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Orwellian Language and the Politics of Tribal Termination (1953-1960)

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Abstract

From 1953 to 1960, the federal government terminated sovereign recognition for 109 American Indian nations. *Termination* was a haphazard policy of assimilation that had disastrous consequences for Indian land and culture. Nonetheless, termination cloaked latent motivations for Indian land within individual rights rhetoric that was at odds with Indian sovereignty. Termination highlights the rhetorical features of social control under capitalism portrayed in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), in which opposing principles are fused and inverted. This essay critiques termination's Orwellian language to show how ideographs of social liberation are refashioned by the state to subvert Indian sovereignty and popular dissent.

On August 1, 1953 Congress approved House Resolution 108, terminating the federal government's recognition of sovereignty for five of the largest American Indian nations, the Flathead, Klamath, Menominee, Pottowatomie, and Turtle Mountain Chippewa (Wilkinson, 2005, p. 57). Announced as the new direction of Indian affairs, *termination* signaled the decline of New Deal enthusiasm for tribal sovereignty. From 1953 to 1960, Utah Senator Arthur V. Watkins and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Commissioner Dillon S. Myer, with Congressional support, reoriented federal Indian policy to align with Cold War ideologies of national unity, anti-Communism, and cultural homogeneity. Termination disbanded federally-recognized tribes, removed their tax exemptions, ended federal assistance, and extinguished fishing and hunting rights. Nonetheless, Watkins and Myer insisted that termination was in American Indians' best interests. They spoke euphemistically of termination as an Indian freedom program that would emancipate tribes from paternalism, create formal equality, facilitate self-reliance, and bestow Indians with citizenship.

Despite Watkins and Myer's bold claims, termination reversed decades of policies that enabled tribes to recover millions of acres of land. Fixico (1986) argues that "termination threatened the very core of the American Indian existence – its culture" (p. 183). Termination contributed to a decline in funds for health, education, employment, and resource management. Fixico concludes that during the termination era "the government processed 109 cases of termination affecting 1,369,000 acres of Indian land and an estimated 12,000 Indians" (p. 183). By individualizing ownership, termination opened tribal lands and assets to private sale and commercial development, frequently against the expressed interest of the tribe in question.

In this essay, I examine how Watkins and Myer successfully defined termination - a policy inimical to tribal sovereignty - as American Indian liberation. They used terms connoting

individual rights such as *freedom* and *equality* to redefine assimilation as an ethical duty. Such rhetoric mystified the ways in which termination served the economic freedoms of non-Indians interested in exploiting tribal lands. Watkins and Myer's rhetoric demonstrates the recurring failure of individual rights rhetoric to facilitate American Indian self-determination. They inverted historic Indian demands to escape paternalism into an antithetical argument for assimilation into mainstream society. Termination rhetoric garnered strong support because it accessed ideological narratives of American democracy rooted in liberal capitalism. In this assessment, I am guided by Koppes' (1977) insight that "in formulating policy for native American societies, mainstream Americans often reveal not so much their concern for Indian realities as their image of what society at large should be" (p. 544).

In the policy rhetoric of termination, Indians were not removed but *liberated* from their reservations; not deprived of federal protection but *unburdened from paternalism*. Reservations were not homelands but *prisons*. These discourses exhibit the rhetorical features of social control that unfold in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), a vision of a dystopian society governed by a corrupt language of inverted and unified opposites in which "war is peace, freedom is slavery, ignorance is strength" (p. 10). Further, because termination rhetoric unified emancipatory terms with oppositional meanings, it functioned like Orwellian *Newspeak*. Revisiting the insights of Orwell on language and his theorization by Herbert Marcuse (1964), I advance an Orwellian critique of political language to expose how capitalist interests are sustained by unifying opposed principles. Orwell and Marcuse can guide critics interested in demystifying discourses that consolidate power under the banner of social liberation. Focusing on the exemplary case of termination, this analysis animates the workings of Orwellian language, its potentially dangerous consequences, and alternatives for resistance.

The Critique of One-Dimensional Language

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the official language of *Newspeak* replaced Old English with the aim of liquidating subversive thought. *Freedom*, *peace*, and *equality* were redefined as their opposites and emblemized in the state party slogan: “War is Peace.” The unification of opposites negated the anti-authoritarian language of protest. Orwell (1949) wrote that “the special function of certain Newspeak words, of which *oldthink* was one, was not so much to express meanings as to destroy them” (p. 311). Newspeak inoculated its authoritarian purveyors against discourses of dissent and laid siege to oppositional reasoning by promoting *doublethink*, a cognitive practice of reconciling contradictory ideas through the manipulation of language. Orwell’s concern with the corruption of language and its fusion with repressive state functions directed social theorists to examine discourse as a constructive feature, rather than representative element, of totalitarian society (Orwell, 1946). John Rodden (2003) writes that for Orwell, “the corruption of language ... could fatally undermine freedom and open the door to tyranny” (p. 21).

Though this allegory provided a poignant critique of Soviet communism, Orwell explained how linguistic mystification was fashioned as a method of social control in the West. A devout Democratic Socialist, Orwell did not intend *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to defend freedom as defined under Western capitalism (Hitchens, 2002; Kellner, 1984). Herbert Marcuse (1964) explains the significance of Orwellian thought for critical theory:

[T]he fact that the prevailing mode of freedom is servitude, and that the prevailing mode of equality is superimposed inequality is barred from expression by the closed definition of these concepts in terms of the powers which shape the respective universe of

discourse. The result is the familiar Orwellian language (“peace is war,” and “war is peace,” etc.), which is by no means that of terroristic totalitarianism only. (pp. 88-89)

Marcuse directed Orwell’s critique toward the parallel rise of new forms of social repression in the West, observing that capitalist societies stabilized themselves through integrated consumption and production of false needs and the advancement of technological control. In such societies “the very mechanism which ties the individual to his society has changed, and social control is anchored in the new needs which it has produced” (p. 9). He used *Orwellian language* to describe how the key terms of social liberation generally associated with class struggle become unified with their opposites to nullify critical thought. In Douglas Kellner’s (1984) words Orwellian language “smooth[s] over social contradictions and problems, and thus restricts thought and public discourse to the terms and interests of the established society” (p. 258).

