The following speech was given by Russell Means in July 1980, before several thousand people who had assembled from all over the world for the Black Hills International Survival Gathering, in the Black Hills of South Dakota. It is said to be Russell Means’ most famous speech.

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The only possible opening for a statement of this kind is that I detest writing. The process itself epitomizes the European concept of “legitimate” thinking; what is written has an importance that is denied the spoken. My culture, the Lakota culture, has an oral tradition, so I ordinarily reject writing. It is one of the white world’s ways of destroying the cultures of non-European peoples, the imposing of an abstraction over the spoken relationship of a people.

So what you read here is not what I have written. It is what I have said and someone else has written down. I will allow this because
it seems that the only way to communicate with the white world is through the dead, dry leaves of a book. I don’t really care whether my words reach whites or not. They have already demonstrated through their history that they cannot hear, cannot see; they can only read (of course, there are exceptions, but the exceptions only prove the rule). I’m more concerned with the American Indian people, students and others, who have begun to be absorbed into the white world through universities and other institutions. But even then it’s a marginal sort of concern. It’s very possible to grow into a red face with a white mind; and if that’s a person’s individual choice, so be it, but I have no use for them. This is part of the process of cultural genocide being waged by Europeans against American Indian peoples’ today. My concern is with those American Indians who choose to resist this genocide, but may be confused as to how to proceed.

(You notice I use the term American Indian rather than Native American or Native indigenous people or Amerindian when referring to my people.) There has been some controversy about such terms, and frankly, at this point, I find it absurd. Primarily it seems that American Indian is being rejected as European in origin — which is true. But all the above terms are European in origin; the only non-European way is to speak of Lakota — or, more precisely, of Oglala, Brule, et. — and of the Dineh, the Miccousukee, and all the rest of the several hundred correct tribal names.

(There is also some confusion about the word Indian, a mistaken belief that it refers somehow to the country, India. When Columbus washed up on the beach in the Caribbean, he was not looking for a country called India. Europeans were calling that country Hindustan in 1492. Look it up on the old maps. Columbus called the tribal people he met “Indio,” from the Italian in dio, meaning “in God.”)

It takes a strong effort on the part of each American Indian not to become Europeanized. The strength for this effort can only come from the traditional ways, the traditional values that our elders retain. It must come from the hoop, the four directions, the relations:

a young organization. This was a result of a confusion that I no longer have. You cannot be everything to everyone. I do not propose to be used in such a fashion by my enemies. I am not a leader. I am an Oglala Lakota patriot. This is all I want and all I need to be. And I am very comfortable with who I am.
it is necessary for Caucasians to step outside European culture — alongside the rest of humanity — to see Europe for what it is and what it does.

To cling to capitalism and Marxism and all the other “isms” is simply to remain within European culture. There is no avoiding this basic fact. As a fact, this constitutes a choice. Understand that the choice is based on culture, not race. Understand that to choose European culture and industrialism is to choose to be my enemy. And understand that the choice is yours, not mine. This leads me back to address those American Indians who are drifting through the universities, the city slums, and other European institutions. If you are there to learn to resist the oppressor in accordance with your traditional ways, so be it. I don’t know how you manage to combine the two, but perhaps you will succeed. But retain your sense of reality. Beware of coming to believe the white world now offers solutions to the problems it confronts us with. Beware, too, of allowing the words of native people to be twisted to the advantage of our enemies. Europe invented the practice of turning words around on themselves. You need only look to the treaties between American Indian peoples and various European governments to know that this is true. Draw your strength from who you are.

A culture which regularly confuses revolution with continuation, which confuses science and religion, which confuses revolt with resistance, has nothing helpful to teach you and nothing to offer you as a way of life. Europeans have long since lost all touch with reality, if they ever were in touch with it. Feel sorry for them if you need to, but be comfortable with who you are as American Indians.

So, I suppose to conclude this, I would state clearly that leading anyone toward Marxism is the last thing on my mind. Marxism is as alien to my culture as capitalism and Christianity are. In fact, I can say I don’t think I’m trying to lead anyone toward anything. To some extent I tried to be a “leader,” in the sense that white media like to use that term, when the American Indian Movement was it cannot come from the pages of a book or a thousand books. No European can ever teach a Lakota to be Lakota, a Hopi to be Hopi. A master’s degree in “Indian Studies” or in “education” or in anything else cannot make a person into a human being or provide knowledge into the traditional ways. It can only make you into a mental European, an outsider.

