



## “FIRST IN TIME, FIRST IN RIGHT”

### Indigenous Self-Determination in the Colorado River Basin

On September 30, 1935, President Franklin Roosevelt took the stage perched thousands of feet above the Colorado River to address an expectant crowd celebrating the newly completed Boulder Dam.<sup>1</sup> In his informal remarks prior to his speech, Roosevelt exclaimed, “This morning I came, I saw and I was conquered, as everyone would be who sees for the first time this great feat of mankind” (“Dedication”). Flanked by one of the world’s great engineering marvels, Roosevelt praised the human industry and ingenuity that finally controlled this “turbulent, dangerous river,” which, left unrestrained, “added little of value to the region this dam serves” (“Dedication”). With these words, the president opened an era of frenzied dam building along the Colorado and throughout the West as the US Bureau of Reclamation, the federal organization created in 1902 to redeem the region’s desert landscapes, engineered into existence the expansive water infrastruce that today supports the region’s burgeoning cities and economies.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Boulder Dam was renamed Hoover Dam in 1947. I would like to thank the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies for a 2020 fellowship that supported my research for and writing of an early version of this article.

2. The Bureau was first known as the United States Reclamation Service. The name changed to its current form in 1923, a year after Congress approved the Colorado River Compact, which would become the foundational document for Colorado River policy and management between the states, Mexico, and Indian tribal nations.

This “great feat of mankind” and its offspring have benefitted and continue to pay dividends to countless individuals in and out of the American Southwest. However, the efforts to reclaim the arid West have also brought the Colorado less welcome notoriety. As Marc Reisner famously observed in *Cadillac Desert*, his classic treatise on western water development, because the Colorado “has more people, more industry, and a more significant economy dependent on it than any comparable river in the world,” it has become “the most legislated, most debated, and most litigated river in the entire world” (1986: 120). Thirty-five years after Reisner penned these words, the situation along the Colorado today has only intensified as a result of a decades-long drought, the increasingly alarming effects of climate change, and the growing clamor among the river’s many stakeholders to solidify their claims to the river.<sup>3</sup>

For the Colorado River Basin’s Indigenous communities seeking their slice of the Colorado within this complex matrix of competing interests and growing environmental concerns, the struggle has been immense. While Boulder Dam overwhelmed Roosevelt through its sheer awe and magnificence, its conquering effect has extended to the tribes as this icon of western conquest facilitated the colonization of the arid West and the further removal of tribes from their historic use and access to natural resources. Notwithstanding the foundational 1908 Supreme Court ruling in *Winters v. United States*, which granted tribes water rights based on the date of their reservation’s creation and, in many cases, made them the most senior water rights holders in the region, the West’s water governance approach based on a “first in time, first in right principle” tended to benefit non-native water users.<sup>4</sup>

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3. Beginning in 2000, the Colorado has been mired in what the US Department of the Interior has described as a “historic, extended drought” (“Drought”). Terms such as “megadrought” and “hot drought” are now used by scientists to describe what appears to be the new normal in the Basin (Williams, et. Al 2020; Udall and Overpeck 2017). These current realities combine to create significant stress within the system that directly supports approximately 40 million people in the United States and Mexico.

4. “First in time, first in right” articulates the approach that the prior appropriation doctrine, the system of water governance in the arid West, takes to allocating water rights. The *Winters* ruling was upheld in the 1964 *Arizona v. California* decree which quantified water allocations to a number

Thus, despite their literal embodiment as the “first in time, first in right” users through the West, the tribes have historically lacked the means by which to perfect or develop those rights whereas settler communities, often aided by state and federal dollars, have controlled many of the West’s waterways and their development. As a result, the Colorado River’s colonization has compromised tribes’ ability to exert their water sovereignty.

This article seeks to decolonize Colorado Basin water knowledge by reassessing the “first in time, first in right” dictum that has long shaped Indigenous water practices in the region. To do so, I bring Indigenous knowledge about the Colorado River Basin and the natural world more broadly out of the mainstream’s obscurity to reposition these perspectives at the foreground of the region’s water cultures. This decolonization employs Dina Gilio-Whitaker’s call for “indigenizing environmental justice” to examine a number of texts representing various tribal affiliations and genres to consider how their particular use of narrative engages the historic and ongoing environmental injustices they have faced and continue to negotiate in their fight to preserve their sacred lands, identity, and access to reliable, clean water (2019: 26). Such a decolonization occurs through these texts’ use of narrative to work within and against the scientific and instrumental discourses and their respective genres that have traditionally constructed and dictated mainstream Colorado River knowledge and activity.<sup>5</sup> In essence this discursive manipulation establishes the texts’ “rhetorical sovereignty,” what Scott Lyons defines as “the inherent right and ability of *peoples* to determine their own communicative needs and desires in this pursuit, to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse” (449).

