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# All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life, by Winona LaDuke

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# Book Review: All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life by Winona LaDuke

Joseph A.P. Wilson

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**LaDuke, Winona. *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*. Haymarket Books (Reissue edition), 2015. 256 pages. Paperback, \$19.00.**

Winona LaDuke (Minnesota Ojibwe) is a prominent indigenous environmental activist and scholar, perhaps most famous as Ralph Nader's vice presidential candidate on the Green Party ticket in the years 1996 and 2000. This is a reissue edition of her iconic 1999 book, which was a bellwether for many subsequent trends at the intersection of environmentalism and indigenism, anticipating the millennial renewal of radical leftist environmentalism and the Native American civil rights struggle in American politics. More than a decade before such language became mainstream (largely as a consequence of the Occupy Wall Street movement, circa 2011) LaDuke bemoaned the detrimental ecological and cultural impact of "that 1 percent of the U.S. population that controls an estimated 50 percent of the country's wealth" (p. 70).

I had the honor of attending LaDuke's engaging lecture on environmental justice at the meeting of the *International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* in Gainesville, Florida in January 2016, and I recognized that the themes of this book are still relevant more than fifteen years later. As Executive Director of Honor the Earth (an indigenous environmentalist advocacy organization), LaDuke has been directly involved in several of the most visible native and environmentalist protest movements over the last few years (e.g. coordinating the public opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline project, among others), and is arguably the most distinguished spokesperson for a unified traditionalist indigenous political front against the large industrial enterprises on Native lands in northern North America, which too often exploit and do not benefit the native custodians of these lands. This book similarly addresses many themes related to transnational energy policy, advocating for a traditionalist-indigenous alliance with radical environmentalist opposition to globalization and environmentally destructive energy policies, especially in the U.S.-Canada border regions.

This reissue edition was conceived by Haymarket Press (a publisher devoted to contemporary social justice activism) in the light of the present extreme urgency surrounding these issues of climate justice and with the object of continuing to build bridges across the seemingly disparate constituencies of the contemporary Left. I had therefore hoped this new edition would include updates and/or revisions reflecting the major changes, new challenges, and progress made since the late 1990s. Alas, I was disappointed in that regard, even as many of the chapters remain highly relevant. This book is an unaltered reprint of the first edition. Thus, the data the book presents is now approximately 20 years out of date, and, thus, this book must be used as merely the starting point for research on the intersectional topics which it so poignantly addresses. It is not necessary to summarize the whole volume (it has been reviewed previously), but a handful of representative examples, in the light of current events, are merited.

Chapter one recounts the Canadian and U.S. Mohawk experience with polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in their traditional foods, i.e. the fish of the St. Lawrence River, perfectly

illustrating the intersection of environmental and cultural damages caused by pollution. The industrialization of the entire Great Lakes Basin is implicated in the extreme contamination of the river exiting this massive watershed. At the time of this reissue edition (2015) unacceptable levels of PCBs and mercury were still being detected in the St. Lawrence [1]. Yet measurements have shown many changes in the Great Lakes Basin as a whole since the 1990s, as PCB levels in fish have been dramatically reduced across many monitoring locations [2]. This is arguably one of the great successes of the contemporary environmental movement, which ‘picked up steam’ in the same period. Beginning in the early 1990s, organizations like the Great Lakes Aquatic Habitat Network (now called Freshwater Future) have successfully connected grassroots activism with policymaking. This indicates cause for hope.

Chapter five addresses the moribund nuclear energy industry, and the disproportionately negative impact it has had on native nations. LaDuke presciently indicates the declining fortunes of this industry as the 107 operating plants (circa 1999) attained barely one-tenth of the one-thousand plants that were prognosticated in the naïve days of the Nixon administration (p. 97). This chapter requires revision. Yucca Mountain is sacred to Paiute and Western Shoshone peoples, and the possibility of a nuclear waste dump still threatens this land (pp. 108-109). The proposal seemed to be ‘dead in the water’ during the Obama administration, but the Yucca Mountain nuclear dump proposal has since become a real possibility again thanks to the Trump administration’s *laissez-faire* attitudes [3]. Another problem with this chapter is the publisher’s poor reproductions of map images from the original 1999 edition. For example, the grayscale reproduction of the nuclear waste map legend (p. 96) is presented in too low resolution to distinguish between “proposed” versus “existing” nuclear waste dumps, not to mention the numerous necessary changes to these data over the subsequent years.

Chapter eight is devoted to native Hawaiian sovereignty issues, and there have been some important developments on this front. In 1893, U.S. troops abetted a conspiracy of business elites and plantation owners to overthrow the Hawaiian monarchy in a *coup d’état*. LaDuke highlights the injustice of Native Hawaiians existing as squatters on their own land, lacking the legal status that many other U.S. native peoples enjoy. (There are distinct parallels and thematic links here with some of the non-reservation Native American groups she interviewed, e.g. the Independent Traditional Seminole Nation featured in Chapter two). President George W. Bush was a steadfast opponent of Native Hawaiian sovereignty and made official proclamations to that effect [4]. President Obama, himself born in Hawaii, made some modest efforts to advance the cause of Hawaiian nationhood but did not succeed during his administration [5]. Donald Trump’s position is unclear, but proponents of sovereignty remain optimistic and defiant [6]. A revised and expanded discussion of these issues is sorely needed.

Chapter nine’s discussion of solar energy as a “way forward” for traditionalist Southwestern natives (Hopi and others) is brief and tantalizing. Solar and wind power have undergone a major boom since the original publication, demanding a much deeper discussion of the successes and challenges experienced by natives implementing alternative energy systems.

Another reviewer in the field of indigenous environmental policy has criticized LaDuke's presentation as somewhat simplistic and anti-modernist in toeing a 'hard line' for traditionalism, and denying the relevance of new technology [7]. A robust revision and expansion of the alternative energy discussion would do much to alleviate that legitimate concern.

In summary, this book remains powerful and relevant in spirit and in thematic resonance with present issues, but the currency of the argument is not at all clear. I urge the author to consider writing a revised and expanded second edition, or possibly a sequel volume which advances the crucial narratives up to the present date.

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