I should be clear about something here, because there seems to be some confusion about it. When I speak of Europeans or mental Europeans, I’m not allowing for false distinctions. I’m not saying that on the one hand there are the by-products of a few thousand years of genocidal, reactionary European intellectual development which is bad; and on the other hand there is some new revolutionary intellectual development which is good. I’m referring here to the so-called theories of Marxism and anarchism and “leftism” in general. I don’t believe these theories can be separated from the rest of the European intellectual tradition. It’s really just the same old song.

The process began much earlier. Newton, for example, “revolutionized” physics and the so-called natural science by reducing the physical universe to a linear mathematical equation.

Descartes did the same thing with culture. John Locke did it with politics, and Adam Smith did it with economics. Each one of these “thinkers” took a piece of the spirituality of human existence and converted it into a code, an abstraction. They picked up where Christianity ended: they “secularized” Christian religion, as the “scholars” like to say — and in doing so they made Europe more able and ready to act as an expansionist culture. Each of these intellectual revolutions served to abstract the European mentality even further, to remove the wonderful complexity and spirituality from the universe and replace it with a logical sequence: one, two, three. Answer!.

This is what has come to be termed “efficiency” in the European mind. Whatever is mechanical is perfect; whatever seems to work at the moment — that is, proves the mechanical model to be the
right one — is considered correct, even when it is clearly untrue. This is why “truth” changes so fast in the European mind; the answers which result from such a process are only stopgaps, only temporary, and must be continuously discarded in favor of new stopgaps which support the mechanical models and keep them (the models) alive.

Hegel and Marx were heirs to the thinking of Newton, Descartes, Locke and Smith. Hegel finished the process of secularizing theology — and that is put in his own terms — he secularized the religious thinking through which Europe understood the universe. Then Marx put Hegel’s philosophy in terms of “materialism,” which is to say that Marx despiritualized Hegel’s work altogether. Again, this is in Marx’ own terms. And this is now seen as the future revolutionary potential of Europe. Europeans may see this as revolutionary, But American Indians see it simply as still more of that same old European conflict between being and gaining. The intellectual roots of a new Marxist form of European imperialism lie in Marx’ — and his followers’ — links to the tradition of Newton, Hegel, and the others.

Being is a spiritual proposition. Gaining is a material act. Traditionally, American Indians have always attempted to be the best people they could. Part of that spiritual process was and is to give away wealth, to discard wealth in order not to gain. Material gain is an indicator of false status among traditional people, while it is “proof that the system works” to Europeans. Clearly, there are two completely opposing views at issue here, and Marxism is very far over to the other side from the American Indian view. But let’s look at a major implication of this; it is not merely an intellectual debate.

The European materialist tradition of despiritualizing the universe is very similar to the mental process which goes into dehumanizing another person. And who seems most expert at dehumanizing other people? And why? Soldiers who have seen a lot of combat learn to do this to the enemy before going back into combat. Murderers do it before going out to commit murder. Nazi SS
At this point, perhaps I should be very clear about another matter, one which should already be clear as a result of what I’ve said. But confusion breeds easily these days, so I want to hammer home this point. When I use the term European, I’m not referring to a skin color or a particular genetic structure. What I’m referring to is a mind-set, a worldview that is a product of the development of European culture. Peoples are not genetically encoded to hold this outlook, they are acculturated to hold it. The same is true for American Indians or for the members of any other culture.

It is possible for an American Indian to share European values, a European worldview. We have a term for these people; we call them “apples” — red on the outside (genetics) and white on the inside (their values). Other groups have similar terms: Black have their “oreos;” Hispanics have “coconuts” and so on. And, as I said before, there are exceptions to the white norm: people who are white on the outside, but not white inside. I’m not sure what term should be applied to them other than “human beings.”

What I’m putting out here is not a racial proposition but a cultural proposition. Those who ultimately advocate and defend the realities of European culture and its industrialism are my enemies. Those who resist it, who struggle against it, are my allies, the allies of American Indian people. And I don’t give a damn what their skin color happens to be. Caucasian is the white term for the white race: European is an outlook I oppose.