The rhetorical sovereignty these Indigenous voices claim not only demonstrates their expertise in addressing current water

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of the Lower Basin’s tribal nations according to their priority dates. See *Arizona v. California* section II for quantification details.

5. Rhetorician Walter Beale identifies instrumental discourse by its “governance, guidance, control, or execution of human activities. It includes such specific products as contracts, constitutions, laws, technical reports, and manuals of operation” (1987: 94).

issues but their ability to exert their “Indigenous eco-agency” to challenge the status quo and offer their own solutions rooted within their respective experiences and traditions (Adamson and Monani 2017: 9). And narrative—the stories of these traditions and connections to land and water—is central to Indigenous sovereignty both in terms of the language used to address environmental concerns and on-the-ground efforts to control resources. As Cree scholar Stephanie Fitzgerald argues in her assessment of Indigenous women’s writing about land dispossession and environmental justice, “It is narrative that creates the representation of the dispossessed, challenges the hegemonic invisibility of Native land dispossession in all its forms, and disseminates potentially useful and strategic counternarratives” (2015: 15). To understand how tribes are currently asserting their water sovereignty through narrative within the Colorado Basin, I first turn to a discussion of indigenous environmental justice to establish the grounds upon which these narratives operate. Then, I examine how the “Colorado River Ten Tribes Partnership Tribal Water Study” (2018; henceforth “Water Study”) and the Grand Canyon Trust’s “The Voices of Grand Canyon” use narrative to shed greater light on the essential cultural, spiritual, and economic relationships the Basin’s nations and tribes have with the Colorado River. Through these counternarratives to the West’s dominant water ideologies and cultures, the Basin’s tribal nations draw attention to past and ongoing struggles to secure equitable water access while amplifying their resilience and self-determination.

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#### INDIGENIZING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Over the last couple of decades, numerous scholars and activists in the environmental humanities have attended to the countless manifestations of environmental injustice playing out across the globe. Those working at the intersections of Indigenous and environmental studies have amplified the understanding of environmental justice and the ways in which its historic roots in the Civil Rights movement and current focus on issues of racial and economic parity fail to fully describe the environmental injustices plaguing Indigenous communities in North

America and beyond.<sup>6</sup> For example, Dina Gilio-Whitaker (Colville Confederated Tribes) and Kyle Powys Whyte (Potawatomi) define environmental justice for Indigenous peoples as equal access to the earth's material resources and also to its spiritual elements which comprise essential components of Indigenous identity. Their respective arguments for "indigenizing environmental justice," as Gilio-Whitaker put it, suggest a significant reorientation for how dominant culture envisions human-earth relations and posit needed directives for reimagining Colorado River water use in the twenty-first century (2019: 26). Gilio-Whitaker contends that the traditional notions of environmental justice are rooted in colonizing systems, which have negatively shaped Indigenous cultures:

the underlying assumptions of environmental injustice as it is commonly understood and deployed are grounded in racial and economic terms and defined by norms of distributive justice within a capitalist framework. Indigenous peoples' pursuit of environmental justice (EJ) requires the use of a different lens, one with a scope that can accommodate the full weight of the history of settler colonialism, on one hand, and embrace differences in the ways Indigenous peoples view land and nature, on the other. (12)

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Under this alternative vision of environmental justice, the equitable access to natural resources is only the beginning of a more just future for Indigenous peoples. Rather, an Indigenized environmental justice accounts for the basic ideologies that have compromised equitable access to those resources and embraces alternative epistemologies, such as those reflective of tribes' spiritual and communal connections for how people and the Earth interact.

