



Voices from the Gaps

Winona LaDuke

“

Across the continent, on the shores of small tributaries, in the shadows of sacred mountains, on the vast expanse of the prairies, or in the safety of the woods, prayers are being repeated, as they have for thousands of years, and common people with uncommon courage and the whispers of their ancestors in their ears continue their struggles to protect the land and water and trees on which their very existence is based. And like small tributaries joining together to form a mighty river, their force and power grows. This river will not be dammed.

— “Like Tributaries to a River”

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Quick Facts

- * Born in 1959
- * Native American novelist, journalist, and activist
- * Author of *Last Standing Woman*

Biography

Winona LaDuke was born in 1959 and grew up in Los Angeles, California. She is Anishinabe from the Makwa Dodaem (Bear Clan) of the Mississippi Band of the White Earth reservation in northern Minnesota. Her father was a supporting actor in westerns as well as an Indian activist. Her mother was a Jewish art professor. She credits both her parents for passing the spirit of activism on to her. LaDuke became involved in Native American environmental issues after meeting Jimmy Durham, a well-known Cherokee activist, while she was attending Harvard University.

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Winona LaDuke

Biography continued

At the age of 18, she spoke in front of the United Nations regarding Indian issues and since has become known as a voice for American Indian economic and environmental concerns throughout the United States and internationally. She was the recipient of the 1989 International Reebok Human Rights Award and in 1995 was named as one of “50 leaders” for the future by *Time Magazine*.

After graduating from Harvard, LaDuke moved to White Earth. She became involved in a lawsuit to recover lands originally held by the Anishinabe people and taken illegally by the federal government. After exhausting the legal system, she founded the White Earth Land Recovery Project in order to raise funds to purchase original White Earth land holdings. She maintains that if a people do not have control of their land, they do not control their destiny. She has published numerous articles, testified at government hearings and was Ralph Nader’s vice presidential running mate in the 1996 presidential election.

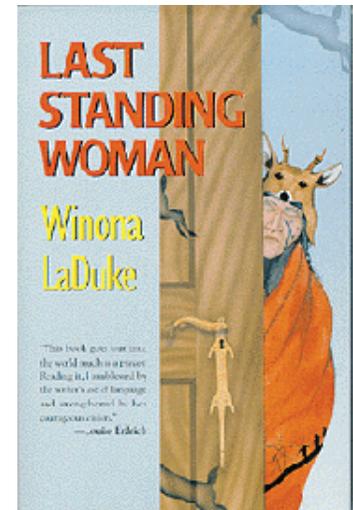
Although LaDuke considers herself a journalist, she had stories to tell which did not fit in the journalism category. LaDuke’s first novel, *Last Standing Woman*, is written with a sense of humor, a gentle spirit and with much forethought and wisdom. This book, about the history of White Earth and the Anishinabe community beginning in the 1860’s and continuing through seven generations, concerns “how we see ourselves, who we are and how we came to be.” Within this time frame, three women have earned the name Ishkwegaabawiiikwe (*Last Standing Woman*). It is a story with characters based on White Earth residents which combines historical events with the drama of storytelling. LaDuke enlightens the reader about issues of racism and social injustice suffered as a result of contact with white people and the colonialism which followed. LaDuke’s storytelling reflects many aspects of traditional Anishinabe culture, including a sustenance lifestyle and the importance of community, ceremony and respect for all things. Most importantly, this book reflects a people who struggle with imposed lifestyle changes and reaffirms the determination and courage with which they fight to maintain their culture and traditions. The story is told in a circular pattern. However, LaDuke continues the story into the future, a future which is hopeful and promising as the next generation is born and continues to practice a traditional way of life. Hopefully, this future generation will strive to maintain balance and harmony with the earth. LaDuke writes the entire last chapter in the Ojibway language as a tribute to the Ojibway people and as evidence that the Ojibway language flourishes today.



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Biography continued

Presently, LaDuke is living on the White Earth Reservation with her two children. She continues to be a spokesperson for the Chippewa people of Northern Minnesota, an organizer of the Honor the Earth National Tour, and active with the White Earth Land Recovery Project and the Indigenous Women's Network, which she founded. She also teaches courses on Native Environmentalism at the University of Minnesota and in other university settings. Her latest book, *Recovering the Sacred: The Power of Naming and Claiming*, is a collection of essays based on research, including interviews, in which LaDuke argues for Native American rights to control and access sacred objects and sites.



Selected Bibliography

Works by the author

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