

Dunlap, "Inherited Silence: Listening to the Land, Healing the Colonizer Mind"

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Article abstract

Louise Dunlap's book "Inherited Silence: Listening to the Land, Healing the Colonizer Mind" is a heartfelt exploration of the historical harm caused by colonization, with a focus on Dunlap's Californian roots. Through a blend of personal experiences and broader themes such as climate change, resource wars, and genocide, Dunlap offers insight into the trauma caused by colonization and suggests self-healing strategies for descendants. The book is split into ten chapters, each of which explores a different aspect of the issue.

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Book Review

Dunlap, Louise. *Inherited Silence: Listening to the Land, Healing the Colonizer Mind*. New Village Press, 2022.

Louise Dunlap's book offers an insightful exposition of the historical harms caused by early colonizers of America, with special emphasis on the author's Californian roots, while also providing self-healing suggestions for descendants. The ten-chapter book is written from the first-person perspective and adds a fusion of personal experiences from memoirs and extrapolations linking lived experiences to diverse themes of the discourse. Topics include anthropogenic impacts on the natural world and climate change, resource wars and genocide, as well as controversial ancestral claims amidst subtle, deliberate subversions of truths about early colonization history. These themes are evident in the ten chapters briefly summarized below.

Drawing on Anishinabe Nation leader Dave Courchene's teachings on environmental stewardship, in Chapter 1, "Fires of Awakening," Dunlap suggests that forest fires and climate change are the result of imperialistic mindsets that disregard the Indigenous population's original instructions and result in a failure to care for the planet. By recognizing Indigenous teachings, it becomes clear that human actions have had a profound influence on the environment, particularly by looking at the actions of European settlers.

In Chapter 2, "Beyond the View From My Uncle's Deck," Dunlap systematically presents some unique attributes of the early Indigenous peoples of California in the Napa region, specifically in relation to development changes across timescales captured in the author's self-reflections on past and present experiences. The author contrasts Indigenous mastery of the land with the actions of European settlers, such as the latter's practice of extinguishing the forest fires that were essential for preserving the land's health. Dunlap also discusses how the oral history of colonizers is incomplete and fails to capture the pain and anguish of the colonized Indigenous people. Ultimately, she recognizes the tension between descendants of colonizers and those colonized and how they must find a way to coexist in the face of world changes.

In Chapter 3 of the book, "Facing our Silenced History," Dunlap delves into the history of Indigenous tribes in the region and questions the accounts of certain anthropologists about the exact tribe first to inhabit the area. Dunlap then goes on to discuss the colonization, land grabbing, and resource wars that took place, leading to the violent resistance movements and the government's failure to honor treaties with Indigenous people. These issues led to a reawakening of the brutality experienced by Indigenous people in the 19th century, such as the Gold Rush and ethnic cleansings that fit into the definition of genocide.

In Chapter 4, “Mother’s Legacy,” the author further shows how colonization has had a lasting impact on both the people and the land of the region, specifically through her mother’s lens. Dunlap discusses how her mother had a deep connection to the Pansy Field in Napa, California, organizing springtime children's walks and picnics there. She noticed the spread of wild oats and star thistle, two invasive plants from the Mediterranean brought by the Spanish colonizers, which had displaced the native grasses. After her mother’s death, Dunlap found that the native grasses were beginning to return to the area, and she was filled with joy at the thought of her mother seeing the land restored.

Chapter 5, “Dad and the Oaks,” is about the author’s father learning about the history of the Patwin people who used to live in the valley where her father grew up. Dunlap’s father, who was raised in a time when the truth about Indigenous life was kept quiet, was shocked to learn about the injustices they endured. Dunlap reveals how the Patwin had two villages along creeks near the lower Napa River and how her father's family had taken over their land. In his final weeks, her father wrote a warm holiday greeting to a friend without the fire, a metaphor for his newfound understanding of the anger created by the injustice that was done to the Patwin people and a profound hope for a peaceful future for them, free from the oppression and discrimination that had been part of their history.

