



BLUE STORM: THE RISE AND FALL OF JASON KENNEY

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Kenney's Ride: Albertan Neo-Liberal Myths and the Symbology of a Blue Dodge Ram

Chaseten Remillard and Tyler Nagel

If you like it up loud and you're hillbilly proud
Throw your hands up now, let me hear you shout
Truck yeah

Tim McGraw, "Truck Yeah"¹

Introduction

A pickup truck invokes themes of power. You can tow house-sized travel trailers, livestock, other vehicles, and building materials. A truck portrays independence: you're your own man—and yes, a truck is gendered.² As the preponderance of advertising and country songs emphasize, pickup trucks are semiotically a man's vehicle,³ even though the gender balance in pickup truck ownership is approaching equality.⁴

A pickup truck is unstoppable. You don't get stuck—in the oilfield or your back lane. A pickup truck is quintessentially a blue-collar symbol of "git'er'done" and pragmatism.⁵ Of course, the pricing of pickup trucks far exceeds most other types of passenger vehicles, and many of the owner's

practical budgets, but the value proposition of the pickup truck is emphasized through ad campaigns that draw on the themes of freedom, individualism, and chauvinism. A famous pickup truck television ad starts with the words “America is still the land of rugged individualism” before cutting to Bob Seger’s “Like a Rock,” all the while accompanied by images of hard-working men, cowboys, and dirt roads. A “coal-rolling” truck is a political statement against climate science, or at least a willful blind eye towards it.⁶ In other words, a truck is not simply a truck; a truck is a powerful cultural artifact of visual communication, a discursive moment through which myths of masculinity, independence, resource extraction, and settler culture assemble, are reaffirmed, and embodied.

Jason Kenney chose a truck early in his rise to power in Alberta. In fact, it was a signature object from the start. Following the 2015 election victory of the New Democratic Party (NDP) (led by Rachel Notley) against a conservative movement fractured into the Wildrose Party and the Progressive Conservative (PC) Party, there was a general recognition among conservatives of the need to “unite the right”—to effectively challenge Notley in the 2019 Alberta election. In August 2016, Jason Kenney took up the challenge of merging the two parties, and launched the “Unite Alberta Truck Tour,” visiting all eighty-seven Alberta constituencies over the following months in a blue Dodge 1500 pickup truck.⁷ Ultimately, he was successful—merging the PCs and the Wildrose Party to form the United Conservative Party (UCP).

The blue Dodge Ram rolled out again for the 2019 Alberta election. Using the same truck with new decals, Kenney crisscrossed the province with powerful messages of “jobs, economy, and pipelines”⁸ for a province in the midst of an oil downturn. Mostly eschewing a campaign bus, he used the vehicle to arrive at campaign stops, sometimes jumping out to greet crowds while the truck was still rolling.⁹ The truck led him to victory—he literally rolled to victory in it, driving right inside UCP headquarters for his election night victory speech. A photo of him that night—leaning out of the window, waving as the truck drives through the crowd inside the Calgary convention centre, became emblematic of the decisive UCP election in 2019.¹⁰ Since the 2019 victory, the truck has made periodic appearances—for example, rolling out for events following the June 2021 “Open for Summer” announcement during the COVID-19 crisis and

even becoming Kenney's Twitter profile picture.¹¹ The truck again went into hiding as pandemic deaths surged in September 2021, expunged even from the premier's Twitter profile picture.

We propose that when Kenney began his "Truck Tour" in August 2016, his vehicle of choice—a blue Dodge Ram 1500—functioned to mobilize a powerful set of existent cultural and societal repertoires. In entering the truck, Kenney literally entered (and metaphorically took the wheel of) a symbology that neatly aligned with a host of neo-liberal populist myths of what Alberta is and who Albertans are. The image of Kenney and his truck aligned his own personal political brand with the well-trodden symbology of the pickup truck, and brought together powerful myths of Alberta exceptionalism, sovereignty, anti-elitism, and populist homogeneity.