Marcuse’s critique unmasks the discursive practices that obscure exploitation and erode critical reasoning faculties ([Bonefield](#), 2001; Horkheimer, 1992; Marx, 1867/1983, p. 77). With rationalizations superimposed over social contradictions, Marcuse argues that reason under capitalism assumes the primordial properties from which it proclaims to ascend:

Today, the mystifying elements are mastered and employed in productive publicity, propaganda, and politics. Magic, witchcraft, and ecstatic surrender are practiced in the daily routine of the home, the shop, and the office and the rational accomplishments conceal the irrationality of the whole. (p. 190)

The unification of opposites conflates reason with reality, name with function, and essence with existence. Kellner (1984) writes that “reason has identified itself with the reality: what is actual is reasonable, although what is reasonable has not yet become reality” (p. 231). This shift in the

locus of mystification is an ideological iteration of post-industrial rationality in which, “the rational rather than the irrational becomes the most effective vehicle of mystification” (p. 189).

Marcuse’s turn to Orwell was motivated by two concerns. The first was his “repressive tolerance” thesis which held that the state and capital maintained power through permitting dissent while employing discursive cooptation strategies (Marcuse, 1969). The second is one shared by rhetorical theorists: the tendency of political vocabularies to malfunction. Burke (1969, 1959) observed the atrophy of reason through *casuistic stretching*, a mode of argument employed to resolve moral concerns by applying abstract principles to specific cases. Casuistry is moral reasoning abstracted from historical analogies followed by generalized maxims for situated moral decision-making (Jonsen & Toulmin, 1988, p. 257). Wright (2006) argues that *casuistic stretching* can impoverish analogical reasoning through “the deliberate bending of an argument’s topic and scope” (p. 55). Like Marcuse, Burke (1984) suggests that argument by analogy can erode disparate categories of reasoning through rationalization: “the breakdown in our categories of the ‘proper’ is now so thorough that this transplantation of words into ‘inappropriate’ settings is constantly with us” (p. 109). In what Marcuse calls *one-dimensional language*, analogical reasoning concerning the situated application of principles such as *liberty* and *equality* are invoked ad nauseam without reflection on their polyvalent historical meaning.

McGee (1980) argues that part of the problem is that rhetorical situations are never perfectly similar. Ideographs, or politically resonant “ordinary language term[s] found in political discourse,” are employed to establish connections between diachronic and synchronic contexts (p.15). Ideographs such as *equality* acquire meaning through application to their comparatively appropriate present-day usages. Analogies can malfunction to the extent that rhetors overlook disparate contextual meanings. McGee notes that “such instances have the

potential to change the structure of ideographs and hence the ‘present’ ideology” (p. 14).

Inconsistent usages of ideographs distort historical precedent and flatten diachronic meanings to justify antithetical courses of action. In such cases, liberal ideographs can be employed to conflate diachronic with synchronic meanings, transforming the terms historic connotations. Aune (1994) suggests that Marcuse was similarly concerned with both the failure of political vocabularies and the functionalization of language, “the tendency to substitute signal responses to language for critical thought” (p. 83). This mirrors McGee’s observation that political slogans can be “easily mistaken for the technical terminology of political philosophy” (p. 5). Further, by structuring society’s ideological commitments, ideographs can produce deferential responses to reiterated political language.

Concerned with deceptive political vocabularies, some critics have employed approaches that can be characterized as demystification (Aune, 1999; Cloud, 2003; Edelman, 1977, 2001; Pei, 1973; Schiappa, 1989), a Marxist strategy of uncovering *false consciousness*, or a social superstructure imposed over an unequal base that conceals the exploitative conditions of production (Foulkes, 1983). Applied to the ideological function of language, McGee (1984, 1982) and Wander (1984, 1983) contend that discourse serves agents of social and economic power. Critics, thus, should fashion their interpretative capacities to understand, in Cloud’s (1994) words “how political and economic power is mediated, reinforced, perpetuated, and challenged in the texts we study” (p. 143). Here I am less concerned with relative truth or falsity of termination rhetoric than its plausibility, or fidelity to capitalist ideology. I am guided by McGee’s (1980) proposition that political languages are not “important because of their *fiction* ... but because of their *truth*, their links with the trick-of-the-mind that deludes individuals into believing that they ‘think’ with/for/through a social organism” (p. 15).

Cloud (2003) provides a foundation for criticism of one-dimensional language, arguing that “the left must use the resources of demystification - which means countering emotion with reason - in the process of building a counter-hegemonic movement” (para. 15). Cloud elaborates further:

[D]eliberation includes the capacity to seek out and entertain multiple positions on a given event, the capacity to historicize events, the capacity to weigh competing evidence and reasoning and discard the less credible, the capacity to probe the motivation of discourses and adhere to those with the fewest privately motivated sponsors, and the capacity to take action based on this deliberative process. (para. 37)

The goal, then, of demystification is to introduce multidimensional thought against the unification of opposites, or otherwise deceptive political vocabularies. Advancing Cloud’s argument, I argue that critics must also counter *rationalization* with *reason*. Demystification demands the reintroduction of rejoinder and reciprocity into dominant discourse, holding abridged, contradictory language to the light of critical reason.

