmony, 1991), 17–18.
 38. Lee, *Earth First!*, 48.
 39. Dave Foreman, “Earth First!,” *The Progressive* (October 1981): 40.
 40. Foreman, *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior*, 18–19.
 41. See Foreman, *Earth First!*, 41, and *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior*, 18.
 42. Ken Sanders, “Ed Abbey, Earth First!, the Monkey Wrench Gang and Me: Musings on the Late Author of *Desert Solitaire* and *The Monkey Wrench Gang*,” presented at the Friends of the Marriott Library Books and Authors Series, <http://stream.scl.utah.edu/index.php?c=details&id=8611>.
 43. “Group Vows to Dismantle Glen Canyon Dam,” Associated Press (March 24, 1981).
 44. Foreman, *Earth First!*, 42. Manes also notes that the FBI dusted the plastic for fingerprints, “apparently with no results.” Manes, *Green Rage*, 6.
 45. “The Ecological Green Berets,” *Newsweek* (July 19, 1982): 26.
 46. Lee, *Earth First!*, 46–48.
 47. Christopher Manes Biography, <http://activistcash.com/biography.cfm/b/3463-christopher-manes>.
 48. Manes, *Green Rage*, 7–8.
 49. Philippon, “Edward Abbey’s Remarks at the Cracking of Glen Canyon Dam,” 161.
 50. Cahalan, *Edward Abbey*, 169.
 51. *Ibid.*, images.
 52. *Ibid.*, 174.
 53. Many pictures of Ed show that he favored this particular buckle. It appears to be the same buckle he is seen wearing with his ranger friends along the El Camino del Diablo in 1969 and with his friend William Eastlake in 1984 (Cahalan, *Edward Abbey*, images). The buckle itself is silverish, with rays extending from the left and right and scrollwork on the top and bottom reminiscent of the vultures that Abbey so loved. The design suggests Navajo craftsmanship.

- The buckle could fairly be called mid-sized—Ed wouldn't have likely worn a large one. As he wrote, "Cowboy's, yahoos and red-necks: the bigger the belt buckle, the smaller the cock, say the girls." Abbey, *Confessions of a Barbarian*, 327.
54. Philippon, "Edward Abbey's Remarks at the Cracking of Glen Canyon Dam," 162. There is some debate in the literature about who actually unrolled the plastic. Lee notes that the act was carried out by "four men and one woman." Lee, *Earth First!*, 45. Manes lists "Foreman, Wolke, Spurs Jackson, and three other Earth First'ers." Manes, *Green Rage*, 5–6.
 55. Edward Abbey, "The Second Rape of the West," *Playboy* 22 (December 1975): 138, 194.
 56. Cahalan, *Edward Abbey*, 138.
 57. Philippon, "Edward Abbey's Remarks at the Cracking of Glen Canyon Dam," 161.
 58. The Glen Canyon Dam appears anecdotally in *Good News* (first published in 1980) when Burns (who also appeared in *The Brave Cowboy* and *The Monkey Wrench Gang*) is trying to convince his son that he (Burns) is actually his father. "My father was a lunatic," his son responds. "Deserted my mother. Killed himself trying to blow up a dam." Edward Abbey, *Good News* (New York: Plume, 1991), 150.
 59. Eliot Porter, *The Place No One Knew (Commemorative Edition)* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 2000), 6.
 60. Abbey was often quoted as saying, "Growth is the ideology of the cancer cell." He first introduced this concept (growth as cancer) in *Desert Solitaire* (see, e.g., 127). Cahalan, *Edward Abbey*, 38 and 131.
 61. Winston Churchill, "The Few" (speech delivered at the House of Commons, August 20, 1940), The Churchill Centre and Museum at the Churchill War Rooms, London, <http://www.winstonchurchill.org/learn/speeches/speeches-of-winston-churchill/113-the-few>.
 62. Edward Abbey, *Fire on the Mountain* (New York: Avon, 1992).
 63. M. Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline S. Palmer, *Ecospoken: Rhetoric and Environmental Politics in America* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992), 224.
 64. Edward Abbey, "Abbey on Books—and Gurus," in *The Earth First! Reader: Ten Years of Radical Environmentalism*, ed. John Davis (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1991), 156.
 65. Lewis Mumford, *The Myth of the Machine: Technics and Human Development* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967), 3.

66. Lewis Mumford, *The Myth of the Machine: The Pentagon of Power* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), 429.
67. Abbey’s *Good News*, for example, begins in the postapocalyptic remains of industrialized society and examines family, love, and revolution in the wake of societal collapse. Abbey’s ever-hopeful philosophy of rebirth is shown when Glenn, a musician, is asked what he’ll do with himself as his group of friends prepares to move on. He replies, “I’m staying right here until the world becomes sane again.” Abbey, *Good News*, 238.
68. The poem begins: “All things bright and beautiful,/All creatures great and small,/All things wise and wonderful,/The Lord God made them all.” Cecil Frances Alexander, “Maker of Heaven and Earth,” <https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/html/1807/4350/poem9.html>.
69. James Herriot, *All Creatures Great and Small* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2004).
70. *All Creatures Great and Small* (British Broadcasting Corporation, 1978–1990).
71. The Declaration of Independence states, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”
72. Henry David Thoreau, *Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau*, ed. Franklin Benjamin Sanborn (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1894), 416.
73. Cahalan, *Edward Abbey*, 163.
74. William Leiss, *The Domination of Nature* (Buffalo: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994), 123.
75. *Star Wars: Episode V—The Empire Strikes Back*, directed by Irvin Kershner (Lucasfilm, 1980).
76. Edward Abbey, *Down the River* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1982), 90.
77. Edward Abbey, “Before the Boom: A Last Look at the Towns and Trails in the Shadow of MX,” *Rolling Stone* 339 (March 19, 1981): 22–23.
78. Edward Abbey, “Anarchism and the Morality of Violence” (master’s thesis, University of New Mexico, 1959), 40.
79. *Ibid.*, 60; emphasis added.
80. *Ibid.*, 75.
81. This isn’t the only place we see mention of Abbey’s grandmother. In the version of “MX” published in *Down the River* (1982), Abbey writes, “Mankind will not be free until the last general is strangled

with the entrails of the last systems-analyst. As my sainted grandmother used to say” (88). Here we not only see Abbey’s grandmother again but also a reworking of Diderot’s observation, “Men [Abbey used “Man”] will never be free until the last king is strangled with the entrails of the last priest,” which Abbey had placed on the cover of the University of New Mexico’s student publication *The Thunderbird* in 1951—while attributing the quote to Louisa May Alcott.

82. Cahalan, *Edward Abbey*, 9.
83. *Ibid.*, 193.
84. Deborah Tannen, *Talking Voices: Repetition, Dialogue, and Imagery in Conversational Discourse* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 110.
85. Edward Abbey, *Confessions of a Barbarian*, 240.
86. Cahalan, *Edward Abbey*, 142.
87. Christer Lindh, *Abbey’s Web*, <http://www.abbeyweb.net/quotes.htx?op=search&query=never>.
88. Abbey, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, 163.
89. Gideon O. Burton, “Bdelygmia,” *Silva Rhetoricæ*, <http://rhetoric.byu.edu/>.
90. James Cantrill, “Gold, Yellowstone, and the Search for a Rhetorical Identity,” in *Green Culture: Environmental Rhetoric in Contemporary America*, ed. Carl G. Herndl and Stuart C. Brown (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 167.
91. Philippon, “Edward Abbey’s Remarks at the Cracking of Glen Canyon Dam,” 162.
92. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 93–94.
93. Bas Andeweg, Japp de Jong, and Hans Hoeken, “‘May I have your attention?’ Exordial Techniques in Informative Oral Presentations,” *Technical Communication* 7 (1998): 273.
94. Kevin Michael DeLuca, *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999), 165.
95. *Ibid.*, 1.
96. *Ibid.*, 6.
97. Mark R. Leary and Ashley Batts Allen, “Self-Presentational Persona: Simultaneous Management of Multiple Impressions,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 101 (2011): 1033.
98. Abbey, *The Journey Home*, xii.
99. Cahalan, *Edward Abbey*, 274.
100. *Ibid.*
101. *Ibid.*, 273.

102. Ibid., 97.
103. Ibid., 166.
104. Much of Abbey’s published work revolved around his own experiences—by many accounts, however, Abbey was creative with his “nonfiction,” often adding details, changing dates, or adding fictional events to his real adventures. In 1981, he was hired to teach creative nonfiction at the University of Arizona. Hence, “the Edward Abbey of [his] books” is both real and fictional.
105. Abbey, *Confessions of a Barbarian*, 246–247.
106. Erving Goffman identified the importance of self-presentation in 1959. This management of the way people control other’s impressions is often described as “impression management.” See also Mark R. Leary and Robin M. Kowalski, “Impression Management: A Literature Review and Two-Component Model,” *Psychological Bulletin* 107 (1990): 34–37.
107. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959), 17.
108. Ibid., 242.
109. Ibid.
110. Ibid.
111. Ibid., 242–243.
112. Ibid., 243.
113. As Goffman notes, “We expect, of course, some coherence among setting, appearance, and manner.” Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 25. When the audience and the performer have different goals, as happened at an Earth First! rally on February 6, 1986, in Tucson, Arizona, it is possible for the audience to come away with a poor impression of the speaker while the speaker’s ego remains intact, or is even bolstered. At this particular event, for example, Abbey wanted to tell a different story from the environmentally charged polemic for which he was known. Abbey did give the audience a few environmental slogans, but he mainly read to them from his “Cowboy and His Cow” essay. The audience was later described as “sullen.” Abbey, however, seemed pleased to remain a troublemaker. Cahalan, *Edward Abbey*, 238–239.
114. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 25
115. Leary and Kowalski, “Impression Management,” 38.
116. Barry R. Schlenker, “Identity and Self-Identification,” in *The Self and Social Life*, ed. Barry R. Schlenker (New York: McGraw Hill, 1985), 74. Schlenker later notes on page 94 that “desirable identity images exist in context and comprise what people believe they can and should be in the context.” Thus, Abbey’s persona may be

- more Cactus Ed at an Earth First! rally in front of the Glen Canyon Dam, more professorial in the classroom, more husbandly at home, and more writerly in his office.
117. Not “Home, Pennsylvania,” as he often claimed.
118. See, for example, Terrence Moore’s iconic image of “Edward Abbey with his shotgun and freshly bagged television, Tucson, AZ, 1986,” <http://explorepahistory.com/displayimage.php?imgId=1-2-1F6E>.
119. Larry Beason, “Strategies for Establishing an Effective Persona: An Analysis of Appeals to Ethos in Business Speeches,” *The Journal of Business Communication* 28 (1991): 328.
120. Beason, “Strategies for Establishing an Effective Persona,” 328–329.
121. Worth noting here is that Abbey’s crowd is not hostile to him. They appear to fit into the type of public that Fitzpatrick-Lewis, Yost, Ciliska, and Krishnaratne identify as “problem facing.” This type of public “recognizes [a] problem and believes that something can be done about it.” They differ from a “constrained” public, which “recognizes [a] problem but thinks that nothing can be done,” and a “fatalistic public,” which “does not recognize [a] problem and has the perception that very little can be done to affect [a] situation.” Donna Fitzpatrick-Lewis, Jennifer Yost, Donna Ciliska, and Shari Krishnaratne, “Communication about Environmental Health Risks: A Systematic Review,” *Environmental Health* 9 (2010): 11.
122. In his introduction to *The Journey Home*, Abbey wrote:
- I’ve done plenty of plain living, out of necessity, but don’t know how to maintain a constant level of high thinking. It’s beyond me. Some itch in the lower parts is always dragging me back to mundane earth, down to my own level, among all you other common denominators out there in the howling wilderness we call modern American life. (xii)
123. Richard G. Peters, Vincent T. Covello, and David B. McCallum, “The Determinants of Trust and Credibility in Environmental Risk Communication: An Empirical Study,” *Risk Analysis* 17 (1997): 54.
124. A trained photographer, for example, who, in an instant, captures a near-perfect image; a speaker who adapts his or her language to best suit an audience on the fly; an athlete who responds instantly to changing circumstances: these, and more, illustrate this sense of embodied expertise.

125. Sanders, "Ed Abbey, Earth First!, the Monkey Wrench Gang and Me," 41:45.
126. Derek G. Ross, "Dam Visuals: The Changing Visual Argument for the Glen Canyon Dam," *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication* 38 (2008): 77.

THIRTEEN

“I’m angry both as a citizen and a father”

Robert F. Kennedy Jr.’s Melodramatic Discourse on the Environmental Consequences of “Crony Capitalism”

ROSS SINGER



In 2007, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and a camera crew made their way into a diner in Charleston, West Virginia, where Kennedy met with Bill Raney, president of the West Virginia Coal Association. Less than a minute into their exchange, Kennedy seized the moment and asked Raney how Massey Coal can have sixty thousand environmental violations and not be penalized for them. Kennedy prodded: “What if somebody robbed a bank sixty thousand times? Every time they [Massey] do that . . . it’s supposed to be a thirty-one thousand dollar penalty, but they have never paid a single penny for violating the Clean Water Act.” Kennedy’s prompt insinuation that Raney and his organization have had a hand in the injustice caught Raney off guard. Typical of Kennedy’s style of environmental advocacy for over two decades, his remarks enacted a moral confrontation and demanded accountability. The contentious interaction that unfolded between the two men later became a scene in the documentary *The Last Mountain*.¹

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is one of the leading environmentalists in the United States today. Kennedy first established himself as an environmental leader through his work with the Hudson Riverkeepers and as a founder of the Waterkeeper Alliance, the global advocacy network of approximately two hundred organizations committed to protecting public waterways. In addition to his continuing service as president of the Waterkeeper Alliance, Kennedy is a senior attorney for the Natural

Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and clinical professor and supervising attorney at Pace University School of Law's Environmental Litigation Clinic.² In recent years, Kennedy has become especially active in a variety of high-profile media venues and speaking events. He has become particularly well-known for his riveting orations and strained speaking voice caused by a rare voice box disorder. Carl Pope, former executive director of the Sierra Club, attests to Kennedy's rhetorical abilities: "He's the only speaker in the environmental movement who can say he'll speak for 20 minutes, then speak for 40 and you want him to go on longer."³

In this chapter, I explicate some of the patterned rhetorical practices that have defined Kennedy's environmental advocacy and suggest that these practices provide insight toward the advancement of a theory of humane environmental melodrama. Steven Schwarze writes that despite being a "recurrent form" of moral confrontation practiced by environmental movements, melodrama has received little scholarly attention, especially as a potentially wise and humane response of moral outrage to conditions of injustice, anguish, and their concealment.⁴ By offering a case study of one environmental leader humanely appropriating the melodramatic form, the present study helps address this void. Kennedy offers an instructive example of melodramatic persona in multiple controversies over time. Kennedy's characteristic rhetorical practices explored in this chapter include his modeling of morality through personal testimony and his use of polarizing populist characterizations of elite enemies.

Before examining the rhetorical practices by which Kennedy has demanded accountability from what he suggests are corrupt institutions negligently destroying the environment, I provide a theoretical overview of environmental melodrama. The analysis constructed thereafter illuminates and theoretically engages characteristic expressions of melodramatic frustration and outrage found across a wide range of Kennedy's rhetorical texts. The collection of texts from which I draw includes often lengthy keynote addresses at various formal events, brief speeches at protest rallies, television interviews, opinion-editorial columns in mainstream outlets such as *The Nation*, *Rolling Stone*, *Vanity Fair*, and the *Washington Post*, a blog for the *Huffington Post*, a cohosted radio show called *Ring of Fire*, and the national best-selling book titled *Crimes against Nature: How George Bush and His Corporate Pals Are Plundering the Country and Hijacking Our Democracy*. Following my reading of Kennedy's discourse, I discuss and summarize insights for understanding environmental melodrama and identify challenges regarding what warrants melodrama and how to gauge its political effectiveness.

MELODRAMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL FRAMES

In environmental advocacy, the rhetorical appropriateness of a particular "corrective" frame or combination of frames depends on the context.⁵ However, as Schwarze observes, past rhetorical scholarship has tended to negatively judge melodramatic frames for polarizing and simplifying public issues and disputes. Scholars have most often concluded that melodrama destructively frames controversy in rigid, emotional, personalized, and morally absolute terms. Schwarze associates this tendency with a "continued reliance" on Kenneth Burke's poetic categories to make sense of melodrama, even though Burke only briefly mentions melodrama, situating it as a subset of his "tragic frame."⁶ In *Attitudes toward History*, Burke describes the tragic frame as oversimplifying social problems and their solutions, dehumanizing perceived antagonists in a dispute, and lacking humility.⁷ Edward C. Appel also notes this tendency in some rhetorical studies to conflate the tragic frame with melodrama.⁸ Viewed as necessarily tragic, melodrama enacts a primal human impulse to transcend one's own guilt and human imperfection. Melodrama is merely a means of final resolution, often actualizing through permanent, redemptive, and cathartic victimage rituals of scapegoating.⁹ The logic that follows is that melodrama is ethically inferior to what Burke calls a "comic" frame of balance and humane charity. In the comic frame, rather than vicious and evil, wrongdoing is seen as foolish, mistaken, and part of the human condition. A comic frame therefore offers charity, humility, well roundedness, and cooperation.¹⁰

The present study builds on Schwarze's retheorization of melodrama as a potentially productive and humane response to environmental destruction. Schwarze suggests that rhetorical scholars should look more closely not at whether melodrama creates social division, but *how* it creates division across contexts.¹¹ Schwarze identifies four features of a nontragic and productive melodramatic form—what I describe as humane melodrama.¹² These features include a focus on sociopolitical conflict, polarization of characters and positions, moral framing of public issues, and development of monopathy.¹³ The development of monopathy originates in Robert Bechtold Heilman's study of melodrama on the modern stage. Heilman describes monopathy as "unitary emotional identification" with either the victors or victims, through celebration or sympathy.¹⁴ The etymology of the term is instructive: "mono" (one) and "pathy" (emotion). According to Schwarze, the development of monopathy is integral to melodrama as it "sharpens conflict through a bipolar positioning of characters and forces" and "frames conflict not as a mere difference of opinion, but as evidence of a fundamental moral clash."¹⁵

In addition to the concept of monopoly, Schwarze draws from Heilman a view of melodrama as affective but nondestructive. For Heilman, unlike Burke, melodrama differs from tragedy in its avoidance of narrowing blame for social problems on a permanently flawed scapegoat. Instead of pursuing the symbolic kill of a scapegoat inherent in tragedy, melodrama positions agents of wrongdoing as human adversaries whose motives are tied contingently to broader institutional systems and sociopolitical problems. As a result, this humane melodramatic frame enables accountability and censure without scapegoating. Providing several examples of this humane melodramatic frame, Schwarze illuminates how environmental advocates have built victim/villain and David/Goliath character types without resorting to scapegoating.¹⁶ Several examples show how melodrama may productively draw public attention to an injustice by personifying a villainous leader or parodying a corporate logo as a “synecdoche to signify systemic failure.” One example that Schwarze offers is the Love Canal controversy in which Lois Gibbs and her neighbors villainized the governor of New York and state health officials, portraying them as public obstacles to the relocation of Niagara Falls residents threatened by buried toxic waste. These officials “symbolized the inertia of bureaucracy and provided a clear target for public advocacy.”¹⁷ A more in-depth case example highlighted is that of local activism against the asbestos industry in Libby, Montana. In 1999, investigative journalists and local residents began to piece together evidence showing that for decades, mining company W. R. Grace as well as state and federal governmental officials knew of an asbestos hazard that was killing Libby residents. By contrasting evidence found in secret company memos, emotional personal accounts from the victims, and visual images of crosses commemorating the deceased, newspaper accounts helped break long-held local identifications with the company. The growth of publicity led to investigations across the country, the entire town being placed on the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) National Priorities List for cleanup, and the indictment of former and current W. R. Grace employees.