At the same time, the symbology of the truck, as is the case for all cultural artifacts, is somewhat of an inside game. You need to believe in unlimited resource extraction and consumption, normative notions of cisgender heterosexual masculinity, settler culture, rugged individualism, and rural (or so-called redneck) homogeneity and chauvinism to see the truck as a positive assemblage of these myths. Otherwise, as some critics pointed out, and many people intuitively feel, the truck is a symbol of an antiquated, troubled (and troubling) reliance on old thinking about resource management, exclusionary and pugilist politics, and conservative (non-liberal) populist values and politics.

In short, the truck (as a form of visual communication, as a symbol, as a cultural artifact) is rich, nuanced, and contradictory. On the one hand, the truck is a dog-whistle symbol, communicating (without explicitly saying) that the neo-liberal populist Albertan myths are on the road again and that a new masculine sheriff is in town and at the wheel. On the other, the truck also mobilizes, meaningfully and implicitly, a spectrum of Albertan values that resist and challenge that same version of Albertan identity. As such, the truck functions to enable us to discuss the Janus-faced political landscape of Alberta: one that looks back towards a mythic past when driving a truck down a rural dusty road to an oil rig was uncomplicatedly celebrated, and one that looks forward to an Alberta less reliant on oil, and more urban, inclusive, federalist, and cosmopolitan.

In what follows, we offer a "reading" of Kenney's pickup as a cultural artifact and a form of visual communication. We look to understand how

the truck aligns with the political culture of the UCP brand of neo-liberal populism and the version of Alberta it wants to represent. Ultimately, we claim that although drivers may come and go (Kenney in particular), the myths that the blue truck mobilize (and the social repertoires these myths rely on) are much more difficult to dislodge. In other words, the blue truck—like Stephen King’s Plymouth *Christine*—has a life of its own.

Alberta and Neo-Liberalist Populism

Kenney’s truck arrived on the political scene with both bravado and pugilism. “I figured,” Kenney stated, “my Dodge Ram would do the job better than a Prius.”¹² During his “Truck Tour,” Kenney promised to visit all eighty-seven electoral districts and sign up “tens of thousands” of grassroots Albertans.¹³ Kenney’s tour, his words, and his choice of vehicle all align with a particularly recognizable form of Albertan neo-liberalist populism.

Populism as a political movement, as defined by Mudde,¹⁴ “considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite,’ and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonte generale* (general will) of the people.”¹⁵ As such, Mudde continues, populism is antithetical to both elitism and pluralism. Elitism because the elite is the enemy of the people, by definition, and pluralism because pluralism decenters the assumed homogeneous nature of the “pure people,” or questions the very existence of homogeneity with concepts such as positionality. At its core, therefore, populism is fundamentally bellicose, as it is premised on the need to combat the oppositional forces of elitism and pluralism and their respective definitions of political ideology and policy. Moreover, the battle that populism wages is much less about observational differences in policy and practice, and more about the perceived irreducible difference between populist, elitist, and pluralist political positions. As Mudde concludes, in populism “there are only friends and foes.”¹⁶

In 2016, Kenney found himself in just such a precarious environment. Kenney’s path to power was beset on all sides. To the right, he found himself contesting the fractured base, and he vowed to bring homogeneity back to conservatives: to create a unified conservative party. To the left, if he was successful, he needed to confront the new pluralism and perceived

elitism of the urban, liberal, and environmentalist NDP. Kenney proposed an explicit platform that promised both unity and confrontation. He also signaled a return to an Alberta of populist lore: prosperous, maverick, masculine, and rooted in settler culture. To help him create and maintain this neo-liberal populist myth of Alberta, he stepped into a blue Dodge Ram. Kenney's truck should not be considered inherently meaningful, therefore, but be understood as an assemblage of meanings from, and an agent to give voiced meaning to, different cultural and social tropes that support a particular set of myths about what Alberta is and who Albertans are.