In Chapter 6, “My Generation Takes Care of the Ranch,” Dunlap discusses how her family needed to find ways to share the water they use to access the land while also respecting the land's history and looking at the land with an Indigenous way of thinking. Dunlap calls all families to find ways to share the water instead of owning it, use their resource in a way that is safe for the next generation, and look at the land with an Indigenous way of thinking. She also promotes finding ways to protect the land from further development.

Chapter 7, “Two Waves of Colonizers on the Tulucay Grant,” describes the second and third wave of colonization that took place in the Tulucay Grant. It discusses how Nathan Coombs acquired land from Cayetano Juárez, a Mexican citizen, in the second wave of colonization. It also discusses how Juárez's ancestors were part of the first wave of colonization and how they worked to protect the Franciscan missions. It explains how General Vallejo collaborated with the Patwin people and had a strategy to occupy the North Bay valleys with settlers.

As described in Chapter 8, the Coombs family experienced the idea of “Manifest Destiny” when they moved from New England to Napa, California in the late 1800s, and settled on the land.. Dunlap reminds us of the violence and atrocities that had happened in order to make settlement possible.

Chapter 9, “Healing the Deeper Past,” tells the story of the author's family and their experience with the genocide and silencing of Indigenous people in the United States. It traces the family's

lineage to the Mayflower and how their ancestors took advantage of an Indigenous population 90% destroyed by a pandemic of European disease. Six generations of colonial warfare and enslavement of Indigenous people likely shaped the attitude of the family towards Indigenous people in California. Dunlap reflects both on the guilt and shame of her family's involvement in this history and on her search for healing and understanding.

In Chapter 10, “Ceremonies for the Soul Wound,” Dunlap reflects on the land and its people, both Indigenous and settler, and how both are affected in different ways by the trauma of colonialism. Dunlap shares how Indigenous people have developed grief ceremonies and urges settler descendants to do so also. She sees new voices arising, leading with a peaceful and forgiving attitude. Dunlap also gives examples of how Indigenous and settler people are working together to protect sacred sites and how they are healing both themselves and the land from the soul wound of colonization.

The chapters are connected by a thread of the author's reflections and stories about the Indigenous people of California, their history and culture, and how colonization has affected them. This thread is further woven by Dunlap's personal stories of her family's involvement in the genocide, her reflections on the past, present, and future of the land, and how Indigenous and settler populations must work together to heal from the trauma of colonization. Indigenous people have long been doing the work to heal, but settler people are only just beginning. Dunlap urges us to work harder on this. As Dunlap reflects on the land, the people, and the history, the book is able to illustrate the power of earth and how Indigenous wisdom can help us prepare for the future.

Inherited Silence is a good read for academics, students, practitioners, activists, and others interested in America's history, biodiversity, sustainability, and climate change. Its ability to address multifaceted problems across political, social, economic, and environmental sectors is noteworthy, especially as these issues equally have global implications.

However, the way family members were introduced into narratives to validate facts suggests that an ancestral family tree would have been suitable for carrying readers along as part of the book's preliminary or supplementary materials. Likewise, a detailed map of the discussed geographical scope would have been beneficial for readers, specially for those outside of California. Furthermore, while readers will appreciate the literary devices used in the story-telling—especially techniques like flashbacks and foreshadowing—readers might struggle to find significant historical reference points buried within the stories.

Nonetheless, *Inherited Silence* is an ancestral biography that offers a fine glimpse into Indigenous culture, ecology, and political history with stories that concretize the subject matters instead of presenting them as mere abstractions. It is also significant as a guideline for workable solutions

to multifaceted sustainability concerns—for example, the need to increase awareness of and education about Indigenous cultures, knowledge, and history in order to foster greater understanding and respect for the environment. When trying to address climate change and environmental degradation, it is important to recognize the history of Indigenous people, because they are the original stewards of the land. As Dunlap argues, they have a deep connection to the land and a wealth of knowledge about how to care for it.

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