The aforementioned examples show how activists make choices within what they perceive as situations in which desperation must somehow overcome complacency. In these situations, conventions of civility and dialogue have proven ineffective. Yet, as Gregory Desilet and Edward C. Appel attest in their analysis of the Libby controversy, not all controversies culminate in such seemingly clear moral choices and justifications.¹⁸ Providing some useful considerations for the present study, Desilet and Appel propose the notion of melodrama as “warrantable” or “warranted outrage”—a descriptor borrowed from Herbert

Simons. They also find support for this notion in a brief and ambiguous suggestion made by Burke that beyond comedy and tragedy, there is a third possibility for "a good character" moved by "motives of *justifiable vengeance*."¹⁹ In Desilet and Appel's conceptualization of nontragic melodrama as warrantable outrage, or what they call "comic-filtered melodrama," from their Burkean perspective,²⁰ they propose a slight reframing of Schwarze's conclusions. They argue that melodrama was an effective and humane choice in Libby because of the large amounts of "convincing evidence" of dehumanizing corporate action that emerged in the media. In other words, the evidence warranted the use of melodramatic framing and is what made melodrama rhetorically efficacious. Desilet and Appel propose that the case of Libby as well as other examples of melodrama demonstrate that "warranted outrage toward one side can only be generated with . . . double-visioned vetting of *competing* claims—analogueous to the airing and evaluation of arguments in a judicial proceeding."²¹ As I explain later in the essay, some features of Kennedy's activist discourse complicate Desilet and Appel's view of politically efficacious melodrama as rational argument.

RFK JR.'S MELODRAMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL DISCOURSE

The development of Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s novel melodramatic style of activism has occurred in various venues over time and through rhetorical engagement in multiple melodramas—that is, through several related controversies and social movements. An implicit purpose in much of Kennedy's discourse is to reveal hidden elite interests and alliances and their contradictions across multiple public debates and controversies. The issues range from global climate change to regional alternative energy initiatives to how neoliberal economic deregulation affects public waterways. Rather than temporary imperfections in a generally sound relationship between corporate enterprise and governmental regulation, Kennedy reframes environmental problems as by-products of the "normal" operations of a colluded and corrupt political economic system. In this sense, Kennedy's discourse purports to critically expose and disrupt institutional structures, modeling for audiences what Robert E. Terrill calls strategies of "radical judgment."²² These strategies demonstrate a democratic sensibility, promote an alternate worldview not authorized by governing institutions, and are not readily available in mainstream corporate news media.

The rhetorical analysis that follows focuses on gleaning new insights and questions regarding activist engagement in environmental

melodrama through particular configurations of form, content, and presentational style. In the following sections, I explicate two defining rhetorical practices in Kennedy's activism, as well as their key features. These practices include his modeling of moral character through personal testimony and his polarization of "crony capitalism" as immoral enemy.

MODELING MORAL CHARACTER THROUGH PERSONAL TESTIMONY

Like many activists' rhetoric, Kennedy's includes but also expands beyond the use of external sources traditionally deemed authoritative in the process of inventing claims. Past rhetorical studies have noted some of the potentially powerful and unconventional tactics of "unruly" forms of argument, including personal testimony.²³ In the case of Kennedy, embodying and displaying moral character through personal testimony illuminates the fluid unity of his personal and professional experiences and commitments, models a critical environmental sensibility for audiences, and fosters the monopathic identification needed to inspire others. Blurring rhetorical distinctions between narrative and drama noted by Edwin Black,²⁴ Kennedy shades his narration—his telling—with reflexive first-person accounts that model moral character for his audiences. As such, Kennedy's discourse invites audiences to make sense of his narration through the perceptual filter of his own active participation, commitments, and attitude of engagement. Rather than passive witness and conduit of truth, Kennedy dramatizes his own experiences of environmental truth, shifting back and forth between showing and telling. As detailed in the following discussion, Kennedy's rhetorical practice of modeling his own moral character consists of two intertwined features: appeals to environmental activism as nonpartisan morality and the use of firsthand experience as evidence. I will begin with the former.

Kennedy often opens his writings, speeches, and interviews by marking his own environmental activist persona as "nonpartisan." Kennedy invites audiences to identify him as a genuinely concerned citizen and, above all, a moral voice defending trusted values of ordinary people. Although it is common for environmental advocates to assume or champion the voice of grassroots democracy, Kennedy's approach of framing this voice as nonpartisan is unorthodox. Environmental advocates have often viewed centrist declarations, such as those historically found in green consumer discourse, with suspicion (i.e., "greenwash"). From this vantage point, nonpartisanship implies ulterior motives and, at

minimum, an uncritical attitude of active or passive consent to progress as defined by dominant corporate regimes.²⁵ Kennedy's discourse belies this reading, however, as much of it is likely to appear highly partisan to observers applying stock meanings of nonpartisanship. As I will show, Kennedy sets and generally stays within the rhetorical parameters of his own meanings for this term.

Kennedy explicitly defines a nonpartisan environmental ethic as an overriding commitment to sustaining the ecological "infrastructure" of local communities for future generations. The nonpartisan environmentalist maintains political loyalty to no particular party affiliation but instead to protecting the environment that sustains our livelihood. One of the most commonly used statements across Kennedy's texts captures this argument: "It's about recognizing that nature is the infrastructure of our communities, and we must meet our obligation as a generation, as a civilization, as a nation, to create communities for our children that provide them with opportunities for dignity and enrichment and good health."²⁶ Kennedy often adds that nature is the "ultimate source of our values and virtues and character as a people"—that is, it is what connects us to our past.²⁷

Kennedy often attempts to model nonpartisan environmentalism for his audiences by appealing to his own record on the issues and argumentatively justifying the choices that he has made as an environmental advocate. In some instances, Kennedy appeals to the nonpartisanship demonstrated in his professional experiences as an environmental attorney, where the law provides baseline standards of morality and reason. Take, for example, this brief excerpt in the introduction to *Crimes against Nature*: "I've worked hard to be nonpartisan. The fisherman and farmers whom I represent as an attorney run the political spectrum."²⁸ In other cases, Kennedy's approach is to show audiences that his record suggests that he has supported and criticized both major political parties and their representatives in Washington. In the opening of a 2006 address at the University of Florida, Kennedy asserts: "I've supported both Democrat and Republican candidates. I'll support any candidate regardless if they're good on this [the environment] issue and I criticize any candidate who isn't."²⁹ Similarly, in the keynote address at the St. Thomas University School of Law, he repeats and elaborates upon the previous statement: "For twenty-three years as an environmental advocate, I have been disciplined about being nonpartisan and bipartisan. . . . I don't think there is any such thing as Republican or Democrat children. The worst thing that can happen to the environment is that it becomes the province of a single political party."³⁰ Although Kennedy sometimes implies that this "worst thing that can happen" has actually already

occurred and the environment has become the province of liberals and Democrats, he has consistently expressed melodramatic discontent with both major parties. In this way, Kennedy models his nonpartisan environmental ethic for audiences.

One example of how Kennedy has practiced his notion of activism as nonpartisan morality is by taking a stand against impractical green energy platforms and proposals, even if it means disagreeing with environmental organizations with which he is affiliated. For example, over a period of several years, Kennedy has contributed to a public fight against a large-scale wind power project in the Nantucket Sound area of Massachusetts. In a 2011 op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*, Kennedy charged that the proposed project was a “wind power rip-off.” According to Kennedy, the Cape Wind firm had unfairly planned to charge consumers for electricity produced through its wind turbines, with conservative cost estimates at four times the cost of other forms of green power available in surrounding states. Kennedy alleged that “heavy-handed Cape Wind backers,” including state of Massachusetts officials, concealed the real costs of the project and misled citizens toward “buying into a boondoggle.” He concluded, “Whether you agree or disagree with the fishermen, homeowners and environmentalists who have fought Cape Wind for a decade, the fact is that this project makes no sense for ratepayers and taxpayers.”³¹ On the same day that Kennedy’s op-ed was published, Cape Wind circulated a press release making a counterattack against him. One charge made was that Kennedy exemplified “hypocrisy” because he works with the NRDC, an environmental organization that supported the project.³² Staying true to his own philosophy of nonpartisan environmentalism rather than to the position of others, Kennedy took a stand for what he believes in: the morality of an undistorted, free marketplace.

A second example of Kennedy’s nonpartisan morality demonstrates his commitment to nonpartisan activism across political party lines. Beginning in 2009, Kennedy began to speak out on President Obama’s failures on coal energy issues. Not long after, media discourse swirled about him being on the short list to head the EPA in the Obama administration. In an *ABC News* television interview, Kennedy criticized Obama on the issues of clean coal and coal industry lobbying. In response to the question of whether he thought Obama has been pressured or “hoodwinked” in light of his endorsement of clean coal, Kennedy stated: “I think it’s a sad testament to the impact of campaign contributions . . . you have . . . great men like Barack Obama, who feel the need to parrot the talking points of this industry that is so destructive to our country.” The interviewer responded: “That’s not going to help your chance of a

job in this administration." Kennedy then replied: "My loyalties are to my country and not to any particular politician. . . . I've been non-partisan and bi-partisan. . . . If somebody does something wrong, I'm going to say it."³³ In this melodramatic moment, Kennedy foregoes a message of balance and charity for one that risks controversy. As Edwin Black writes, this type of shift from passive disembodiment to active participation and unambiguous words elicits judgment rather than observation. Hence, new risks emerged as Kennedy centered himself, as much as his message, as the object of moral judgment.³⁴

Approximately three months later, Kennedy again challenged Obama on coal, this time in a *Washington Post* op-ed. In the article, Kennedy asks: "When will the Obama administration finally stop this Appalachian apocalypse? If ever an issue deserved President Obama's promise of change, this is it." Kennedy adds that mountaintop coal mining is the "worst environmental tragedy in American history," emphasizing its consequences using vivid, heartfelt language:

Mining syndicates are detonating 2,500 tons of explosives each day—the equivalent of a Hiroshima bomb weekly—to blow up Appalachia's mountains and extract sub-surface coal seams. They have demolished 500 mountains—encompassing about a million acres—buried hundreds of valley streams under tons of rubble, poisoned and uprooted countless communities, and caused widespread contamination to the region's air and water.

The column goes on to offer six action steps for the Obama administration to remediate its regulatory failures.³⁵ Here and in his *ABC News* interview, rather than seizing a moment for potential self-promotion created by discussions of him as possible EPA head, Kennedy used the spotlight for melodramatic activism. Staying within humane bounds of sociopolitical conflict, his discourse expanded audiences' perceptual horizons on the issue of coal energy.³⁶ Through words that string factual claims together into vivid imagery of inhumane industrial devastation, Kennedy lambastes the White House for failing to respond strongly and immediately. Kennedy does not simply lash out; his discourse engages in deliberative reasoning. Moreover, rather than inhumanely scapegoating, he makes Obama a political target for environmental pressure.

I turn now to the second defining feature of the rhetorical practice of modeling moral character, which is the use of firsthand experience as evidence. As perhaps most clearly illustrated throughout his passionate critiques of the material consequences of the coal industry, Kennedy's

melodramatic discourse often includes attempts to educate his audiences. He often alerts audiences that mercury produced through illegal practices of coal-burning power plants is poisoning them, their children, and their communities. Discussion of mercury poisoning tends to include segments narrating his own decision as an avid fisherman and consumer of fish to have his mercury levels checked. He tells audiences about the alarmingly high levels found in the results of the test and instructs them how to get their own levels checked. In his discourse, Kennedy stresses the particularly detrimental health effects of the coal industry on women and children. For instance, during his 2006 St. Thomas School of Law address, Kennedy states that a national authority on mercury contamination told him that a woman with the same levels of mercury would have children with cognitive impairment. Recalling his response to the expert, Kennedy remarked: "I said to him, 'You mean she might have,' and he said, 'No, the science is very certain today. Her children would have some kind of permanent brain damage.'"³⁷ Kennedy went on: "Anyone who wants their levels tested should go to our website, www.waterforalliance.com. Every woman of child-bearing years should certainly do this. Just send a lock of your hair. . . . I had my levels tested, they are double the levels the EPA considers safe, and this is just by eating fish." A similar account of Kennedy's mercury test experience is found in *Crimes against Nature* and in several other texts. In some of these texts, Kennedy describes unborn children exposed to high levels of mercury at risk for lowered IQ levels, cancer, as well as "a grim inventory of diseases, including autism, blindness, and mental retardation."³⁸

Across most of his public discourse, Kennedy complements the use of personal experience as evidence with historical and statistical evidence, placing them alongside the discourse of the opposition to expose incongruities. This melodrama practice, which Schwarze as well as Anne Demo and Kimberly Powell have described as "juxtaposition,"³⁹ contextualizes different knowledge forms regarding a situation, encourages audiences to take sides, heightens moral outrage, and pressures institutions to resolve the problem. Kennedy's keynote address to an audience of over twenty thousand at the 2009 Solar Power International Convention, described by the *New York Times*' Todd Woody as a "barn-burning speech," exemplifies his use of juxtaposition in his melodramatic advocacy.⁴⁰ In one segment of the speech, Kennedy contrasts what coal energy backers celebrate as the low financial cost of coal power with its hidden costs on public health. As part of his allegation that government and industry are distorting and concealing mercury's destructive effects, Kennedy asserts: "Today, according to CDC, there are 640,000 children born in this country every year who have been exposed to dangerous

levels of mercury in their mothers' womb. That's one of the costs of coal . . . that you don't see when you pay six cents a kilowatt."⁴¹ Another example of juxtaposition appears in a 2003 *Rolling Stone* column, where Kennedy expresses outrage warranted by personal experience:

I am angry both as a citizen and a father. Three of my sons have asthma, and I watch them struggle to breathe on bad-air days. . . . A main source of . . . asthma-provoking ozone particulates is the coal-burning power plants that President Bush recently excused from complying with the Clean Air Act.

Further lamenting the effects of coal plant mercury emissions on his own children, Kennedy adds: "My kids are among the millions . . . who cannot enjoy the seminal American experience of fishing locally with their dad and eating their catch. Most freshwater fish in New York and all in Connecticut are now under consumption advisories."⁴² Variations of these testimonials appear with regularity across Kennedy's texts. Within the structure of juxtaposition, these narratives cross over into the realm of drama as they show Kennedy's own firsthand experiences, not as an illustration of his claims but as proof supporting them.

In the discourse of personal experience illuminated here, as Kennedy attempts to equip audiences with strategies of radical judgment, he assumes the risk of subjecting himself to moral evaluation. His use of firsthand experience as evidence models an attitude of democratic engagement and personal affliction. By narrating his own active participation and his concerns about his personal and family health, Kennedy embodies and invites the monopathic identification so integral to motivating a collective response. His firsthand accounts polarize corporate and governmental officials on moral grounds, and his use of juxtaposition avoids oversimplifying the issue.

POLARIZING "CRONY CAPITALISM" AS IMMORAL ENEMY

Kennedy's second rhetorical practice, that of polarizing what he calls "crony capitalism" as immoral enemy, constitutes certain institutional forces and characters as enemies of a truly free marketplace and the national values it epitomizes. Here, Kennedy's nonpartisan environmental ethic shines through as he positions the environment as the ultimate judge of economic viability and sustainability. He regularly makes statements such as the following: "I don't even think of myself as an environmentalist anymore. I consider myself a free marketeer. Along with

my colleagues at the NRDC and Waterkeeper, I go out . . . and catch cheaters. . . . Because when polluters cheat, it distorts the entire marketplace.”⁴³ Like his appeals to his own activism as nonpartisan morality, this affirmation of a free and truly rational market could be misread by fellow environmentalists as a nod to conservative economic policy. Again, however, closer inspection shows that Kennedy has redefined the concept in his own way. By casting the enemy as a “cheater,” Kennedy exposes a moral violation that transcends his personal passions or partisan politics. Stated differently, Kennedy rhetorically dissociates himself from conservative policy and puts himself in a strong position to counter charges of being a stereotypical (liberal-progressive) antibusiness environmentalist. Furthermore, Kennedy appeals to principles of fairness, justice, and reason with which most Americans are likely to identify.

