



# AmericanRhetoric.com

**Russell Means**

*Statement to the Senate Special Committee on Investigations*

delivered 30 January 1989, Washington, D.C.



**AUTHENTICITY CERTIFIED: Text version below transcribed directly from audio**

*Hau mitakuyepi, miye malakota. Maje tahan ki ne zi tiyospaye ki le hesa woke lila wakan. Mitakuye ate tasunka witko tiyospaye. Mitakuye ina wanbli zuya tiyospaye.*

This is the traditional greeting of my people that I am bound to give; albeit, it's a short version. What I said in my own language translated into English thusly:

*Hello my relatives, I am an Oglala Lakota and I come from a very sacred holy land, the Black Hills where Yellow Thunder Village is. My mother is from the War Eagle clan and my father's family is from the Crazy Horse clan.*

This greeting is, to this day, the way all Indians throughout the nation still greet one another, those that still know their culture. This is the only way we present ourselves to one another that is acceptable. We tell you who we are, where we are from, who we are from, our clans, and we do this without ever saying our name. Anything less would be an insult to you and to my people.

Senators, my morning prayers to the great mystery always include you and your colleagues in Congress, as well as leaders in all governments.



# AmericanRhetoric.com

It is an honor to come before you as a spokesman for my people, the American Indians of the United States of America. In these United States of America, this great country of ours, we American Indians, we can be anything we want to be except American Indians; and that is created by the laws of this nation and condoned by its subsidiaries, the so-called Tribal Government, and designed for the Indian to fail, to be expendable, to be eliminated.

I take you back in your history. After the American Indian hostiles have been subdued and forcibly confined to Indian reservations, it took approximately 30 years, one generation, for us to adjust and become economically viable, contrary to what the anthropologists say and we even ourselves are taught as Indian people. However, allotments were made smaller. Our remaining lands were opened to homesteading, and we were forced into reducing our livestock.

Nevertheless, we made the adjustment again, in less than half the aforementioned time, 15 years; we have become economically self-sufficient again. But once again, the American Indian was forced into reducing our livestock. The "boss-farmer" concept was instituted. We were told what, when, where, how much and how little we could grow the supply to agriculture and our livestock. Again, we recovered in a time span of approximately 15 years.

We were so successful in our third recovery that the American Indians enjoyed the finest of economic times while the rest of the industrialized world was wallowing in the Great Depression. It was then that President Roosevelt introduced the Howard-Wheeler Act, better known as the Indian Reorganization Act, the IRA, which institutionalized the so-called Tribal Governments, which are not one of our institutions, and it is still foreign to us this very day. We have yet to recover.

Forty-five years later, the IRA -- Indian Tribal Governments on their own initiative, began renewed efforts at reestablishing their sovereignty, focused on the oldest profession of American Indians -- that is gambling. Bingo and other gaming operations have been, without exception, a proven initial success. Failure through mismanagement, politics, or litigation has been less than 15%. Showing a better than 85% success rate, the new Indian-sponsored gaming industry on reservations dwarfed success ratios of any and all other non-Indian industries in America. Gaming operations have proven to benefit the revenue gathering of all governments, be they county, state, or Indian reservation. With regulation of bingo and gaming by the congress, we are experiencing repetition of history. One shouldn't remedy success. The results: the United States government, through Congress, once again intervenes to regulate a proven success in violation of all basic and fundamental rules of economics and totally contrary to all laws of capitalism.



# AmericanRhetoric.com

American Indians are human beings. We are supposed to be citizens of the United States of America. We fought in your wars in other countries. Our Navajo Nation code talkers served and saved this nation in World War II. We have the inalienable right to joint venture with whom we choose as long as we do not harm nor commit fraud upon anyone. There is no piece of evidence anywhere that proves Indians ever conspired with criminal elements to establish bingo. The Bureau of Indian Affairs, the infamous colonial office of the Department of Interior and the initiator of sleaze in government, has been regulating contracting on Indian reservations since 19 -- since 1824. This fact alone should convince and teach every student of government that regulation of commerce and enterprise does not work. In fact, it only produces the opposite result. Graft and corruption is rampant to the contracting officers of the BIA and its surrogate Tribal Government.

Indian front contractors bid for and receive government contracts only to proceed to build shoddy dangerous bridges, buildings, schools, roads, and dams. The Indian is the scapegoat when there is a failure and is always the one indicted. Contracting on reservations has proven historically to breed and feed corruption within the BIA and now, the tribal governments.

Within the past two years, I personally have attempted to assist seven Indian reservations located in the southwest, the northwest, and the northern plains, to no avail. The investors I represented were from various groups interested in establishing banks, resorts, Indian-owned public relation firms, factories, fishing ports, and international trade. I now know that tribal governments do not want economic development unless graft is a major ingredient.

The BIA is a major player in land leases being sold by petty bureaucrats for as meager in amount as 40 dollars. There is a scandal of monstrous proportions occurring in at least two Indian agencies, the BIA's branch of land operations and the branch of realty. I challenge this Investigations committee<sup>1</sup> to intricately go into the branches of realty and land operations. The BIA does not enforce its trust -- trust responsibility. Quite to the contrary.