The Vietnamese Communists are not exactly what you might consider genetic Caucasians, but they are now functioning as mental Europeans. The same holds true for the Chinese Communists, for Japanese capitalists or Bantu Catholics or Peter “MacDollar” down at the Navajo reservation or Dickie Wilson up here at Pine Ridge. There is no racism involved in this, just an acknowledgment of the mind and spirit that make up culture.

In Marxist terms I suppose I’m a “cultural nationalist.” I work first with my people, the traditional Lakota people, because we hold a common worldview and share an immediate struggle. Be-
cial imperative for Europe. Pollution began to become a problem in
the cities, and the earth was ripped open to provide coal whereas
wood had simply been gathered or harvested at no great expense to
the environment. Later, oil became the major fuel, as the technol-
gy of production was perfected through a series of scientific “rev-
olutions.” Pollution increased dramatically, and nobody yet knows
what the environmental costs of pumping all that oil out of the
ground will really be in the long run. Now there’s an “energy cri-
esis,” and uranium is becoming the dominant fuel.

Capitalists, at least, can be relied upon to develop uranium as
fuel only at the rate at which they can show a good profit. That’s
their ethic, and maybe that will buy some time. Marxists, on the
other hand, can be relied upon to develop uranium fuel as rapidly
as possible simply because it’s the most “efficient” production fuel
available. That’s their ethic, and I fail to see where it’s preferable.
Like I said, Marxism is right smack in the middle of the European
tradition. It’s the same old song.

There’s a rule of thumb that can be applied here. You cannot
judge the real nature of a revolutionary doctrine on the basis of
the changes it proposed to make within the European power struc-
ture and society. You can only judge it by the effect it will have on
non-European peoples. This is because every revolution in Euro-
pean history has served to reinforce Europe’s tendencies and abil-
ties to export destruction to other peoples, other cultures and the
environment itself. I defy anyone to point out an example where
this is not true.

So now we, as American Indian people, are asked to believe that
a “new” European revolutionary doctrine such as Marxism will
reverse the negative effect of European history on us. European
power relations are to be adjusted once again, and that’s supposed
to make things better for all of us. But what does this really mean?

Right now, today, we who live on the Pine Ridge Reservation are
living in what white society has designated a “National Sacrifice
Area.” What this means is that we have a lot of uranium deposits

But rationality is a curse since it can cause human beings to for-
get the natural order of things in ways other creatures do not. A
wolf never forgets his or her place in the natural order. American
Indians can. Europeans almost always do. We pray our thanks to
the deer, our relations, for allowing us their flesh to eat; Europeans
simply take the flesh for granted and consider the deer inferior. Af-
after all, Europeans consider themselves godlike in their rationalism
and science. God is the Supreme Being; all else must be inferior.

All European tradition, Marxism included, has conspired to defy
the natural order of things. Mother Earth has been abused, the pow-
ers have been abused, and this cannot go on forever. No theory can
alter that simple fact. Mother Earth will retaliate, the whole envi-
ronment will retaliate, and the abusers will be eliminated. Things
will come full circle, back to where they started. That’s revolution.
And that’s a prophecy of my people, of the Hopi people and of
other correct peoples.

American Indians have been trying to explain this to Europeans
for centuries. But, as I said earlier, Europeans have proven them-
selves unable to hear. The natural order will win out, and the of-
fenders will die out, the way deer die when they offend the har-
mony by over-populating a given region. It’s only a matter of time
until what Europeans call “a major catastrophe of global propor-
tions” will occur. It is the role of American Indian peoples, the
role of all natural beings, to survive. A part of our survival is to
resist. We resist not to overthrow a government or to take political
power, but because it is natural to resist extermination, to survive.
We don’t want power over white institutions; we want white insti-
tutions to disappear. That’s revolution.

American Indians are still in touch with these realities — the
prophecies, the traditions of our ancestors. We learn from the el-
ders, from nature, from the powers. And when the catastrophe is
over, we American Indian people will survive; harmony will be
reestablished. That’s revolution.
same culture. So, in both theory and practice, Marxism demands
that non-European peoples give up their values, their traditions,
their cultural experience altogether. We will all be industrialized
science addicts in a Marxist society. 

I do not believe that capitalism itself is really responsible for
the situation in which American Indians have been declared a national
sacrifice. No, it is the European tradition; European culture itself is
responsible. Marxism is just the latest continuation of this tradition,
not a solution to it. To ally with Marxism is to ally with the very
same forces that declare us an acceptable cost.