The following remarks, from a 2006 speech, explain how Kennedy sets the parameters for defining the crony capitalist enemy of nonpartisan morality: “The free market encourages efficiency. Efficiency means the elimination of waste, and pollution is waste. The free market also encourages us to properly value our natural resources.” Kennedy explains that the undervaluation of those resources has led to wastefulness, adding, a “true free market” enriches oneself, one’s neighbors, and the community.⁴⁴ As summarized in a speech at the 2007 Live Earth Festival, “In 100% of the situations, good environmental policy is identical to good economic policy.”⁴⁵ This discourse suggests that the motive behind his use of the free market concept is to use that concept’s nonpartisan appeal against those elites whom he suggests have used the concept to justify environmental negligence.

Two key features, carried on from the rhetorical inheritance of the American Populist movement of the late nineteenth century, characterize Kennedy’s practice of constituting faceless and personified corporate and governmental enemies of a truly free market. With regard to the first feature, Kennedy’s discourse often constitutes faceless enemies in a way that implicitly helps rectify the long-perceived antagonism in U.S. political culture between economic viability and environmental sustainability. The structure of Kennedy’s discourse becomes melodramatic as it offers little to no charity and humility, emphasizes difference, and locates political problems as primarily caused by corporate and governmental institutions.

An example of Kennedy’s practice of making uncharitable allegations to constitute enemies of the free market can be found in a 2011 address in Spokane, Washington. As he had done for the better part of a decade before that, Kennedy distinguishes crony capitalism from true free market capitalism, positioning the former as using a guise of the

latter. According to Kennedy, "big polluters," their "huge PR firms," and "phony think tanks" on Capitol Hill such as the Competitive Enterprise Institute, the Heritage Foundation, and the American Enterprise Institute "pretend to love free market capitalism." Kennedy elaborates, "What they really are fighting to safeguard . . . it's capitalism for the poor but socialism for the rich and for the big corporations."⁴⁶ Consistent with the humane melodramatic form, the structure of polarization that this discourse reflects emerges through moral claims that purport a need to expose institutional distortions. The content—the terms that Kennedy uses to label and polarize his faceless enemies as well as his appeals to free market morality—are quintessentially populist in nature. To identify his vision as defending the interests of "the people," Kennedy invokes faceless enemies not unlike what the American Populist movement derided as "the Money Power," "plutocrats," "The Monster Bank," and other "plundering" enemies. Furthermore, the way that Kennedy appeals to a vision of free market morality harkens back to the Populists as well. As Michael Kazin notes: "Populists, wage earners, farmers, and others with ancestors who once praised capitalism as a free labor system now looked with dread on the financial monopoly that mocked Christian values of charity and brotherhood."⁴⁷

These Populist rhetorical inheritances appear throughout Kennedy's discourse, targeting various faceless enemies across multiple melodramas. In a 2007 *Rolling Stone* column, Kennedy alleged distortion and concealment of the truth by a faceless, greed-driven enemy: "King Coal and the oil barons like to pretend that their industries dominate the energy sector because their products are cheaper and more efficient than alternative fuels. . . . This is a myth." Kennedy added: "The dominance of fossil fuels is the direct result of . . . crony capitalism that would make a Nigerian dictator balk." As also found in the Spokane address noted earlier, the column supports these allegations with detailed evidence, demonstrating Kennedy's extensive research on the issues. Kennedy explains: "Direct federal subsidies to Big Oil—everything from loan guarantees and research support to outright tax breaks and waived loyalty fees—amount to as much as \$17 billion a year." The remainder of the article provides intricate details on how the government provides billions to the oil industry only to "award it for bad behavior" such as environmental destruction. Kennedy cites, for example, studies showing the oil industry creating at least \$4.6 billion in damage to crops, forests, rivers, buildings, and monuments; \$54.7 billion in taxpayer costs for treating "a host of debilitating illnesses caused by oil pollution"; and another \$100 billion to defend the industry's infrastructure around the world.⁴⁸ These remarks reflect Kennedy's use of the melodramatic

structure of polarization. Here, the kind of evidentiary presentation expected of conventional rational argument serves as justification of uncharitable enemy characterizations.

Across Kennedy's discourse, some articulations of faceless enemies use stronger language than others. In these articulations, Kennedy assumes heightened risk that results from opting for attack over patient deliberation, controversy over charity, and monopathic emotional identification over apathy or uncertainty. Kennedy's 2012 blog entry in the *Huffington Post*, titled "Petro Plutocracy," opens with a series of illustrative epithets: "Last week, the world got a preview of America's new post Citizens United petro plutocracy with the oil lords flexing their political muscles like oil soaked body builders pumped up on a steroid drip of campaign dollars. It was all about fracking."⁴⁹ Kennedy goes on to describe three events during that week that he contends provide a glimpse of a government corrupted by a brutal and faceless enemy:

The petro tycoons first orchestrated the forced resignation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) top frack patch enforcer, then forced the same cowed agency to stall its release of a damaging scientific study on fracking and finally strong armed the Interior Department to open America's public lands to gas companies without prior disclosure of their frack chemicals.

It is important to note that the remainder of Kennedy's piece elaborates on each of these three events in their respective contexts, justifying why readers should respond to each event with moral outrage—why *Petro Plutocracy* is an appropriate name for the perpetrators.

A second feature of Kennedy's rhetorical practice of polarizing crony capitalism as immoral enemy is consistent with what Schwarze calls melodramatic "personification of villains" to create "victim/villain and David/Goliath character types." If used carefully, this tactic creates a clear target and pressure point for exposing deeper systemic problems and helps shore up motivation for sustained social critique.⁵⁰ Kennedy's melodramatic critiques generally focus on powerful individuals who help him illustrate conflicts of interest and the corruption of democratic government by industry. For example, in a 2007 *Vanity Fair* column, Kennedy expresses outrage at President George W. Bush's "revolving door" hiring practices through which leaders and lobbyists from private-sector industries became governmental regulators of those very industries. He writes: "No president has mounted a more sustained and deliberate assault on the environment . . . and implemented more

than 400 measures that eviscerate 30 years of environmental policy."⁵¹ Kennedy charges that Bush appointed representatives of polluting industries or environmental skeptics to head virtually all environment-related federal agencies. He supports his argument with a list of work history descriptions for twelve Bush administration officials whom he suggests have eliminated the need for corporate lobbying by making corporations the government. In these remarks, Kennedy rhetorically positions powerful individuals as symptoms of deep structural problems that warrant public outrage rather than charity and minor correction. In other words, through polarization of the villain, this time with a face, the discourse contests the morality of an institutional norm. Engaging in melodramatic rather than comic framing in such instances allows for coming to terms with the reality that some individuals are more powerful and more responsible for a wrongdoing than others. Kennedy's enemy constructions of crony capitalist figures promote accountability without oversimplification as well as censuring relative to the extent of the injustice.

As Kennedy polarizes powerful officials and the brute institutional structures that they represent, he often promotes a monopathic unity of feeling by using strong, inflammatory language to emphasize the severity of the injustice and the need for urgent action. Compared to all of the rhetorical practices discussed thus far, Kennedy's articulations of personified villains are most thoroughly saturated by inflammatory language of outright attack. Still, Kennedy's discourse of outright attack most often functions as a melodramatic prompt toward public deliberation rather than the foreclosure of it. Consistent with the American Populist frame, Kennedy emphasizes not that government power itself is the problem, but rather that greedy and tyrannical men had usurped the birthright of a nation intended to be the creation and property of ordinary people.⁵²

Arguably attesting to the sometimes unpredictable effects of melodramatic populism as a rhetoric of invention rather than resolution, Kennedy's attacks on powerful individuals have contributed to already-existing controversies in very different ways. A comparison of two examples of Kennedy's attacks on personified villains provides an illustration of melodramatic advocacy's indeterminate effects. In the first example, one of Kennedy's 2010 blog entries engages in the personification of elite villains. Provocatively titled "Sex, Lies and Oil Spills," the entry argues that Bush and Cheney, not Obama, should be held responsible for the ongoing British Petroleum oil spill, and that the spill should not merely be seen as an isolated crisis in an otherwise sound institutional system.⁵³ Kennedy alleges that Cheney staffed the oil industry regulator, the Minerals Management Service, with "oil industry toadies, including his Wyoming carbon cronies," instituting "a septic culture of corruption."

Kennedy cites a 2003 agency report that he suggests provides a shoddy explanation for why industry use of acoustic regulators, which are safeguard devices for helping to close a gushing oil rig pipeline, had not been mandated by government regulators. Further emphasizing conflict of interest and problems in the institutional system, Kennedy's blog entry charged that past investigations demonstrate immoral behavior and recklessness. Kennedy discussed a 2009 investigation exposing that regulatory officials had frequently consumed alcohol and drugs at industry gatherings and engaged in sexual relationships with oil and gas company representatives. Inviting moral outrage and monopathic identification regarding the need for structural change, Kennedy lashed out: "Bending over for Big Oil became the ideological posture of the Bush White House, and under Cheney's cruel whip, the practice trickled down. . . . The Minerals Management Service . . . hopped in bed with the regulated industry . . . literally." While inflammatory and provocative, these remarks contributed to what at the time was a public chorus of moral outrage regarding the spill. Not only does Kennedy avoid scapegoating, but his response reflects the role of *kairos* in his melodramatic advocacy. Kennedy's response to the environmental exigence was timely and seized the moment of opportunity for radical judgment.

There have been other instances, however, in which Kennedy's inflammatory personifications have been met with mixed responses. In 2012, Kennedy faced a conservative backlash for a remark he posted on Twitter as the news media covered congressional hearings on fuel economy standards. Targeting Republican senator James Inhofe for a letter sent the previous week to administrator Lisa Jackson questioning the Obama administration's air pollution policies related to fuel economy, Kennedy tweeted: "Speaking of prostitutes, big oil's top call girl Sen Inhofe wants to kill fuel economy backed by automakers, small biz, enviros, & consumers." The statement drew fire as critics used it to counter recent left-wing attacks on radio host Rush Limbaugh's description of a Georgetown University student as a "slut" amid political debates regarding birth control. Some observers suggested the buzz generated around Kennedy's remark was "silly" because Kennedy's intentions were obviously to deploy metaphor as a tactic to make a political point, and others suggested that unlike Kennedy, Limbaugh had attacked a "civilian."⁵⁴ Kennedy told *Politico* that he stood by his tweet: "I think it's an opportunity for Americans to compare the relative moral positions of the two acts in question and which is more harmful to our country," he said. "In Sen. Inhofe's case, here's a U.S. senator whose job is to serve the American public who has made a clear and unambiguous choice to serve the moneyed interests of oil companies." Kennedy

continued: "The context with which Mr. Limbaugh used it was wrong and immoral. . . . But it's not immoral in using it to apply to a politician who is selling his office."⁵⁵ Kennedy insinuates that he had tactically seized on the Limbaugh controversy to promote the exact kind of comparisons and controversy that unfolded. However, Kennedy's attempt to articulate *kairos* in this instance is questionable and did not achieve rhetorical efficacy. Although Kennedy attempted to ignite democratic engagement by appropriating Inhofe as a representative symbol of a corrupt institutional practice, the inflammatory language that he used distracted attention away from his intended goal.

When comparing these two very different instances of rhetorical attack on powerful individuals, it is clear that even as Kennedy used similar language in both occasions, contextual differences subjected his reputation and character to varying degrees of risk. More than personal catharsis, expressions of outrage in these instances attempt to match the power of targeted individuals and institutions. Indeed, Kennedy engages in inflammatory speech that he believes to be warranted and that will provide critical insight to a broad audience. It seems that for Kennedy, the potential harm to Inhofe, to the Bush administration, and to his own reputation paled in comparison to the destruction being wrought by current fossil fuel establishment policies.

Across the two key features comprising Kennedy's rhetorical practice of polarizing crony capitalism as immoral enemy, inflammatory allegations and radical judgments modeled for audiences do not project vicious hate, characterize the malefactors as permanently evil, or elicit a symbolic killing of the enemy. Kennedy warrants his outrage on the basis of hidden and detrimental effects to the environment and the public interest. Viewed on a broad scale, Kennedy's rhetoric of moral polarization also positively contributes to U.S. environmentalists' long-term efforts to overcome elitist tendencies and stereotypes. John M. Meyer describes the problem of environmental elitism as a "paternalist" tendency presuming a unitary conception of the people and their true interests while often citing ignorance, apathy, or egoism as the reasons for failing to recognize those interests.⁵⁶ On the benefits of an alternative, "populist" approach practiced by some movements, Meyer states that populists avoid patronization, placing faith in grassroots organizing without demanding a change in traditional values or suggesting a solution made possible by knowledgeable professionals. In environmental populism, "The problem is identified as powerful elites and corporations whose greed and self-interest is at odds with most people's extant preoccupations with family, health, and livelihood." Furthermore, populism has an ethical and religious basis and involves judgments about fairness and

justice needed to distinguish law-abiding citizens from criminals.⁵⁷ Certainly, Kennedy's melodramatic discourse reflects this populist approach not only by distancing enemies representing crony capitalism but also in its narration of a moral struggle to preserve trusted American values.

DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

This case study of Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s environmental activism contributes to the little existing literature theorizing melodrama as a potentially wise and humane response to unjust conditions. Kennedy offers scholars an instructive example of melodramatic persona development in multiple controversies over time. Two defining rhetorical practices comprising this persona include modeling morality through personal testimony and using polarizing populist characterizations of elite enemies. Through multiple venues, including popular media, Kennedy's environmental leadership demonstrates for audiences sense-making strategies of radical judgment not readily available in mainstream culture. Kennedy's personalized style, unruly practice of argument, and simultaneous affirmation of a nonpartisan agenda offers to reorient how many audiences think about environmental advocacy. I have shown that Kennedy's activism is reflective of complex philosophical substance, and that this substance cannot be adequately understood with a focus on his words alone. Kennedy crafts and models a distinct melodramatic orientation at the boundaries of drama and narrative, as well as the personal and professional. The depth and breadth of this orientation reinforces Schwarze's contention that melodrama must be explored as more than a rhetoric of reactionary polarization categorized as a subset of Burke's tragic frame.⁵⁸

Arguably, Kennedy's tactical assumption of risk is one of the distinct characteristics of his melodramatic discourse. Together, Kennedy's use of personal testimony and appeals to his own nonpartisanship extends a fairly bold invitation to audiences to evaluate his moral character and the credibility of his message. Still, it is unclear how aware Kennedy has been of the possible constraints that his risky discourse creates. For example, as he attempts to reclaim and reorient terms such as "free market" and "nonpartisan" for environmentalists, there is surely some risk of misleading or confusing audience evaluations of his commitments. Relative to the productive political possibilities exemplified in Kennedy's humane melodramatic discourse, however, such risks and constraints seem rather minimal. Indeed, it is precisely such attempts at reorientation that mark the novelty and notable philosophical complexity found in Kennedy's activism.

One way that this case study promotes further inquiry on melodrama is by demonstrating that practices and features of the form may affirm as well as violate deliberative conventions of traditional rational argument. Here, Kennedy's melodramatic persona seems to complicate Desilet and Appel's proposition that melodrama is effective and warranted when it equally vets competing viewpoints and demonstrates superior persuasive reasoning for one side.⁵⁹ Although Kennedy does often engage in the double-vetting process noted, it would be limiting to assess the rhetorical efficacy of his activism solely in terms of evidentiary presentation and tangible instrumental ends. One reason for this is that Kennedy's melodramatic discourse has engaged multiple environmental issues, debates, and controversies over time. To borrow from William J. Kinsella, Kennedy has participated in some of today's most ideologically entrenched "master melodramas" of the environment, such as that regarding coal energy.⁶⁰ In these master melodramas, even when the scientific evidence clearly favors one side and competing claims have been effectively vetted, their complexity creates political gridlock, mixed outcomes, and incremental gains. This is certainly true of global climate change, a melodrama that by its nature also defies attempts to pinpoint the villain. In the case of anti-coal activism, Kennedy and others confront formidable affective public identifications with coal through ideological discourses of "energy independence," low-cost energy, and American jobs. Here, Kennedy's well-publicized discourse helps constitute, not simply respond to, broader political clashes between already-existing ideological narratives.

Another reason for the difficulty of assessing Kennedy's melodramatic discourse in terms of evidentiary vetting and instrumental ends is that it has emerged across various venues with conventions and constraints often not highly conducive to in-depth evidentiary vetting. Many of these venues include popular media, and given the highly indeterminate nature of rhetorical agency in today's media, Kennedy's discourse raises the question of how one is able to predict what will come of a melodramatic rhetorical act. Moreover, although Desilet and Appel make a convincing case about why melodrama was effective in Libby, the particular way that evidence gets presented and the superiority of the evidence for one side provides no guarantee of political success.⁶¹ Here, it seems important to return to Schwarze's point that the temptation to pin down "a rather sure sense of its effects, as well as its normative value" led to scholarly resistance to melodrama in the first place.⁶² This is to suggest that melodramatic rhetoric may or may not create deliberation on the intended issues, may or may not develop into full-blown controversy, may or may not motivate additional affected and charged parties to come forward, and may or may not succeed because of an

evidentiary advantage. As in the case of Kennedy, many activists practicing melodrama justify and warrant their outrage by pointing to humane ends that they intend either to pursue or protect against dehumanizing and destructive forces. They also appropriate unconventional forms of evidence and risky rhetoric that intentionally violate or complement conventions of rational argument. Still, appeals to moral causes and unconventional evidence are not exempt from accountability and do not warrant acts of victimage such as scapegoating. Deciphering what is warranted on humane grounds is a critical and ethical act complicated by the presumption that clear ethical lines can and will be drawn *in context* between vicious and spiteful, inhumane and humane, tragic and melodramatic. The inflammatory language in Kennedy's discourse provides an example of such complications, as what is read as within bounds of the humane and warrantable in the present study could be read elsewhere as perhaps largely humane but very occasionally tragic as well. In either case, what is most important, it seems, is not precise agreement; rather, it is that our theorizing of melodrama might become more careful while still preserving the unruliness of the form.

