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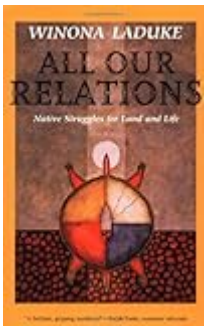
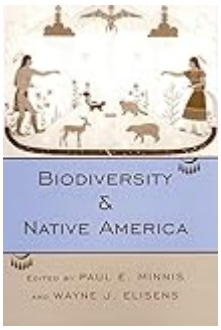


Winona LaDuke. *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life.* Cambridge, Mass: South End Press, 1999. vii + 241 pp. $40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-89608-599-2.



Paul E Minnis, Wayne J Elisens, eds. *Biodiversity and Native America.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000. x + 310 pp. $34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8061-3232-7.

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Real Ecological Indians: Connecting Culture and Ecology in Native America

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Ecological practices and beliefs among American Indians, of long-standing interest in popular consciousness, are receiving well-deserved attention from scholars in history, anthropology, and the biological sciences, as well as Indian activists. The intense gaze of academia on Indian ecology has produced controversy, usually over whether or not the "noble savage" stereotype is employed too readily in an attempt to portray all Indians as the first American environmentalists or is used as a straw man to deny that Indians interacted with the natural environment in a manner significantly different than the European intruders. Both views are, of course, vast oversimplifications. As anthropologist Shepard Krech demonstrated recently, Indians sometimes killed more animals than they needed for food, sometimes outstripped certain resources such as trees, and certainly altered local landscapes and environments.[1] The two books under consideration here suggest strongly, however, that not only did the diverse Indian peoples understand and utilize the

American natural environment in a manner more apt to preserve biological integrity than did Europeans, those Indians who preserve traditional culture today (language, religion, lifeways, and so on) seem to be much better equipped to preserve biodiversity and healthy ecosystems than mainstream American society.

Culture makes a difference, and Indian peoples throughout North America have linked cultural survival with preservation and restoration of original ecosystems. In many cases, Native knowledge of the intricate relationships between flora and fauna in a given ecosystem surpasses scientific information; witness the 1993 hantavirus outbreak in the Southwest solved by Navajo medical knowledge that mice feeding on pinyon nuts are carriers of the disease. Clearly, there are environmental lessons to be learned from Indian people.

Winona LaDuke is an enrolled member of the Mississippi Band of Anishinaabeg in Minnesota, an environmental activist, a writer, a member of the White Earth Land Recovery Project and of the national Indian environmental rights organization Honor the Earth, as well as a two-time Green Party vice presidential candidate. She provides a snapshot of ongoing efforts by Indians throughout the United States and Canada to preserve and restore traditional culture along with natural ecosystems. LaDuke insists that "[t]here is a direct relationship between the loss of cultural diversity and the loss of biodiversity. Wherever Indigenous peoples still remain, there is also a corresponding enclave of biodiversity" (p. 1). In nine case studies LaDuke investigates Indian communities across North America by giving a brief history of European-Indian relations there, the expropriation of the Native land base by Europeans, and the effects of industrial forms of resource exploitation on land and people in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. What makes her case studies different from other recent works on American Indian environmental issues is her incorporation of Indian religious beliefs and land ethics, her firsthand knowledge of the issues and peoples she discusses (she interviewed and visited folks in each of the communities), and her detailed presentation of Native efforts to correct environmental problems while simultaneously protecting traditional culture.[2]

Each community discussed by LaDuke has a unique history of coping with environmental and cultural degradation, but they all have common enemies among corporate despoilers and governmental negligence. On the eastern US-Canadian border lies the Akwesasne Mohawk reservation, downstream from 25 percent of all North American industry around the Great Lakes. PCBs and other contaminants have killed fish and other wildlife and polluted the groundwater. Mohawk mothers discovered PCBs in their breast milk in the late 1970s and have identified a neighboring General Motors plant as the likely source of contamination. In response, Mohawks created the Akwesasne Mother's Milk Project in 1985 and went to battle against GM and other polluters. They continue to seek restoration of healthy lakes, fish, and people.