Therefore, in the case of the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) statement on environmental justice, Gilio-Whitaker notes

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6. The EPA defines environmental justice as "the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. This goal will be achieved when everyone enjoys: the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards, and equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work" ("Environmental Justice").

its shortcomings as a “universalizing, unidimensional approach that fails to account for different histories” (36). In sum, “for environmental justice to be responsive to the needs of Native peoples it must be indigenized—tailored to account for their very different histories, relationships to the land, and political relationships to the State” (147). On this latter point, Karen Jarratt-Snyder and Marianne O. Nielsen’s recent work on Indigenous environmental justice clarifies how popular articulations of environmental justice aiming for racial parity in the access to clean, healthy natural resources fail to account for the fact that “Native American tribes are governments, not ethnic minorities” (2020: 9). This important distinction necessitates a different relationship between tribal nations and the United States government, one based on the “Trust Doctrine,” which emphasizes the federal government’s “obligation to protect the interests of Indian tribes” (2016: 9). This article’s primary objective is to foreground some of these different histories in light of tribal nations’ unique legal position to raise awareness of their utility and relevance to present and future Colorado River governance.

Kyle Powys Whyte’s work on environmental injustice informs Gilio-Whitaker’s assessment and helps further elucidate the challenges Indigenous communities within the Colorado River Basin and elsewhere face when it comes to asserting their claims to their historic lands and waters. While Whyte’s vision of an Indigenous environmental justice relies on principles of access previously articulated, his notion goes much deeper to the fundamental relationships humans have with other humans and the natural world that have been nurtured for countless generations. For Whyte, environmental

injustice also occurs when the social institutions of one society systematically erase certain socioecological contexts, or horizons, that are vital for members of another society to experience themselves in the world as having responsibilities to other humans, nonhumans and the environment. Injustice, here, involves one society robbing another society of its capacities to experience the world as a place of collective life that its members feel responsible for maintaining into the future. (12.4)

The relationships Whyte traces between various human and non-human entities both in the present and for the future encapsulate

his “systems of responsibilities,” and it is the “interference with and erasure” of these connections that constitute environmental injustice (12.25). The subsequent analysis of the Ten Tribes’ “Water Study” and “Voices” projects highlights some of these “horizons” and their associated discourses through which tribes reinscribe their role as river stewards.

Other scholars have also emphasized these particular relationships in light of Indigenous land possession. In summarizing Diné (Navajo) and Anishinaabe/Ojibwe perspectives on nature and their contrast to romanticized notions of the “ecological Indian,” Fitzgerald explains that because “nature is linked to everything else,” nature is understood “not on sentimental feelings or affinities for what, in American English, can be amorphous concepts,” but on a system of “relationships and stewardship” (2015: 11).<sup>7</sup> Joni Adamson and Salma Monani extend this understanding of Indigenous connections with nature by framing these approaches within what they identify as “Indigenous cosmovisions,” perspectives which “articulate dynamic epistemologies that have been negotiated over long histories (sometimes thousands of years), and many present sound ethical and scientific reasoning for ecological protection” (2017: 9).<sup>8</sup> Thus, rather than framing the natural world as the antithesis of culture, a trope that has bedeviled Western literature for generations, the Indigenous texts examined here forge connections between nature and culture where concern for the land and water reflects a concern for the self, the home,

7. For more on the notion of the ecological Indian see Shepard Krech’s *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (2000).

8. Adamson and Monani ground their discussion of Indigenous cosmovisions within the theory of cosmopolitics, the origins of which they trace in the introduction to their edited collection *Ecocriticism and Indigenous Studies*. They conclude that cosmopolitics “implies that we are entering a moment in politics that takes as its goal [...] the recognition of intergenerational, evolutionary space and time required not just for the survival of all species, but for the recognition of the ‘rights’ to life for all humans and nonhumans” (7). Looking to Adamson’s extensive work on this emerging perspective, Mascha Gemein defines ecopolitics both as a “theoretical framework and political strategy for an expansion of political participation beyond the human realm” and notes that it “corresponds to the philosophies guiding Indigenous movements” (2016: 485).

community, and all relationships that unite the human with the non-human world.<sup>9</sup>