Kenney's Truck and Myth of Albertan Exceptionalism

In the neo-liberal populist myth of Alberta exceptionalism, Alberta is a maverick province, populated by (an ironically homogenous group of) mavericks. Alberta has a long history as a province with notions of its own. Excepting the province of Quebec, few provinces have expressed a desire to diverge with the other provinces as much as Alberta has. Because of the obvious distinctiveness of its economy (based on oil), its physical remoteness to other population centres in Canada, and its social conservative values, Alberta often finds itself proudly differing with other provinces. Alberta as the “maverick” province of confederation has become a trope, culminating, among other things, in permanent exhibit at the Glenbow Museum—*Mavericks: An Incurable History of Alberta*.¹⁷ In this myth of exceptionalism, Alberta is also a land populated by mavericks: people who thrive through personal enterprise more than social endeavour. While the early cowboy and homesteader history of the province is rife with left-wing politics (including the formation of public health care, pro-labour legislation, and social credit theory), this ended with the premiership of Ernest Manning, and a (seemingly permanent) shift in ideology toward conservative.¹⁸

The early left-leaning political days are now largely unknown, replaced with a perception of a conservative cowboy ideology that claims a lineage straight back to the first white settlers (see Roger Epp's chapter). Now, the images of the lone cowboy on the range, of the little house on the prairie, of the intrepid North-West Mounted Policeman at the whiskey forts,

easily manifest themselves in many cultural icons, but none so relevant than that of a pickup truck. From the Tim McGraw country song “Truck Yeah” to images of trucks dominating untamed wilderness, the pickup truck is an easy symbol of personal freedom and masculine individualism.¹⁹ The maverick identity of a province forging its own road despite the judgement and direction of others is typified by the visual artifact. As a visual symbol, the truck provides utility, reliability, functionality, and ultimately, independence. As Hirschman writes, “The rugged individualist seeks equipment that is or at least appears to be rugged, solid, and dependable, just as he is. . . .”²⁰ Or as *Petersen’s 4-Wheel & Off-Road* magazine puts it: “something about the raw lines of the truck just screams that it is a truck. They evoke the days when trucks were actually trucks and had the aerodynamics of a barn door, got the gas mileage of a tank, and had the drivetrain of a semi-truck.”²¹ According to the myth of exceptionalism, Alberta and Albertans are as unapologetic as these trucks, defiant and unique in their capacity.

A pickup truck removes limits and invokes pioneering homesteader themes. A pickup truck is emancipation from cramped public transit, offering instead the open road. A truck invokes themes of abundance. No longer do overflowing trunks pose a problem; a truck answers the question of how to bring home IKEA purchases or lumber or the bacon. A truck is a necessary tool (and logical consequence) of natural resource extraction. You both need and generate abundance when you drive a truck. Indeed, the myth of Alberta exceptionalism is imbued with an independence derived from the prosperity of natural resource extraction. This too combines with the populist myth that Alberta and Albertans support themselves within confederation and individually (through private enterprise, oil and cattle). This mythical veneration of private enterprise and resource extraction fosters an inherent antagonism toward those who rely on the government for support and has galvanized resentment in Alberta towards provinces that need support—typified by the resentment toward recipients of equalization payments like Quebec and politics (and politicians) that are viewed as “socialist” (Notley’s NDP, Trudeau’s Liberals). When Kenney drives his truck, he sends a message that Alberta is resource(full), unique in its capability and prosperity.

Kenney's Truck and the Myth of Albertan Sovereignty

Popular sovereignty is an important myth of Albertan populism—governance that leaves “the power to the people.”²² In this populist myth, Alberta is a non-elite province, not just an outsider, but actively shut out of the halls of power in the East. The feeling of western impotence in shaping national discourse resulted in the 1980's proposals for a US-style “Triple E Senate” (elected, effective, and equal), which would have given equal geographic representation (and unequal per-capita representation) to the Canadian provinces.²³ “The West's demand for equality among the provinces precludes acceptance of any provision that creates a hierarchy of provinces.”²⁴ In essence, the populists of Alberta demand a greater per-capita influence in the senate than other, more populous provinces would receive.