NOTES

1. *The Last Mountain*, DVD, directed by Bill Haney (New York: Docurama Films, 2011).
2. "Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. Official Website," <http://www.robertfkennedyjr.com/>.
3. Mark Leibovich, "Another Kennedy Living Dangerously," *New York Times*, June 25, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/25/fashion/25bobby.html?pagewanted=all>.
4. Steve Schwarze, "Environmental Melodrama," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 92 (2006): 240.
5. For one recent study that cautions against the idea of a single, superior counterframe, see Emily Plec and Mary Pettenger, "Greenwashing Consumption: The Didactic Framing of ExxonMobil's Energy Solutions," *Environmental Communication* 6 (2012): 459–476.
6. Schwarze, "Environmental Melodrama," 241. See Michael Osborn and John Bakke, "The Melodramas of Memphis: Contending Narratives during the Sanitation Strike of 1968," *Southern Communication Journal* 63 (1998): 220–234; Carl Burghardt, "Discovering Rhetorical Imprints: La Follette, 'Iago,' and the Melodramatic Scenario," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 71 (1985): 441–456; Elizabeth Anker, "Villains, Victims, and Heroes: Melodrama, Media, and September 11," *Journal of Communication* (2005): 22–37.

7. Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes toward History*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
8. Edward C. Appel, "'Tragedy-Lite' or 'Melodrama': In Search of a Standard Generic Tag," *Southern Communication Journal* 73 (2008): 189.
9. Burke, *Attitudes toward History*.
10. Schwarze, "Environmental Melodrama," 239–241.
11. *Ibid.*, 243.
12. Schwarze does not settle on one consistent term for positive melodrama, though he describes it at various points as adversarial, wise, agonistic, moral, and potentially transformative. I use the term "humane melodrama" in the same sense—to denote the promotion of meaningful critical publicity and action against dehumanizing injustices, suffering, disease, death, ecological harm, and their concealment. Following Schwarze, I view "melodrama" as a flexible frame that can be used humanely or inhumanely, but I choose to be more precise here because my case study concerns the humane type.
13. Schwarze, "Environmental Melodrama," 245.
14. *Ibid.*, 244.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, 102.
17. *Ibid.*, 247.
18. Gregory Desilet and Edward C. Appel, "Choosing a Rhetoric of the Enemy: Kenneth Burke's Comic Frame, Warrantable Outrage, and the Problem of Scapegoating," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 41 (2011): 340–362.
19. Desilet and Appel, "Choosing a Rhetoric," 354; Herbert Simons, "Burke's Comic Frame and the Problem of Warrantable Outrage," *KB Journal* 6 (2009): <http://www.kbjournal.org>; Burke, *Attitudes toward History*, 41.
20. Desilet and Appel's concept contrasts with Appel's argument for "tragedy-lite" in an earlier essay to denote the same form, though they suggest either term is acceptable. See Desilet and Appel, "Choosing a Rhetoric"; and Appel, "'Tragedy-Lite.'" Like Schwarze, I am skeptical about whether Burkean categories, even when creatively blended, can account for a humane melodramatic form. While acknowledging that Burke fails to adequately address questions that his categories raise about blame and censure, Desilet and Appel nonetheless search exclusively within the Burkean system to conceptualize melodrama. Perhaps with the exception of their ethic of contingency and avoidance of scapegoating, the Burkean-inspired notions of "tragedy-lite" and "comic-filtered melodrama" that they propose insufficiently capture features that Schwarze identifies.

Melodrama (constructive or destructive) is noncooperative, does not place heavy emphasis on an ethic of understanding, is not well-rounded in its generosity and humility, stresses division over unity (or over a balance between the two), is not a frame of reform for pursuing change within a well-accepted system, does not moderate tensions, and identifies wrongful action primarily on one side of a dispute.

21. Desilet and Appel, "Choosing a Rhetoric," 355.
22. Robert E. Terrill, *Malcolm X: Inventing Radical Judgment* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2004), 22–24, 129.
23. Kevin M. DeLuca, "Unruly Arguments: The Body Rhetoric of Earth First!, Act Up, and Queer Nation," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 36 (1999): 9–21; Barbara Pickering, "Women's Voices as Evidence: Personal Testimony as Pro-Choice Films," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 40 (2003): 1–22; Kathryn M. Olson, "Rhetorical Leadership and Transferable Lessons for Successful Social Advocacy in Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 44 (2007): 90–109.
24. Edwin Black, *Rhetorical Questions: Studies of Public Discourse* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 147–155.
25. TerraChoice Environmental Marketing Group, "The Seven Sins of Greenwashing: Summary Report: North America," April 2009, <http://sinsofgreenwashing.org/findings/greenwashing-report-2009/xorg/findings/greenwashing-report-2009/xreport-2009/>; Ross Singer, "Neoliberal Style, Ecological Jeremiad, and the American Re-generation in Thomas Friedman's 'Code Green,'" *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture* 4 (2010): 135–151.
26. Robert F. Kennedy Jr., "Address to the Sierra Summit 2005," San Francisco, California, September 10, 2005, <http://www.common-dreams.org/views05/0916-27.htm>.
27. See, for example, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., "Keynote Address: We Must Take Back America," January 1, 2007, *Pace Law Faculty Publications*, Paper 583, <http://digitalcommons.pace.edu/lawfaculty/583>; Robert F. Kennedy Jr., "Crimes against Nature," Address Delivered at St. Thomas School of Law, February 2, 2006, *Pace Law Faculty Publications*, Paper 582, <http://digitalcommons.pace.edu/lawfaculty/582>.
28. Robert F. Kennedy Jr., *Crimes against Nature: How George W. Bush and His Corporate Pals Are Plundering the Country and Hijacking Our Democracy* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2004), 2.
29. Robert F. Kennedy Jr., "Opening Address to the Twelfth Public Interest Environmental Conference and Sixth Annual Conference of

- the Environmental Association," University of Florida Levin College of Law, March 8, 2006, <http://www.sg.ufl.edu/Documents/Accent/transcripts/RobertKennedy.txt>.
30. Kennedy, "Crimes against Nature," Address Delivered at St. Thomas School of Law.
 31. Robert F. Kennedy Jr., "Nantucket's Wind Power Rip-Off," *Wall Street Journal*, July 18, 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304521304576447541604359376.html>.
 32. Cape Wind, Inc., "Cape Wind Responds to RFK Jr.," July 18, 2011, <http://capewind.org/news1205.htm>.
 33. "Interview with Robert F. Kennedy Jr.," *ABC News*, April 14, 2009, <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/story?id=7400698&page=1#.T7wI0nJEQtk>.
 34. Black, *Rhetorical Questions*, 147–155.
 35. Robert F. Kennedy Jr., "Obama Should Stop Mountaintop Mining," *Washington Post*, July 3, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2009/07/02/AR2009070203022.html>.
 36. Kennedy's criticism of Obama was certainly not the first time that he had pressed Democrats on environmental accountability. For example, in *Crimes against Nature*, Kennedy wrote of John Kerry's 2004 presidential campaign, "The party and its candidate did little to aggressively argue environmental issues before the American people. . . . Kerry did not air a single advertisement on the Bush environmental record" (221).
 37. Kennedy, "Crimes against Nature," Address Delivered at St. Thomas School of Law.
 38. See, for example, Kennedy, *Crimes against Nature*; and Robert F. Kennedy Jr., "Speech of Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., University of Arkansas, April 8, 2004," *Arkansas Law Review* 57 (2005): 885–912.
 39. Steve Schwarze, "Juxtaposition in Environmental Health Rhetoric: Exposing Asbestos Contamination in Libby, Montana," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 6 (2003): 313–336; Anne Teresa Demo, "The Guerilla Girls' Comic Politics of Subversion," *Women's Studies in Communication* 23 (2000): 133–156; Kimberly A. Powell, "The Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching: Strategies of a Movement in the Comic Frame," *Communication Quarterly* 43 (1995): 86–99.
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41. Robert F. Kennedy Jr., "Solar Power International Convention Keynote Address: Part III," October 28, 2009, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3pgUUT7MTUw>.
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 44. Kennedy, "Crimes against Nature," Address Delivered at St. Thomas School of Law.
 45. Robert F. Kennedy Jr., "RFK Jr. Live Earth Speech," July 7, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KG5zckBejK0>.
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 60. William J. Kinsella, "Identity, Community, and Risk: Some Constitutive Consequences of Environmental Melodrama," *Environmental Communication* 2 (2008): 90–93.
 61. Desilet and Appel, "Choosing a Rhetoric," 355.
 62. Schwarze, "Environmental Melodrama: Explorations and Extensions," 102.

FOURTEEN

Ashley Judd's Indictment of Mountaintop Removal Coal Mining

A Stain on the Conscience of America

BETH M. WAGGENSPACK
AND MATTHEW VANDYKE

INTRODUCTION



Celebrities often use their status as a platform for political engagement and social change.¹ For instance, Oprah Winfrey heavily endorsed Barack Obama during his presidential campaign in 2008,² and U2's lead singer, Bono, is an ongoing prominent antipoverty activist.³ Among the celebrities working for prosocial causes, many work to bring about pro-environmental change as well. Harrison Ford, Robin Williams, Chevy Chase, Leonardo DiCaprio, and Robert Redford have all teamed up with the Natural Resources Defense Council to champion pro-environmental causes and campaigns.⁴ Ted Danson, a longtime advocate for ocean conservation, sits on the board of directors for Oceana, the largest international organization working to protect the world's oceans. Celebrities who partner with advocacy organizations provide a much-needed voice for the cause they represent. According to Julia Bovey of the Natural Resources Defense Council: "Celebrities 'have a bigger megaphone than we would ever have or ever be able to buy . . . [because] when we have celebrities . . . talk about what we do and why it matters, we're able to reach hundreds of thousands, or even millions.'" ⁵ Because celebrity viewpoints reach so many people, it is valuable to examine how celebrities frame the different environmental causes they promote in the public sphere.

This case study examines metaphor as a means for constituting reality and provoking action concerning the issue of mountaintop removal coal mining. Metaphor provides a perceptual pattern to which people can respond, intensifying certain perceptions and avoiding others, causing audiences to focus on desired consequences and ignoring unwanted ones. This analysis explores Ashley Judd's environmental rhetoric by examining how she uses metaphors to constitute her environmental identity, establish audience perspectives on mining practice, and mobilize the audience toward action. Specifically, this chapter focuses on Ashley Judd's National Press Club keynote address against mountaintop removal coal mining delivered on June 10, 2010, in which Judd partnered with the Natural Resources Defense Council to speak out against the Appalachian Mountains practice. Beyond denouncing the destructive mining practice, Judd used the forum to provide members of the press a particular perspective of the practice's violence and destruction, those responsible for it, and the irreparable damage caused. Her rhetoric extolled her own values and prescribed values for others regarding the irreversible practice of mountaintop removal coal mining. Her argument encompasses what J. Robert Cox termed the *locus of the irreparable*, "a way of organizing our perceptions of a situation involving decision or action; its use calls attention to the *unique* and *precarious* nature of some object or state of affairs, and stresses the *timeliness* of our relationship to it."⁶ By emphasizing the irreparable nature of mountaintop removal mining, her rhetoric heightens a sense of urgency to end the pernicious practice. This analysis is useful not only as a case study for exemplifying how a rhetor may use one's celebrity status as a stage for environmental activist purposes but also in suggesting how Judd's use of metaphor constitutes the Appalachian geology and heritage being lost to an environmentally hazardous practice.

BACKGROUND

Ashley Judd is no stranger to activism; she has long been involved with many social, economic, medical, and educational humanitarian causes. According to the *New York Times*, "She has delivered impassioned speeches to the United Nations General Assembly about sex- and labor-trafficking . . . [and] she is a board member of PSI, a global health organization where she has worked on issues like maternal health, family planning and malaria prevention."⁷ According to Judd's website, she has served as an expert panelist or moderator at conferences such as the Clinton Global Initiative; the Women Deliver Conference; the International

AIDS Conference; the Global Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria; and the National Press Club.⁸ A worldwide activist, Judd graduated from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government with a master's degree in public administration in May 2010, making her "one of the few [actors/activists] to get formal training in public service."⁹ She asserts that she chose Harvard in order "to become a more effective activist, [stating] 'I didn't want to go to Harvard Kennedy School to be approved of by anyone, but to immerse myself in some very serious, earnest, practical learning with people who have literally dedicated all they have to public service.'"¹⁰ Judd's credentials have led her to testify as an avid environmental advocate on Capitol Hill regarding a number of issues.¹¹ On April 23, 2009, she spoke to a panel in the House of Representatives, advocating that policymakers allocate \$7 billion to pay for damages caused to the environment and wildlife caused by climate change. While Judd joined Obama's presidential campaign as a key supporter, she vowed to "press [his] administration on mountaintop coal mining" after his election.¹² Judd's passion to end mountaintop removal coal mining, among other environmental issues, stems from her Appalachian Mountains lineage.

MTR is a type of surface mining that removes the summit of mountains to reveal coal seams. *Mining overburden*, or rocks, dirt, and foliage that are above the coal, are typically disposed in neighboring valleys.¹³ According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, MTR operations are concentrated in eastern Kentucky, southern West Virginia, western Virginia, and scattered areas of eastern Tennessee.¹⁴ Studies show that mountaintop removal coal mining has contributed to an increase of minerals found in water, which may negatively influence biodiversity in the affected waterways. As a result, some waterways are completely covered up during the process. Among other issues, forests may be destroyed and soil may become compacted, making it hard for vegetation to grow back. The common mining practice in the Appalachian Mountains fuels the rhetoric of pro-environmental activists.

Judd's keynote address to the National Press Club on June 9, 2010, was presented as part of its Luncheon Speakers series. Her appearance was arranged by the Natural Resources Defense Council, a group that has partnered with Judd on the mining issue. The National Press Club, a private organization for journalists and other communication professionals, has been a Washington, D.C., institution for more than a century. According to its website, the Luncheon Speaker series, which is covered by C-Span, "allows a guest such as a head of state, politician, cabinet secretary, business leader, musician, actor, sports star or

other interesting person to give a significant speech of good duration and then take questions from the press.”¹⁵ According to Rob Perks, an NRDC blogger: “With her Southern charm and natural grace, she dazzled the crowd with tales of her Appalachian heritage, her deep love of the land and people, and her extensive first-hand knowledge of the damage wrought by rapacious mining throughout the region she proudly calls home.”¹⁶

METAPHOR

Metaphors are omnipresent in everyday expression. Skillfully used they can trigger perceptual shifts and mobilizing action. In contrast to observing metaphor as a linguistic embellishment or decoration, this case study of Judd’s keynote address examines metaphor as a means for constituting reality and provoking action. Metaphors provide perceptual patterns to which people can respond, intensifying certain perceptions while avoiding others, causing audiences to focus on desired consequences and ignore unwanted ones. Alain Paivio offered this image: “Metaphor is a solar eclipse. It hides the object of study and at the same time reveals some of its most salient and interesting characteristics when viewed through the right telescope.”¹⁷ Alan Gross asserted that metaphors exceed a literary convention and function in a constitutive fashion. In this way, metaphors have the ability to create and to control the audience’s perception of an event or an object.¹⁸ Richard Weaver noted: “But when its essential nature is understood, it is hard to resist the thought that metaphor is one of the important heuristic devices, leading us from known to an unknown, but subsequently verifiable fact or principle.”¹⁹ By controlling the audience’s perceptions, metaphor prepares that audience to take action. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson suggest that in structuring reality metaphor can alter one’s conceptual system, causing one to act on the metaphor’s implication.²⁰

Typically, a figurative term (or vehicle) from one field acts on a literal subject (or tenor) from another. As I. A. Richards noted, the presence of one with the other establishes a meaning that is not attained without interactions between the two.²¹ In some cases, the two come to be so closely associated that the tenor “is imagined to be that very thing which it only resembles.”²² In other words, a metaphor consists of the new understanding gained because of the interaction, or as Richards says, “the interanimation,” between the meanings of the tenor and the vehicle. By offering a constitutive representation, a metaphor impacts perceptions, intensifies emotions, and creates or enhances community.

For example, a football game may be characterized as a war, suggesting the goal of victory at whatever price: the quarterback “throws bombs” in a “surgical strike”; the defense “wins ugly” in “trench warfare”; a score provides the “knockout blow” to the other team with a “shot across the bow” that results in “unconditional surrender.” A university as either consumer-driven business or as a community frames the academic endeavor in conflicting ways. If a university is a business, then consumer satisfaction, branding, provider, or products and services become watchwords. If a university is a community, then the focus shifts to lifestyle, family, a place to grow, and shared dialogue. Weather metaphors supply distinct perceptions to daily actions and conditions: a cloudy or foggy mind, the winds of change, the sunshine of my life, clear skies ahead, a lightning rod for criticism, a thaw in relations between contrary countries, suffering a long dry spell, engaging in a blizzard of activity, and having a weathered visage. Metaphors create a community of meaning, of shared values, perceptions, and beliefs.

Metaphor establishes ideological awareness by connecting something new or not previously considered with something familiar. Metaphors are tools by which dominant ideologies are presented and reinforced. If metaphoric language shapes thought, it has the possibility of leading to profound implications and even policy decisions. Michael Osborn and Douglas Ehninger noted that metaphors in persuasive communication are created by the need to “win a group response of understanding, belief, or feeling” and the desire for an immediate action to be taken.²³ There is a rich tradition in communication studying the use of metaphor across contexts and audiences, with environmental discourse the subject of several metaphorical analyses.²⁴

While metaphor may shape thought, J. Robert Cox asserts that the use of the locus of the irreparable evokes value and agency, and such arguments may encourage action by forewarning of an irreparable occurrence.²⁵ The concept of this locus is based in Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca's work and in particular in the analysis of an argument's starting points of agreement. When a communicator selects the initial premises that serve as the argument's foundations, she must rely on the audience's adherence to these agreements. Two types of arguments of agreement concern the real, consisting of facts, truths, and presumptions, and the other involving the preferable, including values, hierarchies, and lines of argument relating to the preferable.²⁶ Characterized as *loci communes* (common topics) by Aristotle, they are described by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca as referring to “premises of a general nature that can serve as the basis for values and hierarchies.”²⁷ The locus of the irreparable, one that relates to that which is preferable,

accentuates an object or idea that is tenuous or precarious. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca suggest that the irreparable is connected to other loci, such as the locus of quantity, where the effects of an act will remain indefinitely. Cox expands their conception by noting that time has an ontological function, because the appeal of the irreparable organizes our chronological existence. We structure our lives in terms of a time frame from which we experience loss, separation, and death—all aspects that define anxiety over the future. Cox asserts that the irreparable fails to offer the hope that religious arguments do; an irreparable event “constitutes not only radical severance—an altered state or condition—but also the ceaseless experiencing of its consequences.”²⁸ Humans are very uncomfortable with this lack of ability to impact future loss and will react against it with action. The locus of the irreparable is also connected with the locus of quality, because if something is constituted as irreparable, it must be unique. “To be irreparable, an action must be one that cannot be repeated: it acquires a value by the very fact of being considered under this aspect.”²⁹ As Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca note, the potentially irreparable requires urgent action.