These articulations of responsibility to the Earth and its inhabitants run counter to private property and the American West's prior appropriation doctrine. Although prior appropriation implies "beneficial" use—intended to prevent the "waste" of water flowing in a stream that could otherwise be used for a public good such as agricultural or domestic use—it is beholden to the prevailing beliefs about how water benefits society. While sensibilities have shifted in the United States to extend beneficial use to include ecosystem management and aesthetic purposes in certain areas, western water law is still a system rooted in ownership and individual rights that often pits users and uses against one another. In my readings of the texts that follow, I examine how the narratives broaden the possibilities of beneficial use through systems of responsibility, which Gilio-Whitaker suggests in her own summation of these connections are "relationships of reciprocity based on responsibility toward [...] life forms" (2019: 13). Such relationships then, as they extend beyond the human world and emphasize the value of all life forms, become provocative examples of "native resistance" (13). Expressed and forged through narrative to establish the authors' rhetorical sovereignty, these responsibilities, relationships, and cosmovisions define how these "first in time, first in right" Indigenous communities today seek to develop their Colorado River allocations and use their unique legal position and discursive strategies to emerge as water leaders in an age of growing uncertainty and scarcity.

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#### TEN TRIBES PARTNERSHIP TRIBAL "WATER STUDY"

One of the most extensive and recent collections of Indigenous voices from the watershed comes from the Colorado River Basin Tribes Partnership or Ten Tribes Partnership (Partnership) formed in 1992 to "claim their seat at the table and raise their voices

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9. Such are the issues at the heart of the recent Dakota Access Pipeline protests on the Standing Rock Reservation. In *Our History is the Future* (2019) Nick Estes cites the Lakota and Dakota idea of Mitakuye Oyasin or "all my relations" or "we are all related" in his treatment of Indigenous efforts to protect the Mni Sose (Missouri River) (15).



in the management of the Colorado River as water challenges persist” (“The Ten Tribes Partnership”).<sup>10</sup> This partnership includes the Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation, the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, the Southern Ute Tribe, the Jicarilla Apache Nation, and the Navajo Nation from the Upper Basin and the Fort Mojave Indian Tribe, the Chemehuevi Indian Tribe, the Colorado River Indian Tribes, the Quechan Indian Tribe, and the Cocopah Indian Tribe from the Lower Basin.<sup>11</sup> Together, they represent a powerful force for promoting Indigenous rights throughout the Colorado River Basin as they hold claims to 2.8 million acre-feet of Colorado River water (“Water Study” 1-1). The Partnership’s study represents a significant step in the tribes’ assertion of their rhetorical and hydrological sovereignty as it captures their cultural, spiritual, and economic values—their systems of relationships to the river.<sup>12</sup>

In December 2018, the Partnership joined the US Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Reclamation to publish the extensive “Water Study” to articulate each of the tribal nations’ relationships to water and to outline past, current, and future water needs. Informed by the 2012 Colorado Basin Supply and Demand Study, which outlines the Basin’s future water needs as a whole, the Partnership’s “Water Study” ensures that many of the region’s tribes articulate “from their own perspective” what they see as the Basin’s water issues (“Water Study” i). The 362-page study begins with the Foreword authored by both the Commissioner of Reclamation, Brenda Burman, and the Ten Tribes

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10. In his opening remarks at a 2018 water law symposium, Ernest House, Jr, a member of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe and former Executive Director of the Colorado Commission of Indian Affairs, shared wisdom his father had passed on to him after years of representing the tribe: “if you’re not at the table, you’re on the menu” (“Enhancing”). The Ten Tribes Partnership represents an important coalition to bring tribal perspectives on water issues to the fore.

11. The Upper Basin includes Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, Wyoming and a very small portion of Northern Arizona. The Lower Basin comprises the rest of Arizona, California, and Nevada.

12. The Ten Tribes Partnership represents only a portion of the tribal interests in the watershed as there are twenty-nine reservations served by the Colorado River (“Water Study” i). See the “Colorado River Basin Tribes” section on the *Tribal Water Uses in the Colorado River Basin* website for more information about the Basin’s different Indigenous nations and tribes.

Partnership to reflect the unique legal relationship that unites the US government with these tribal nations as sovereign entities. This opening and the rest of the extensive document reflect the Partnership's efforts to "control the story" of Colorado River use by the Basin's Indigenous communities, a move Timothy Casey identifies as an important strategy in shaping policy (2020: 161). The Partnership's Foreword underscores from the beginning that "water is life" and situates findings about tribal water interests within the watershed's broader context ("Water Study" iii). That is, the Partnership's goals are to better understand how their current, respective water use fits into the Basin's larger management picture, how tribal development of reserved water will impact entities using tribal water, and how future tribal water development will impact the Basin in coming years ("Water Study" iii). Such goals demonstrate just how significant a player tribal water rights have become within the watershed. Where they historically have had minimal impact on the Basin's overall management, today they have become the "slumbering Monstro of the Southwest"—a juggernaut which will have a significant impact on how Colorado River water is developed in the future (Powell 2008: 154). The Partnership's "Water Study" and the articulations of each respective tribe's water rights and unresolved claims cannot be denied. Future deliberations will be shaped by these rights established over a century ago with the Winters case.