Justifications for demands of greater power often relate to Alberta's financial contributions to the rest of the country. Misperceptions of federal equalization as a literal transfer that Alberta sends to Ottawa each year,²⁵ and the oil industry contributing to the overall prosperity of Canada are used to justify demands for a bigger say at the table²⁶ (see Jared Wesley's chapter). Growing popular support for proposals to reform Canadian political institutions, such as the Senate and the equalization formula, endorsed by conservative politicians including Preston Manning, Ralph Klein, and Jason Kenney, belie a profound dissatisfaction in the voice Alberta has in the context of other populations and provinces in Canada. Conservative governments of the past and present seem all too keen to stoke these fires of resentment, in the full knowledge that revisions to the constitution are unlikely to occur.

Takach describes the Alberta legend—“rugged individualists, carving out a living and a future from dust.”²⁷ With this identity of individualism and labour comes expectations of autonomy. The populist myth of Alberta demands a greater sovereignty over their natural resources, economy, and control over federal institutions. Such values enmesh with the symbology of a truck, an iconic vehicle providing mobility and motricity to its owner. The truck is not the public transit of confederation, it is an icon for personal sovereignty, an empowerment to choose one's own destination and route, pavement or not, with the ability to take as much cargo as you'd like

along for the ride. The personal sovereignty manifested in the desire for a pickup truck is a proxy for the desire of a greater say in Confederation. As such, the myth of Albertan sovereignty finds voice in a call for non-federalist alliances and pro-oil stances. To that end, Kenney's promise that his "Dodge Ram would do the job better than a Prius"²⁸ speaks simultaneously in opposition to a politics of social inclusion, federal allegiance, and environmental stewardship. Kenney's truck distinctly counters a perceived left-wing environmentalism associated with Prius ownership, since a Prius is a "visible marker of moral commitment and ecopiety."²⁹ Kenney's truck reaffirms and undercuts a perceived environmentalist smugness and elitism and reaffirms the capacity of Alberta to go it alone.

Similarly, within the symbolic system of Alberta public culture, Kenney in his truck will accomplish what Rachel Notley and Justin Trudeau (implied drivers of said Prius) would (or did) fail to accomplish. He'll reaffirm Albertan sovereignty where they couldn't or won't. Furthermore, Kenney's truck claims the primacy of a resource-based economy as a central engine of Albertan sovereignty. In contrast to a Prius, a Dodge Ram is clearly a less environmental vehicle (see Duane Bratt's chapter).

The truck also signals a shift in gendered leadership. A pickup truck is more expressly a masculine symbol and plays into Kenney's political antagonism against both Trudeau and Notley. As Lezotte argues: "of all the vehicles produced for the American automotive market, perhaps none is more strongly associated with masculinity than the full-size pickup."³⁰ Pickup advertisements routinely emphasize the gendered expectation of truck ownership, although "women are the fastest growing segment of pickup truck buyers they have been notably absent in truck advertising."³¹ Conversely, "the Prius may technically fulfill the needs of much of an individual's heavy work, or even every day lifestyle, but it does not fulfill the accompanying need: being masculine."³² Kenney's truck, therefore, reaffirms a mythic need for masculine, non-environmentalist rule within Alberta, in contrast to both Rachel Notley and the self-professed feminist leadership of Justin Trudeau³³ and their green policies.

Kenney's Truck and the Myth of Grassroots Albertans

Alberta populism perceives itself as a non-elite within a non-elite. First, Alberta defines itself as non-elite within confederation. Historic perceptions of anti-western behaviour—typified as “The West verses the Rest”³⁴ have been fuelled by a perceived exploitation of the western provinces as a frontier for the metropolitan east—an application of Canadian historian Careless’ metropolis-hinterland theory.³⁵ These concerns by Albertans—of “The East” viewing Alberta as nothing more than a hinterland—have provided a lens through which to view many federal (and federalist) initiatives as fuel for western alienation. The literal binary in “The West verses the Rest” has the effect of dividing Canada into the virtuous Alberta, and the antagonistic “Rest of Canada.” Indeed, this divide fuels an entire vernacular for the relationship, including the “Wild West,”³⁶ “Maverick Alberta,”³⁷ and even slogans such as the infamous “Let the Eastern bastards freeze in the dark.”