In addition, the irreparable is related to the locus of the unique, something that is rare and irreplaceable. Its qualitative value is based on the fact that it is not common, and therefore its loss would be irremediable. Cox provides an example from the March/April 1981 *Nature Conservancy* newsletter, which stressed “the unique and priceless riverine woodlands and streams that comprise the heart of the Deep South.”³⁰ When this uniqueness is contrasted with something that is vulgar or common, the argument becomes even stronger. Cox interprets Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s conception of the locus of the precarious meaning that something is fleeting or ephemeral, such as a “state of affairs which cannot intrinsically be sustained” but whose loss may be halted if the audience acts as the rhetor requests.³¹ If a unique, precarious state is threatened, it may be rescued by an agent’s activity. Cox notes that things gain value when they are constituted for an audience as precarious, and the locus of the irreparable asserts that this fragile state need not be lost, because a choice is possible. Muir echoes that in her analysis of the web metaphor for the environment, suggesting that it may be too frail of a metaphor because “the very notion of thin strands holding together a delicate ecosystem” may not create a sense of possibility.³² As she notes, a web is easily brushed away, and “there is a certain fatalism implicit in characterizing our already devastated environment as a fragile gossamer web.”³³ The irreparable suggests that the audience must not feel helpless in the face of the future. As a further extension of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, Cox suggests that the value of timeliness of choice

or action evokes a need for action to save the unique object. "Urgency of choice and action occurs when what we perceive as fragile or essential to our well-being is threatened; hence, we act to forestall or oppose forces that would do irreparable harm, to save what is exceptional."³⁴ He suggests that the rhetorical appeal of the locus of the irreparable is that it sets defining limits, providing a forewarning of "an opportunity to act in appropriate ways before it is too late." In essence, if the irreparable object is lost, it cannot be restored; a choice not to act is final and cannot be reversed.

Cox offered several strategic and ethical implications for the rhetorical use of the irreparable. Arguments concerning the irreparable speak against incremental decision-making, because that strategy only provides temporary courses of remediation. Instead, the irreparable asserts the importance of considering permanent, nonreversible, and final effects when choosing courses of action. In addition, because an action may be irrevocable, there is an urgency on the audience's need to gather accurate information that can direct their choices. When people imagine what might happen, their investigation of actions and consequences are heightened. A third implication of the use of the irreparable is Cox's "minimum condition rule." He says that in this case, an agent has to evaluate prospective actions against a fundamental societal presumption: the preservation of future choice.³⁵ Cox provides an example from the U.S. Office of Surface Mining's proposal allowing coal mining in environmentally sensitive regions: "The line of argument which in theory would be most effective in compelling a designation of unsuitability would concentrate on the likelihood of irreversible damage from mine subsidence, landslides, destruction of endangered plant and animal species, and loss of habitat for native trout, black bear, and other species."³⁶ The use of the minimum condition rule lets a rhetor contrast conflicting values, by saying that doing action *x* today will preserve one's future choices; performing action *y* today will eliminate those future alternatives. The final strategic implication is a warrant for extraordinary measures, allowing agents to use extreme actions to halt the loss of the unique or fragile. The locus of the irreparable allows one to perform actions that might be considered radical, or at the least out of the norm, because such extraordinary measures are justified in the face of total loss of something that, once gone, cannot be retrieved. One example of extraordinary measures is tree spiking, where nails or screws are inserted into a tree trunk where a logger might encounter them. This type of trap damages equipment as lumberjacks attempt to cut down a tree. The Earth Liberation Front's 1998 arson of a Vail ski resort and 2003 burning of a five-story San Diego housing complex are

among the most expensive radical actions calling for land and wildlife preservation.

Cox concludes by suggesting that the use of the *locus* of the irreparable identifies what audiences see as unique or rare, structuring their choices of action. In addition, “rhetorical occurrences of the irreparable may offer some understanding of the ways a culture views its own future.”³⁷ The irreparable has persuasive power when the audience believes that it has the ability to act in the future, rather than seeing tomorrow fatalistically because of a lack of agency. The use of the irreparable allows a rhetor to call upon a culture’s “good reasons” for not fighting the loss of something unique. It may also evoke an audience’s beliefs in its authority and resources, asserting that it can act now to impact the future.

This case study examines Ashley Judd’s use of metaphor and *locus* of the irreparable while presenting a keynote address to the National Press Club on June 10, 2010. Her speech develops stories about three time periods: the ancient, the old, and the contemporary, through which the Appalachian Mountains have been irreparably altered by what she terms a “state-sanctioned, federal government–supported, coal industry–operated rape of Appalachia.” Judd’s metaphors and arguments establishing the irreparable connect practices of which the audience is unaware with familiar cultural assumptions and experiences. This analysis will discover how she constitutes a reality about the practice of mountaintop removal coal mining and attempts to provoke her audience into action.

ANALYSIS

Analysis of Ashley Judd’s speech to the National Press Club on June 10, 2010, reveals a specific body of constitutive metaphors built around each of the eras she characterizes—the ancient, the old, and the contemporary. She constructs the ancient by describing the place Appalachian genealogy holds in American history, exemplified by her own personal heritage in the mountains of eastern Kentucky. Her description of the old depicts how the exploitation and abuse of the Appalachian Mountains was established in the nineteenth century and is perpetuated in the twentieth century through MTR. Finally, there is the contemporary story that explains how the uses of technology and fraudulent corporate practices permanently and irreversibly obliterate a mountain range, a culture, and a people. Judd winds through the three eras, constituting the image of a place and people that once were intertwined but now have

been violently and deceitfully wrenched apart. As regulation is wrongly created or loosely enforced over time, the environment continues to depreciate. Judd's metaphors constitute the Appalachian Mountains as a sacred and unique place that has been brutally destroyed by the industry's immoral actions that are centered in claims of mining techniques and rights as "necessary and convenient."³⁸ The locus of the irreparable argues that the loss of this fragile ecosystem need not happen, because a choice of action is possible.

At the keynote's start, Judd establishes herself as a native eastern Kentuckian, "a proud hillbilly who traces my family back at least eight generations in our beloved mountains." She characterizes this status as an honor that provides her the greatest sense of self, and one of the many things that "my Creator has seen fit for me to have accomplished." Judd notes that she has enjoyed a well-traveled life, but she's on a genealogical journey that reaffirms her roots. The metaphor of being a proud hillbilly might strike some in the audience as strange, given the standard stereotype of the mountain person. However, Judd's speech reconstitutes the essential being of someone who defines herself through the experience of having grown up in the mountains; her genealogy establishes presence. A hillbilly is converted to a noble, reverential resident of the land who has "a deeply engrained mystical sense of place, a sense of belonging that defines us." This sacred place metaphor is used to cement her relationship with the mountains and its people. Judd calls this magical Kentucky her Avalon, the legendary, magical Arthurian island, where the sword Excalibur was forged, where the Holy Grail was buried, where fairies reside—a holy location that utilizes a reverent metaphor to establish place. Judd follows up the mystical aspect of place by recounting several incidents where she was able to drive right to old family homesteads that she had not visited since a child. In one example she related that in 2008,

after doing a fly over of legal and illegal mountaintop removal coal mining sites in Pike County, I drove to Black Log Hollow, where my paternal grand-mommy was raised. I had never been there before. I drove straight to my great-grandmother's home. Pulling onto Black Log, something ineffable, without words and deeper than memory, from a place so primal it transcends thought and conscious action, I stopped at the foot of a long drive. Although I had never seen it, I recognized it. I was unsurprised, when I looked, that the mailbox said, "Dalton." My grand-mommy's maiden name. Yes, folks with whom I am kin, live there yet.

Judd establishes the metaphor of sacred place as something deeper than memory, stronger than consciousness, drawing its people home, just as King Arthur was drawn back to Avalon. This sacredness is a unique quality of the land. Its qualitative value is based on the fact that it is not common or mundane, for it is something that is rare and irreplaceable. In this way, Judd begins to establish the argument that its loss would be irremediable. She ends by saying: "I don't see that little white house nestled in Black Log Hollow so much as I feel it, right here." Judd confirms her genealogy: she is part of the mountains, emotionally and psychologically, and connected to the noble people who are blessed enough to live in that sacred place.

THE ANCIENT STORY

Judd promised the audience that she would recount three stories in her speech: an ancient one, an old one, and a contemporary one. In this way, she establishes the timeline that characterizes humanity. Cox asserted that time has an ontological function, and the appeal of the irreparable organizes our chronological existence.³⁹ Human life is structured through a time lens, one that ultimately creates anxiety about the future, because it promises inevitable loss and death.

Judd's ancient story rests in the Appalachian Mountains' genealogy, a metaphor that coincides with images of tracing a unique family lineage, much as Judd was doing herself, discovering connections among people and events, or even unearthing a legacy or inheritance. It is not enough that the sacred place metaphor is important to her—it is made equally and genealogically relevant to others, binding those living in the mountains and those in the audience. Judd asserts that this sacred place is now marked by "a searing tear, a gaping wound in the fabric of my life and in the lives of all Appalachians." These violent metaphors portray horrifying results that establish a sense of ecological devastation because, as she notes, the problem grows with "every Appalachian mountain that is blown up, every holler that is filled, every stream that is buried, every wild thing that is wantonly killed, every ecosystem that is diminished, every job that is lost to mechanization, every family that is pitted one against another." Who is the villain authorizing this reckless and immoral devastation? It is MTR, "the state-sanctioned, federal government-supported, coal industry-operated rape of Appalachia." In describing MTR as rape, the violence metaphor is extended. There can be nothing positive about an appalling practice that wounds, rapes, or kills. She is beginning to foreshadow the warrant for extraordinary

measures that would permit agents to use extreme actions to halt the violation or loss of the something unique. The *locus* of the irreparable justifies extraordinary measures by agents fighting against the destruction, because they face the total loss of something that, once eliminated, cannot be reinstated.

This depiction of an environmental tragedy ends the initial extended genealogical metaphor of the mountains as sacred dwelling place, one that was “an unglaciated refuge for many species” and “ancient, life-giving, a perfectly complete and closed loop of life and economy.” Judd reminds the audience that the Appalachians are the oldest North American mountain range, and they may be the oldest mountains in the world. She cements a reverence for aged things by noting that geologists poetically refer to the mountains’ age as “Deep Time.” The mountains are personified as possessing “biological generosity” as they reseeded the land following the last ice age. The Appalachians as sacred place are unique, possessing a history that should be revered as they have nurtured all of our lives. Comparisons to other mountain ranges suggest that “it is inconceivable the Smokies would be blasted, the Rockies razed, the Sierra Nevadas flattened, bombs the equivalent to Hiroshima being detonated weekly for years anywhere in the U.S. except here.” The newly constituted reality of the Appalachians and the outrage of atomic bombing is designed to rouse the audience by invoking the irreparable; this provocation occurs because the Appalachians have been permitted by government-sanctioned practices to be subjected to “environmental genocide.” Life and death archetypal metaphors have long been established in the literature,⁴⁰ and Judd employs them to establish a sense of outrage and loss. Here, the sacred place metaphor is extended, from an ancient, life-giving (and living) mountain environment described as “a natural endowment that should be treated as sacred” to the reality of ill-treated land “blasted to smithereens” and condemned to death from which it will never recover.

From her recounting of the ancient story, where a rich genealogical legacy of a sacred place is the Appalachian’s legacy, Judd prepared the audience for two more stories that hopefully would move them to take action against MTR.

THE OLD STORY

In contrast to the sacred place metaphor Judd uses in the ancient story to give genealogical and spiritual meaning to the majestic Appalachian mountains, her old story transitions to an explanation and indictment of

the Broad Form deed, which she defines as “one of the most diabolical, abusive legal documents ever created.” This license to mineral rights was in force from the late nineteenth century for the next hundred years. She characterizes this permit “as stunningly arrogant and entitled as a white man buying from a Native American vast tracts of land for a nickel.” The story turns the audience’s attention to the scoundrels and villains rather than to the Appalachian Mountains as victim. The shameful heritage of governmental and private individual treatment of Native Americans is a familiar one: they were cheated of their lands, robbed of their culture, and swindled without regret by those perpetrating the ruses. The metaphor of this fraudulent manipulation is an easy one to envision and apply to MTR’s discreditable history. Using Kentucky archives, Judd weaves a research-based tale about the coal buyer’s treatment of the natives of the ancient, mineral-laden Appalachian Mountains. She describes the typical buyer as a materialistic, superficial man who is interested in no more than a self-serving grab of mineral rights. She quotes an account of such a transaction:

With every convincing appearance of complete sincerity, the coal buyer would spend hours admiring the mountaineer’s horse, while compliments were dropped on every phase of his host’s accomplishments. He marveled at the ample contents of the mountaineer’s smokehouse and savored the rich flavor of the good woman’s apple butter. After such a visit, he and the man of the house would get down to business, and before long the deed or option was signed with the uncertain signatures, sometimes just an X, of the mountaineer’s and his wife.

It is easy to imagine the scene of an oily, sleazy manipulator swindling the naïve mountain folks of their land; it is a metaphor long applied to used-car salesmen, greedy businessmen, and con men preying on the elderly and naïve. In great detail, she explains that the Broad Form deed gives the coal buyer the rights to all natural resources on the land; miners could “dump, store, and leave upon said land any and all muck, bone shale, water, or other refuse,” use and pollute water courses in any manner, and do anything “necessary and convenient” to extract subsurface minerals. Several similar graphic descriptions establish the swindles arranged by the greedy agents for mining companies and the loss to be suffered by the unsophisticated Appalachian people.

The land agents “swept through the region,” likening them to a swarm of locusts devastating the land. Not only were land agents buying

the mineral rights to the Appalachian Mountains as quickly as possible, courts allowed the mining companies to extract the resources from the land by doing “anything necessary and convenient.” Moreover, for decades, most cases that ended in court upheld the companies’ rights over those of Appalachian natives. The ethical implications of “necessary and convenient” are contrasted with the locus of the irreparable, which argues against piecemeal decision-making, because that strategy only provides temporary courses of remediation. In this case, Judd does not even assert that the government and mining company decisions and actions have any benefit. Instead, the rhetoric of the irreparable asserts the importance of considering permanent, nonreversible, and final effects before choosing courses of action.

The Broad Form deeds left the original Appalachian landowners with little actual land ownership other than in name, without any of the mineral wealth contained within the land. As Judd put it: “In other words, the hillbillies still paid the taxes on the land.” Since she had reconstituted the hillbilly metaphor early in her speech, the audience now regards that resident as the hardworking, traditional Appalachian inhabitant who for generations has served as a steward to the sacred, magical land. Like Judd, these people “feel” this mystical sense of place because Appalachian mountain residents gained their heritage through “inimitable generations of belonging.” Increasingly, though, these families’ subsistence farms were rendered useless, because “roads [were] cut across pastures, forests devastated, fields ruined, water supplies polluted.” As a consequence, they became “landless migrants” who “roamed the region or left the mountain entirely.” The “landless migrant” metaphor is powerful: it likely invokes negative images about stability, work ethic, ability, educational level, or race/ethnicity/culture. It may imply that the person is “less than” or even somehow unwanted and alien because being landless suggests that the person lacks roots. When added to the knowledge that generations of a family grew up on a particular parcel of land, as Judd had described her own “kin,” the metaphor becomes even more poignant; the public assumption may be that the loss of the land is somehow that person’s fault; he was not a good steward of its resources, or he did not care enough to fight for it. In reality, her speech attempts to construct (or reconstruct) the image of residents who are torn from blissfully living in a beloved place to losing it all through others’ duplicity and reckless disregard for the sacredness of the land.

These searing descriptions are emotionally striking, and Judd returns to a much stronger violence metaphor to end the old story: rape. She

reminds the audience that she had earlier used that word in describing what had been done to the ancient mountains. She notes ironically that in 1987–1988, when “this law [the use of the Broad Form deed] that allowed coal companies to rape the land without consent, spousal rape was still legal in Kentucky.” She acknowledges that Kentucky’s gender laws had been undergoing change, but she asserts that “Kentucky’s environmental laws, monitoring, evaluation, and enforcement need to move a pace.” A comparison of two violent, immoral-yet-legal rape scenarios presents a metaphor arguing that change in one required the same treatment for the other. But Judd’s argument does not stop with the rule of justice. Again, incremental change is not acceptable. Cox argues against incremental decision-making, as does Judd, because that strategy is not future directed. Her argument of the irreparable avows that there is a need for permanent and nonreversible actions to save the land.

