



Edge of Morning: Native Voices Speak for the Bears Ears

Jacqueline Keeler, Editor

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Encompassing wisdom and grace, Edge of Morning is a finessed articulation of respect and the simplicity of being human.

Edge of Morning: Native Voices Speak for the Bears Ears, edited by Jacqueline Keeler of the Navajo and Yankton Dakota tribes, is a poignant and edifying collection of interviews, essays, and poems that details the efforts of an unprecedented intertribal alliance to protect the cultural resources of the Bears Ears region in southeastern Utah. The anthology also describes how Native peoples' heritage and identity are inextricably linked to land and the fight to preserve their sacred spaces is a fundamental responsibility.

Spanning 1.9 million acres, Bears Ears is the ancestral homeland to more than thirteen southwestern tribes. Artifacts, petroglyphs, and cave dwellings indicate the presence of native peoples since time immemorial. In 2015, prompted by ongoing desecration and extraction of its natural resources by energy companies, five tribal governments—the Ute Mountain Ute, Navajo, Hopi, Pueblo Zuni, and the Ute Indian tribe of Utah—united to form the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition and lobby President Obama for permanent protection. Their proposal succeeded, and Obama designated 1.35 million acres a national monument in 2016.

Structured in three sections that offer interviews with coalition organizers, narratives from activists and academics about traditional connection to Bears Ears, and accounts from indigenous leaders about access to land across the United States, the anthology is thoughtful, sobering, and expansive. It emphasizes that preservation of all sacred lands to which native peoples lay claim does more than protect fragile ecosystems and archaeological sites. It allows modern people to experience how their ancestors lived and uphold traditional knowledge for future generations.

Accordingly, the collection demands contemplation of critical questions, such as: What is the value of indigenous cultural landscapes compared to the land's natural resources that can be extracted for economic wealth? Where is the value of the land? Who has authority to control the land: indigenous populations whose ancestral "footprints [span] across the landscape" for millennia or "contemporary" settlers who colonized the area?

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AMY O'LOUGHLIN (Religion 2017)

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