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LaDuke Discussion

Winona LaDuke, a member of the Ojibwe Nation, published a novel titled “Recovering the Sacred,” which explores environmental activism as a way to support the Indigenous population in the United States. To restore some of the lost historic sites and practices to the remaining tribal communities, the Harvard University graduate elaborates on notions of sustainability, ideas of food sovereignty, as well as administrative policies to combat many of the issues that her community has faced. “Recovering the Sacred” expands on how xenophobia and fear of native practices have led to the destruction of sacred land, emphasizing that the restoration of these sites is critical for the continuation of the Indigenous population and the overall well-being of Earth and its inhabitants. The natural world is significant to Native spiritual teachings and therefore should be preserved.

Colonization has significantly impacted different communities and their religious interactions. Indigenous people and the European colonists generally had very different views on Creation- the use of land, water, plants and animals. The colonization of the New World pushed out Indigenous culture, practices, and territory. When the Europeans first arrived in the Americas, they forced their faiths onto a population that strongly believed that the land was already blessed. Worship and prayer by Indigenous people began to be considered political because it went against Manifest Destiny and therefore, against the new Imperialist America. Many natives were forced to suppress their practices. It wasn’t until 1978 that Congress passed the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, to provide a form of security for Indigenous practices in the U.S. Although this act was a step forward, on page 357 of “Recovering the Sacred” LaDuke mentions the very important fact that “While the law ensured that Native people

could hold many of their ceremonies, it did not protect the places where many of those rituals would take place or the relatives and elements central to these ceremonies such as salt from the sacred Salt Mother for the Zuni, or salmon for the Nez Perce.” Two decades later, in 1996, the Clinton administration helped to aid the Indigenous population by expanding the Act to state that the government will do their best to avoid intruding on sacred land. Winona LaDuke calls out the Bush Administration for ignoring this largely, advising readers that many sacred sites still remain in danger.

Throughout her book, LaDuke informs readers of how the Sacredness of Wind, which is referred to as *Tate*, has helped to restore faith and contribute to the widespread production of green energy in the Great Plains. Harnessing wind power has helped reservations with economic growth, and communal expansion as it has been a connector for tribes on both the East and West coasts. LaDuke also introduces readers to tribal COUP, an American nonprofit that focuses on environmental issues and energy development in tribes throughout parts of the US. Some of the themes throughout her passages are also conveyed throughout the novel *Borderlands* by Gloria Anzaldúa in which the author describes her personal journey of inhabiting borders of race, gender, language, religion, and sexuality. While discussing the importance of spiritual activism, Anzaldúa further explores ideas of interconnectedness with animals, humanity and nature. Her teachings follow many of spiritual ecology beliefs which are urged by Winona LaDuke.

In 2012, LaDuke gave a TedTalk titled “Seeds of Our Ancestors, Seeds of Lives” in which she discusses how the destruction of sacred land has led to a decline in biodiversity. This has resulted in an array of economic, agricultural, and health issues due to a concentration of crop ownership and increasingly singular genetic ancestors for crops, such as corn. To stress the impacts of these changes, Winona shares that the sickness that resulted from the lack of access to

traditional foods has led to an influx of diabetes throughout her reservation and others like it. My question for the class is, with urbanization and gentrification, will these sacred lands continue to be protected in the future or is their destruction inevitable?