
Stephanie Woodard. *American Apartheid: The Native American Struggle for Self-Determination and Inclusion*. IG Publishers, 2018. 288 pp. ISBN 978-1632460684.

<https://www.igpub.com/american-apartheid/>

The United States, in the age of Trump, has entered an era in which our politics have become animated by unprecedented levels of corruption and mendacity, while a significant portion of the populace has been driven to vigorous displays of dissatisfaction and protest in response. If this all seems strange and new to many of us, however, it is a reality that has cast a long historical shadow over Indian Country. Stephanie Woodard's new book *American Apartheid* provides an up to date roadmap of the ongoing battles of Native peoples in the U.S. to retain their land base, secure voting rights, halt the exploitative extraction of resources on their lands, and stem the tide of abuse, neglect, and coercion that has often defined relationships with the settler colonial powers that Woodard likens to the oppressive South African system referenced in her title.

Woodard, although not Native herself, has spent nearly the last two decades reporting on indigenous affairs in respected alternative media outlets such as *Indian Country Media Network*, *In These Times*, and *Yes*. Although her reporting at times lacks the granular detail one might expect in a more tribally specific, or even geographically focused, scholarly study, it is clear that Woodard has established trusting relationships with peoples in indigenous communities across much of the country and has served as an effective advocate and ally. Not surprisingly, recent events at the Standing Rock Indian Reservation (Íŋyaŋ Woslál Háŋ) provide a kind of touchstone for the general reader who may have no frame of reference for Native activism beyond the highly publicized 2016-2017 standoff to halt construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. But Woodard is quick to acknowledge that Native activism long precedes Standing Rock, and her book bears witness to that broader range of cultural and political struggles, zeroing in on her field reporting in Native space, but providing ample historical context covering centuries of survivance. In observing the resilience of Native peoples through all these conflicts, Woodard comes to regard indigenous culture as "a shield that has persisted, indeed thrived, despite all efforts to stamp, starve and regulate it out of existence (xii).

Each chapter in *American Apartheid* is laid out in regards to a specific issue, with the first chapter dedicated to resource extraction on indigenous lands, the second chapter devoted to voting rights, the third to issues of cultural preservation and repatriation, and so on. Because Woodard's reporting over the years has been fairly extensive on each of these issues, she doesn't focus on simply one story or incident per chapter, but instead expands upon a range of encounters with indigenous nations, from New Mexico to Alaska, whose experiences help to illuminate systemic patterns of abuse. For instance, in chapter four, which covers ongoing issues of incarceration, jurisdiction, and police violence both on and off the reservations, she touches base with events effecting the Puyallup, the Northern Cheyenne, the Lakota and others. Her method is typically to locate leaders, activists, or individuals within the indigenous community whose lives have been touched by the issue in question, and to embed herself to some degree in the actions forged to address and confront these issues. This approach helps us to see, in a holistic manner, how indigenous communities are responding to these terrific historical challenges.

We can see how this works when, in the fourth chapter entitled “Rough Justice,” Woodard reports on the death of Jaqueline Saylers of the Puyallup Tribe, who in January of 2016 was shot at close range by police in Tacoma, Washington while in her car, despite being unarmed (145). Although the police were ultimately cleared of charges, the Puyallup were not prepared to let matters drop. In response, they forged “Justice for Jackie, Justice for All,” which began as a support group among family members, but grew into a community-wide gathering of Native, black, white, and Latino citizens, all concerned or personally effected by the issue of escalating police violence. Woodard offers the testimony of various speakers at these meetings but trains her attention on Jackie’s uncle, James Rideout, who, recognizing a responsibility to care for all those in attendance, gathers fresh crab from Puget Sound before the event. Rideout explains to Woodard that “Puyallup” translates into English as “the generous welcoming people.” He explains that “when the police killings happened to people who didn’t have a tribe to back them up, they were alone, on their own out there. When our tribe took a position on the issue, we realized we had an opportunity to take care of them all, to bring them along with us” (168). Tim Renyon, a tribal council member who also speaks with Woodard, clarifies that this is precisely “the original significance of what it means to be a tribe” (169). Moments like these in the book demonstrate Woodard’s sensitivity to discursive frameworks of indigenous-centered knowledge and offer a poignant glimpse into the very human responses surrounding otherwise tragic and difficult, if not atypical, circumstances.

