It would be all too easy to dismiss this book on face value. The title alone seems to promise yet another New Age instalment of recovered wisdom. Add to this a cover picture of Native American warriors presented in best naïve romanticist fashion and a by-line endorsement by the wonderfully named Wilma Mankiller promising ‘Remarkable stories of indigenous communities reclaiming their life ways’ and I began to wonder just why this book had been sent to the antipodes to review. This book also follows the current American trend for multiple endorsements with eleven heartfelt, passionate statements of its qualities not only on a page just inside the cover, but with five of them repeated on the back cover. In short, this is the type of book your usual, somewhat cynical academic looks at, sums up with a dismissive phrase and moves on from—which would be a mistake.

Winona LaDuke has all the ‘right on’ qualifications that make the jaded wince: indigenous (Ojibwe), a mother of three, environmentalist, winner of human rights awards, a *Time* promising young leader, multiple award winner, graduate of Harvard and Antioch, Green Party vice-presidential candidate in two American elections, author of books on ‘native environmental activism’ and a children’s book, and, finally, living in Minnesota on the White Earth Reservation. It makes one want to drink beer from a bottle and eat McDonalds while watching rugby league on TV or drive fast and badly in a big gas-guzzling car listening to AC/DC. Again, this is to mistake what is in this book—or at least the important parts of it. For central to this book is a series of narratives detailing the annihilation wreaked upon the Indigenous population of North America by colonization. In my own country, New Zealand, the co-leader of the indigenous Maori Party sparked a recent controversy by using the term ‘holocaust’ to describe the treatment of her people under European colonization. What was interesting was that the debate focused on the appropriateness of taking such a specific term, related to a specific event, and applying it to another series of events—not that such events ever happened. In many ways this has been due to the central element of the Treaty of Waitangi, signed between the indigenous Maori and the British Crown in 1840, which has constituted the relationship between settler and indigenous populations as a legal partnership.
(ideally) of equals. It has also meant, over the past twenty years, the systematic attempt, by both Maori and the government to attempt to readdress past wrongs in a process involving not just financial redress but also public apologies by the government for the misdeeds and violence of the past and the continuing attempt to educate the nation as to what exactly occurred in the past—and occurs, as a result of such dispossession and cultural violence, into the present.

To such an end, Winona LaDuke acts as a cultural historian, building on the groundbreaking work of those such as Dee Brown who, almost forty years ago in *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, made America recognize the acts of implicit and explicit cultural genocide that had and still occurred. The power of this book is the horror of the narratives and the over-riding indifference to indigenous culture, rights and beliefs that are perpetuated by those claiming, often, an economic or scientific rationale. Institutions and activities as various as the Vatican and the Universities of Arizona and North Dakota, Monsanto, anthropology and bio-genetics, museums and power companies all act to continue the marginalization of indigenous concerns, beliefs and values, mostly in the name of progress and economic rationalization. It is a catalogue of shameful acts, past and present, an alternative cultural history of North America detailing the systematic and intentional marginalization and neglect of its indigenous population. Central to the author’s claims is that land is essential for a spiritual health and identity; control and marginalize the land and you control and marginalize the indigenous population not just politically and economically but, most crucially, spiritually.

It is easy to challenge such an argument with the accusation of romanticist essentialism, as forms of *volkgeist* that claim the explicit recognition of what can be termed an implicit self-claim and self-narration. And this is where LaDuke’s book does falter in its argument. For it is written for those who are already open to the indigenous *volkgeist* claim, those who take the implicit claim as self-evident without critique because it is indigenous and ‘natural’ and ‘organic’ and ‘ancient’. Therefore we get a series of case studies that are informative, moving, and disturbing—yet without any wider analysis or conclusions. The explicit narratives are meant to carry the implicit truths and conclusions within them. This is the book’s greatest weakness because those who are already sympathetic will find much to confirm their outrage and New Age piety; yet those wanting more than a narrative for the already-converted will come away dissatisfied. Yes, terrible things happened and continue to happen; yes, indigenous populations have been systematically mistreated, brutalized and marginalized by settler populations. But are indigenous beliefs and claims of self-identity beyond critique, analysis and challenge just because of this history and/or just because they are indigenous? Why are we so often prepared to accept explicit *volkgeist* spiritualities in the name of culture—if they are non-Western and indigenous?
Is this actually just a case of liberal racism? To claim the true or essential indigenous identity as that found in and with a volkgeist articulation, without critique, without challenge could be seen as yet another way to ‘keep the natives in their place’; that is—over there, away from where ‘we’ are. An exercise in what could be termed the ‘liberal exotic’ it is unfortunately pitched at those who have no time for explicit religion and no critique of implicit, indigenous spirituality. In short, it is a book to be read politically—and ignored for any claims to ‘recover the sacred’.

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