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Review: Recovering the Sacred: the Power of Naming and Claiming

By Winona LaDuke

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Winona LaDuke. *Recovering the Sacred: the Power of Naming and Claiming*.
Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2005. 294 pp. ISBN: 13: 978-0-89608-
712-5. US\$18.00 (paper).

Economist, writer and activist Winona LaDuke uses stories, facts and examples to explain why recovering that which is "sacred" to Native Americans is critical to social justice struggles as well as the survival of the planet. The book documents numerous efforts by Native Americans to reclaim land, resources, culture, religion, genetic information, and all else that rightfully belongs to them. What is at stake, for example, is the fate of the approximate two hundred thousand Native American remains held in public and private museums, something LaDuke labels "imperial anthropology" in a chapter by the same name (pp. 67-86). Skeletons and other artifacts mummified by collectors are being held against the will of their rightful inheritors, and recent efforts at repatriation have returned less than 10 percent to date.

The power to name leads to the right to claim. Cherokee jeeps, Crazy Horse beer, and Indian motorcycles are all corporate products that claim the name with no consideration or recompense to Native Americans. The 600 educational institutions that use Native American mascots trivialize and demean individuals and erase a culture. LaDuke says, "... it is time for the settler to end the process of naming that which he has no right to own, and for us to collectively to reclaim our humanity" (p. 149).

Native culture is essentially defined as being in contrast to the culture most Americans know. Such contrasts include, for example, wage labor versus communal work, privately held property versus collectively held property, communalism versus capitalism, and living in harmony with the land versus exploiting earth's resources. LaDuke believes that "the integrity of what is sacred to Native Americans will be determined by the government that has been responsible for doing everything in its power to destroy Native American culture" (p. 11). The Dawes Act of 1887 is a good example of this. The European concept of privately held property was forced on tribal people whose land had been held collectively. Eighty-acre plots in 118 reservations were allotted to individual families, including non-Natives. By 1957, two-thirds of the land had been taken from Native Americans through the allotment process. The 1980 Chiloquin Act was the only instance of land

returned to an individual Native person when 580 acres was returned to Edison Chiloquin of the Klamath tribe.

LaDuke draws comparisons between Indigenous peoples worldwide using studies by the World Council of Indigenous Peoples. For example, "terminator seeds," produced by corporate seed companies and used throughout the world, cannot be saved for replanting and must be bought anew each year. Furthermore, in certain countries, legislation makes it a crime for farmers to save seeds they've grown for themselves or to share them with others. This includes the United States, where, in 1994, farmer-to-farmer seed exchange was outlawed. Indigenous populations depend on seed harvesting, and for Native people, seed gathering and preservation are important to the culture.

LaDuke's stories also include those of hope and positive change in reclaiming Native culture. Examples include the Great Plains tribes producing energy for their communities using green power, the White Earth Reservation re-introducing sturgeon into the headwaters of the Mississippi and Red rivers, and the Nez Pearce returning to the breeding of quality horses. This book will help non-Native readers better understand Native American culture. Highly recommended for public, academic and private collections.

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