In September of -- of 1987, I moved from the poorest county in America, the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, to the richest area in the country, the Navajo Indian reservation. There is no difference. I have paraphrased the former Secretary of the Department of the Interior, James Watt: If you want to see an example of failed socialism, go to an Indian reservation.

The poorest and richest reservations in our nation suffer from identical problems: mismanagement, a bloated patronage system, no checks and balances, and tribal governments' waiver of sovereignty in order to initiate debt. This is not anything new. This is an everyday occurrence in all tribal governments. [The] problem is leadership. In this case,



# AmericanRhetoric.com

it is the lack of leadership. Ironically, everyone, including you senators, referred to the allegedly elected tribal officials as leaders.

*Leaders* are supposed to work for a better quality of life for their constituents. It is an insult to my heritage, my ancestors, and my dignity as an Oglala Lakota to have the term used loosely. Many of the tribal officials are honest and sincere men and women who have good hearts. Nevertheless, a vast majority of the tribal officials parasite on the incestuous world of tribal politics, not as our forefathers who were the best providers, protectors, defenders, advocates, and friends. The game of "who is the most important" rules. It's embarrassing.

At the turn of the century, American Indians numbered about 230,000, all traditional. With each succeeding generation, we lose a population base and our spirit as once proud peoples. The American Indians statistics of deprivation have remained constant since the end of World War II. All other groups of citizens -- fortunes rise and fall with the gross national product, the -- the GMP. The American Indian statistical lines of deprivation remains constant, a straight line. With the blatant genocide of our traditional people, we have less than 50 thousand in America today. We are averaging a loss of 1000 a year since 1900. We are losing a value system as distinct people that sets us apart from the industrialized world. These facts surface in our tribal statistics and no one attempts to do anything about it except for a few social workers and reservation police.

This new statistical horror is women and child abuse. Child's sexual abuse is epidemic on Indian reservations and all you hear are whispers. This abuse can be directly attributable to the schools on the reservations. Education, BIA, public, the contract and missionary schools do not teach positive values from non-Indian culture and in collusion with the BIA certainly do not allow Indian culture and values to be taught. The fact is, educators continually denigrate American Indian traditional lifestyle as primitive, dirty, and without any redeemable virtues. And the tribal councils condone it. Needless to say, every time the U.S. Government has interfered with American Indian lifestyles, it has been proven to be disastrous.

In the 1960s, legal services were implemented on Indian reservations. It was a boon for the people. Tribal officials all of a sudden were held accountable. Legal services stepped in and lo and behold, tribal courts had power to the power of attorney for the people. The result, an edict from Washington D.C. is handed down and legal services can no longer represent people against the Tribal Government and they can no longer represent class action lawsuits against any government.



# AmericanRhetoric.com

Presently, legal services are not much more than a meal for divorce lawyer trainees. Congress passed the American Indian Religious Freedom Act in 1978. To date, six cases concerning our freedom of religion has reached the Supreme Court. We lost every one of them. We do not win lawsuits. State governments lose. The only time we allegedly win a lawsuit, it is in reality the federal government winning out over the sovereign rights of a state. Once again, the American Indians are the pawn.

The major factors presenting American Indian people were the existing rights to self-determination. American Indians suffer under a system of dual citizenship, that is U.S. citizenship and Tribal citizenship, maintained by the BIA. Only Hitler did that. The dual citizenship is a major obstacle in the free exercise of individual and tribal sovereignty. The continuing loss and attrition of existing lands to various federal, state, and local laws and/or regulations is a hindrance, the abridgment of sovereign rights to remaining lands and the arbitrary monetary policies of settlement of these rights whenever they are recognized.

Another major factor preventing Indian people from self-determination, subjugation of the American Indian individual to the laws of government sponsored tribal governments and the continuing arbitration of the BIA rules and regulations, which have the force of law yet are not repealable solutions. The American Indian people's right to self-determination is recognized and will be implemented through the following policies:

- The American Indian individual shall have the right to choose his or her citizenship and the American Indian nations have the right to choose their level of citizenship and autonomy up to absolute independence;
- The American Indian will have their just property rights restored which include rights of easement, access, hunting, fishing, prayer, and water;
- The BIA will be abolished with the American Indian tribal members deciding the extent and nature of their governments, if any;
- Negotiations will be undertaken to exchange otherwise unclaimed and un-owned federal property for any and all government obligations to the American Indian nations, and to fully -- and to hold fully liable those responsible for any and all damages which have resulted from the resource development on or near our reservation lands including the -- including damages done by careless and inexcusable disposal of uranium mill tailings and other mineral and toxic wastes.



# AmericanRhetoric.com

I want to thank you, gentlemen, for inviting me here. It's been a high honor, especially since I'm the only one invited here today to testify that doesn't receive money from the federal government. Also, I want to make -- I was introduced as a former founder and leader of American Indian movement to the tribal chairwoman that you have here, a former associates for the American Indian Movement back in the days when we were gross militants and so I just wanted to let you in on that, that the American Indian Movement is a very proud continuing part of American Indian Society.

I thank you.

<sup>1</sup> The Special Committee on Investigations of the Select Committee on Indian Affairs