The second elite/non-elite division occurs within the borders of Alberta. Drawing on popular perceptions of the maverick, the conservative Albertan ideal is inherently anti-elitist. Those Albertans in fields such as public service, academia, and education are certainly perceived as antagonistic elites, but a stamp of approval is given to some that would be perceived as elite in other contexts: “Alberta oil executive? One of us. Quebec-raised Prime Minister (named Trudeau!)? Definitely one of them.”³⁸ In this way, the uniquely Albertan perception of elitism has less to do with material wealth and access to power than it has to do with perceptions of Eastern imperialism and those that support it verses the energy industry and those that oppose it. Kenney himself draws directly on anti-elite sentiment. Speaking in a truck stop diner in Calgary in 2016, during the Notley NDP government, he said “There are a number of Albertans who are off the radar screen for the elites, and they are going through serious adversity right now. They are decent, dignified hard-working people who feel totally disoriented about what’s going on and they feel like the government is working against them, not for them.”³⁹

The blue truck serves as a rallying call to the Albertan version of anti-elitism. The truck serves up motifs of the west, of individualism and

independence, of fossil fuel consumption and resource exploitation. It inherently supports the fossil fuel industry, and inherently rejects ideas of climate change initiatives of the prior Alberta NDP government and the federal Liberals. The blue truck is a symbol for the binary division of elites and non-elites: a shorthand way of expressing anti-elitist sentiments.

Kenney's Truck and the Myth of Populist Homogeneity

Homogeneity's role in populism is somewhat under debate. While viewed as intrinsic by Mudde,⁴⁰ some scholars believe the role of homogeneity is overstated—that populism is not necessarily linked to anti-pluralism, but rather is linked to a sense of unity *in* the populist group.⁴¹ Other scholars view homogeneity as peripheral to the core of populism, but commonly encountered.⁴² Regardless, homogeneity can be antecedent to populism as well as a result of it. In Alberta, views of the “mavericks” are often homogenous and hegemonic: the white rancher, the male oilman, the middle-aged cisgendered labourer. One of the most influential depictions of Alberta's history is the Glenbow Museum's exhibit. Although some of the Glenbow museum's van Herk-guided *Mavericks: An Incurable History of Alberta* exhibit features some “mavericks” that are not hegemonies (for example, black rancher John Ware and women's rights activist Henrietta Muir Edwards) the list of featured mavericks speaks to the preponderance of white, cisgendered men in non-elite roles.⁴³ This extends to a homogeneity in the image of a model disenfranchised westerner: a rural, white, hardworking, cisgendered Albertan-born conservative, espousing traditional conservative social values. In short, a match for the traditional image of a pickup truck owner.⁴⁴

Owning a pickup truck is “as Albertan as being rat-free and not having a sales tax”⁴⁵—a claim borne out by the official Statistics Canada numbers on new vehicle sales. Alberta outpaces the Canadian average on truck sales: 86 per cent of new vehicles sold in Alberta are classified as trucks.* In Quebec, trucks account for only 68 per cent of new vehicle sales.⁴⁶ Pickup truck ownership is linked to a provincial identity—and

* Statistics Canada divides new vehicle sales into two categories: “passenger cars” and “trucks.” Trucks include minivans, sport-utility vehicles, light and heavy trucks, vans and buses.

represents a near-universal homogeneity among Albertans. Startlingly, Kenney's choice of a campaign vehicle representing nearly nine out of ten new vehicle purchases resonates with more Alberta voters than being staunchly against a provincial sales tax (opposed by 73 per cent of Albertans in 2018 and by 57 per cent in 2020).⁴⁷ It's difficult to contemplate a characteristic more Albertans share than their taste in vehicles.

