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BOOK REVIEW

A Journey Through Decolonization, Reconciliation, and Indigenous Resilience

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Lytton: Climate Change, Colonialism and Life before the Fire

by Peter Edwards and Kevin Loring

Random House Canada, 2024. pp. 376 \$36.00 CAD

Lytton: Climate Change, Colonialism and Life before the Fire by Peter Edwards and Kevin Loring explores the complex relationships between climate change, colonialism, and community resilience in Lytton, British Columbia. Once a central and thriving part of the Nlaka'pamux Nation, Lytton now symbolizes the complex effects of colonial disruption and environmental change, worsened by the devastating 2021 wildfire.

The book emphasizes Indigenous knowledge systems and the cultural significance of land stewardship, offering an integrated framework for learning rooted in traditional ecological knowledge and contemporary approaches. Storytelling plays a crucial role in this framework, serving as both a research method and a means of cultural preservation (Lewis, 2011). By embedding narratives within academic discourse, Indigenous communities assert their histories and knowledge systems in ways that counter colonial erasure. However, while storytelling is an essential tool for decolonization, it must also be supported by concrete policy frameworks to address systemic injustices (Alfred, 2009; Coulthard, 2014). While the book critiques colonialism, it does not engage deeply with land-back initiatives or Indigenous legal frameworks that ensure sovereignty beyond symbolic recognition (Alfred, 2009; Coulthard, 2014). Discussing legal



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precedents like the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) could have enhanced its policy contributions.

This review builds on Tucker's (2024) earlier journalistic reflection in *The British Columbia Review*, which focused on the book's narrative style and accessibility for a general audience. In contrast, this review takes a scholarly approach, situating *Lytton: Climate Change, Colonialism and Life Before the Fire* within academic discussions on decolonization, Indigenous methodologies, and climate justice. While the book amplifies Indigenous voices, it overlooks governance models like co-managed conservation areas that assert sovereignty beyond colonial systems (Simpson, 2017; Pasternak, 2017). This review critically examines storytelling, land-based learning, and Two-Eyed Seeing, integrating scholarly sources to assess its academic and policy contributions. It also critiques the book's lack of concrete policy pathways and limited engagement with Indigenous governance, highlighting both its strengths and areas for further development. Ultimately, the book contributes to decolonization and climate justice by using storytelling to foster empathy and bridge Indigenous methodologies with sustainable practices.

This small but historically significant town was devastated by the 2021 wildfires, yet its story reaches far beyond this tragedy. Lytton is deeply connected to the Nlaka'pamux Nation, which holds thousands of years of cultural, environmental, and spiritual importance. Loring reflects, "The story of this special place at the heart of the Nlaka'pamux Nation is many thousands of years old... Lytton has been my muse and my passion" (Edwards & Loring, 2024, p. 7). However, the town also serves as a symbol of colonial impacts, highlighting the disruption of Indigenous ways of life and ongoing resistance. Since the gold rush era, "the Nlaka'pamux have been fighting for sovereignty over their lands, and against colonialism and erasure" (Edwards & Loring, 2024, p. 277).

Peltier (2018) describes Two-Eyed Seeing as a framework that allows for the integration of Indigenous and Western perspectives, fostering a balanced and collaborative approach to knowledge. Edwards and Loring exemplify this by blending historical documentation with Indigenous oral traditions, reinforcing the necessity of including multiple epistemologies in research and policy discussions.

The book emphasizes Two-Eyed Seeing as an essential framework for addressing modern challenges, blending Indigenous ecological wisdom with Western scientific approaches. Two-Eyed Seeing, introduced by Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall in 2012, promotes a collaborative approach to complex issues by recognizing the strengths of Indigenous knowledge systems and Western science. This concept encourages balance and mutual respect, combining both perspectives to create more comprehensive solutions. The book presents the Nlaka'pamux worldview of interconnected land and beings, emphasizing sustainable practices and climate adaptation. This perspective offers a framework for sustainable practices and climate adaptation. The contrast between the abundance of the land and the starvation endured by children at St. George's Residential School further illustrates the importance of land-based knowledge. The authors note, "hunting, fishing and foraging was quite simply a way of life... Which was another

reason the starvation of kids at St. George's was such an outrage. They were literally surrounded by food" (Edwards & Loring, 2024, p. 275). These stories highlight the power of Indigenous knowledge in guiding reconciliation and sustainability efforts.