At first glance, the comprehensive "Water Study" resembles a typical hydrological report filled with scientific data to guide management scenarios, yet its reliance upon narrative throughout the document brings a very different tone to the type of reports produced by the Bureau. Indeed, as tribes engage narrative to evoke their cultural and spiritual values, they exhibit "Indigenous scientific literacies," which Adamson and Monani reveal are "complex multispecies entanglements that imaginatively argue for a safer, livable present and future" (14).<sup>13</sup> For example, evidence for such literacies appears in the Partnership's water-is-life theme, which

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13. Adamson and Monani look to Grace L. Dillon's collection *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction* (2012) to formulate their assessment of Indigenous scientific literacies within the broader theories of cosmopolitics and cosmovisions.

is far more than an obvious statement about the element's fundamental nature to all life. Rather, it is a refrain expressing deep cultural and spiritual values that define the tribal nations' stewardship of this material entity. The Partnership's introductory vision statement captures this broader understanding of water's significance within an Indigenous context. The statement reads,

Water is life. Water is the giver and sustainer of life. Water is a sacred and spiritual element to the Tribes of the Partnership. The Creator instilled in the First Peoples the responsibility of protecting the delicate, beautiful balance of Mother Earth for the benefit of all living creatures. The Partnership will embrace and own the stewardship of the Colorado River and lead from a spiritual mandate to ensure that this sacred water will always be protected, available and sufficient. ("Water Study" 1-1)

The repeated emphasis on the spiritual relationship to water and the Tribes' sacred duty to protect and maintain this essential resource draws a noteworthy difference from how traditional, non-native water reports articulate the importance of water. The Partnership establishes its rhetorical and hydrological sovereignty by clearly stating its role in the Colorado's future: they "own" the river's caretaking and will be the leaders on this front, one which other entities, including the federal government with its legal responsibility to the tribes, have failed to do. With this deliberate and direct language it is no surprise that the Ten Tribes Partnership's official website opens with a panoramic image of the Colorado River winding through desert canyons with the title "Keepers of the River" and a selection from the "Water Study"'s vision statement emphasizing the Partnership's role in stewarding the river ("Ten Tribes Partnership").<sup>14</sup> Significantly, this cultural relationship to the Colorado also infuses river management with spirituality. Nowhere does this passage set scientific knowledge as the *de facto* epistemology by which to direct the river's future. Instead, the "Water Study" is a bold witness of Indigenous cosmovisions by which the tribes will govern their

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14. The "Keeper of the Rivers" title recalls the "Water Protectors" moniker used by those protesting the Dakota Access Pipeline (Estes 2019: 15).

allocations—approaches which stand in stark contrast to mainstream river governance systems.<sup>15</sup>

The “Water Study” emphasizes this unique relationship between the cultural and spiritual relationships that defines their stewardship, particularly in Chapter 5, which offers an extensive overview of each of the ten tribes and their historical connections to the Colorado and its tributaries. For example, the section on the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe outlines their historic territory that ranged from southern Colorado and into Utah and New Mexico depending on the time of year and their eventual relocation to the reservation in southwest Colorado where they turned to ranching and agriculture (“Water Study” 5.3–3). The Tribe also notes the inadequate water infrastructure and the non-irrigable lands that characterize much of the reservation (5.3–3–4). This brief history reminds the audience of the Ute’s long-standing tenure in the area and the challenges they have faced since relocation as they have had to adapt to settler-colonial lifestyles. Despite the upheaval that has changed their traditional ways of life and connections to historic homelands and waters, the Ute Mountain Ute continue to maintain important cultural and spiritual relationships with the waters around them. The tribe explains that “Water brings life, sustenance, and is a tool of blessing and prayer for the Tribe,” particularly during the Bear and Sun dances that renew tribal identity and meaning (5.3–4). By outlining these sacred connections to water, the Tribe establishes the rationale for subsequent discussions about its current water supply and the unresolved water claims it has with New Mexico and Utah.