Marcuse and Orwell offer a supplemental critical language. As Aune (1994) notes, rhetoric theorists would glean insights from Marcuse’s contribution; however, “it has been insufficiently acknowledged that Marcuse is preeminently a philosopher of *communication*” (p. 76). Turning to Orwell, Marcuse sought to emancipate discourse from instrumental rationality. Combining theory and practice, Marcuse (1964) defends “the emancipation of consciousness,” arguing that “[w]ithout it all emancipation of the senses, all radical activism, remains blind, self-defeating. Political practice still depends on theory...on Reason” (p. 131). Concerned with the relationship between discourse and economic oppression, Marcuse’s critique of Orwellian language emphasizes the social power of signifying practice while also foregrounding the

primacy of materialist interests in sustaining and challenging social domination (Best & Kellner, 1991). Further, since both Marcuse and Orwell theorized the communication practices governing capitalism during the Cold War, the conditions through which their critical insights emerged aligned with the context in which termination gained favor.

Termination's Contexts

Termination garnered support by accessing Cold War discourses emphasizing cultural homogeneity and individualism in contradistinction to Soviet communism (Philip, 2005; Rosier, 2006). Metcalf (2002) argues that termination was a “type of ideological combat,” which even for those who defended the welfare of tribes, “devolved into a struggle over land and resources” (p. 3). To connect their objectives to national unity and American capitalism, terminationists employed liberal ideographs of *freedom*, *equality*, and *self-reliance*. These terms evoked nationalist pride in democracy and emphasized the absence of those values in Soviet Communism. More broadly, termination rhetoric was situated within the American liberal tradition, in which freedoms were derived from a Lockean notion of property and labor.

Cold War Anti-Communism

Anti-communism made assimilation a necessary goal for Indian affairs. Under John Collier (1933-1945) the BIA had supported policies that preserved tribal self-governance. In 1934, Congress passed the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), which prohibited individualized allotment of tribal lands, established procedures for adjudicating federal land claims, and established tribal constitutions (Nagel, 1997). Prior to the IRA, Indian policy was governed by assimilationist impulses reflected by the policy of allotment. The Dawes Act (1887) divided reservations into individual holdings under the assumption that private ownership would encourage agricultural cultivation and Euro-American lifestyles (Debo, 1984; Marks, 1998, pp.

216-220). Despite treaty guarantees, allotment resulted in the loss of nearly 90 million acres of tribal lands by 1934 (Wilkinson, 2005, p. 43). With Collier's support, the IRA gave tribes a legal mechanism to recover lands lost through allotment.

Communal land ownership became a concern when Indian administrators felt pressure to align Indian policy with Cold War imperatives. A New Deal supporter, Collier was accused of being a Communist by members of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs for supporting tribal sovereignty (Finger, 1993, pp. 89-90). Collier's exit from the BIA and the rise of anti-communism shifted the priorities of Indian affairs toward assimilation. Senator Joseph McCarthy's paranoid inquisitions from 1949 to 1954 promoted suspicion of Communist influence in American government and, consequently, distorted how New Deal programs were portrayed. Whitfield (1996) argues:

The Cold War put the reformist strategies of the New Deal and the Fair Deal on ice, as though those experiments were part of the continuum that stretched all the way to Moscow. From the perspective of a resurgent right, the regulation of capitalist abuses that Roosevelt had begun easily shaded into something more sinister. (p. 19)

Programs promoting cultural pluralism or restraining capitalism were viewed with suspicion. Related, the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act called for exclusion of foreign aliens with beliefs or ties to Communism, Socialism, and Anarchism (Wilkinson, 2005, p. 64). Edward Lazarus (1999) identifies synergy between the nativist sentiment expressed in McCarran-Walter and the rise of pro-assimilation forces. Anti-communists and nativists shared a commitment to national unity, expressed strong antipathy toward otherness, and were suspicious of deviations from the mainstream.

President Truman's appointment of Dillon S. Myer as BIA commissioner in 1950 secured the defeat of Collier's principles. Possessing no direct experience in Indian affairs, Myer's credentials included directing the War Relocation Authority, responsible for administrating Japanese internment during World War II. A vocal supporter of assimilation, Myer was one of the architects of termination. Drinnon (1987) argues that Myer was an unapologetic nationalist and a cold-hearted bureaucrat, his career reaching "out laterally to become an expression of Western racism, nationalism, imperialism, and colonialism and in that global context added confirmation of Hannah Arendt's insights into 'the banality of evil'" (p. xxviii). Influenced by Protestantism, Myer embraced the cultural melting-pot and firmly opposed cultural pluralism (Philip, 1989). In office, he designed urban relocation programs and encouraged white adoption of Indian children. Post-war changes in BIA policy made Myer's efforts relatively easy. In 1947, Assistant BIA Commissioner William T. Zimmerman Jr. compiled a report known as the *Doomsday Book*, categorizing the tribes that were most prepared for assimilation. Fortunate Eagle (2002) observes that in 1952 the Department of Interior compiled a 1,800 page document that calculated the expense of maintaining federal protections and determined that, "twenty-three western tribes controlled a third of the nation's low-sulfur coal, fully 80 percent of the country's uranium reserves, and from 3 to 10 percent of national reserves in gas and petroleum" (p. 17). They calculated that termination would be a cost-efficient way to develop tribal natural resources (Churchill & LaDuke, 1992; Fixico, 1998; Weyler, 1984).

Termination also complemented prevailing paradigms of minority rights. Cold Warriors were wary that indigenous self-determination and decolonization had the potential to destabilize the capitalist order. African-Americans' civil rights, however, advanced during the termination decade, including the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision (1954), in large measure

because desegregation converged with the ideological interests of Cold Warriors in enhancing the American image abroad (Bell, 1980; Dudziak, 1988, 2002; Wilson, 2003). This integrationist approach confused assimilation and detribalization with desegregation. Differences mattered, as Deloria (1971) argues, because where they systematically segregated African Americans, whites had “force-fed the Indian what he was denying the black” (p. 173). Unlike desegregation, however, American Indian sovereignty was confused with divisive cultural separatism.

