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Book Review

Ryan Emanuel, *On the Swamp: Fighting for Indigenous Environmental Justice* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2024), xiv + 291 pp., $19.95 (pbk), ISBN: 978-1-4696-7832-0.

Hydrologist and Lumbee tribe member Ryan E. Emanuel has written an engaging, informative, and deeply personal book that offers significant insights regarding the intersectionality of environmental justice, Indigenous rights, the brutal legacy of colonialism and racism in the United States, and the importance of place. The narrative weaves the history of the Coastal Plain in North Carolina with incisive critiques of political and economic policy impacting the region and the people who live there.

The words 'religion' or 'religious' scantly appear in the text, but that is because this is a book about broader views of the land and its waters and human relationships to it. The central theme I identify concerns recognition and the consequences when it is withheld. The Introduction and Chapter One establish that the book is about 'Native peoples and their present-day environmental challenges', starting by reimagining the idea of land acknowledgments (p. 44). Chapter One explicitly critiques standard land acknowledgments that include phrases like 'these are the ancestral lands', which carry 'both truth and trauma that can slip past uneducated ears' (p. 22). His critique is that the continued life of the traumatic legacy of colonialism in the region is not genuinely recognized in such acknowledgments, but also how such statements omit a deeper understanding of the Lumbee's relationship to the region's land and waters. 'To acknowledge us', he argues:

> Is to understand something deeper about the Coastal Plain, the losses we endured, and our fight to survive as distinct peoples in relationship to places that are that are transforming rapidly because of pollution, climate change, and decisions that cause the destruction of our fragile and watery world. (p. 43)

Chapters Two and Three focus on acknowledgment as it relates to crafting environmental policy and how environmental justice is understood in contrasting ways between Indigenous and non-Indigenous interests. For example, in Chapter Two, Emanuel writes about the US federal government's understanding of environmental justice and how often polluters of the region's waters have not been held accountable sufficiently or made to clean the contamination they caused. He concludes Chapter Three

with a very similar point, stating that 'the struggle for environmental justice begins and ends with the acknowledgment that our homelands have always been—and always will be—a watery world' (p. 86), and that water has played a significant role in the life of the Lumbee people. Emanuel ties the stakes described in the book together by stating that 'to separate us from our watery world through wetland drainage, pollution, climate change, or any other factor is an insidious form of dispossession and cultural genocide in which we remain in place but the world transforms around us' (p. 86).

Chapters Four and Five continue with this theme of recognition with a particular focus on gas pipelines, thus bringing wider attention to the struggles of North American Indigenous peoples. In Chapter Four, the issue of recognition comes about in the context of lawsuits and challenges to constructing gas pipelines and how the broader political discussions often conflate Indigenous interests with environmentalist groups and mischaracterize Indigenous peoples' interests. More to the point, Emanuel argues, 'Pipelines and fossil fuel infrastructure expose key barriers to tribal participation in environmental decision-making on the Coastal Plain' (p. 123), yet, as he also notes, 'Indigenous peoples have responded to these barriers by exercising their inherent sovereignty in creative and powerful ways' (p. 123).

Chapters Four and Five focused on the oil and gas and farming industries, respectively. In both cases, Emanuel highlights the gulf between Lumbee's perspectives on the land, its waters in their way of life and traditions, and that of those in power who seem to mouth the language of environmental justice without considering Indigenous people's views and experiences. Chapter Six continues this point as it relates to climate change and the challenges and existential threats it poses to the region and the people who live there. He notes the threats that climate change poses to human health and the environment and the economic injustice related to how people in very different social strata experience these effects. He writes:

> The disparity in potential economic damages from climate change is striking, especially considering that wealthier, whiter counties—which are expected to see much smaller proportional damages—are the seats of power for corporations and governments that make most of the decisions about fossil fuel pipelines, power plants, and other sources of climate-waring emissions in [North Carolina]. (p. 159)

Chapters Seven and Eight address potential ways of addressing the challenges in the previous chapters. Emanuel argues that while 'the situation is slowly changing in North Carolina, mainly due to the advocacy of tribes and not self-awareness on the part of state government' (p. 183), it is still an 'unfortunate reality' that 'indigenous peoples' values do not factor into' the majority of the decisions that affect the region and their lives (p. 183). Once again, the issue of recognition figures into the conclusions. They also figure into his recommendations, which he offers in the following chapter, in particular addressing the 'voicelessness' of Indigenous peoples 'born of [their] erasure from society' (p. 193).

In chapter Eight and his concluding chapter, Emanuel eventually calls for collaboration, full participation, and recognition of various parties, especially Indigenous peoples' diverse and varied communities. 'The exact threats differ from one tribal community to another', he writes, 'but we all recognize the severity of the situation and the need to do something about it' (p. 211). To that end, he argues, the voices of Indigenous peoples deserve more recognition as 'the original and permanent stewards of the places' they come from (p. 211). I recommend this book to those who want to (re)think the ethics of environmental activism, but also those who are concerned with how certain voices are excluded even when, regardless of the intention, land acknowledgments are given, especially pertaining to claims to one being 'conscious' of the disproportionate effects of pollution, development, and climate change on Indigenous peoples. I would also recommend this book to historians who want to think more deeply about the region and the history of the Lumbee people and other Indigenous communities.

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