In the Florida Everglades live the nearly-extinct Florida Panthers and traditional Seminole Indians. The causes of their decease are largely the same: loss of habitat (especially wetlands) to industrial and residential development and pollution of the environment by industry. Thanks to some private foundation help, traditional Seminoles are reacquiring property in the Everglades area and working to save the panther. Innu (Montagnais) peoples in northeast Canada fight against destruction of the forests by hydroelectric projects and military bases. The U.S. Air Force conducts low-level flights over the region disrupting animal routines and harming Native people. The Innu are fighting in the courts and through direct action by appealing to the U.S. and Canadian governments, occupying runways, and insisting on living as they always have in their homeland, including traveling where they want and hunting and fishing as they always have. The Northern Cheyenne in southern Montana are working to correct the monumental destruction left by decades of coal strip mining, most of which was approved by the Bureau of Indian Affairs on behalf of the tribe with little to no input from tribal members. Because the semi-arid region of southeastern Montana takes decades, if ever, to recover from strip mining, Cheyenne activists such as Gail Small formed Native Action to prevent any further mining through legal challenges. LaDuke criticizes west coast environmentalists for adopting a NIMBY (Not-In-My-Back-Yard) approach to this issue and failing to assist the Cheyennes, since much of the power generated on and near the Cheyenne reservation flows west to major coastal cities, whereas the pollution and ecosystem devastation remains out of sight in rural Montana.

LaDuke's fifth chapter discusses nuclear power, uranium mining, and nuclear waste, an environmental issue she has written about before and which is of particular importance within the setting of our current president's energy proposals.[3] Native activists have long pointed out that approximately one-half of American uranium reserves are on Indian land but about 80 percent of all uranium mining has occurred on Indian land, with 1,000

uranium mines on the Navajo reservation alone. The same underhanded way that the federal government acquired less than satisfactory mining contracts on Indian land is now occurring with regard to nuclear waste disposal. LaDuke highlights the Western Shoshones, on whose land the Nevada Test Site and the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste storage site reside, and their efforts to fight against further radioactive contamination.

Forest preservation and restoration, land recovery, and hunting, fishing, and gathering rights are the focus of traditionally-minded Anishinaabeg on LaDuke's own White Earth Reservation in Minnesota. After a century of rampant clear-cutting of the forests by outside interests, such as Weyerhauser, LaDuke and others formed the White Earth Land Recovery Project in 1989 to reacquire land. "The struggle to preserve the trees of White Earth," LaDuke contends, "is not solely about forest preservation and biodiversity. It is also about cultural transformation, for the Anishinaabeg forest culture cannot exist without the forest" (p. 127). Similarly, on the Plains, Indian nations are trying to build up their own buffalo herds in order to restore the prairie ecosystem and reestablish cultural ties with their buffalo brothers and sisters. By so doing, Plains Indians such as the Lakotas find themselves at odds with white cattle ranchers and with government officials who authorize the slaughter of buffalo who wander beyond the boundaries of Yellowstone National Park. Yet, their efforts are succeeding and there are hopes of restoring vast areas of the Plains to their pre-ranching biodiversity.

LaDuke's last two case studies take us to Hawaii and the Hopi reservation in northern Arizona. Native Hawaiians occupy lands that the U.S. Government has converted to military bases and national parks, though they have succeeded in getting the Kaho'olawe Island–used as a bombing range by the navy–restored to Native ownership. Issues of land repatriation (from governmental and private claims), toxic waste cleanup, and traditional fishing and farming methods are front-and-center among traditional Hawaiians. LaDuke closes with Hopi efforts to selectively use modern technology, especially solar power, to address present needs while preserving ecological and cultural integrity. Electricity-generating plants and power lines are viewed by traditional Hopis as too intrusive, and alternative energy supplies are viewed as an answer to the need for some electricity.

All Our Relations is written clearly, compellingly, and with reasoned judgement. Excellent maps at the start of each chapter add to this work's usefulness as an undergraduate and general audience text on American Indian environmental issues. Winona LaDuke has become one of the leading voices within the environmental movement and among Indian activists, and she has important things to tell all of us.

In the opening to their book, Paul Minnis and Wayne Elisens echo LaDuke's plea to listen to what Native North American people have to say about environmental stewardship: "Native peoples have been neither passive consumers of nature's economy nor primitive rapists of pristine natural environments . . . aboriginal peoples have helped shape environments for untold millennia, and their accumulated ecological expertise and experiences with diverse organisms and varied biotas will be critical for building a sustainable and just future".[4] Essays by anthropologists, biologists, and environmental scientists examine nine geographic and topical areas for ancient and contemporary Native ecological practices. Their collective effort is part history, part science, and part a call to action for environmentalists and others concerned with the fate of our ecosystems.