Lockean individualism

The extension of *freedom* and *equality* was enabled by each term’s historic connection to private property. John Locke (1689/1965) argued that civil society was organized around the maximization of property. As owners of their labor power, Locke reasoned that individuals could claim ownership over that which one transformed in the natural world. *Life, liberty* and *estate* were natural rights guaranteed by the social contract between individuals and government. Locke’s philosophy was embraced by American colonists as a rationale for both revolution and dispossession of Indian lands. Hall (2003) observes that because of his Eurocentric view of property “Locke’s *Two Treatises* have been among the most influential texts ever written to provide legal or moral justifications for the dispossession and genocide of Indigenous peoples” (p. 185). Whereas European political philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau viewed property as the root of social inequality, early Americans enthusiastically adopted Locke because his theories were “well suited to empire” (Engels, 2005, p. 360).

Locke’s concept of property buttressed the European *doctrine of discovery* which guaranteed in customary law that land claims in the Americas were property of discovering nations. The doctrine advanced the notion that Indian lands were vacant, awaiting to be subdued by European settlement (Deloria, 1985). From tribal perspectives, lands considered vacant to

American colonists were fully cultivated. Marks (1998) contends that Indian land ownership was “the right simply to use its resources by hunting, gathering, and planting using nonintrusive methods” (xxii). Hall notes that Euro-Americans ignored unobtrusive forms of Indian horticulture (p. 184). Myths that Indians lacked any concept of ownership were not verifiable political facts but rationalizations for dispossession.

Freedom in principle often meant the pursuit of a Eurocentric concept of private property in practice. The natural rights vocabulary contracted to individualist connotations of property at odds with Indian sovereignty. The diachronic meaning of freedom as property explains how termination proponents were able to contort natural rights as a justification for replacing communal ownership with privatized allotments. Lockean notions of freedom were the engines of liberal capitalism, emphasizing the accumulation of wealth and the expansion of private enterprise; however, for Locke’s contemporaries such as Rousseau, and later Marx, Fredrick Engels, Louis Henry Morgan, and Native intellectuals Joseph Brant and Tecumseh, freedom was maximized by transcending private property and its byproducts of inequality. Thus, dormant Lockean individualism buttressed non-Indian rationales for expropriating tribal lands.

The Orwellian Language of Termination

In the remainder of this essay, I critique three phrasing strategies employed by Watkins and Myer that demonstrate the features of Orwellian language: termination as emancipation, termination as self-reliance, and reservations as prisons. To sketch what I call *termination rhetoric*, I focus on the policy’s architects: Watkins and Myer. Both individuals devoted large portions of their political careers to termination, led Congressional hearings, and wrote the foundational articles that justified termination to policy-makers. Throughout, I provide examples where other policy-makers adopted their vocabulary. Though it is beyond the scope of this essay

to examine all 109 termination cases, the generic features of termination rhetoric can be extrapolated from the arguments circulated by Watkins and Myers. I examine portions of their writing and testimony in defense of the termination cases initiated by H.R. 108 to demonstrate the application of their rhetorical principles in practice.

Termination as emancipation

Terminationists made painstaking efforts to convince policy-makers that assimilation was a policy of liberation. To accomplish this, H.R. 108 was framed by natural rights language:

Whereas it is the policy of Congress, as rapidly as possible, to make the Indians within the territorial limits of the United States subject to the same laws and entitled to the same privileges and responsibilities as are applicable to other citizens of the United States, to end their status as wards of the United States, and to grant them all of the rights and prerogatives pertaining to American citizenship. (H.R. 108, 1953)

Associating termination with words such as *freedom*, *emancipation*, and *liberation*, terminationists redefined assimilation as the fulfillment of a Native civil rights agenda and thus, an ethical obligation. As termination gained momentum, many couched their efforts in the language of liberalism. Former commissioner Zimmerman (1957) evoked the language of equality and citizenship to defend termination: “Indians should be subjected as rapidly as possible to the same laws and entitled to the same privileges and responsibilities as other American citizens” (p. 40). Similarly, Montana Senator George Malone (1949) asserted the natural rights argument for citizenship because Indians were “born of the fact that they do not have equal opportunities and privileges, as compared to other American citizens” (as cited in Fixico, 1986, p. 54).

There were no more fervent defenders of termination than Watkins and Myer. Watkins (1957) wrote that the aim of termination was to create “equality before the law” and that “our course should rightly be no other” (p. 55). Arguing he was duty bound, Watkins asserted that “firm and constant consideration for those of Indian ancestry should lead us all to work diligently and carefully for the full realization of their national citizenship with all other Americans” (p. 55). The ethical obligation to assimilate Indians relied on a spurious analogy to African American civil rights, leading Watkins to frequently conflate desegregation with Indian self-determination. Myer also compared termination to desegregation when he wrote, “I believe that we should move as fast as possible toward assisting the Indians in the country to become integrated into the general pattern rather than being maintained in segregated groups” (as cited in Wilson, 1950, p. 99). Summoning the Fourteenth Amendment to his cause, Myer (1953) argued that the “constitution provides that ‘all persons born or naturalized in the United States...are citizens of the United States,’” thus, “not only are Indians today American citizens; they are citizens of the several states” (p. 193).

