



Remarkable stories of indigenous communities reclaiming their life ways.
—Wilma Mankiller

Winona LaDuke

Recovering the Sacred: The Power of Naming and Claiming

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Recovering the Sacred: The Power of Naming and Claiming Winona LaDuke

When she invites us to “recover the sacred,” well-known Native American organizer Winona LaDuke is requesting far more than the rescue of ancient bones and beaded headbands from museums. For LaDuke, only the power to define what is sacred—and access it—will enable Native American communities to remember who they are and fashion their future.

Using a wealth of Native American research and hundreds of interviews with indigenous scholars and activists, LaDuke examines the connections between sacred objects and the sacred bodies of her people—past, present and future—focusing more closely on the conditions under which traditional beliefs can best be practiced. Describing the plentiful gaps between mainstream and indigenous thinking, she probes the paradoxes that abound for the native people of the Americas. How, for instance, can the indigenous imperative to honor the Great Salt Mother be carried out when mining threatens not only access to Nevada’s Great Salt Lake but the health of the lake water itself? While Congress has belatedly moved to protect most Native American religious expression, it has failed to protect the places and natural resources integral to the ceremonies.

Federal laws have achieved neither repatriation of Native remains nor protection of sacred sites, and may have even less power to confront the more insidious aspects of cultural theft, such as the parading of costumed mascots. But what of political marginalization? How can the government fund gene mapping while governmental neglect causes extreme poverty, thus blocking access to basic healthcare for most tribal members? Calling as ever on her lyrical sensibility and caustic wit, moving from the popular to the politic, from the sacred to the profane, LaDuke uses these essays not just to indict the current situation, but to point out a way forward for Native Americans and their allies.

Recovering the Sacred: The Power of Naming and Claiming Details

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From Reader Review Recovering the Sacred: The Power of Naming and Claiming for online ebook

Roger Green says

Winona LaDuke should be president of the U.S.

Lisa Kentgen says

Few books I have read are as equally well-researched and readable as this one.

Having read it I have clarity on how our country/culture needs to come to terms with our violent past (and present) if we are to move beyond our destructive, violent circumstances and address the most urgent issues of our time.

Could not recommend more highly.

Julia Clark-Riddell says

Absolutely comprehensive; chock-full of information that I'm still processing. The book definitely presents evidence and expects the reader to draw their own big-picture conclusions, and I'm trying to live up to the task.

Jess Gard says

LaDuke deftly weaves powerful metaphors and image rich anecdotes into the legal logic and hard facts and figures throughout every essay in this collection. She at once mourns the Native American cultural losses and bring sharp pointed condemnation down upon those perpetrators of genocide both past and current. She succeeds with a cool beautiful prose that resists over-wrought pathos appeals (which are plentifully available—but she's not taking the cheap shots)

While she relays the losses and injustices to the indigenous tribes currently within the borders of the USA, she celebrates their continued resistance and champions their hardwon successes.

This book is essential reading for anyone seeking to understand the Native American perspective in this modern era and it is a testament to the promise of the Indigenous people of the North America and their culture. They just may be the saviors of us all.

Rhys says

Stories of the difficult legacy of colonialism (and neo-colonialism) told with wit and wisdom.

Gloria says

Many of the truths that Ms. LaDuke talks about in this book are really universal truths that all humans need. I learned a lot about what the Native Americans of this country have lost and how they are going about to recover it.

Tomek says

An excellent overview of recent cases of resistance of indigenous communities and cultures against the cultural hegemony which is destroying their way of life and the environment upon which we all depend.

John says

Should be required reading for all people.

Amy says

Fascinating . . . particularly the theme of biodiversity in crops, how we're losing this and how our health problems show it. (LaDuke focuses on the way Native American communities are affected, but I think its a problem for us all.)

Jennifer DeJonghe says

LaDuke gives a damning account of current and past injustices committed against the indigenous tribes of North America. She uses a combination of personal experience and interviews mixed with historical research and government records to make the case that racism and stealing is still occurring, but in new forms such as biopiracy and historical revisionism. She writes with a lot of passion - at times her anger is clearly evident, but in other sections she uses humor and reveals a hope for the future and in reconciliation.

This is an important book for anyone to read - many contemporary issues are highlighted that should be receiving more notice.

Ami Nicholson says

Winona LaDuke is a Native American activist, and this book is a collection of tales about the attempts of the Indigenous people to recover elements of their traditional way of life. She discusses civil rights infringements that the Native Americans have experienced due to our government's endless desire to make

money. I was especially touched by the different levels of environmental racism that the people are facing, and how a complete lack of cultural sensitivity continues to deny them their freedom to worship and to commune with one another. The most astonishing section of the novel discusses how items of cultural patrimony were stolen from the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890, and then sold to white settlers as mementos. Many of these things - including cradleboards and a baby's foot- were later displayed in museums. The thought of the baby's foot actually kept me up at night. Some of the stories were very sad - as the Native People are still fighting for the return of their sacred items and sites. It is a shame that the actions of our government - going all the way back to George Washington - have caused the Native American people to have an average tribal diabetes rate of nearly fifty percent. However, there were also several stories with happy endings that talked about the different ways the Native Communities are fighting back through grassroots efforts and a return to cultural methods. They are educating the younger generations in the traditional language and religious customs. I think the greatest thing about books like this is that they extend an invitation to people outside the Indigenous community to get involved in the efforts to return what does not belong to us and to become more understanding. This is a tremendous book that will make you look at history differently, and I definitely recommend it.