The importance of human relationships privileged in *American Apartheid* are supplemented by the reporting of historical contexts and statistics that, while perhaps not surprising or new to Native Studies scholars, will be helpful to the average reader for whom this book is presumably written. Woodard points to the despoliation of Native lands, observing how a quarter of superfund sites in America are located on Indian reservations (138). She reports on incarceration rates for Natives that are 38% higher than other Americans. While Native peoples comprise a very small percentage of the American population she writes that Native children are “three times as likely to be under lock and key as white kids” (147). Because of unique jurisdiction issues pertaining to tribal lands, even misdemeanors are likely to be tried in Federal Court and typically result in stiff sentencing. Meanwhile, as a result of legal arrangements dating as far back as the 1887 Indian Allotment Act, Native individuals often remain unable to obtain even a fraction of market value for the leasing of tribal lands or the extraction of resources. Taking a long historical view, Woodard notes how the tribes were transformed “from flourishing pre-Contact societies to today’s marginalized and often poverty-stricken communities,” walled off from surrounding prosperity by “federal policies, bureaucratic incompetence, official corruption and racism” (5).

Although Native peoples have fought tirelessly for decades to change these entrenched practices, there are systems set in place to prevent meaningful reform. Woodard reports effectively on how laws have been used, across the nation, to suppress Native votes, particularly in sparsely populated states where Native voter turnout could potentially turn the tide of an election. Those living on reservations, lacking local polling places, typically have to travel hundreds of miles of bad road back and forth to cast their votes, and often face intimidation when they do so. Although Federal laws require that voting be accessible, little effort is extended to meet this requirement on reservations that are, by design, secluded from major population centers. As one

Navajo citizen incredulously exclaims, “don’t penalize me because of who I am and where I live. The government put us on this reservation, and now we can’t vote because we live here” (56-57).

In the village of Togiak, in the Bristol Bay region of Alaska, Woodard reports on how voter turnout among indigenous peoples rose substantially after extensive legal battles requiring ballots to be translated into the Yup’ik language. In addition, early voter opportunities were enacted in order to accommodate subsistence hunting practices that made it virtually impossible for all voters to appear on a single prescribed day. Arriving by bush plane to observe the election day results in Togiak, Woodard notes the enthusiasm of the community at the increased participation, and later attends a celebration feast consisting of local fare such as whale blubber, beaver, moose, herring roe on fronds of kelp, and baked, dried, and jerked salmon. In a conversation with Nicole Borromeo of the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN), she is told, “our people have a hunger to vote. They go to huge lengths to do so and overcome barriers no one else in the country faces” (76). As a result of the increased voter participation on that day, Woodard reports that Alaska’s Natives were able to “elect a Native lieutenant governor, raise Alaska’s minimum wage and create barriers to placing copper, gold, and molybdenum mines in the watershed of the bay” (76).

There are a few loose ends the book neglects to tie up, narratives threads one might wish to revisit even if the legal battles in question remain unresolved, and some might fault Woodard for being partial in her coverage to western plains and Alaskan Native groups. East coast Nations receive scant attention despite, in many cases, having endured the strains of this “apartheid” system for a greater period of time. Certain issues, such as the epidemic of sexual violence against Native women, while referenced, are not given as much attention as they seem to deserve. Nevertheless, *American Apartheid* effectively covers a great deal of journalistic ground. It is a useful and informative book that certainly might be assigned, either as a whole or by selected chapters, in classes designed to introduce contemporary concerns of indigenous communities to students. The conversations are surprisingly current, taking us into legal decisions only just being brought down by the current administration. But, more importantly, Woodard remains up to date on the ways that Native peoples are defining their struggle, survival, and sovereign identity under long-sustained settler colonial oppression. She discusses culturally engaged educational initiatives and reforms taking place on reservations, how indigenous social workers are using traditional practices to address the ongoing generational traumas of boarding school programs and adoption policies, how the identification of ancient Pueblo aqueducts and water filtration systems might have implications for current legislative action, and she pays special attention to the multigenerational concerns of indigenous leaders who wish to pass along lifeways and resources to their children and grandchildren.

Visiting an ancient camp of the Western Shoshone with tribal member Joseph Holley and his two grandchildren, Woodard observes how historic sites, medicinal herbs, and other artifacts like arrowheads found along the trail were discussed, handled, and carefully placed back in their proper place by the young children. Part of this area was bulldozed over by a mining company in 2016 to make way for a powerline, despite the fact that the site had been determined as eligible for consideration in the National Register of Historic Places. Although the loss from such wanton, toxic, destruction is immeasurable, Holley remains invested in affording his grandchildren the opportunity to engage with this space, so that “the children can then look at

our modern camp and see that it reflects the old one, with places to sleep, cook, gather, work, and pray. They understand that they are part of the entire story” (117). Woodard’s *American Apartheid* offers readers a window into that story as well. Her years of reporting and dedication to the stories coming out of Native space are condensed into very readable, engaging, and informative passages that speak not only to the inevitable and far-reaching consequences of unrelenting materialism and greed in our time, but to the remarkable endurance of indigenous peoples against continuing settler-colonial infractions.

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