There is another way. There is the traditional Lakota way and
the ways of the other American Indian peoples. It is the way that
knows that humans do not have the right to degrade Mother Earth,
that there are forces beyond anything the European mind has con-
ceived, that humans must be in harmony with all relations or the
relations will eventually eliminate the disharmony. A lopsided em-
phasis on humans by humans — the European’s arrogance of acting
as though they were beyond the nature of all related things — can
only result in a total disharmony and a readjustment which cuts
arrogant humans down to size, gives them a taste of that reality
beyond their grasp or control and restores the harmony. There is
no need for a revolutionary theory to bring this about; it’s beyond
human control. The nature peoples of this planet know this and so
they do not theorize about it. Theory is an abstract; our knowledge
is real.

Distilled to it’s basic terms, European faith — including the new
faith in science — equals a belief that man is God. Europe has al-
ways sought a Messiah, whether that be the man Jesus Christ or
the man Karl Marx or the man Albert Einstein. American Indians
know this to be truly absurd. Humans are the weakest of all crea-
tures, so weak that other creatures are willing to give up their flesh
that we may live. Humans are able to survive only though the ex-
ercise of rationality since they lack the abilities of other creatures
to gain food through the use of fang and claw.
in order to do so, Marxism must maintain the industrial system. Once again, the power relations with European society will have to be altered, but once again the effects upon American Indian peoples here and non-Europeans elsewhere will remain the same. This much the same as when power was redistributed from the church to private business during the so-called bourgeois revolution. European society changed a bit, at least superficially, but its conduct toward non-Europeans continued as before. You can see what the American Revolution of 1776 did for American Indians. It’s the same old song.

Revolutionary Marxism, like industrial society in other forms, seeks to “rationalize” all people in relation to industry — maximum industry, maximum production. It is a materialist doctrine that despises the American Indian spiritual tradition, our cultures, our lifeways. Marx himself called us “precapitalists” and “primitive.” Precapitalist simply means that, in his view, we would eventually discover capitalism and become capitalists; we have always been economically retarded in Marxist terms. The only manner in which American Indian people could participate in a Marxist revolution would be to join the industrial system, to become factory workers, or “proletarians,” as Marx called them. The man was very clear about the fact that his revolution could occur only through the struggle of the proletariat, that the existence of a massive industrial system is a precondition of a successful Marxist society.

I think there is a problem with language here. Christians, capitalists, Marxists. All of them have been revolutionary in their own minds, but none of them really means revolution. What they really mean is a continuation. They do what they do in order that European culture can continue to exist and develop according to its needs.

So, in order for us to really join forces with Marxism, we American Indians would have to accept the national sacrifice of our homeland; we would have to commit cultural suicide and become industrialized and Europeanized.

At this point, I’ve got to stop and ask myself whether I’m being too harsh. Marxism has something of a history. Does this history bear out my observations? I look to the process of industrialization in the Soviet Union since 1920 and I see that these Marxists have done what it took the English Industrial Revolution 300 years to do; and the Marxists did it in 60 years. I see that the territory of the USSR used to contain a number of tribal peoples and they have been crushed to make way for the factories. The Soviets refer to this as “the National Question,” the question of whether the tribal peoples had a right to exist as people; and they decided the tribal peoples were an acceptable sacrifice to industrial needs. I look to China and I see the same thing. I look to Vietnam and I see Marxists imposing an industrial order and rooting out the indigenous tribal mountain people.

I hear a leading Soviet scientist saying that when the uranium is exhausted, then alternatives will be found. I see the Vietnamese taking over a nuclear power plant abandoned by the U.S. military. Have they dismantled and destroyed it? No, they are using it. I see China exploding nuclear bombs, developing nuclear reactors, and preparing a space program in order to colonize and exploit the planets the same as the Europeans colonized and exploited this hemisphere. It’s the same old song, but maybe with a faster tempo this time.

The statement of the Soviet scientist’s is very interesting. Does he know what this alternative energy source will be? No, he simply has faith. Science will find a way. I hear revolutionary Marxists saying that the destruction of the environment, pollution, and radiation will be controlled. And I see them act on their words. Do they know how these things will be controlled? No, they simply have faith. Science will find a way. Industrialization is fine and necessary. How do they know this? Faith. Science will find a way. Faith of this sort has always been known in Europe as religion. Science has become the new European religion for both capitalists and Marxists; they are truly inseparable; they are part and parcel of the