Storytelling is central to the book's structure, bridging cultural perspectives and historical analysis. The authors weave personal memories, community history, and environmental changes to create an intimate and universal narrative. Loring writes, "Every season has its food. And we spent every season out in the mountains and on the river harvesting those foods" (Edwards & Loring, 2024, p. 318). This intimate relationship with the land contrasts sharply with the destruction caused by the 2021 wildfire. Loring reflects, "You dig anywhere in this town, and you'll find artifacts from thousands of years of Nlaka'pamux. Now this charred layer that was the Lytton of my entire life is just another layer in the geography" (Edwards & Loring, 2024, p. 318). Through these deeply personal stories, the book invites readers to engage emotionally and intellectually with the challenges and resilience of the Nlaka'pamux Nation, offering a nuanced understanding of the ongoing interplay between past and present.

The book's greatest strength lies in its thoughtful integration of Indigenous methodologies and land-based perspectives. Grounded in the Nlaka'pamux worldview, it weaves cultural and environmental knowledge to offer readers a rich and compelling narrative. The establishment of the Stein Valley Nlaka'pamux School, with its mission to help students "be confident, immersed in Nlaka'pamux way of life and excel academically," exemplifies how education can be a transformative tool for decolonization (Edwards & Loring, 2024, p. 269).

The storytelling approach is efficient, fostering empathy and understanding while addressing intergenerational trauma. The authors highlight how the legacy of St. George's Residential School continued to affect the Nlaka'pamux long after its closure, with many turning to traditional beliefs and practices for healing. These personal narratives make complex issues like colonialism and climate change relatable and accessible to a broad audience (Reibold, 2022). While the book excels in its narrative approach, it could benefit from more actionable pathways for reconciliation and systemic change. While the book details the 2021 wildfire, it does not critique colonial land management. Indigenous fire stewardship, like controlled burns, could mitigate future disasters (McGregor, 2021). Some chapters rely heavily on anecdotal storytelling, which, while engaging, occasionally limits the depth of analysis. For instance, "The Battle for the Stein Valley" chapter could be strengthened by a more detailed exploration of the systemic and legal factors that shaped the conflict's outcome. The authors connect the Stein Valley conflict to the resurgence of Nlaka'pamux cultural values and land rights, offering a collaborative model for sustainability and justice.

The Stein Valley, a sacred site for the Nlaka'pamux, Lil'wat, and St'at'imc Nations, became the center of a major environmental battle in the 1980s and 1990s when logging interests threatened its old-growth forests. Indigenous leaders like Chief Ruby Dunstan, Chief Leonard Andrew, and Chief Mike Leach joined forces with environmental groups to stage protests, legal battles, and blockades, successfully halting logging plans. Their activism led to the 1995

designation of the valley as a co-managed Class A provincial park, ensuring its protection (Elders Council for Parks, 2022). However, as McAllister (2019) notes, this transition also introduced tensions between conservation policies and Indigenous sovereignty, highlighting the broader struggle for self-determination and land stewardship within conservation frameworks.

In the “Battle for the Stein Valley” chapter, the book recounts the fight to protect this sacred area, described as "a site of medicine and food gathering, vision seeking and cleansing" (Edwards & Loring, 2024, p. 271). Edwards and Loring dedicate significant portions of their book to detailing this struggle, highlighting the deep connections between land, culture, and Indigenous sovereignty. Their account illustrates how the battle was not just about environmental conservation but also about Indigenous self-determination and resistance to colonial land dispossession. The 1995 victory was a groundbreaking achievement in Indigenous land stewardship, demonstrating the power of sustained activism and legal action. This victory remains a powerful example of Indigenous resilience and environmental justice, reinforcing the book’s broader themes of decolonization, reconciliation, and the ongoing fight for Indigenous land rights. This chapter and others illustrate the connections between land, culture, and healing in the broader decolonization process. Overall, the book’s compelling storytelling and cultural insight make it an impactful contribution to discussions of sustainability and reconciliation, even as there is room for deeper exploration of systemic solutions.

Lytton: Climate Change, Colonialism and Life Before the Fire is a powerful contribution to human rights, social justice, and sustainability, centering the lived experiences of the Nlaka’pamux Nation. Edwards and Loring blend personal narratives, historical research, and ecological insights to highlight Indigenous resilience and the urgent need for decolonization. Through storytelling, education, and land-based learning, the book challenges colonial narratives and underscores the role of Indigenous knowledge in shaping sustainable futures. While it effectively integrates Indigenous methodologies, future scholarship must go beyond resilience to actively support Indigenous governance. Recommended for those interested in decolonization and sustainability, Lytton demonstrates the transformative power of storytelling as a tool for education, advocacy, and reconciliation. It offers a compelling call to action, urging readers to honor Indigenous perspectives, bridge divides, and work toward justice and sustainability.

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Amy Tucker is a Master of Human Rights and Social Justice student at Thompson Rivers University, specializing in decolonization, land-based learning, and Indigenization of the curriculum. Her research explores inclusive educational practices that honour Indigenous knowledge systems and promote equity in higher education. Passionate about transformative learning, Amy aims to bridge traditional and contemporary approaches to create meaningful change in academic and community spaces.