Beans says

Amazing.

This is one of the best histories (to use the term loosely - it's way more than that) I've read in a very long time. Winona LaDuke manages to balance infuriating and terrible things with a cautious positivity towards steps being taken to reclaim land that was taken and changes in energy usage, all in a well-written, well-sourced, but totally accessible text. This was hugely refreshing to read after a long stretch of being disappointed by nonfiction.

Bart says

Winona LaDuke covers a wide range of struggles to recover sacred places - Apache resistance to University of Arizona and the Vatican's project to build a telescope on Mount Graham - and objects and human remains from Museums. LaDuke is a great writer, and the whole book is interesting. Reclaiming sacred objects from federally funded institutions through NAGPRA was of strong relevance to me as I work in one of the museums that LaDuke discusses. I also found struggles to recover blood that non-indigenous (white? I can't remember) scientists collected on false pretenses - supposedly to help study diabetes but really to profit off of indigenous genetics - and traditional food as a means to heal very interesting.

Erik Caswell says

wow. what a valuable read. there's so much here & so a lot to make my not-so-lil reading response to - this is a really factually dense text although accessible and not overly verbose. through a combination of firsthand accounts, several oral histories from Native elders, journalist writings, historical documents, and quotes from leaders, activists, and the like, there is never an unresearched page. so much history I didn't know, or had only gotten in bits & pieces, and definitely had not heard from an indigenous perspective or speaker. there are also so many sacred sites - mountains, rivers, volcanoes, told of in origin stories, etc that I'd never even

heard of, no less known the history of their capture & renaming. ((remember the Dept of Interior returning Mt. McKinley to its original name - Denali - a few years back and all the whitelash?)) the sections on indigenous agriculture, food, and recovering original seeds and crops were really beautiful and eye opening.

one of my big takeaways was how absolutely instrumental white science, academia, and museums have been in oppression of indigenous people. these are often thought as "nonpolitical" agents by the people practicing them - esp the scientists, who have an almost religious belief about the political "purity" of science ((there is a section on this belief in the book)). the sections on Native bodies, body parts, and people and their blood & genes held by these institutions against people's will and ability to properly bury, mourn, and see them off with proper rites and ceremonies had me at the verge of tears. how evil... blatant dehumanizing arrogance. LaDuke also shows how central indigenous rights over their own lands and ancestral customs and heritage and representation is to the fight against colonial expansion: which is through industry, especially the energy industry ((OIL)). this is a text I wish I had a class to work with in going slowly, to truly take in all LaDuke has to offer.

particularly powerful bits: LaDuke's opening and closing lines "How does a community heal itself from the ravages of the past? That is the question I asked in writing this book." ... "By democratizing power production, Native nations are providing the solutions that all of us will need in order to survive into the next millennium."

also, this bit from Robert Jensen got me thinking: "'Indians don't get to tell white people what to do. Why not? Polite white people won't say it in public, but this is what I think many white folks think: 'Whites won and Indians lost. It's our country now. Maybe the way we took it was wrong, but we took it. We are stronger than you. That's why we won. That's why you lost. So get used to it. You don't get to tell us what to do.'" -- I have absolutely encountered this sentiment unabashed & explicitly stated when talking to friends' parents whenever indigenous rights come up in conversation, news, etc ((in a community that owes its entire economic existence to the theft of desirable coastal Native land no less)). sometimes you can break through by making present day connections to Standing Rock, violated treaties, buried history of massacres that happened 20 minutes down the road. but some people do not want to & do not care to recognize the ruthless violence of that stance - moral conscience dead & buried

Amy Moritz says

I bought this book years ago, probably shortly after it was published, when Winona LaDuke spoke in Buffalo. She signed my copy. I read a few of the essays but never got around to reading all of them. With Thanksgiving on the horizon, I figured this was a good time to revisit LaDuke's work.

This was fascinating. And sad. I found the chapters on food particularly powerful -- how big business has impacted health and environment.

That the National Academy of Sciences suggested some areas be deemed "National Sacrifice Areas" makes my heart hurt.

Also powerful is the line that "In the end, it is a question of who gets to decide your identity and how that will be reflected in dominate society.

Again and again, LaDuke illustrates the competing world views of Native Americans and white men: Native Americans see people as part of nature, as a mutually beneficial relationship. The "white men" see nature

as something to be dominated. I find myself challenged to approach the natural world as a relationship rather than something to be controlled.

The only reason I gave this three stars was because it was dated. North Dakota, for instance, has retired the Fighting Sioux nickname. That does not change the fight or the history. But I had to Google a lot of things to find out where they stood now.

Also it was very factual. Which is good. From a reading standpoint, at times it felt too much like work.