Kenney's Truck: The Dangers of an Autonomous Vehicle

Anthropologist Alfred Gell proposes that artifacts have agency—that they are created by humans who intend to change the world, rather than just comment upon it.⁴⁸ However, Gell contends, artifacts may have an agency of their own, capable of effects that differ from the intentions of the human creator. A structuralist approach to meaning making, as we've invoked in our reading of Kenney's blue truck, assumes that the significance of any one cultural object is beyond the object itself, and certainly beyond the creator of the object. The discourse, the social and cultural repertoires that inform the meaning of any artifact flood into the object to fill it with meaning. As such, the power of the truck is beyond any one driver. No driver can fully control the symbology of the truck. The myths of neo-liberal populist Alberta and the social and cultural repertoires that inform the meaning of pickup trucks more generally exist with or without Kenney at the wheel.

The truck, if taken as totemic of conservative populist myths, has a surprisingly robust and stable set of meanings that do not adapt well to changing political realities. By taking on the truck, Kenney entered a pre-formed set of constraints that limited his ability to govern effectively—especially in an increasingly complex political environment. Ultimately, Kenney was elected (at least partially) on the depth of the neo-liberal populist myths that enriched the symbology of the blue truck. But the “blue truck” approach is not always the most expedient nor most effective remedy for Alberta's political challenges.

While Kenney and the truck were physically and idealistically one during his run for the leadership and the subsequent 2019 election that took the UCP to power, cracks began to emerge between the blue truck

and Kenney. In a series of policy reversals, the UCP government has diverged several times from the “true blue” conservative values manifested in the truck.

One of the first reversals was a policy on removing dozens of parks from the provincial park system, reverting some to Crown land, and allowing others to be operated by private partners. The policy was ultimately stymied by widespread outcry.⁴⁹ On Crown land in Alberta, off-road driving is generally allowed—in provincial parks, not so much. The initiative to convert these lands to ideal habitat for blue trucks was defeated.

Another major policy reversal was on coal mining. A large-scale mining project, promoted by an Australian mining company, was the standard-bearer for a larger policy that would have allowed coal mining in the eastern slopes of the Albertan Rocky Mountains. Coal mining and jobs—linked strongly to blue truck ideology—seemed to be a policy that would resonate with Kenney’s conservative base. But the predictable opposition from the left-leaning environmental lobby was unexpectedly joined by small town councils and ranchers, concerned about pollution and destruction of a landscape that their livelihood depended upon.⁵⁰ Kenney misread his base: blue truck drivers love the eastern slopes as they are (see Roger Epp’s chapter).

The COVID-19 pandemic has been the most polarizing reversal of all. Throughout the pandemic, Kenney has been slow to implement restrictions and fast to rescind them. These policies, seemingly an effort to maintain the support of his right-leaning base, have no doubt resulted in the deaths of some Albertans who would have survived under more protective policies. Kenney justified this course of action under two auspices: the economic costs of lockdowns, and personal freedoms infringed by public health measures. When restrictions finally were imposed, there was hesitation in enforcing them, culminating in a series of high-profile evangelical Christian clergy and small business owners flouting the rules. As the death toll mounted and the hospitals filled, an untenable situation developed between the government and the scofflaws, culminating in a series of high-profile arrests that galvanized the right wing against Kenney.⁵¹ Paradoxically, attempts to deliver policy that would resonate with these right-wingers resulted in delays in implementing restrictions in the second, third, and fourth waves, and ultimately led to the need for

much harsher restrictions than were required in more moderate and left-ist provinces. Weekly anti-restriction protests, predominately attended by right-wing, anti-vaccine, anti-maskers continue, seemingly regardless of the policy that the government adopts.

In each of these reversals (parks, coal, and COVID-19), Kenney had to get out of the truck, attend to business, and try to get back into the truck again. Each time this maneuver was performed, the social licence for Kenney's use of the blue truck diminished.

