

Review: On the Swamp: Fighting for Indigenous Environmental Justice

By Rayen Emanuel

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Emanuel, R. *On the Swamp: Fighting for Indigenous Environmental Justice*. US: The University of North Carolina Press, 2024. 312 pp. ISBN: 978-1469678320. \$19.95. Paperback.

On the Swamp presents a comprehensive application of Indigenous Environmental Theory in the case study of North Carolina's Coastal Plain, with a focus on Robeson County and the Lumbee River. Partly recounted through the exploration of historical artifacts and partly narrated through the author's modern engagements in the field. The book weaves together an intergenerational portrait of what Indigenous Environmental Justice looks like and details the many ways in which such justice has been betrayed for the Lumbee Community. In addition to integrating present experiences with past histories, *On the Swamp* incorporates a plethora of readable maps that guide the reader in understanding the geography of the region while not detracting from the reading experience through overt complexity.

A particularly notable aspect of this book is the cadence of the writing. In addition to presenting large and complex ideas in an understandable and digestible manner, the writing flowed with an enthusiastic voice and lyrical cadence. As a reader, the author appreciated the dedication to making this book both accessible and pleasurable to read, rather than a bluster to confirm academic prowess. Emanuel's passion for Indigenous Environmental Theory and deep grounding with the land explored in the text shines through. Vivid descriptions and emotive paragraphs ground the reader in a way that proves the strength of the theories explored. Indeed, through the combination of legal and cultural histories alongside modern experiences, the narrative voice and flow in the text made Indigenous Environmental Theory a deeply relatable and understandable perspective while not being didactic.

The core critique is its lack of connection with alternative academic theories and literature. Despite the robust grounding within Indigenous Theory that was wholly persuasive and immersive, could have been more drawn in, for example, from Feminist Theory, or Intersectional Theory, as ways to amplify and strengthen the arguments. This is not to say that every text on Indigenous Theory should feel obligated to engage with these additional non-conformist theoretical positionings, but

rather that much of the work seemed in natural alignment, to the point that their inclusion felt like it would be an enhancement. It would strengthen the integration of these multiple threads from the perspective of readers who are either new to academia or not in the field at all, however, might receive help from learning about the alignment with these other theoretical underpinnings. Because the text is so accessible and welcoming to the field of theory, it is likely to be an introductory grounding for many who have not yet engaged with Indigenous Environmental Studies and might awaken further curiosity and growth.

Another point, if it can be called a critique, is that the author wished Emanuel had offered more ideas for creating changes in response to the unjust systems discussed in the book. While Indigenous Environmental Theory is broadly painted as a solution to the many environmental woes and crises that threaten humans today, there are fewer practical tips for readers as academics and engaged human beings on how to move forward and instigate change. Reading about the injustices described indeed creates a hankering for cultural changes, yet it was unclear whether such a change was possible on an individual level or is conceived of as necessary by institutions themselves. Though it is not the responsibility of Indigenous academics to teach non-Indigenous individuals how to improve themselves and the world around them, this book carries the passion of a rallying cry, which made it seem absent when no clear path forward was identified.

Overall, this book is highly recommended, not just to academics interested in developing their understanding of Indigenous Environmental Theory. It is also valuable for activists looking to understand the context within which they run and students situating their work within the field. The writing flow and content is engaging and accessible so that audiences from a range of academic exposures will be able to keep pace. The deep engagement with the multitude of sides of Indigenous Theory makes this text stand out for providing readers with a strong grounding that will allow readers to connect on multiple levels to their own experiences and feelings of the world.

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