Note that throughout the 1950s, civil rights activism was predominantly integrationist, directed at eliminating formal segregation and public discrimination in schools, housing, transportation, and the military (Dierenfield, 2008). Prior to the direct action tactics of the 1960s, the prevailing ideology of racial justice was, in the words of Condit and Lucaites (1993), based on “Integrated Equality that included political equality, equality of economic opportunity, and integrated public facilities” (p. 167). Replacing *separate but equal*, racial justice evolved throughout the post-war period to include a “mathematical proportion as a test of equality” based on the assumption that “although there might be important cultural differences, similarity

outweighed difference” (p. 168). Drawing from the rhetoric of desegregation, Watkins (1953) conflated Indian emancipation with equal access to public goods:

Virtually since the first decade of our national life the Indian, as tribesman and individual, was accorded a status apart. Now, however, we think constructively and affirmatively of the Indian as a fellow American. We seek to assure that in health, education, welfare, in social, political, economic, and cultural opportunity, he or she stands as one with us in the enjoyment and responsibilities of our national citizenship. (p. 47)

Here, Watkins positioned termination within intergrationist logics of minority-rights, assuming that like African-Americans, the Indian’s “status apart” was to blame for inequality and that desegregation would provide desired access to public institutions. Thus, Indian self-determination was redefined within the context of citizenship not inherent tribal sovereignty. The problem with “Indian wardship,” he argued, was that it privileged race over citizenship, “treating the Indian of today as an Indian, rather than as a fellow American citizen” (p 48). Watkins then pursued misguided, color-blind forms of racial equality.

His analogy did not end with the civil rights movement. He aligned termination with the abolition of slavery and H.R. 108 with Abraham Lincoln’s *Emancipation Proclamation*. Comparing himself to a modern-day Lincoln, Watkins (1957) wrote of termination: “following in the footsteps of the Emancipation Proclamation ninety-four years ago, I see the following words emblazoned in letters of fire above the heads of the Indians – THESE PEOPLE SHALL BE FREE!” (p. 55). Here, Watkins aligned himself with an entire history of racial struggle. An expression of hubris, Watkin’s alignment with nineteenth- and twentieth-century civil rights advocacy also inoculated termination proponents against suggestions that they possessed self-

interested motives concerning tribal resources. Termination was constructed as an ethical obligation to enfranchise Indians despite the political costs. A red herring fallacy *par excellence*, his comparison drew attention to the ethical and emotive principles of equality at work in the struggle for African American civil rights, overlooking the fundamental differences between the two.

Watkins casuistic reasoning transferred to federal wardship the ethical principle that would motivate a rejection of slavery. Veiled comparisons between wardship and slavery were, however, dangerous. Explaining the costs of conflating desegregation with Indian self-determination, Deloria (1971) argues that in such arguments “the white man presented the *problem* of each group in contradictory ways so that neither black nor Indian could understand exactly where the problem existed or how to solve it” (p. 173). In an effort to transfer the conventionally affective responses toward abolition and desegregation to termination, Watkins’ analogy did a disservice to both. He used casuistry to stand in the place of sound reasoning, and, in the process, undermined a clear analytical assessment of the disparate causes of Indian oppression.

To dispel comparisons between termination and previous legislation dispossessing tribal lands, Watkins (1953) asserted that federal Indian policy had always been guided by ethical principles: “historically ... the Congress, although perhaps more or less ineffectively until recent years, has sought in the nineteenth and early twentieth century to free the Indian. A full study of Congressional actions will bear this out. Freedom for the Indian was the goal then; it is the goal now” (p. 48). Watkins suggested that with historical perspective, termination would be judged as the apex of a continuous effort to liberate American Indians. By suggesting that the goal of federal policy had always been Indian emancipation, Watkins rewrote the history of removal and

dispossession as a series of well-intentioned mistakes easily remedied by termination. In fact, he highlighted historical moments in which allotment was the federal policy as those in which American Indians were on the path to liberation, a claim many tribal leaders would dispute.

Watkins argued that termination reconnected Indian affairs with its supposed ethical foundations, that “in the postdepression years Congress - realizing this change of policy - sought to return to the historic principles of much earlier decades” (p. 48). Termination provided the appropriate remedy, serving as the tribal Emancipation Proclamation or *Brown* decision. Watkins suggested that policy-makers meditate on the historic significance of the moment:

This was a most worthy moment in our history. We should all dwell upon its deep meaning. Considering the lengthy span of our Indian relationship, the recency of this event is significant. Obviously, such affirmative action for the great majority of Indians has just begun. (p. 48)

Myer (1953) echoed Watkins by suggesting that termination was “one of the most important milestones in the history of American Indian affairs,” a “landmark in the history of Indian legislation” (p. 193).

Watkins (1957) dubiously concluded that he was a civil rights leader. He anticipated harsh rebuke; however, argued that equality was won only through righteous determination. Disagreement was inevitable, but “as with any such major social concern, methods vary in proposed solutions and emotions sometimes rise as to how the final goal should best be reached. A clear understanding of principles and events is necessary” (p. 47). He contended that because termination was a moral issue, it transcended political considerations. As a result, any dissent was anti-Indian:

After all, the matter of freeing the Indian from wardship status is not rightfully a subject to debate in academic fashion, with facts marshaled here and there to be maneuvered and counter-maneuvered in a vast battle of words and ideas. Much more I see this as an ideal or universal truth, to which all men subscribe, and concerning which they differ only in their opinion as to how the ideal may be attained and to what degree and during what period of time. (p. 47)

Placing himself above politics, he expressed disinterest in winning a debate through reasoned argument. Instead, he elevated termination to a universal ethical principle. As such, he asserted that common ground existed for agreement based on shared ethical investments in civil rights. Although some opponents may have disagreed with its logistics, they should be moved by their conscience to agree that native enfranchisement was a moral imperative.

Watkins also inverted arguments concerning corporate exploitation of tribal resources. He suggested that termination would remove special interests from Indian affairs and provide for tribal control of natural resources: “special interests are of course involved in other ways; thus commercial companies having specific reservation leases may be reluctant to see terminal programs proceed, feeling that their own economic interests may be jeopardized” (p. 48). In many cases, however, wardship protected tribal lands from corporate development, particularly in forest conservation, where BIA regulations mandated sustainable forestry and curtailed exploitative timber contracts on tribal lands. Under federal protection, the Klamath tribe sustained nearly 2 million dollars in timber sales prior to 1950 and the Menominee survived by a thriving sawmill (Fixico, 1986, pp. 116-117). Removing BIA timber restrictions, termination opened forests to individual sale and facilitated corporate control of tribal timber. Federal

protections contributed to the economic autonomy of the Klamath and Menominee, the same evidence marshaled by Watkins to support the claim that tribes were ready for termination.

