
Devon A. Mihesuah and Elizabeth Hoover, eds. *Indigenous Food Sovereignty in the United States: Restoring Cultural Knowledge, Protecting Environments, and Regaining Health*. Foreword by Winona LaDuke. University of Oklahoma Press, 2019. 390 pp. ISBN: 9780806163215.

<https://www.oupres.com/books/15107980/indigenous-food-sovereignty-in-the-united-sta>

In her 1999 book, *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*, Winona LaDuke introduces her discussion of environmental issues and the negative impacts of colonization (both direct and indirect) on Indigenous communities. She explains “The last 150 years have seen a great holocaust. There have been more species lost in the past 150 years than since the Ice Age. During the same time, Indigenous peoples have been disappearing from the face of the earth” (1). Her book from 20 years ago addresses ongoing issues that are still present today, though she poses questions and possibilities of hope for the future of Native tribes. Similarly, she writes “the survival of Native America is fundamentally about the collective survival of all human beings. The question of who gets to determine the destiny of the land, and of the people who live on it—those with the money and those who prey on the land—is a question that is alive throughout society” (5). LaDuke’s investigation of this division highlights a topic that is still alive today, and *Indigenous Food Sovereignty in the United States* is a text that continues the discussion because it addresses this question, highlights the activism and goals currently in place in 2019, and demonstrates hope for the future of tribal communities who do not own the land or officiate neoliberal practices, but resist the power structures that do. Winona LaDuke writes in this text’s foreword:

Despite the \$13 billion corporate food industry, 70 percent of the world’s food is grown by families, peasants, and Indigenous farmers... In a time when agrobiodiversity has crashed and world food systems are filled with poisons, our seeds remain, and they return. These are our stories: stories of love and hope (xiv).

LaDuke’s role as an economist, environmentalist, feminist, and activist demonstrates how close she is to the topics that this edited collection addresses. Her foreword to the book emphasizes the idea of returning to Indigenous food practices and the ways that individuals or communities have actively initiated these processes to counter the extreme damages from the food industry. Similarly, LaDuke’s work and the work highlighted in *Indigenous Food Sovereignty* reflect not only a desire to change a heavily flawed corporate system, but the authors also draw attention to public practices that are enacting these changes.

Devon A. Mihesuah’s and Elizabeth Hoover’s edited collection discusses important concepts surrounding the commodification and marketization of food in the United States, specifically emphasizing the negative impact colonization has had on the decline of tribal communities’ environmentally conscious and healthy practices. This book significantly foregrounds public projects that aim to restore food sovereignty to Native American people, and it functions as both a criticism of neoliberalism and as a hopeful message about the growing changes activism can bring. Mihesuah and Hoover set up their book by directly blaming colonial systems of operation

at both the state and federal levels for the loss of Indigenous food practices and the statistically proven decline in Native people's health. They write that "Over the past several centuries, colonialism has unleashed a series of factors that have disrupted Indigenous communities' ability to retain control of their food systems. In many cases, this interruption was intentional" (4). The authors then follow up with moments from history that have either directly or indirectly enforced the decline in Indigenous food practices, including the forced introduction of boarding schools, relocation programs in the 1950s, environmental change brought about by industrial practices, and U.S. governmental food rations (5-6). Unfortunately, these federal and state practices that have intentionally labeled Native people as subordinate individuals on their own lands have also heightened neoliberal practices and have led to an emphasis on the economy that dehumanizes those that are forced to participate in it.

Neoliberalism embeds in its structures a system that continues the marginalization of communities by not permitting much room for social or economic mobility. In a section about the transformation of food production in Alaska Native communities, Melanie M. Lindholm explores the shift in morals and the economic damages that a neoliberal, corporatized system of food production has created. She explains that Alaska Natives have traditionally hunted in the cold climate, specifically relying upon a healthy, marine-based diet, and they typically utilize all parts of the animal to avoid being wasteful (161). The differences between tradition and the contemporary economization of food therefore signifies an increasing amount of waste, a system that does not value animals beyond their food profit, and a forced assimilation for those who must participate in the market in order to achieve success. Lindholm explains that the "combination of corporate control over what foods are available, who can afford them, and how they are produced can be termed nutritional colonization because it exploits people's labor, health, environment, and well-being" (162). Thus, this chapter (and others in the book like it) addresses the issues Indigenous communities experience when they feel forced to assimilate to a system ruled by profit and the commodification of traditional skills. Similarly, this marketization of food preparation and consumption attempts to erase tribal practices and, in effect, distances descendants from the cultural traditions of their ancestors.