THE CONTEMPORARY STORY

In the contemporary story, Judd explains how environmental regulation has done little to monitor or hold coal companies accountable for the damage they cause to the environment. She describes the regulatory process as a company applying for a permit, which she characterizes with the metaphor of largely being “rubber stamped.” This suggests that permits were granted in a perfunctory fashion without debate or significant thought given to their potential impact. She derides this practice even further, labeling it “creeping perinitis,” signifying that the indifferent, ineffective practice of issuing permits had been taking over, much like an invasive vine that kills native vegetation. What few restrictions there were on the permit process could be waived merely by applying for a permit variance. The lack of a permit was not considered an impediment for many mining companies, which found it just as easy to mine without a permit. She noted that companies who did not bother with permits “found it more convenient—if you remember that word?—to mine without any permits and simply leave.” She continued, stating ironically that some coal companies are “good enough to self-report and the state often show[s] them leniency for having done so.” Convenience outweighs policy or requirement; punishment fails to serve as a deterrent while regulators were culpable for their appalling lack of oversight and enforcement. Mining companies were depicted as violating the law, in addition to cheating the Appalachian natives. Not only have these damaging decisions been made with only the present in mind, but Cox’s “minimum condition rule” has been ignored. Judd demands that the

government (and the audience) evaluate prospective actions against a fundamental societal presumption: the preservation of future choice.⁴¹

Next, Judd described the contemporary process of mountaintop removal coal mining by using metaphors that envision violence and carnage:

Explosives are trucked in, explosives so volatile they must be carried on separate vehicles. Small hills are drilled into the rock of the mountain and every single day in Kentucky and West Virginia, around the clock seven days a week, 2,500 tons of explosives are detonated. Blasts one thousand times greater than the blasts that brought down the Oklahoma City Federal Building. What used to be home for human, flora, and fauna and the potential economic boom for a classically exploited and distressed area has become in the coal company's callused terminology: overburden.

Here is the metaphor of place as an ancient, sacred home being violated by unstable explosives that surpass the terrorist devastation of Oklahoma City. Judd links that well-known horrific event to the image of the irreparable damage caused by the mining companies, who, like terrorists, create carnage without regard for those who are affected.

Having already made the Broad Form deed owners and their mining companies, the courts and regulators culpable for Appalachian destruction, Judd adds another villain to the mix: technology. The 1977 Surface Mining and Reclamation Act failed to create adequate regulation, and because of new uses of technology, "coal mining techniques outdistanced regulation immediately." She notes that when the inadequate act was debated and passed into law, strip mining was shocking, but "mountaintop removal is warp-speed, overdrive, strip mining on steroids." Technology accelerated Appalachian destruction, which occurs, she reminds the audience, in "one of the most rich, biodiverse habitats in the world." Before detailing the MTR process, Judd reflects on the old growth trees that mark the mountains and the forests, which contain thirty tree species. The sacred place remains, and desirable qualities of biodiversity (a large number of diverse species and their natural communities) enhance that image. Then, in an abrupt turn to violence, she describes "shovels the size of buildings" and "a drag line twenty stories high," metaphors that accentuate the monstrosity of method used for destruction. Judd reminds the audience of the Deep Time mountains that began her address: majestic old growth; a home to human, flora, and fauna; the "lauded and mythical hollows of Appalachia"; all of

which are exploited and distressed, labeled by the coal companies as “overburden.” Coal seams are metaphorically where *The Thing* (the drag line) “rips out ribbons of coal, like little layers of chocolate cake.” In another example she notes: “[By] using shovels the size of buildings, the essential ingredients of Deep Time [are] pushed into the lauded and mythical hollers of Appalachia, indiscriminately burying all that is produced and lives there: watershed, perennial and permanent streams, all plant and wildlife, contaminating the groundwater in the process.” Monsters, whether they are mechanical or human, devour and devastate the mountains.

Judd returns to her depiction of coal companies as villains to broaden the audience’s outrage. She builds upon Cox’s notion of the irreparable, stirring the audience’s need to gather accurate information that can direct them to informed choices.⁴² When people imagine what might happen, their desire to investigate actions and consequences is heightened. When the MTR process is over, she describes how some coal companies simply abandon the job site, but others attempt to return the land to “approximate contour.” They are equally responsible for the continued degradation of the mountains. Companies engaging in reclamation activity maintain they return the job site to a similar state by planting “nonnative, fast-growing invasive grasses, and then with their incessant propaganda, celebrate the site as an example of how good for Appalachia mountaintop removal is.” Judd’s sarcasm over corporate social responsibility is extended as she describes a prison and a golf course built on former mining sites. As for the prison, she pointedly asks, “Guess what? The foundation subsided. Locals call it ‘Sink Sink.’” Judd asserts that a large group of coal companies belong on a list of shame for their role in destroying “ineffable mountains of profound past that should have infinite future.” In case the audience has forgotten the genealogical place—the sense of tradition and mystery metaphor—it is reintroduced here. She calls MTR’s devastating actions “a stain on the conscience of America.” Stains aren’t easily removed; they are foreign marks that do not belong on the surface they occupy. Stains tarnish, sully, taint, or smirch. Our conscience, that inner voice that acts as an ethical guide to the rightness or wrongness of behavior, is stained by the actions of many unrepentant, greedy, or unfeeling groups, just as the mountains are forever annihilated. The locus of the irreparable suggests that if a unique, precarious state is threatened, it may be rescued by an agent’s activity. Cox notes that things gain value when they are constituted for an audience as precarious; and the locus of the irreparable asserts that this fragile state need not be lost, because a choice is possible. Judd’s metaphors establish the land as unique, and in doing so, she triggers in the audience a desire to act.

According to Judd, the coal companies not only physically obliterate the land and falsely claim to recover it, but they also promulgate lies and myths that keep the Appalachian people dependent on them. They began this destruction of the sacred place with the Broad Form deed, which promised money and a better life but delivered with devastation and expulsion. The coal companies continued with the acceleration of MTR that ravaged the mystical mountain lands. The very people whose heritage has been destroyed are portrayed to believe corporate lies and yield to mining companies as the creators of jobs. She counters this false belief by explaining, "Projections for coal employment for the future are the same. Coal will never again employ one hundred thousand West Virginians, like it once did." Judd characterizes the coal companies' persuasive tactics with another series of metaphors: "Their denial, sleight-of-hand, smoke and mirrors, and relentless propaganda is absolutely stunning. I know what is happening. I know how outrageous it is. Yet they try to make us feel like lunatics, out of touch with reality, and like fringe conspiracy theorists." Using metaphors of false illusion and deliberate deception, she accuses the coal companies of offering fraudulent explanations for their own gain. The intent to cheat the Appalachian people of their land, resulting in the annihilation of a sacred place, is also hidden by sham accusations that MTR opponents are fringe conspiracy theorists. This pejorative characterization discredits opponents as having far-fetched beliefs that question what right-thinking people know to be the case. She counters this categorization by retorting: "Four million pounds of explosives every day is a fact." Judd's metaphors contrast a corporate magician intent on deception with a right-thinking individual who asks questions, and she lets the audience determine which side to take.

Her speech ends with a personal story of a paper she wrote at the Harvard School of Public Health, which again dispels the stereotype of a hillbilly or perhaps a dilettante actress. When the paper was presented to her cohort, whom she describes as "a highly intelligent, profoundly energetic, and engaged group," not one of them had ever heard about MTR. She had wrongly assumed that "this issue would be the *cri de coeur* of my class." A *cri de coeur* is a passionate outcry, an appeal to protest. Instead, she found that when she left the class, "They followed me out onto the streets and said, 'Who were the migrant laborers being recruited to work in these sites?'" She tried other ways to advance her cause and educate the uninformed, but all were met with rejection. Thanking the audience for offering her the powerful opportunity to speak, she enjoined them to ask questions and to take one concrete action: write to Lisa Jackson at the EPA and request a veto for Arch Coal's Spruce Mine MTR permit.

CONCLUSION

This analysis shows how metaphors in Ashley Judd's National Press Club keynote speech were used to constitute and attempt to transform the audience's understanding of mountaintop removal mining. After establishing her credibility on the topic, she related three eras designed to provoke the audience intellectually, emotionally, and perhaps even behaviorally. Beginning with the ancient story that depicted the primal Appalachian Mountains as a pristine, sublime place that should be held as sacred, she moved to two other eras that demonstrated how greed, fraud, mismanagement, ignorance, and most of all, violence had decimated this magical, sacred place and the people who were genealogically tied to it. The old story introduced the Broad Form deed, the first of many wrongs perpetrated on the Appalachians, allowing arrogant, greedy men to gain control of the land through trickery, fraud, and judicial sanction. Court rulings and state and federal regulations added to that fraud by poorly designed laws or weakly enforced legislation. The final accelerated annihilation of this perfectly precious biome was caused by the twin monsters of technology and corporate propaganda; this was the theme of the contemporary story. The Appalachians are constituted as a unique, precarious, and fragile place, one which, once lost, can never be regained or repaired. As Cox explains, when the locus of the precarious is invoked, the locus of the irreparable asserts that this fragile state need not be lost because the audience may rescue the object through informed choice.

The metaphors used in the address develop Judd's narrative into three distinct yet coherent eras; they also indicate how she identifies with the natural environment and constructs it for the audience. Her characterizations of mountains as pure, majestic, and transcendent stand in stark opposition to the actions of MTR branded as violent, fraudulent, environmental genocide. Her argument establishes the locus of the irreparable, where the Appalachians are perceived as a unique aspect of our lives and their loss as something unrecoverable. Judd demonstrates that the mountains are in a perilous state, and because of our timeless relationship with them, it is long past time to act. A locus of the irreparable has several strategic implications. As Cox noted, one of the fundamental presumptions of society is the preservation of future choice. In essence, this argument suggests that a failure to protect the land now will compromise the future, leaving few acceptable choices, and it is echoed in Judd's address. In addition, something that is irreparable will last forever, and a claim of finality permits us to argue for measures that

go beyond what might be typical.⁴³ Judd tries to convince the audience that it is wrong on their part, given their newfound knowledge, to allow something to occur that cannot be undone. Whereas her call to action may not be extensive, her depictions of the Appalachians were influential. Future speeches will likely detail what behaviors must be carried out, perhaps even including a warrant for extraordinary measures that are justified in the face of total loss of something that, once gone, cannot be retrieved.

Judd's metaphors provide an inductive way of understanding her environmental identity; however, it is possible that not all Appalachian natives would characterize the Appalachian Mountains and coal mining the same way Judd does, as many natives who live in the Appalachian Mountains work in the coal mining industry. Do coal miners view the mountains through metaphors of sacred place, home, economic security, or as a safety/health hazard? While many Appalachian natives have worked in the coal mines for generations, a dialectic exists among the people since "mountaintop removal mining is as devastating to the local environment as it is economically efficient for coal companies." The environment is complex as both a home to a rich mountain heritage and a mono-economy that relies on the natural resources the same environment provides.

This case study provides grounds for further inquiry about the types of metaphors environmentalists use and how those people constitute their understanding of the environment. Research has revealed the complex interplay of identity, tradition, and the role of community in defining issues,⁴⁴ but more inquiry is needed to understand how various groups of people identify with nature. For example, how do organic farmers, people affected by natural disasters, or those affected by corporate environmental misuse understand and identify with the environment? What metaphors do they employ to constitute their reality? Future research could attempt to conceptualize environmental identity. Such research is important not only to understanding how environmental identities are formed and perpetuated but also for understanding how to negotiate pro-environmental change among such groups that are resistant to identity conflicts. In the same way, further examination of metaphors used to constitute the pros or cons of environmental practice and regulation could suggest persuasive strategies to mobilize action or to counter opposition. The relationship between credibility and environmental message is also ripe for study: for example, do coal miners identify with Ashley Judd, the Kentucky native, or do they see her as an outside voice who is no longer able to speak for the Appalachian

Mountains? Moreover, to whose messages will coal miners most likely be receptive regarding subjects such as mine safety or the possibility of a transition to renewable energy jobs?

There are also avenues for further study of the locus of the irreparable. Does the *locus* of the irreparable demonstrate a unique persuasive power only when the audience believes that it has the ability to act in the future? Or does it always fail when the audience assumes a fatalistic vision because they lack agency? How does the use of the irreparable characterize a particular culture? Will the systematizing of loci, determining which are fundamental to a culture, lead to a vision of a group's reality and thus direct or justify a rhetor's strategy? This case study is a step in those directions. Analysis of the metaphors and locus of the irreparable used in Ashley Judd's keynote speech proved beneficial in demonstrating how these strategies are used to constitute and transform the audience's understanding of the MTR environmental crisis.

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FIFTEEN

Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice

*Benjamin Chavis Jr. and
Issues of Definition and Community*

RICHARD W. LEEMAN



In 1991, under the auspices of the United Church of Christ (UCC) and the leadership of the Reverend Benjamin Chavis, the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit was convened in Washington, D.C. The catalyst for the summit was the 1987 *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States* report issued by the UCC's Commission for Racial Justice, for which Chavis served as executive director. In the report's preface, Chavis argued that this was "the first national report to comprehensively document the presence of hazardous wastes in racial and ethnic communities throughout the United States."¹ "It is our hope," he wrote, "that this information will be used by all persons committed to racial and environmental justice to challenge what we believe to be an insidious form of racism."² Activists responded strongly to the report's statistical data, which confirmed their own lived experiences. Frustrated by the continued inattention of mainstream environmentalists and the discriminatory policies of the government, the Commission for Racial Justice organized its 1991 summit to confront both strands of the establishment.

The conference was formally designed to accomplish three purposes: to create strength in numbers by uniting disparate causes under a single umbrella organization, to increase the visibility and influence of minority voices in the environmental movement, and to raise awareness and concern about environmental issues among minority populations. In

pursuit of these goals, Benjamin Chavis and subsequent speakers at the summit employed discourse echoing that of the militant black rhetors of the 1960s. The summit's discourse, like that produced by 1960s speakers, centered on issues of definition and control over language. Where 1960s militant black rhetors had asserted control over the meaning of words such as "integration," "segregation," "black nationalism," and "black power," Chavis especially emphasized the meanings contained in the two symbiotic terms: "environmental racism" and "environmental justice." While mainstream environmentalists deplored the universal harms caused by institutional neglect and greed, Chavis and his fellow attendees highlighted the discriminatory nature of such environmental ills, noting the human cost of pollution that systematically targets populations based on their race, color, or ethnicity. Chavis and the summit's attendees, like the black militants of an earlier era, constructed their ethical appeals through a narrative that positioned them as spokespersons for the community, not only asserting their authority over language and meanings but, through that language, the community as well. Where black militant rhetors could speak for a single, well-defined community, however, Chavis was forced to employ a discourse that addressed communities in the plural. The long-term impact of the summit's rhetoric of environmental racism has been to empower diverse, highly motivated groups to coalesce around a cause that is both moral and pragmatic and has constructed "environmental justice" as a central, organizing term for activists as well as government agencies.

CHAVIS'S RHETORIC OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

In the opening sentences of his introductory remarks, Benjamin Chavis foreshadows the attention he will devote to the proper definition of what is happening as well as the challenge of merging multiple communities into a single people:

We have come to this historic First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit from throughout the United States and world to join hands together in our common struggle to prevent the destruction of our peoples and our communities, and to rescue the environment from the clutches of persons and institutions gone mad with racism and greed.³

The audience, those physically present as well as the extended audience in the United States and the world, can only conduct the "struggle"

appropriately when they apprehend the true definitions of words. "One of the challenges before us," Chavis observes later in his remarks, "is to define our reality in ways that are not only perceptible by our sisters and brothers in the community, but to define our realities so that we can wage [the environmental struggle] in a pro-active way."⁴ Words are important, he argues, and the act of naming should be embraced, not avoided. At the summit he says, "We should not try to be ashamed that we spent some time in our self-togetherness, so we can be ready to have the kind of critical, constructive dialogue that is going to be necessary."⁵

An important element of truthfully defining these realities is to recognize what Chavis terms "environmental racism." Early in his speech, he takes care to advance an explicit definition of environmental racism, one that broadly catalogues the charges of injustice the summit will level against the corporations, government, and mainstream environmental movement:

Environmental racism is racial discrimination in environmental policy making and the enforcement of regulations and laws, the deliberate targeting of people of color communities for toxic waste facilities, the official sanctioning of the life threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in our communities, and the history of excluding people of color from the leadership of the environmental movement.⁶

He quickly follows this operational definition with one that goes to the heart of the matter: "The issue of environmental injustice in our communities has become an issue of life and death."⁷ Directly contrasting his definition of the problem with that of the "mainstream" environmentalists, Chavis asserts that "it is not a philosophical discussion, although we do need to question the philosophical ethos that allows a society to participate in its own destruction."⁸

Throughout his remarks, Chavis demonstrates a concern with the proper naming of things. "In this racist society that tells us that we cannot be multiracial and multicultural," he tells the audience, "we have a profound responsibility to dispel that myth."⁹ He continues by confronting the accepted meanings of the normal and abnormal: "One problem of life in this world is that the abnormality of racism appears to be normal. Too often, we accept the abnormality of racism and the divisions based on race, class, religion, and ethnicity which prevent us from coming together like this."¹⁰ Terminology becomes important again later in his speech when Chavis discusses President George H. W. Bush's environmental policies.

We are opposed to any attempt to export toxic wastes from the United States to Third World people of color communities. U.S. foreign policy has always been connected to its domestic policy. Do not let the media tell you that Bush does not have a domestic policy. His foreign policy *is* his domestic policy. A nation which would deliberately dump on its own because of race is a nation which would dump on the global community because of race. The policy is consistent, both domestic and international.¹¹

Only when one understands that Bush's domestic and foreign policies are two halves of the same agency can the pervasive nature of environmental racism and injustice be appreciated.

Indeed, the systemic character of the "persons and institutions gone mad with racism and greed" is a critical element of Chavis's message. One cannot "rescue the environment from the clutches of persons and institutions" unless the true quality of those persons and institutions is apprehended. The "disproportionate presence of toxic facilities and pollutants" in "people of color communities" constitutes an "insidious form of institutionalized racism."¹² The racism and injustice manifest here are not the products of ill-intentioned individuals, susceptible to change through reeducation or the politics of the personal. Environmental racism represents the very structure of society itself and therefore requires societal change. Systemic racism must be confronted by systemic activism. "We have to channel our anger," Chavis instructs his audience, "into a constructive *modus operandi*, where our political will is felt by those that make policy in this country, by those that *make* those decisions."¹³ The goal of the Summit is to produce that systematic *modus operandi*, the "mechanisms" that will "make the good news real in our communities, in the nation, and in the world."¹⁴ Such mechanisms are not simply the product of revelatory naming, however. The activists' systemic challenge to environmental racism must also *produce* such clarity of vision, for themselves and others: "The problem has been there are some who would exploit. There are some that would do anything to anybody to advance their own personal or collective avarice and greed. We are saying that we have to pull the sheets off all such persons."¹⁵ The white sheets and racism of the Ku Klux Klan had been obvious for all to see; it was the summit's task to reveal the white sheets of contemporary, subtler racism.