Paralleling LaDuke, Minnis and Elisens argue that "[m]aintaining biodiversity–whether organismic, ecological, or agricultural–necessitates a concomitant concern for the loss of cultural and linguistic diversity" among Native peoples (p. 17). The three essays in section one, "Issues and Overviews," follow this reasoning. Gary Paul Nabhan describes his efforts to catalog and preserve Native knowledge of plant and animal species in the Sonoran Desert bioregion by working with O'odham and Seri elders. Robert Bye and Edelmira Linares outline the interconnections between biological and cultural diversity in Mexico. The importance of ethnopharmaceutical data obtained from indigenous people is the subject of Walter H. Lewis's essay. He cites promising discoveries of possible treatments for HIV among plant species utilized by Native people, as well as other plant medicines, and he argues for the establishment of legal patent procedures to ensure that Native groups get the credit and compensation that they deserve for this knowledge.

The second section provides three ethnographic case studies of indigenous use and knowledge of plant and animal biodiversity. Catherine S. Fowler analyzes data on Great Basin Indian utilization of plant and animal species. In Nevada alone, Indians used hundreds of plants and animals for food and medicine, and Fowler describes ongoing efforts among Shoshones and others to retain this knowledge. The horticultural practices of the Salish peoples of interior British Columbia are investigated

by Sandra L. Peacock and Nancy J. Turner. Salish management of hundreds of plant species for food, medicine, and other materials–by annual burning of underbrush for example–produced unnaturally high yields and preserved biodiversity, unlike contemporary industrial uses of herbicides and pesticides. Enrique Salmon explains the spiritual connections that the Raramuri people of Chihuahua, Mexico hold with the non-human natural world. Maintenance of a balance between people and nature, especially crops, are part and parcel of their culture, rituals, and daily lives.

The last three essays examine pre-contact Native methods of conserving and enhancing biodiversity. Indian alteration of the prehistoric landscape of the semiarid Rio del Oso Valley of northern New Mexico is the subject of an essay by Richard I. Ford. He delineates numerous examples of water control structures that allowed for greater plant production and enhanced biodiversity. Gayle J. Fritz, using archeological and ethnohistorical materials, looks at the entire eastern woodlands prior to European arrival and concludes that Native cultivation of maize and other crops and alteration of local ecosystems through burning and other methods enhanced plant and animal species throughout the region. In the last essay, and the only one that has been previously published, Julia E. Hammett considers the Native southeastern United States. She mines the narratives of early European explorers in order to construct a template of methods used by southeastern Indians to manage their environments.

The unescapable conclusion of Hammett's paper and the other essays in this volume is that the environment and landscape of North America is better described as "managed" than "wild" at the time of European arrival, and Indian management produced, generally speaking, greater natural diversity and sustainability than non-Indian alterations since initial contact. Biodiversity and Native America should be required reading for specialists in American Indians, American environmental history, and North American biology. Together, the two works discussed here force us to rethink the history of the natural environment in America, as well as the crucial role within American biodiversity played by, and still continuing to be performed by, Native people.

[1]. Shepard Krech, III, The Ecological Indian: Myth and History (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999).

[2]. Other works on American Indian environmental issues include (but are not limited to) Peter Mathhiessen, Indian Country (New York: Penguin Books, 1979); Al Gedicks, The New Resource Wars: Native and Environmental Struggles Against Multinational Corporations(Boston: South End Press, 1993); Donald A. Grinde and Bruce E. Johansen, Ecocide of Native America: Environmental Destruction of Indian Lands and Peoples (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 1995); and Donald L. Fixico, The Invasion of Indian Country in the Twentieth Century: American Capitalism and Tribal Natural Resources (Niwot, Col.: University Press of Colorado, 1998).

[3]. See Ward Churchill and Winona LaDuke, "Native North America: The Political Economy of Radioactive Colonialism," in Ward Churchill, From a Native Son: Selected Essays in Indigenism, 1985-1995 (Boston: South End Press, 1996), 147-190.

[4]. Ibid.

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