While the blue truck imagery propelled Kenney to power, the same imagery has made it difficult for him to shift to the centre of the political spectrum. Although Kenney's policy reversals have indicated some attempts to shift left, he does so at the peril of alienating right-wing elements of the party he "united" on his truck tours. And given his intentionally linked identity to the blue truck motif, Kenney had a difficult task in endearing himself to centrist moderates. Adopting a symbol of masculinity, of purposeful antagonism, and of the oil sector left an indelible mark that limits his ability to shift his base to more moderate supporters. At the beginning of his decline and in the midst of the anti-restriction caucus insurrection, Kenney realized the limitations of his chosen symbology, allegedly saying he wanted a "new base."⁵² Further challenging Kenney was a growing segment of Albertans that no longer identify with the blue truck ideology. Those Albertans don't believe in the neo-liberal populist myths of Alberta, and instead see the truck as worn, outdated, troubled, and antiquated.

With each policy reversal, Kenney eroded his licence to drive the blue truck and represent the conservative base symbolized by it. The blue truck, with an agency of its own, continues down the road with or without Kenney, in the form of anti-vaccine protests, anti-masking, pro-oil sands development, anti-union sentiment, in the form of conservative social values, and in a vehement distaste for "Eastern" values. Increasingly Kenney appeared to be left behind by the blue truck, standing by the side of the road, his driver's licence revoked, as the Dodge minivans of the centre and the Priuses of the left pass him by.

One of the least obvious details in the historic blue truck entrance to the 16 April 2019 Calgary UCP election night headquarters is perhaps the most important of all: Kenney was not driving the truck that evening. In

the iconic photograph of him waving from the truck, Kenney is seated in the passenger seat of the blue truck that carried him to victory. He was not behind the wheel. It's unclear who was driving the truck that night (perhaps the truck drove itself), but it certainly wasn't Kenney. And it's not clear that he has been in the driver's seat since.

Conclusion

Convenient to populists is to adopt symbols that easily mobilize a host of cultural myths, in the case of Albertan neo-liberal populism, a symbol that communicated exceptionalism, sovereignty, grassroots masculine rule, and demographic homogeneity. As Kenney said, his Dodge Ram did the job better. In this sense, we argue that his blue truck was a perfect assemblage of pre-existing neo-liberal populist myths of Alberta, and as a symbol, it became central to his leadership campaign and election win.

A symbol is always ambiguous and dangerous. While a symbol can communicate more succinctly than words, its meaning predates its contemporary usage. No one person can control the meaning of a symbol, especially one as rich and nuanced as a blue pickup truck. Instead, the symbol may shape future discourse in an unpredictable way, connecting current actions to scenarios of the past and providing unanticipated lenses through which to view current events. As Jason Kenney discovered, this connection can be both constraining and difficult to sever. The symbol of the truck is bigger than Kenney, and it will continue down the road with or without him.

NOTES

- 1 Tim McGraw, "Tim McGraw—Truck Yeah," YouTube video, 3:40, 17 September 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rf7GfUORHtw> (accessed 28 September 2021).
- 2 Chris Lezotte, "A Woman and Her Truck: Pickups, the Woman Driver, and Cowgirl Feminism." *European Journal of American Culture* 38, no. 2 (1 June 2019): 135–53, https://doi.org/10.1386/ejac.38.2.135_1 (accessed 25 September 2021).
- 3 Lachlan B. Barber, "Automobility and Masculinities between Home and Work: Trucks as the 'New Normal' in Newfoundland and Labrador," *Gender, Place & Culture* 26, no. 2 (4 April 2019): 251–71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2018.1552926> (accessed 29 September 2021).

- 4 Ford, "The Great American Truck Survey," <https://media.ford.com/content/dam/fordmedia/North%20America/US/2020/06/22/The-Great-American-Truck-Survey-2020.pdf> (accessed 29 September 2021).
- 5 Elizabeth C. Hirschman, "Men, Dogs, Guns, and Cars—The Semiotics of Rugged Individualism," *Journal of Advertising* 32, no. 1 (2003): 9–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2003.10601001> (accessed 29 September 2021).
- 6 Sarah McFarland Taylor, "I Can't! It's a Prius: Purity, Piety, Pollution Porn, and Coal Rolling," in *Ecopiety*, by Sarah McFarland Taylor (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 68–90, <https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9781479810765.003.0004> (accessed 28 September 2021).
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