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Book Review: The Invasion of Indian Country in the Twentieth Century: American Capitalism and Tribal Natural Resources

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*Book Review: The Invasion of Indian Country in the Twentieth Century:
American Capitalism and Tribal Natural Resources*

by [DONALD L. FIXICO](#)

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The Invasion of Indian Country in the Twentieth Century: American Capitalism and Tribal Natural Resources (Second Edition), Donald L. Fixico. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2011. 304 p., \$26.95. ISBN 978-1-60732-149-1.

In The Invasion of Indian Country in the Twentieth Century: American Capitalism and Tribal Natural Resources, Donald Fixico addresses a diverse audience: historians and Native American and non-Native environmental, legal, political, and cultural activists. Fixico, Distinguished Foundation Professor of History at Arizona State University, grabs the attention of the reader by contrasting the Native spiritual approach to the earth with a greedy, rapacious non-Native approach. Fixico holds the reader's attention through the first section of the book with six case studies of Native/non-Native interaction over natural resources on Indian reservations. The tribes, people involved, and the particular resources vary but the overriding theme is one fraud and exploitation committed by non-Natives against Natives. In the second section of the book, Fixico argues that Native Americans must assert control over their lands and resources in order to protect themselves from fraud and the environment from degradation.

In chapters One and Two, Fixico describes how members of the Muscogee Creek and Osage Tribes of Oklahoma during the 1920s were defrauded and in some cases murdered by non-Native friends and relatives in order to gain control over oil leases on tribal lands. Chapter Three describes thwarted attempts in the 1930s at wresting control of water rights from Pueblo Indians in New Mexico. Fixico moves to the 1950s in Chapter Four when the Klamath Tribe Reservation of Oregon was terminated and Native and non-Natives attempted to exploit existing timber resources. Chapter Five describes disputes between the Lac Courtes Oreilles Chippewa Tribe of Minnesota and the state of Minnesota over fishing and hunting rights. Chapter Six discusses the loss of the Black Hills in South Dakota by the Lakota and the events leading to the Black Hills Land Claim Decision of 1980.

Chapter Seven gives a historical overview of demand for resources on Native lands, from oil on tribal lands in Oklahoma and Florida in the 1920s to coal and uranium in the Northern Plains in the 1980s and 1990s. Chapter Eight describes the formation of Council of Energy Resource Tribes in the 1970s in order for tribes to assume control over their natural resources rather than having them administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Chapter Nine describes issues of tribal sovereignty and how courts have helped and hindered tribes as they sought to exercise sovereignty. Chapter Ten describes dissension in tribes between factions who want to deal with mineral companies and those who want their tribes to control their mineral resources but leave them untouched. Chapters Eleven and Twelve show Fixico's sympathy with those who would leave mineral resources untouched. For Fixico, utilizing these resources would harm the tribes and contribute to already existing global environmental problems.

Donald Fixico vividly describes what has happened when non-Natives discover that Native American lands contain valuable natural resources in stark terms. For Fixico, non-Natives tend to ravage the earth to their detriment and the detriment of Natives. Fixico falls into the classic trap of putting peoples of mixed Native and non-Native ancestry in the same category as the rapacious non-Natives. Natives who attempted to utilize natural resources for the benefit of their tribes are sometimes portrayed as having betrayed their culture by collaborating with non-Natives who eventually betrayed them. This often happened but Fixico ends up portraying Natives as victims who are not capable of taking control of their destiny. He also assumes that culture is static when it is in fact dynamic. Fixico would do well to explore these issues in a subsequent edition of the book or in a separate work.

For many readers, Native American history ended with the *Dances With Wolves* and the 1889 Wounded Knee Massacre, reappeared with the 1973 Wounded Knee Occupation and *Incident at Oglala*, and resurfaces again periodically with disputes over the use of Native mascots by college athletic teams. *The Invasion of Indian Country in the Twentieth Century* fills in some of these gaps and helps a non-Native reader understand why these issues arouse such strong feelings. Those who are interested in social and environmental policy will also benefit from reading the book. Tribes with lands which contain valuable natural resources have the potential to benefit economically from their utilization. Fixico shows how this can be problematic because tribes have been defrauded and their cultures harmed when they tried to exploit their mineral wealth. For Fixico, developing these resources can harm the quality of life for Native Americans by creating environmental degradation. Readers who agree with Fixico will find their ideas well supported in *The Invasion of Indian Country*. Those who disagree will still find the book to be a useful resource as they try to find an optimal balance between tribal sovereignty, economic development, cultural preservation, and environmental protection.

About the Author:

“Donald L. Fixico (Shawnee, Sac & Fox, Muscogee Creek and Seminole) is Distinguished Foundation Professor of History. He is a policy historian and ethnohistorian. His work focuses on American Indians, oral history and the U.S. West. He has published a number of books including *American Indians in a Modern World* (2008); *Treaties with American Indians: An Encyclopedia of Rights, Conflicts and Sovereignty, 3 volumes*, ed, (2007); *Daily Life of Native Americans in the Twentieth Century* (2006).

Prior to Arizona State University, Professor Fixico was the Thomas Bowlus Distinguished Professor of American Indian History, CLAS Scholar and founding Director of the Center for Indigenous Nations Studies at University of Kansas. He has received postdoctoral fellowships at UCLA and The Newberry Library, Chicago. Professor Fixico has been a Visiting Lecturer and Visiting Professor at University of California, Berkeley; UCLA; San Diego State University and University of Michigan. He was an Exchange Professor at University of Nottingham, England and Visiting Professor in the John F. Kennedy Institute at the Freie University in Berlin, Germany.” [\[back to top\]](#)

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