The institutional nature of environmental racism is also evident in the mainstream environmental movement, and Chavis takes advantage of several opportunities to chastise that movement. There is, he says in his definition of environmental racism, a "history of excluding

people of color from the leadership of the environmental movement,” but his criticism goes further than that.¹⁶ He suggests that mainstream environmentalists suffer from dilettantism when he differentiates their “philosophical discussion” of the problem with the experiences of those attending the summit: “But, for us, the issue of environmental justice is an issue of life and death.”¹⁷ The children of our communities, he reminds his audience, are dying from the toxic air and polluted groundwater found there. “We must worry about more than just the ozone layer,” he avers: “If we are not careful, there are not going to be any human beings for the ultraviolet rays to endanger. We must not forget what is going on the ground, in the water and in the air that we breathe.”¹⁸ Concerns about rain forests, wildlife preserves, and endangered species are, he implies, decidedly secondary to the summit’s more immediate problems of toxic wastes that are killing people now.

Moreover, Chavis indicts the mainstream environmental movement on institutional grounds just as he had indicted the environmental racism found in corporations and government. The summit, he says, will take the “moral high ground” by declaring itself opposed to pollution in *every* community, whereas the mainstream environmental movement has turned a blind eye to the issue of toxic wastes in communities of color. These misplaced priorities do not occur by happenstance however:

The problem with that larger movement out there is that they have refused to take the high moral road; they have refused to challenge the petrochemical industry; they have refused to challenge the multinational corporations. Many multinational corporations and petrochemical companies sit on their board of directors. You cannot have a symbiotic relationship with the problem and seek a solution.¹⁹

Until the larger environmental movement alters its structure, it will remain a participant in the environmental racism that Chavis’s discourse reveals.

ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICE AND BLACK MILITANT RHETORIC

The rhetorical strategies implicit in Benjamin Chavis’s remarks echo those employed by the black militant speakers of the 1960s. For those rhetors, too, naming, or what Molefi Kete Asante calls “*nommo*,” held the power to reveal the true nature of power and racism.²⁰ “I’m not

going to sit at your table and watch you eat, with nothing on my plate, and call myself a diner,” Malcolm X tells his audience in the “The Ballot or the Bullet” speech. He extends the analogy to his citizenship: “Sitting at the table doesn’t make you a diner, unless you eat some of what’s on that plate. Being here in America doesn’t make you an American.”²¹ This kind of definitional argument is threaded throughout Malcolm’s speech, for example: “A Dixiecrat is nothing but a Democrat in disguise”; “A segregated school means a school that is controlled by people who have no real interest in it whatsoever”; and

To those of us whose philosophy is black nationalism, the only way you can get involved in the civil-rights struggle is give it a new interpretation. The old interpretation excluded us. It kept us out. So, we’re giving a new interpretation to the civil-rights struggle, an interpretation that will enable us to come into it, take part in it.²²

Incorrect definitions exclude; true definitions reveal and thus catalyze the needed systemic changes. Robert Terrill, in his analysis of Malcolm X’s oratory, characterizes this discourse as “emancipatory interpretation,” a rhetoric of radical judgment that seeks to “free [the audience] from the confining ways of thinking prescribed by the dominant white culture.”²³

Nor is Malcolm X the only rhetor of the era to employ emancipatory rhetoric and focus on the problem of definitions. “We are now engaged in a psychological struggle in this country,” Stokely Carmichael tells his “Black Power” speech audience in Berkeley, California, “and that is *whether or not black people will have the right to use the words they want to use* without white people giving their sanction to it; and that we maintain, whether they like it or not, we gonna use the word ‘Black Power.’”²⁴ In his speech at the Free Huey rally of 1968, H. Rap Brown asserted new definitions of politics, justice, oppression, revolution, “green power” (the power of money), and progress: “One of the lies that we tell ourselves is that we’re making progress; but Huey’s chair’s empty. We’re not making progress. We tend to equate progress with concessions. We can no longer make that mistake.”²⁵ “We have to learn to see what’s going on” Bobby Seale told the same rally, in much the same way that four years earlier Malcolm X had told his audience, that African Americans “are waking up. Their eyes are coming open. They’re beginning to see what they used to only look at.”²⁶

Moreover, for these speakers as for Chavis, it is critically important that their audiences understand the systemic, institutional nature of the

racism against which they are struggling. *Nommo*, Asante argues, is the creative manifestation or what is “called to be,” and through the act of *nommo*, or naming “the mores and values of the society, becomes the created thing.”²⁷ And so Carmichael framed the mores and values at play by naming the racism systemic:

It is white people who make sure that we live in the ghettos of this country. It is white institutions that do that. They must change. In order—In order for America to really live on a basic principle of human relationships, a new society must be born. Racism must die, and the economic exploitation of this country of non-white peoples around the world must also die.²⁸

Because the racism is institutional, the problems it produces are pervasive. Malcolm X observed that “all of us have suffered here, in this country, political oppression at the hands of the white man, economic exploitation at the hands of the white man, and social degradation at the hands of the white man.”²⁹ Such institutional exploitation could persist only because the exploited did not perceive the truth, and so said Brown: “You find your security in the lies white America tells you. For four hundred years she taught you white nationalism and you lapped it up.”³⁰ Against this “white nationalism” Malcolm X posited “black nationalism,” but it was black nationalism as *he* defined it:

In spreading a gospel such as black nationalism, it is not designed to make the black man re-evaluate the white man—you know him already—but to make the black man re-evaluate himself. Don’t change the white man’s mind—you can’t change his mind. . . . So it is not necessary to change the white man’s mind. We have to change our own mind. You can’t change his mind about us. We’ve got to change our own minds about each other. We have to see each other with new eyes.³¹

New definitions would give African Americans new eyes, and new eyes were the vehicle by which the community could be constituted, and then institutional racism confronted, challenged, and changed.

The institutional, organized nature of this racism—whether that of white nationalism in the 1960s or environmental racism in the 1990s—also requires an organized response, and rhetors of both eras exhort their listeners to come together as a united community. Asante notes that *nommo*, or the word, serves as “the fundament as well as the fashioning instrument of traditional African society”; as such it both “influences

communal behavior, which, in fact, is the source and origin of that behavior” as well.³² “You’ve got to stop dividing yourselves,” H. Rap Brown declared:

You got to organize. I agree with Bobby [Seale]: we are *not* outnumbered; we are out-organized. You have to organize on *every* level. Everybody in the black community must organize, and then we decide whether we will have alliance with other people or not, but not until we are organized.³³

The militant rhetors of the 1960s, however, had the rhetorical advantage of speaking to an ethnically united audience. Malcolm X preached *black* nationalism, Carmichael argued for *Black* Power, and Huey Newton and Bobby Seale organized the *Black* Panthers. H. Rap Brown’s formulation is instructive: blacks must first come together as their own community. Only when blacks had themselves united could they consider whether to form an alliance “with other people.”

In contrast, Benjamin Chavis and the other speakers at the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit are by definition interested in and challenged by the task of forging a single community out of a variety of peoples who are identified by their ethnicities. “It is our intention,” says Chavis, “to build an effective multiracial, inclusive environmental movement, with the capacity to transform the political landscape of this nation.”³⁴ However, while Chavis and the summit seek a movement in the singular—a multiracial, inclusive community—the foundation of the movement is manifestly plural. “We had a multiracial National Planning Committee,” he points out, “and a multiracial National Advisory Committee. Now we are having a multiracial First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit. In this racist society that tells us that we cannot be multiracial and multicultural, we have a profound responsibility to dispel that myth.”³⁵ As a unifying term, “multiracial” communicates both the singular and plural.

Even more than the idea of “multiracial,” Chavis seems to look to the idea of “community” for a transcendent unifying term. There is, he declares in the opening of his speech, that “common struggle to prevent the destruction of our peoples and our communities.”³⁶ Chavis compliments Charles Lee, who directed the publication of the 1987 *Toxic Wastes and Race* report, because Lee has “the kind of commitment exhibited in our people of color communities.”³⁷ It is the “people of color communities” who are targeted for toxic waste dumps and who then suffer from “the increase in infant mortality, birth defects, cancer and respiratory illnesses.”³⁸ Chavis further implores these United States

people of color communities to identify with the “Third World people of color communities.”³⁹

Although Chavis rhetorically invokes a united movement supported by a single multiracial community, his discourse is pervasively plural. Consistently, he recalls the diverse ethnic origins of the delegates and sees in those diverse roots the wellsprings of the larger movement. “We have come,” he reminds them early in the speech, “from Native American sovereign nations and communities, from African American, Latino American, and Asian American communities.”⁴⁰ Later, Chavis again invokes the diversity of his hearers’ ethnicities and experiences even as he attempts to unify them through the synecdochal frame of “our children”:

But, for us, the issue of environmental justice is an issue of life and death. In the South Side of Chicago, **our children** are dying. Some die in their mother’s womb. In Cancer Alley, it is **our children** who are dying. In the Southwest and among farm workers, it is **our children** who are dying. On Native American reservations, territories and lands, it is **our children** who are dying. For Asian American sisters who labor in Silicon Valley, it is **our children** that are dying.⁴¹

Eighteen times in this speech, Chavis refers to communities in the plural. Only five times does he invoke “community” in the singular, and in one of those instances it is the “global community” that he references, and in another instance he predicts “community Summits” that will take place in the future—*within* the diverse and varied communities from which the delegates have come. As framed, such mini-summits would perpetuate rather than transcend the plurality of the “peoples.”

An interesting passage in this regard occurs just past the mid-point of the speech. Here he takes a moment to discuss one particular community’s interests as being unique and singularly worthy of the summit’s attention. Chavis lingers over this point because he explicitly realizes that the leadership’s proposed policy runs counter to the theme of one community and one movement.

It is our intention to call upon the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to ban permanently the storage or disposal of nuclear waste in Native American lands and communities. Now, I want to explain this because you will ask why not **all** communities. History will show that what we allow to go down on our Native American sisters and brothers will come to haunt us. You just

have to live a little while longer. There has been too much tolerance of the genocide against our Native American sisters and brothers. If we do not say anything else at this national leadership Summit when we must speak the truth, we must say that most of us have not taken up and embraced the suffering of our Native American sisters and brothers. We must say that!⁴²

Here, the movement must come together, but it does so in support of an individual segment of the whole. The “people of color communities” formulation thus poses a far greater challenge to rhetorical unification than did the “black community” of the militant speakers of the 1960s. Chavis would like the summit to forge a single movement, but for a summit that also places a distinct rhetorical emphasis on the ethnicities of the varied communities it represents, a single entity is difficult to fashion.

The “Floor Discussion” that immediately follows Chavis’s opening remarks is telling in this regard. In statement after statement, the delegates give voice to a *particular* community’s concern, rarely speaking on behalf of a single, unified movement for environmental justice. “I work with Seminole and Miccosukee traditional on defense of sacred lands,” says one speaker, who then reads into the proceedings a paragraph taken from the International Indian Treaty Council to the Second International Globescope Forum.⁴³ An African American man speaks on behalf of protecting the water supply in his Missouri community from a proposed toxic waste dump.⁴⁴ Yet a third individual announces that he “work[s] with a group of 1,150 Mexican American women that were laid off by a plant closing,” in Texas, and he calls upon the summit to join a boycott against garment manufacturer Levi Strauss.⁴⁵ A delegate from Arctic Village, Alaska, “represent[s] the Gwich’in Nation” and calls for the summit to participate in a march on the Capitol the following day.⁴⁶ That protest will call for legislation to protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Another delegate supports the call for the march, because “I am a Native Hawaiian” and the proposed legislation would prevent the construction of additional hydroelectric dams. “Almost 75% of the native species in Hawaii no longer exist,” she says, and more dams will extend that destruction.⁴⁷ An African American from Los Angeles protests smog, while a New York speaker objects to “dangerous, death trap jobs.”⁴⁸ Although these speakers occasionally invoke the unifying terms of “multiracial,” “environmental racism,” and “environmental justice,” their primary point of reference is the particular ethnic community from which they come, and the particular environmental issue pertinent to that community. The first delegate to speak in the “Floor Discussion”

is representative. "We are all here for the same purpose," she observes at the start, "to eliminate racism, economic and environmental injustice and to do some cross-cultural and multi-ethnic healing." However, she continues: "In all your sessions, please be aware of the female perspective; please be respectful of our voices; please be respectful of the things that we have to share, and the processes that we bring to this Summit."⁴⁹ Thus, while she begins her remarks with a nod toward unity, the focal point of her discourse gives voice to a singular perspective grounded in a specific demographic characteristic.

By necessity, Chavis's rhetoric of environmental racism had to expend a greater effort asserting the existence of a monolithic community than had the black militants of the 1960s. Where their discursive energies could be directed toward transforming the community's image of itself—the "black pride" element of the movement—Chavis's first challenge was to have his audience identify themselves as a single community.⁵⁰ By definition, however, a discourse of environmental racism cannot leave the idea of race far behind, no matter whether the rhetor focuses on a single race, such as blacks, or, as in the case of Chavis, on the multiracial. Further, regardless of the number of races that comprise the victims, the discourse of environmental racism implies an "other" race. For Chavis as for the black militants of the 1960s, that "other" race was defined as white. For both sets of rhetors, an important discursive move was to distinguish between the racism of white America and their own strong condemnation of the "other."

In the discourse of the 1960s, white America frequently came under attack. H. Rap Brown excoriates "the lies white America tells you."⁵¹ As Malcolm X characterizes the situation: "All of us have suffered here, in this country, political oppression at the hands of the white man, economic exploitation at the hands of the white man, and social degradation at the hands of the white man."⁵² In the opening passages of his "Black Power" speech, Stokely Carmichael observes that the existentialist philosophers Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus argued that individuals are inherently incapable of condemning themselves. "In a much larger view," Carmichael extrapolates, "SNCC⁵³ says that white America cannot condemn herself. So black people have done it—you stand condemned. The institutions that function in this country are clearly racist; they're built upon racism."⁵⁴

In contrast, Benjamin Chavis never employs the term "white" as a label for those he condemns; the term is only implied. The summit is necessary, he declares, because America is a "racist society," guilty of "racial discrimination" that is propagated by "institutionalized racism."⁵⁵ The white race as propagator of these evils is implied, but not

stated. President Bush, he argues, must understand that “to see the future of the United States of America, look around the room, because even in the present America is “a nation that is becoming more and more multiracial.”⁵⁶ Unfortunately, the nation’s leadership—in the environmental movement as well as the government—seems unaware of that fact, and thus the institutionalized racism he decries: “A nation which would deliberately dump on its own because of race is a nation which would dump on the global community because of race.”⁵⁷ Ironically, perhaps, his most strongly worded charge of racism does not employ the term itself: “There has been too much tolerance of the genocide against our Native American sisters and brothers.”⁵⁸ While never explicitly claiming that it is white America that has institutionalized racism, “dumped” on its own because of race, or committed genocide, the implied other is clear, as suggested in his closing metaphor alluding to the Ku Klux Klan—the “White Riders”—that the summit needs to “pull the sheets off all such persons.”⁵⁹

To acknowledge the reality of race in America—whether in the 1960s or 1990s—is not, however, to be racist oneself, but it is suggestive of the rhetorical situation both sets of speakers face that they feel compelled to address that issue. As Stokely Carmichael observes, to argue for Black Power is to call white America to account, but that “is not to say that one is a reverse racist; it is to say that one is moving in a healthy ground; it is to say what the philosopher Sartre says: One is becoming an ‘anti-racist racist.’”⁶⁰ Earlier in his career, Malcolm X might not have made the same distinction, but by his 1964 “The Ballot or the Bullet,” he took pains to focus on the behavior he was opposing rather than the race of the perpetrator: “Now in speaking like this, it doesn’t mean that we’re anti-white, but it does mean we’re anti-exploitation, we’re anti-degradation, we’re anti-oppression. And if the white man doesn’t want us to be anti-him, let him stop oppressing and exploiting and degrading us.”⁶¹ Benjamin Chavis, immediately after calling on his audience to “pull the sheets off” the environmental racists, ends his speech with language that closely echoes that of Malcolm X: “Let me say finally, because I do not want to be misunderstood, that evil can come in all colors. We are not organizing an anti-white movement. We are organizing an **anti-injustice** movement. We are organizing an **anti-racism** movement. We are organizing an **anti-environmental** injustice movement.”⁶² That Chavis felt obliged in 1991 to clarify his stand in language reminiscent of 1964 may have been presciently foreshadowed by Carmichael in his own speech: “And this country can’t understand that [Black Power is not racist]. Maybe it’s because *it’s* all caught up in racism. But I think what you have in SNCC is an antiracist racism.”⁶³

Chavis's employment of discourse resembling that of the 1960s black militants is not remarkable, of course, because Chavis himself was an activist who came of age in that era. In 1961, at the age of thirteen, he protested his Oxford, North Carolina, library's segregation policies—and won. Ten years later he was arrested as a member of the Wilmington Ten, in connection with which he was sentenced to four years in federal prison on charges of inciting a riot. In 1980, his conviction was overturned on appeal, although by then he had already served his prison sentence.⁶⁴ Chavis himself has alluded to the primacy of his activist discourse, which he believes then informs his environmental rhetoric. In a 1993 interview with the *New York Amsterdam News*, Chavis remarked that “it might be better said that I am an activist who recognized the convergence of environmental and civil rights issues. I have been working diligently to inform the nation of the disproportionate exposure of the Black community and communities of color to environmental hazards.”⁶⁵ Similarly, communication scholars Tim Brown and Rita Rahoi-Gilchrist have characterized Chavis's rhetorical persona during his sixteen-month tenure as executive director of the NAACP (1993–1994) as a “direct, action-oriented approach to resolving social issues and conflicts.”⁶⁶ They argue that his “more radical approach to leadership” was born from his roots as a civil rights activist, and that “a common theme Chavis espoused [as executive director] defined African Americans as inevitable victims of a racist social order which prevented them from rising above their unequal state.”⁶⁷ In 1997, Chavis joined the Nation of Islam. Now Benjamin F. Muhammad, he turned to organizing marches to rally the black community against black-on-black crime and to build bridges between Christians and Muslims.⁶⁸

By 1998, Muhammad was minister of Mosque No. 7 in New York City, where he continued to be involved in often controversial activist causes.⁶⁹ In the next decade, he helped found the Hip Hop Summit Action Network, an organization that promoted social activist causes by linking them with urban entertainers.⁷⁰ It is not surprising, then, that Chavis's rhetoric of environmental racism should be understood as a particular piece of a protracted discourse of civil rights and social activism.