Watkins insisted that private interests were advanced by keeping Indians as wards “because a few well-intentioned private organizations repeatedly seek to influence Congress to keep the Indian in a restricted status by urging legislation to retain him as an Indian ward and as a member of a caste with social status apart from others” (p. 48). Here, Watkins presented a glaring contradiction. As the argument proceeded, because wardship stunted economic development many tribes were dependent on federal resources. Termination would enable them to escape paternalism; however, the relative autonomy of tribes such as the Klamath and the Menominee demonstrated they had, paradoxically, outgrown the need for protection. He portrayed tribes as simultaneously impoverished and autonomous. Either way, termination was the answer. To smooth over contradictions, he accused opponents of practicing deception and harboring hidden economic motives, arguing that “private organizations and serious-minded periodicals have been used as devices propagandizing viewpoints based upon assertions known to Congress to be contrary to the facts upon Indian conditions” (p. 48). As the argument went, those who opposed termination had something to gain from wardship and because Watkins was driven by lofty principles, his motives were beyond reproach.

Termination as self-reliance

Terminationists embraced a religio-capitalist ideology of free labor, reframing their effort as advancing what Max Weber (1958) termed the *Protestant work ethic*. Within this ideology, frugal and persistent labor was a virtuous article of faith. In addition to a mathematical litmus test for Indian equality, terminationists sought to debunk traditional Indian values that, in their estimation, encouraged dependence. An expression of bourgeois morality, Protestant values of

thrift and industriousness were the driving force behind the private accumulation of wealth. Under capitalism, entrepreneurialism and self-reliance acquire moral and even religious significance. In this regard, Myer's Protestant influence was pronounced. Drinnon (1987) writes that "he was a walking repository of the Puritan virtues and traditional hostility to the very idea of the survival of separate peoples with separate cultures" (p. xxviii). Watkins, a devout Mormon also embraced a religio-capitalist work ethic that led them to believe that Indians lacked self-reliance (Peroff, 1982, p. 60). Watkins' Mormon religious beliefs influenced his approach to termination in other ways. In the Book of Mormon, Indians were the fallen people of American civilization, their skin genetically transmuted by God as punishment for their sins. Doctrine holds that it is a Mormon's duty to restore the Indian's status in God's Kingdom. Metcalf (2002) argues that for Mormons "to 'elevate' Indians means to convert and assimilate them" (p. 13). Fusing religious duty with capitalist morality, termination became a moral and economic imperative.

With references to innate abilities and self-reliance, Watkins expressed a desire to help Indians adopt capitalist values. He argued that termination would place Indians in a position "where they would actually have had to go to work and to take care of their own affairs" (as cited in Wilkinson, 2005, p. 69). Watkins (1957) elaborated:

Self-reliance is basic to the whole Indian-freedom program. Through our national historic development the Indian was forced into a dependent position with the federal government more and more, as America advanced westward, tending to sublimate his natural qualities of self-reliance, course, discipline, resourcefulness, confidence, and faith in the future. (p. 51)

Asserting that self-reliance and individualism were immutable human characteristics, terminationists naturalized their religio-capitalist work ethic and established it as a prerequisite to formal equality. Conversely, terminationists also suggested that the collective values of the reservation (communal property, sharing) were byproducts of a structured ideology of dependence. Once paternalism was eliminated, the veil of ignorance would be lifted and the distorted and characteristically socialist ideologies of the reservation would be demystified. For example, Watkins (1957) argued that relocation programs displayed Indians' innate yet dormant abilities: "through the Bureau's relocation program increasing thousands of energetic, healthy, skilled Indians compete successfully in our cities, bring their families into new modern homes, and thus in effect remove many conditions of their earlier wardship" (p. 49). Presenting capitalist morality as natural, this rhetoric constructed Indian cultural values as debilitating false ideologies. Termination established both a mathematical and moral litmus test for equality achieved through integration and value transformation.

Terminationists argued that because of structured dependence, Indians could not develop their innate abilities. Concerning Menominee termination, Watkins argued that "here we have a group of people who have innate ability just the same as other people, when they get stimulated with a little ambition and a little necessity. You know, necessity is said to be the mother of invention. It is the spur to drive us to do things we don't think we can't do" (as cited in Wilkinson, 2005, p. 75). When tribes resisted, he contorted their efforts into evidence of their innate abilities. During the Ute termination hearings, Watkins retorted: "you have enough judgment and intelligence you think to come here and say 'no' to us. In effect, you are saying 'No, we don't want this.' Haven't you got enough courage to say 'No' to the fellow who comes

along and wants to buy your land?” (as cited in Wilkinson, 2005, p. 75). Put differently, if tribes could resist federal dispossession, they could resist corporate influence.

Watkins also argued that federal dependence was undemocratic, “that what the Indian really wants; he wants representation without taxation. He can tax all the rest of us and vote for people who do tax us; but he doesn’t want to pay taxes himself even though he is able to do so” (as cited in Fixico, 1986, p. 105). Elsewhere he argued that Indians “want all the benefits of the things we have, highways, schools, hospitals, everything that civilization furnishes, but they don’t want to help pay their share of it” (as cited in Wilkinson, 2005, p. 69). Watkins reframed federal protections as *special rights*. For Watkins, legal equality required the performance of patriotic duties, earned only by the full utilization of one’s own innate abilities. In Watkins’ (1957) words, Indians would “at last have full control of their own affairs and would possess all of the attributes of complete American citizenship” (p. 48).