The “Water Study”’s most extensive discussion of a system of reciprocal responsibilities regarding the Basin’s waters and inhabitants along cultural and spiritual values derives from the segment by New Mexico’s Jicarilla Apache Nation. Following brief information about the Nation’s reservation, the document provides a lengthy overview of their historic connections to water. The Nation explains that “Water, in all its forms [...] is sacred to the Jicarilla people

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15. Jarrat-Snider and Nielsen explain that while typical definitions of environmental justice speak to where people “live, work, go to school, and play” an indigenized environmental justice attends also to the places in which people “pray” (2020: 10).

and has been a fundamental tenet of the Nation's religion since time immemorial. In Jicarilla creation stories, "Born of Water" is a major deity who made the world a safe place for human habitation and brought the four sacred rivers—the Arkansas, Rio Grande, Canadian, and Pecos Rivers—to the Jicarilla people" (5.4–3). This explanation of water's significance to the Nation's cultural identity establishes the permanence of this spiritual relationship between the people and the water, one that is "to be protected and honored through religious ceremonies and rituals" (5.4–3). Thus, water has been and continues to be a key component of the Jicarilla Apache's cosmology and identity as the sacred rivers delineate their homelands, which too are "sacred," and which define "Jicarilla religion, culture, lifestyles, and their very identities as a distinct people" (5.4–3–5.4–4). As such, water "has never been just a commodity or a necessity of life" for the Nation, "but a sacred element that requires respect, reverential treatment, and efficient use" (5.4–4).

Evident throughout the Nation's statements is the role water has played in the past and continues to perform today. This connectivity underscores the Nation's rights to water established long before Anglo settlement of their homelands and the need today for the Nation to develop economically while maintaining this sacred relationship. The Nation concludes this section of its respective water study reminding readers that "The reverence for and appreciation of the scarcity of water continue to dictate the Jicarilla's individual and cultural relationship to their homeland. The features of the landscape, especially its water resources, are instrumental and integral to the Nation's modern economic development and the preservation of this ancient culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (5.4–4). These declarations about their sacred connections to the rivers and their homelands, and how these connections are vital to the tribe's future prosperity economically and culturally, assert their fundamental rights to this entity based on the "first in time" principle. Such statements powerfully challenge notions of the "Vanished Indian" myth that too often inform modern America's understanding of Indigenous cultures.

As an important tool in asserting their rhetorical and hydrological sovereignty, each tribal nation's statement on the cultural, spiritual, and economic uses of water upends historically inaccurate

ideas about the region's Indigenous presence. These statements, expressed often in narrative form that delineates tribal histories and, at times, creation stories as in the case of the Jicarilla Apache, combine with extensive commentary on storage capacity, flow rates, irrigation and groundwater infrastructure, and projections of water-use scenarios outlined for each of the Partnership's tribes. The "Water Study"'s discursive hybridity demonstrates the Partnership's rhetorical skill in engaging with the dominant scientific and instrumental discourses that shape water management while at the same time incorporating statements reflective of their ethical and moral standing on water's being and connection to the Partnership's various identities. This discursive manipulation as a form of rhetorical sovereignty or Gilio-Whitaker's "native resistance" can also be expressed as "engaged resistance," Dean Rader's terms, which Adamson and Monani summarize as "a fundamentally Indigenous form of aesthetic discourse that engages both Native and Western means as resistance against," in Rader's words, "colonial assimilation and erasure" (qtd. in Adamson and Monani 2017: 15). These strategic moves throughout the "Water Study" reflect the Partnership's keen awareness of the high stakes involved in securing their legally allotted water and stewarding its care by underscoring the river's sacred nature for all river users now and in the future.

"THE VOICES OF GRAND CANYON" DIGITAL PROJECT

Just as federal agencies such as the Bureau of Reclamation have begun to listen to and engage tribal nations more closely on water resource issues, so too have environmental organizations recognized, albeit long overdue, the value of Indigenous leadership and participation in shaping the public's understanding of the river and watershed. The Grand Canyon Trust's "The Voices of Grand Canyon" campaign is one such initiative to foreground Indigenous systems of responsibilities in this particular region. This non-profit, which focuses on environmental and cultural issues throughout the Colorado Plateau bioregion, released this collection of responses on its website in February 2020. The voices include Jim Enote (Zuni), Nikki Cooley (Diné), Leigh Kuwanwisiwma (Hopi), Coleen Kaska (Havasupai), and Loretta Jackson-Kelly (Hualapai)

who recount their individual and tribal connections to the Grand Canyon and the Colorado River. Their extension of the oral tradition through digital media comprising brief videos and print statements combine to reinforce the tribes' historic connections which assert their "first in time" claims to the river and its surrounding lands.<sup>16</sup>