It is not Chavis alone, however, who represents this strand of American activist rhetoric. His opening remarks at the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit stand as a synecdochal representation of the summit's discourse of environmental justice. Throughout the summit, there is an attention to definition and control of language, with a deconstructionist perspective that posits that the right words used in the correct manner will unveil the status quo's charade. “When we

talk about the environment, we have to talk about our own personal environments,” observed one delegate, who continued, “this is why I have a problem with the word ‘productive land’ because we have to remember that the land has been very productive for the multinational corporations, the Dole Fruit Companies and for the Peabody Coal Companies and now for the toxic waste industry.”⁷¹ “We still have one large group of people who are still living in slavery,” pointed out another delegate, and “these people are farmworkers.”⁷² A prolonged discussion at the summit was over the definition of “indigenous peoples,” because “what we are trying to get across here is that the indigenous people of this land are the original peoples here. Everyone else that is living in our homeland are immigrants to this land.”⁷³ Some argued that Puerto Ricans could not be included in the principle being discussed, because few were members of the Tyno people, the original inhabitants of the island. Others argued more broadly that Chicanos should be considered indigenous peoples. As one respondent noted reflexively: “The issue of trying to define indigenous people carries the danger of leaving out people who are here, but who are not indigenous and, like Puerto Ricans, have been disfranchised even though it’s not their native land. You have to include African Americans.”⁷⁴

Ironically, perhaps, as a featured speaker at the summit, the Reverend Jesse Jackson analogized Chavis to “the best tradition of King and Mandela.”⁷⁵ The rhetorical analysis here suggests that the more accurate comparison would be with Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, and Malcolm X. The irony is compounded because, true to the summit’s rhetorical milieu, Jackson himself speaks more in the tradition of the black militant rhetors than that of Martin Luther King Jr. Correct definitions and control of the language is critical to the activist enterprise. Environmental justice is, Jackson says, “the most basic right,” one which is coming to be appreciated in this “time of great discovery”: “We could not live at a more opportune time in the history of this country for new discovery of values, and for what makes us up, and who we are in relationship to each other and to the earth.”⁷⁶ The time is only “opportune,” however, if activists can successfully rename and redefine those values, relationships, and “what makes us up.” Although “the South has the richest soil and the poorest people—and the worst environmental destruction,” Jackson argues, “you cannot say it is just a Southern problem—that’s like saying I am only sick from the waist down.”⁷⁷ We must “excavate what is covered up in the American culture,” he declares, because only then can Americans experience “the evolution of our consciousness—of our coming into our full maturity.”⁷⁸ For Jackson as for Chavis, environmental racism is institutional:

And so conservatives pollute the earth with carcinogens and toxics [*sic*], and racism and sexism and anti-Semitism and anti-Arabism, and Asian bashing, and Native American bashing; they are the conservators of the wicked privilege. We must expand the consciousness. God has no step-children—he couldn't be God and have them. He would undercut his own divinity—by definition he is a liberator, an expander of the spirit.⁷⁹

This is militant activist discourse, one not confined to environmental justice and environmental racism but, rather, extended to issues such as the attack on organized labor through the outsourcing of jobs, statehood for the District of Columbia, the Clarence Thomas nomination, and defense of affirmative action, because all these are manifestations of the same institutionalized discrimination.⁸⁰

MEDIA COVERAGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Not surprisingly, media coverage of the summit also focused on the definitional issue of naming. The term “environmental racism” figured most prominently in the coverage’s lead, although the term was generally qualified, sometimes explicitly, as in “what *they* call environmental racism” or “what several national environmental groups are calling environmental racism.”⁸¹ Often, the qualification was implicitly signaled through the use of quotation marks.⁸² Only rarely did the reporter or columnist fully accept the summit’s central claim and characterize the issue plainly as “the pervasive practice of environmental racism.”⁸³ Still, no matter whether the term was adopted or not, the question about or the practice of racism occupied a central place in the media’s reporting. The Commission for Racial Justice’s 1987 *Toxic Wastes and Race* study often served as the springboard for this focus on race, just as it had for the summit itself.⁸⁴ Other experts, however, including Berkeley sociologist Robert Bullard, the toxics campaign coordinator of Greenpeace, and the executive director of the Gulf Coast Tenants Association, were also cited to support the claim that race and environmental pollution were linked.⁸⁵

For the media, as for Chavis, the 1987 study, and the 1991 summit, the idea of environmental racism originated with the disproportionate siting of industrial polluters in minority communities. “Cancer Alley,” an eighty-mile stretch of Louisiana along the Mississippi River, served as one exemplar. “Locating scores of polluting plants, incinerators and toxic waste dumps in a strip of Louisiana populated mostly by poor

blacks is an example of 'environmental racism,'" reported one.⁸⁶ Similar cases cited included the Kanawha River Valley's chemical industry, toxic waste incinerators in South Central Los Angeles and Chicago, and toxic waste dumps in Dallas and Michigan.⁸⁷ "Industry wants easy targets for proposed dumping," one NAACP official was quoted as saying, and "guess who's number one on their wish list?"⁸⁸

While the connection of minority communities and toxic waste facilities provided entrée to the notion of environmental racism, a substantial portion of the media's coverage was devoted to the issue of the mainstream environmental movement's "whiteness." Typically, the two sides were characterized, respectively, as "the predominantly white, mainstream environmental movement" and the "predominantly minority, so-called social-justice environmental movement."⁸⁹ "The Big 10 environmental organizations have been just as guilty of environmental racism as the rest of the U.S.," one summit delegate was quoted as saying.⁹⁰ One reporter concurred in his account, echoing the summit's argument: "[Along with industry, the] established environmental agencies such as the Sierra Club, the Wilderness and the National Audubon societies and the National Wildlife Federation also practiced environmental racism until recently. They ignored minority issues and excluded minority citizens from their boards and staffs."⁹¹ Wrote another journalist, "Many in the minority camp remain suspicious of mainstream environmental organizations' composition and intentions."⁹² Mainstream environmentalism, said one activist observer, is "basically a white, middle and upper-middle class movement."⁹³ Another commented that there is certainly "racism and prejudice within mainstream organizations, just as in the rest of society." He continued: "No matter how progressive they claim to be, some of the patterns (and) conditions overall in our society are also part of theirs. . . . It has caused the marginalization that people of color have felt within the mainstream movement."⁹⁴

On the third day of the summit, two officers of mainstream organizations addressed the attendees. Michael Fischer, executive director of the Sierra Club, acknowledged early that "we have been conspicuously missing from the battles for environmental justice all too often," and "we regret that fact sincerely."⁹⁵ The summit, he said twice, "is a turning point."⁹⁶ Both Fischer and John Adams, executive director of the Natural Resources Defense Council, averred that environmental degradations affected minority communities disproportionately, that they wanted input from the activists of color, and that "what we need now is a common effort."⁹⁷ Representing the summit's activists, Dana Alston, senior program officer of the Panos Institute, tentatively accepted the proffered olive branch but reasserted the insidious and systemic nature of racism,

thus implying that the mainstream movement had much work remaining to do.⁹⁸ As Alston concluded, she directed her remarks directly to Fischer and Adams: "The only thing I have to say is, it is up to you who have come here today and laid out your understanding, to challenge your brothers and sisters on this. It cannot continue to be our role alone to keep raising this issue [environmental racism]." ⁹⁹

The question of what caused the movements' fracture was left unresolved in the press accounts, attributed broadly to a variety of factors including "racism, elitism, ignorance, benign neglect."¹⁰⁰ In addition to race, however, media coverage emphasized the natural resources versus human resources divide that was proffered in Chavis's speech. Major environmental organizations "look at the environment from a natural-resource perspective and not a human-resource perspective." The mainstream movement has "found it necessary to focus on natural resources," one Sierra Club official was quoted as saying, because government is already "more responsive to environmental degradation that affects people."¹⁰¹ "We can collectively do better," said the president of the National Audubon Society, but he denied any "subtle form of racism."¹⁰² One Latino activist who had tried to "cross over," however, posited this analogy: "It's like going to a Mexican restaurant that has been yuppified. . . . They're eating Mexican food, but when a Mexican comes in, they stare as if to say, 'What are you doing here?'"¹⁰³ Some mainstream environmentalists acknowledged the gap that separated the two groups and articulated a resolve to change. Offered one national officer of the Sierra Club: "The mainstream environmental movement has been deficient. It's never a mistake to focus on saving a natural resource, but, if the environmental movement is going to be successful, it also has to demonstrate its commitment to saving the human environment as well."¹⁰⁴

The media's emphasis on the conflicts and division between the two environmental groups is particularly noteworthy because, of the three components of environmental racism enumerated by Chavis, he devotes the least of his attention to the "complexion" of the mainstream movement. He pays far more rhetorical attention to the greed and racism evident in the decision-making of industry as well as the regulatory neglect by the government; but while the former claim attracts some media coverage, the issue of governmental racism goes virtually ignored. The Associated Press report dutifully noted that the director of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) "refused an invitation" to attend the summit, and the EPA is singled out in another story as the target of related marches and protests.¹⁰⁵ The Nuclear Regulatory Agency, frequently attacked at the summit, is barely mentioned in passing in one

article. In the main, governmental agencies emerge unscathed from the discussion of environmental racism. The issue of race is a matter of industrial economics, as corporations take advantage of those with less political clout and of battling activists who replicate society's racism in the structure of their own organizations. Environmental racism, the media coverage implied, was not endemic to government itself. For the mainstream media, neither Chavis nor the summit seemed to have succeeded in redefining toxic health hazards as an issue of environmental racism in government.

Manifest in the media's coverage of the summit, however, was the emphasis on ethnicity and communities—in the plural—that is so integral to Chavis's discourse. Consistently, the races were enumerated separately: "Blacks, Hispanics, Asians and American Indians from every state dominate" the summit, reported one, while another led with a similar listing, although omitting the Asians.¹⁰⁶ Environmental issues were determined by race. Incinerators and toxic wastes threaten the "black North Athens" district, new landfills and toxic waste facilities jeopardize the "Rosebud Sioux reservation in South Dakota."¹⁰⁷ Dioxins from paper mills pollute the downstream fishing waters of the Penobscot tribe in Maine.¹⁰⁸ Chemical wastes are contaminating the water supply of "Tucson's Hispanic community."¹⁰⁹ As with Chavis, these ethnic communities were not simply the locus of environmental racism, they were the movement's source of spiritual strength. "Pounding a drum and hoisting placards from places as diverse as Puerto Rico and New Mexico," began one report on the summit, highlighting the varied communities represented by the delegates.¹¹⁰ Another article included a delegate's quotation that repeats the summit's claim that "minorities are the true environmentalists, starting with the Native Americans' who have an almost spiritual attachment to the environment."¹¹¹ An exemplar of a community environmental justice organization is East Austin's People Organized in Defense of Earth and Its Resources (PODER). Significantly, the news account noted that PODER was organized and led by a longtime Chicana activist, and that PODER is both an acronym and a Spanish word meaning "power."¹¹² Power is thus drawn literally and figuratively from individual communities, diverse rather than united. The *Cleveland Plain Dealer's* Margaret Bernstein was a rarity in this regard, when she concluded her column on the summit with a focus on the singular rather than the plural: "The budding movement has the promise of synergy, a strengthening partnership. And in Greater Cleveland, where interracial coalitions are rarely spotted, it's a breath of fresh air."¹¹³

CONCLUSIONS

Since 1991, the idea of “environmental racism” has lived two lives. In the mainstream press, the term occurred with some frequency through the remainder of the decade, only to disappear almost entirely with the turn of the century.¹¹⁴ The EPA avoided employing the term, although in 1992 it did create an Office of Environmental Justice, an important structural response to the movement. In 1994, Bill Clinton created the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council as a permanent task force to the EPA. Pezzullo and Sandler argue that the document outlining the seventeen “Principles of Environmental Justice,” adopted at the summit, “has since served as the defining document for the environmental justice movement.”¹¹⁵ Drawing upon multiple governmental, scholarly, and activist sources, Pezzullo and Sandler summarize the power of Chavis’s and the summit’s *nommo*. The summit and its resulting movement has provided a “transformative public discourse over what are truly healthy, sustainable and vital communities,” shifted “the terms of the debate,” and answered the call for “a total redefinition of terms and language to describe the conditions that people are facing.”¹¹⁶ Although “environmental justice” has served widely as a transformative term, “environmental racism” has played a narrower role. “Environmental racism” has served a catalyzing function for groups such as the Black Workers for Justice, the Breast Cancer Action organization, and the Center for Justice Democracy; has continued to serve as a core phrase for the National Churches of Christ and its organizing for eco-justice; and has been obviously adopted by the Coalition for Environmental Racism.¹¹⁷ Both phrases remain important organizing terms for socially conscious scholars, although, as with the larger population, the term “environmental justice” has been employed far more frequently than “environmental racism.”¹¹⁸

Within this discourse of environmental racism, the individual community continues to play the predominant role. “Environmental racism is when minority and poor *communities* are home to waste facilities, polluting industries, sewage treatment plants [and] other problem facilities that aren’t put in white, more affluent communities,” argued one advocate in the late 1990s.¹¹⁹ She continued with an emphasis on the local: “Environmental injustice occurs when a community is “impinged on by an environmental burden for the alleged good of the society.”¹²⁰ Consistently, environmental racism is identified with the concerns of local communities and neighborhoods. In 2004 the *Buffalo News* reported: “An activist group Thursday charged New York State with

environmental racism, claiming minority communities are exposed to a disproportionate amount of air pollution in the state.”¹²¹ With a broad, statewide claim as a springboard, the story—and the activists—go on to focus on one particular neighborhood with its one particular problem:

West Side residents, meanwhile, are concerned about the number of asthma cases in neighborhoods around the Peace Bridge. Thirty-five percent of residents around the Peace Bridge Plaza have asthma, compared with 19 percent on the East Side and 4 to 9 percent nationally, according to a previously released study by Buffalo General Hospital’s Center for Asthma and Environmental Exposure.¹²²

The “people of color communities” continue to be conceptualized in the plural, by the activists as well as the media.

Benjamin Chavis and the the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit sought to redefine environmentalism, asserting language that conveyed the institutional racism they discerned in the movement, among industry, and in the government. To a large extent, they were successful in doing so. “Environmental racism,” although not part of the nation’s mainstream lexicon, still occupies an important conceptual place within a vocabulary that preferences the broader term “environmental justice.” Unlike “Black Power” and “Black Pride,” language through which activist rhetors helped shape the political conversation of the sixties, “environmental racism” has remained a term that is able to animate particular groups, without yet gaining a foothold on the national stage. It may well be that local activism has succeeded where a broader, single movement would not, however, and that “environmental racism” and its grounding in plural communities of color has been a rhetorically astute strategy. In his trenchant analysis of Malcolm X’s oratory, Robert Terrill argues that such rhetoric centered on the nature of language “offers tremendous emancipatory potential” and presents opportunities for judgment and critique that would not be otherwise available:

The action and ideologies of the dominant culture can be observed without the necessity for immediate political engagement; the categories that the dominant culture produces as a means to manage its own analysis can be rejected; options for response and intervention that fall well beyond the limitations imposed by the dominant culture can be considered; productive

comparisons and parallels between local and global events can be drawn; and judgment becomes individualized and egalitarian rather than the purview of heroic orators or divine prophets.¹²³

Since the 1991 summit, some activists have extolled the progress made in the particular, although others seem to remain frustrated by the persistent silence about environmental racism in the broader public dialogue. The language of environmental racism and environmental justice was powerful enough to catalyze the calling of a Second National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in 2002, a conference attended by over 1,400 delegates, almost triple the expected number, and it continues to echo in the discourse of environmental justice.¹²⁴ Like its militant ancestor of the 1960s, the rhetoric about environmental racism remains a discourse focused on discourse itself: about the world it seeks to change, the people who seek to change it, and the rhetorical path by which they seek to do so.

NOTES

1. Benjamin F. Chavis Jr., "Preface," *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States* (N.p.: Public Data Access, 1987), ix.
2. Ibid.
3. Benjamin F. Chavis Jr., "The Historical Significance and Challenges of the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit," *Proceedings of the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit* (New York: United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice, 1992), 7.
4. Ibid., 9.
5. Ibid., 8.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., 9; emphasis in original.
12. Ibid., 8.
13. Ibid.; emphasis in original.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 9.
16. Ibid., 8.

17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., 9.
19. Ibid., 8.
20. Molefi Kete Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 59–80.
21. Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet,” in *The Will of a People: A Critical Anthology of Great African American Speeches*, ed. Richard W. Leeman and Bernard K. Duffy (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2012), 279.
22. Ibid., 281, 293, 283.
23. Robert E. Terrill, *Malcolm X: Inventing Radical Judgment* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2004), 154–155.
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GREEN

The written works of nature's leading advocates—from Charles Sumner and John Muir to Rachel Carson and President Jimmy Carter, to name a few—have been the subject of many texts, but their speeches remain relatively unknown or unexamined. *Green Voices* aims to redress this situation. After all, when it comes to the leaders, heroes, and activists of the environmental movement, their speeches formed part of the fertile earth from which uniquely American environmental expectations, assumptions, and norms germinated and grew. Despite having in common a definitively rhetorical focus, the contributions in this book reflect a variety of methods and approaches. Some concentrate on a single speaker and a single speech. Others look at several speeches. Some are historical in orientation, while others are more theoretical. In other words, this collection examines the broad sweep of US environmental history from the perspective of our most famous and influential environmental figures.

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