Watkins (1957) also redefined existing protection as dispossession. He asserted that by returning to pre-depression policies, termination would bestow tribes with full sovereignty. Despite the fact that the IRA provided tribes with recourse in federal courts to adjudicate their land claims, he asserted that such protections were against tribal interests. Watkins (1957) referred to federal protections as restrictions and termination as *decontrol*: “[t]he Indian freedom program will not be accomplished immediately in the case of more large and complex situations, but for most tribes it can be numbered in a few years” because, he continued, “the careful clarification and protection of rights, these at times serve to make the process of decontrol lengthy” (p. 49). Here, he implied that constitutional rights provided the necessary federal protections. He continued, “[o]ne facet of this over-all development concerns the freeing of the Indian from special federal restrictions on the property and the person of the tribes and their

members” (p. 47). The restrictions he spoke of, however, prohibited allotment. Other restrictions were intended to prohibit exploitative timber and mineral contracts. What’s more, by treaty, tribes already possessed sovereign control over communally-held assets. Wilkinson (2005) argues that “although Watkins repeatedly said termination would ‘give’ them their land, the tribes already owned it” (p. 71). Despite his promise that termination would give Indians their land, tribes such as the Klamath, Menominee, and Ute lost tens of thousands of acres to individual sale. Self-reliance rhetoric reinforced the erroneous belief that tribes did not already exercise control over their own affairs.

Reservations as prisons

Watkins and Myer argued that reservations were prisons that segregated and punished Indians as conquered peoples. In an address before the Western Governor’s Conference in 1952, Myer argued:

Many of these reservations were something akin to large detention camps for a period of years when the United States government found that it was cheaper to provide rations to Indians than it was to fight them. During this period we had practically destroyed the basis of their economy, which, of course, consisted of hunting, fishing, gathering of wild fruits, nuts, and berries, and limited farming operations. (as cited in Drinnon 1987, p. 237)

Drawing from imagery of Jewish detention in Nazi Germany, Myer argued that reservations were temporary camps for detained prisoners of Western conquest. Conversely, terminating reservations was morally equivalent to liberating European concentration camps. Watkins echoed Myer’s conclusions when he characterized his visit to the Menominee reservation as if it were a gulag, noting the experience was the same “in visiting Europe, the refugee camps in the

Near East” (as cited in Wilkinson, p. 75). Connecting the Indian experience with that of the European detainee, the moral urgency for action was fundamentally the same. Hearne (2005) explains that such imagery “led both politicians and ordinary citizens to view reservations not as tribal lands but as ‘concentration camps’ for temporary detainees, rhetoric drawn from the Jewish experience in Europe” (p. 137). Terminationists decontextualized this emotional post-war experience to obfuscate the underlying causes of reservation poverty.

Terminationists used the geographic distance and stunted reservation economies to bolster their claims. Watkins (1957) wrote that “secluded reservation life is a detriment to the Indian, keeping him apart in ways far beyond the purely geographic” (p. 51). Focusing on the rural qualities of reservation life, Watkins implied that reservations were prisons that segregated Indians and contributed to their ongoing oppression. Myer presented distance and separation as the key markers of detention life and implied that relocation was the moral equivalent of liberation. Myer (1953) carefully distinguished his relocation programs from the forceful measures of the past that were, ironically, responsible for American Indians’ remote segregation:

Because of lack of education, lack of communication, language difficulties, and limited association with non-Indians, many Indians are afraid of the outside world. Also many Indians know that some of their present problems stem from the fact that their forefathers were once relocated. In order to do this job, we must initiate a large-scale training program. (p. 199)

Myer presents a contradiction in which relocation was both the problem and solution to American Indian poverty. The same capitalist drive to assimilate American Indians and dispossess them of their vast lands was refashioned as an instrument of emancipation.

Terminationists linked reservations to Soviet communism. Embry (1956) described reservations as experiments in “forced communism” that kept Indians “economically and socially chained to his reservation” (p. 210). Suggesting that communism and detention were the factors contributing to tribal poverty, Embry charged the BIA to “close to our concentration camps ... The Indian then could take pride not only in being an Indian but in being an American” (p. 229). Terminationists blamed reservation poverty on tribal lifestyles instead of assimilative federal policies. They portrayed reservation life as austere, enslaved, and communistic. For Watkins and Myer, Indians were prisoners of their communal lifestyle. Further, by aligning termination with the Cold War project of defeating Soviet communism and European fascism, assimilationists framed their cause as a just movement for national unity and economic progress.

The Language of Indian Liberation

Blackfoot leader Earl Old Person (1967) wrote that “It is important to note that in our Indian language the only translation for termination is to ‘wipe out’ or ‘kill off.’ We have no Indian word for termination” (p. 18). Termination was a dangerous euphemism that when taken literally meant cultural extinction. The Orwellian language of termination presented confusing analogies, false comparisons, and fallacious racial reasoning. Even a perplexed President Eisenhower, approving legislation transferring tribal criminal jurisdiction to state governments (P.L. 280), stated that “[a]lthough I have grave doubts as to the wisdom of certain provisions in H.R. 1063, I have today signed it because its basic purpose represents still another step in granting equality to all Indians in our nation” (para. 1). Eisenhower questioned the logic of the legislation, yet remained enamored by its lofty principles and pathos-laden appeals to equality.

Many terminated tribes were neither able to deflect commercial pressure to sell nor resist government incentives to withdraw from the tribe in exchange for one-time payments for the

value of their land. Three of the largest terminated tribes - Klamath, Menominee, and Ute - lost nearly half of their tribal members through per-capita payment (Fixico 1986, p. 185). Over a hundred other smaller tribes met similar fates (Stefon, 1978). Wilkinson (2005) concludes that terminated tribes “found themselves poorer, bereft of health care, and suffering a painful psychological loss of community, homeland, and self-identity” (p. 81).