In an attempt to advocate for a return to food structures through Indigenous sovereignty after the damages of colonial practices and political structures have taken a toll on diverse tribal communities throughout the country, Mihesuah and Hoover incorporate interviews from members of different tribes who detail their personal experiences with food systems and their goals to attain Indigenous food sovereignty. Stories that account for working in the food industry but advocating for Native dishes alongside European or American ones, exercising treaty rights to fish, and criticizing the unhealthy commodity foods from the USDA are among stories that make this text powerful, homing in on issues that impact people both systematically and individually (37-40). By acknowledging that discriminatory food practices and poor health conditions on reservations and among poverty-stricken Native communities are direct results of colonization, Mihesuah and Hoover place direct blame on the ways that a profit-driven market negatively impacts the people who had been exercising effective food and ecological practices long before settler colonialism. The stories and research within this book therefore demonstrate

the direct engagement of the authors with the public, and they also reflect the public's collective concerns about maintaining knowledge of traditional food practices so that diverse Native cultures can continue to persist, despite the U.S. systems that attempt to erase their history and dominate their lifestyles.

In another chapter about the decline of health among Indigenous peoples, Mihesuah explains the ambitions of the food sovereignty movement as follows:

To be a 'food sovereign' tribe would ultimately mean, then, that the tribe has the right to control its food production, food quality, and food distribution. It would support tribal farmers and ranchers by supplying machinery and technology needed to plant and harvest. The tribe would not be answerable to state regulatory control, and would follow its own edicts, regulations, and ways of governance. Its members would have educational and job opportunities (95).

Rather than simply acknowledging and critiquing a flawed system that privileges one group of people over another, this book poses a solution to the problem and explains that there is hope in enacting a reclamation of some tribal sovereignty. Thus, this text contributes an important message about public engagement in practice and the various ways communities can advocate for their rights to control the land and the systems of food production that their ancestors once maintained a successful, unopposed authority over. This text relates to ongoing discussions within food studies and public intellectual studies because it identifies individual and public concerns of people living in a society dominated by consumerism and the marketization of everyday items or practices.

In the context of Mihesuah's and Hoover's work, someone examining the problematic role of major corporations on public consumption could read this text within the context of the capital power the food industry exerts on U.S. society. This book demonstrates that food has become a commodity that no longer revolves around utilizing available resources in the environment while being as resourceful as possible with the products, and it has instead become heavily integrated within the neoliberal market system that works to generate finances. In this way, public engagement practices like the ones listed throughout this text advocate for Indigenous food sovereignty and work to disrupt the system of commodification that rests on mass production and the waste of materials.

Furthermore, Mihesuah and Hoover connect their ideas about public intellectualism and public practice to larger problems within federal and state systems that emphasize commodity culture on a wide variety of levels. They highlight that initiatives with motives to reclaim sovereignties mean different things for different levels of activism. While Indigenous people are facing challenges from the colonial ideologies set in place for oppression, their communities remain resistant to these structures and have initiated movements to reclaim traditions that enforce cultural continuity. Mihesuah and Hoover explain that, "[i]n the Native American context, whether as sovereign nations or 'domestic dependents'... tribes have been integrating the

struggle for food sovereignty into broader efforts of self-determination” (10). This idea of self-determination reoccurs throughout the book—emphasizing Indigenous communities’ goals to resist federal contexts that label them as dependent or incapable of being self-sufficient. In fact, this text boldly and accurately blames the European influences of colonization for many of the major challenges the U.S. is experiencing, but also for issues that influence the larger global structure. By identifying concerns across the U.S., including Arctic regions, the authors make a strong argument in favor of Indigenous communities who “view traditional foods as being affected by political, economic, environmental, and other changes in the world” and should therefore be protected (165).

Mihesuah’s and Hoover’s text therefore acts as a work of resistance, both by advocating for a return to Indigenous food sovereignty and by demonstrating how people are engaging with this movement throughout the country. This work will be beneficial for students, scholars, and wider public audiences who are particularly interested in concepts of tribal sovereignty, political systems of oppression, and public engagement that intends to challenge those very systems that have been negatively impacting marginalized groups. Thus, *Indigenous Food Sovereignty in the United States* is a detailed text that effectively conveys hope for the future of Indigenous communities while criticizing colonial practices—emphasizing that there are serious repercussions for abandoning tradition, and there is beneficial power in reclaiming Indigenous authority over food and environmental practices.

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Work Cited

LaDuke, Winona. *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*. South End Press, 1999.