Similar to the expressions of cultural and spiritual relationships within the "Water Study," Jim Enote, the Chief Executive Officer of the Colorado Plateau Foundation, speaks of his tribe's origins in the Grand Canyon and the petroglyphs on Zuni lands to the east and within the Grand Canyon to reaffirm the people's deep connection to these sacred places within the larger Colorado Basin as "they are telling us we should never forget where we came from" ("Voices").<sup>17</sup> Noting the Hopi's particular emergence within the Grand Canyon, Enote provides a history of the Zuni's origins at Chimik'yana'kya dey'a or Ribbon Falls, stating that they lived in the canyon for "a long, long time" and then "emerged, exploring all the tributaries of the Colorado River" before uniting on the lands that presently constitute Zuni Pueblo ("Voices"). While petroglyphs carved into rock long ago capture this movement from the canyon and beyond, the performance of Zuni rituals continues to reinforce their ancestral home ("Voices"). The perpetuation of this knowledge helps Zuni and outsiders understand the tribe's deep ties to this sacred space.

The Grand Canyon's significance as a place of emergence also defines Leigh Kuwanwisiwma's perspectives on the Hopi's affiliation to the area. but for the Hopi, the Grand Canyon is not just the tribe's "genesis" but their "final spiritual home" as their spirits will return to the confluence of the Colorado and Little Colorado

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16. This adoption of new technologies to address current crises recalls Tayo's healing in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977) wherein Ku'oosh, the traditional Laguna healer, explains, "There are some things we can't cure like we used to" (35). When not healed by the traditional methods, Tayo resorts to visiting Old Betonie, an unorthodox medicine man who helps Tayo understand that "after the white people came, elements in the world began to shift; and it became necessary to create new ceremonies" (116). I thank Manlio Della Marca for pointing out this connection to Silko's work.

17. The Colorado Plateau Foundation works with Indigenous communities in protecting local ecosystems, working toward food security, and preserving Indigenous languages.

rivers to then take on the form of clouds, which will then circle the earth (“Voices”). Contrasting popular beliefs about the Grand Canyon’s supernal wilderness qualities, which tend to neglect the canyon’s human presence, Kuwanwisiwma asks that visitors to the area understand that “the Grand Canyon and humanity are all one” (“Voices”). Coleen Kaska similarly invites the canyon’s visitors to consider the region’s Indigenous history as she contemplates the Havasupai’s loss of tribal lands and how Grand Canyon National Park’s centennial celebration in 2019 represents for her a century of dispossession and the failure of the government to fulfill its obligations to Havasupai by recognizing their claims to their traditional lands, including their emergence place at Red Butte (“Voices”). Growing up hearing the stories of her people’s ancestral connections to the Grand Canyon, Kaska directly addresses the audience, reminding listeners that “Natives are still around. [...] And they will never forget. I will never forget” (“Voices”). For Kaska, like Kuwanwisiwma, the canyon is a powerful reminder of her people’s past and the injustices that have characterized the tribe’s relationship to the canyon, particularly after the establishment of the Havasupai reservation, which greatly reduced their use of and access to their traditional homelands.

As one listens and reads these diverse tribal cosmovisions, it is clear that the narratives used herein operate beyond a simple informative overview of each tribe’s historic connections to the Colorado River and the Grand Canyon. Instead, these discussions about sacred origins function to highlight the need to bring attention to current issues of sovereignty and survival the tribes face in light of ongoing threats to their lands and tribal identities. Loretta Jackson-Kelly describes the significance of the middle of the Colorado River as “the backbone of the [Hualapai] people” and that “Without that backbone, we cannot survive” (“Voices”). Her work in the tribe’s cultural resources department and tourism agency ensures that she is able to teach this essential relationship between her people and the river, whose native fish are her people’s ancestors, to the Hualapai reservation’s many visitors (“Voices”). She notes that many outsiders come to the reservation with incorrect ideas about Indigenous peoples and that she wishes they would “try to understand the world that they’re going

