Many Indian groups were aware of the rhetorical strategies employed by Watkins and Myer. The Indian Rights Association (1954) argued that “titles of bills are frequently misleading, so that what a bill might actually do may be entirely different from what its title would indicate” (as cited in Embry, 1956, p. 211). During termination hearings in 1954, Indian delegations traveled to Washington to protest. Many resisted termination by redefining the federal government’s responsibilities (Marks, 1998, pp. 284-289). Responding to Watkins’ claim that the government was tired being a guardian, Mohawk journalist Ernst Benedict argued “can an honorable Nation, just because it is tired, shrug off its responsibilities regardless of the wishes and conditions of the ward?” (as cited in Marks, 1998, p. 286). Some protestors blamed forced dependence on vacillating government policies, arguing that termination had misidentified the central problem with paternalism. Gordon Keshna (Menominee) argued that, “you cannot ask the people to go on their own and govern themselves now when for all those years they have not been permitted to do anything for themselves” (as cited in Fixico, 1986, pp. 95-96). A representative of the Colville tribe argued that termination was abandonment by another name, that Indians “did not want to be wards of the government ...neither did they want to be flung suddenly into the sea of the larger American society” (as cited in Dahl, 1994, p. 42). Protestors refuted that Indians needed to be taught self-reliance by having their treaties abdicated. Self-

reliance, they argued, would be facilitated by devolving control of Indian affairs to tribal governments, not by disbanding them.

American Indians asserted the necessity of land to self-determination and challenged the portrayal of their homelands as prisons. A Colville resident argued to the Senate that “this land is the most important part of my life and the Indian people that live on it for existence and happiness” (as cited in Dahl, 1986, p. 43). In a similar comment, another Colville resident argued, “I can go fishing and hunting when I get hungry, I can cut my own wood whenever I run out of wood, sell some” (as cited in Marks, 1998, p. 286). Reservation residents argued that the land provided self-reliance. Terminationists, however, revoked the treaty-guaranteed fishing and hunting rights that encouraged tribal self-sufficiency. They considered those *special rights*. Contrary to Watkins’ (1957) argument that termination would not “affect the retention of those cultural and racial qualities which people of Indian descent would wish to retain,” traditional reservation residents argued their lands were necessary to preserve cultural heritage (p. 48). Deloria (1970) would observe later: “[n]o movement can sustain itself, no people can continue, no government can function, and no religion can become a reality except it be bound to a land area of its own” (p. 179).

These arguments did not dissuade Watkins and Myer. Other forms of activism, however, were successful. One of the ironies of termination, Nagel (1996) argues was that “American Indian mobilization and ethnic renewal arose in part out of the federal programs designed to terminate the special status of Indian tribes and to absorb Indian people into mainstream society” (p. 118). Urban relocation contributed to the rise of pan-Indian ethnic identification in the inner-city and direct action protests (Johnson, 2007). Coming into closer contact in the inner-city, Indians developed community organizations to combat discrimination and the BIA. Under the

slogan of *Red Power*, new militant forms of activism developed, driven by younger radical elements in the inner-city. These groups worked outside of the conventions of Indian affairs, fashioning direct action strategies to reverse the effects of termination.

The rhetoric of termination demonstrates how emancipating political language can be affixed to antithetical goals. Edelman (1974) observes that “when it suits us to see rationalization as reason, repression as help, distortion as creation, or the converse of any of these, language and mind can smoothly structure each other to do so” (p. 45). In cases in which social power is at stake “distortion and misperception are virtually certain to occur” (p. 45). Some critics argue that such is the fate of ideographs such as *patriotism*, *security*, and *terrorism* in the political vocabulary of the “war on terrorism” (Brock, Huglen, & Klump, 2005; Winkler, 2005). For example, the USA Patriot Act, which significantly expanded law enforcement powers to detain individuals without *habeas corpus*, conduct warrantless searches, and engage in domestic surveillance, was justified on the grounds that restricting civil liberties actually preserves them. In President Bush’s words, “the Patriot Act hasn’t diminished American liberties ... It has helped to defend American liberties” (as cited in Fletcher, 2005, p. A6). Critics have observed similar phenomenon at work in discourses concerning anti-immigration (Pineda and Sowards, 2007), the Iraq war (Stuckey and Ritter, 2007; Kellner, 2007) and criminal justice (McCann, 2007). These critics demonstrate how political languages are the contested terrain of domination and liberation.

Similar to termination, the vocabulary of anti-affirmative action and anti-gay rights advocates assert that legislation to protect historically excluded groups proliferate *special rights*. Neoconservatives mirror termination’s logics: that conferral of federal protections specific to one group victimizes those without the protection and infringe on the rights of those who

discriminate. They appeal to constrictive, denotative forms of equality that measure social justice in vacuum, without reference to the disparate impact of historic discrimination. Omi and Winant (1994) observe that rhetorics of reverse discrimination advance anemic connotations of formal equality that are both ahistorical and discriminatory.

Orwellian language is not unique to the Bush administration and will not wither in the future. Orwell (1946) warns that we must be vigilant to resist terminological tyranny, because “political language - and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists - is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind” (p. 265). Of course, Orwell and Marcuse have been criticized by some for their pessimistic overdetermination of domination (Tomlinson, 2002; Habermas, 1970). Though critical of liberation, Marcuse attuned his theories to analyze the then-existing modes of domination and liberation with an eye toward which parts of society could be negated or transformed. Marcuse (1972) leaves space for resistance when he argues that “instinctual rebellion will have become a political force only when it is accompanied and guided by the rebellion of reason” (p. 131). Informed but not overdetermined by structure, he suggests that because reason is an instrument of domination, society can be transformed through communicative practices that challenge conditioned thought and behavior (Best and Kellner 1991, p. 291). Marcuse’s turn to reason emphasized the liberatory potential of those creative, and rhetorical, traits that stand in opposition to the objectification of thought (Kellner 1984, p. 235; Marcuse, 1955). Marcuse and Orwell guide critics to defend the vocabulary of liberation against the tyrannical influence of economic exploitation.

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