

BOOK REVIEW – *Our History is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance*, by Nick Estes

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“Peace on stolen land is borne of genocide” (Estes, 2019, p. 1).

Our History is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance is an award-winning book about the fight to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline. Author Nick Estes, a scholar and member of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe, places this fight in the context of Indigenous history and the ongoing struggle to protect Indigenous peoples and their land from exploitation and destruction. Drawing on historical accounts, oral histories, and Indigenous philosophies, Estes highlights the interconnectedness of colonial violence, environmental degradation, and capitalist exploitation. *Our History is the Future* provides a thought-provoking and robust analysis of the Standing Rock movement, the long history of Indigenous resistance, harmful settler colonialism, and the ongoing struggle for ecological justice. This review outlines Estes’ argument and shows just how significant this story is, not just to Indigenous peoples, but to everyone who seeks a more equitable and sustainable future.

Our History is the Future opens in 2016, with Estes and his friends on their way to join the Oceti Sakowin Camp, north of the Standing Rock reservation. They were (and still are) fighting against the Dakota Access Pipeline, which was set to run under historic Indigenous lands and beneath Lake Oahe. If the pipeline leaked, the Sioux Nation’s only clean water supply would be contaminated. Estes and his fellow protesters faced freezing temperatures, harsh harassment, military opposition, and vicious police brutality. Yet the protestors, who called themselves “Water Protectors,” continued to fight for the belief *Mni Wiconi* – “Water is Life.” Estes says: “The protestors called themselves the Water Protectors because they weren’t simply against a pipeline; they also stood for something greater: the continuation of life on a planet ravaged by capitalism” (Estes, 2019, p. 15).

Estes organizes his book in a thoughtful and intentional way, structuring it around significant themes that carry profound meaning, such as Siege, War, Flood, and Liberation. Each chapter builds upon these evocative terms to weave a narrative that highlights both the historical and contemporary struggles of Indigenous peoples. Estes uses the 2016 protests at Standing Rock as a focal point to explain the enduring history of Indigenous resistance, drawing connections to pivotal moments like the 1862 Dakota Uprising and the 1876 Battle of the Greasy Grass (Little Bighorn) to illustrate the systemic violence Indigenous communities have faced. By framing these events as interconnected, Estes shows how resistance has always encompassed struggles for environmental and ecological justice. He emphasizes that these battles are not just about Indigenous survival, but about protecting the earth for future generations. Through his vivid storytelling and detailed analysis, Estes provides readers with a deeper understanding of the inseparability of Indigenous sovereignty and ecological sustainability.

Estes presents a strong argument and a richly detailed account of Indigenous struggles, both past and present. His use of oral history emphasizes how strongly memory connects Indigenous culture, weaving together narratives of resilience and resistance that strengthen his argument. Archival research on massacres and uprisings throughout history adds an emotional layer that allows readers to empathize deeply, even if they have no prior knowledge of Indigenous history. Many terms or cultural aspects may be unfamiliar to the average non-Indigenous reader, but Estes excels at breaking them down and explaining the more complex components of the story. Through this careful balance of detail and clarity, the book becomes a profound educational tool for anyone seeking to understand the intersections of colonialism, Indigenous sovereignty, and ecological sustainability.

Estes argues that decolonization is not only a political process, but also a necessity for the survival of our planet. Decolonization, as he presents it, is not merely about reclaiming land but also about dismantling the exploitative systems of settler colonialism and capitalism that prioritize profit over people and the environment. Indigenous practices and philosophies, rooted in sustainable relationships with the land and water, provide a blueprint for a more equitable and harmonious future. Estes emphasizes that these traditions are not relics of the past, but vital living practices that are key to addressing the global ecological crisis. His argument transcends geographical boundaries and can be applied to communities worldwide, particularly those marginalized by colonial and capitalist systems. By situating Indigenous resistance within a global context, Estes illuminates the interconnected struggles for sovereignty, ecological justice, and human rights. His resistance framework resonates with other marginalized communities, offering a model for solidarity and collective action against oppressive systems. The book's contributions to scholarship on ecological justice underscore the essential role

Indigenous communities play as future leaders and stewards of the planet. Estes inspires readers to recognize that supporting Indigenous sovereignty is a necessary step toward building a sustainable and just world for all.

This is a fulfilling text that provides an excellent history of Indigenous resistance, showing how it is deeply tied to colonialism. Estes illustrates how protecting the environment is inseparable from the fight for Indigenous sovereignty, as these struggles are intertwined with the broader quest for justice and survival in the face of systemic oppression. While Estes highlights the resilience and leadership of Indigenous movements, one question that arises is how non-Indigenous allies can support these struggles without perpetuating colonial dynamics. Allies must approach with humility, prioritize listening over leading, and actively challenge the structures of power that sustain colonialism, engaging in decolonial practices and fostering genuine partnerships that respect Indigenous autonomy and knowledge systems.

Our History is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance is an essential read for anyone interested in environmental justice, Indigenous history, and colonialism. The book is important to Indigenous history and contemporary resistance movements, offering invaluable insights into the resilience and agency of Native communities. Policymakers, activists, scholars, and anyone with even the slightest interest in Indigenous rights should read this book to understand the critical connections between colonial violence, environmental degradation, and Indigenous sovereignty. Estes' *Our History is the Future* provides a thought-provoking analysis of the Standing Rock movement, the long history of Indigenous resistance, harmful settler colonialism, and the ongoing struggle for ecological justice. This work masterfully connects past and present struggles, emphasizing the urgent need for solidarity and decolonization to ensure a sustainable and equitable future.

References

Estes, N. (2019). *Our History is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance*. London and New York: Verso Books.

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