

**Marianne Ignace and Ronald E. Ignace. *Secwépemc People, Land and Laws: Yerí7 re Stsqéyís-kucw*. McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017. 624 pp. ISBN 9780773551305 <https://www.mqup.ca/secw--pemc-people--land--and-laws-products-9780773551305.php>**

This collaborative and interdisciplinary work by Marianne and Ronald Ignace explores and documents Secwépemc history, from the Ice Age through to the present. The 588-page text is not only impressive and powerful for the sheer depth in which it introduces and documents Secwépemc history, enduring laws, language, and relationships to land, but also in the ways in which Secwépemc voices past and present are represented and foregrounded throughout. Structurally, the text is divided into 14 chapters; each chapter addresses a different aspect of Secwépemc history, culture, laws, or language. Together, the chapters progress chronologically from the Ice Age through to the present day, starting with Chapter 2: “Le Q7es te Tellqelímúcw (The Time of the Ancient Transformers)” and ending with Chapter 14: “Re Stsqéyís-kucw Wel Me7 Yews (Stories from the Past, Laws and Rights for the Future).” As a whole, this work is too complex, intricate, and multi-dimensional to discuss in its entirety here, so in this review I focus on prominent themes that run throughout the text or important questions that it, as a whole, introduces, such as: the enduring relationship between homeland and lifeways; how Secwépemc voices, scientific research, and written historical records are placed in dialogue; the embedded connection between Secwepemctsin language and homeland; and, lastly, why this book was created and who it is intended to be shared with and used by.

The most salient thread throughout each chapter is how Secwépemc homeland has and continues to shape Secwépemc lifeways, and in turn, how Secwépemc lifeways have, and continue to, shape their homeland. The majority of the chapters are written and compiled by Marianne and Ronald Ignace, however several chapters are written in collaboration with researchers from other disciplines, such as Chapter 3: “Re Tsúwet.s le Q7es te Stefex7éms-kucw (What Archaeology Tells Us about the Initial Peopling and Life of Secwepemcúlecw),” Chapter 5: “Re Styecwmenúlecws-kucw (How We Look(ed) after Our Land),” and Chapter 6: “Le Q7éses re Scwescwesét.s-kucw ell re S7eykemínems-kucw (Trade, Travel and Transportation).” The book also includes several pages of colour images of the Secwépemc territory, people, and culturally and historically relevant and referenced sites and objects. There is an extensive bibliography and reference index at the end of the text.

Marianne and Ronald Ignace start the book with “Yerí7 re sqweqwentsín-kt (An Opening Prayer)” thanking and acknowledging the Creator, Secwépemc land, elders, and language. This prayer reminds the reader not only of the physical importance of Secwépemc homeland and territory, but also that, as they continue reading, they are entering a space of Secwépemc history shaped and mediated by Secwépemc voices and others who collaborated to compile and share this knowledge. The foreword is written by Bonnie Leonard, Tribal Director of the Shuswap Nation Tribal Council, and she highlights that this work was created in order to outline the “shared wisdom of the elders” that is combined with “other more scientific aspects of learning, such as archaeology and ethnology” (xxxiii). Leonard underscores that this book “was never intended to be a comprehensive rights and title resource but is meant to serve as a tool that can be utilized by many to gain insights about and understandings of the values and cultural importance of the Secwépemc people’s connection to land and to their oral histories” (xxxiii). As

such, this text is quietly powerful in the ways in which it integrates Secwépemc oral history, traditional stories, and personal accounts with historic documentation and written archives, as well as with scientific research from archaeology, ethnobotany, linguistics, and historical geography, in order to illustrate that these ways of knowing and documenting are not in opposition, but rather can work in complement to share the history of the Secwépemc people as it has been told by them and as it has been understood by others.

Secwépemc voices anchor each chapter, and the discussion is framed by oral histories and traditional stories that have been passed down and shared by elders in their Secwepemctsin language, as well as more recent personal accounts from Secwépemc people that detail their own lived experiences and shared memories. As articulated by Leonard, the work as a whole does not explicitly argue for Secwépemc people's rights and title to land or other cultural or physical resources. Instead, it seems the goal of the book as a whole is to create a comprehensive resource about and for the Secwépemc people that uplifts and foregrounds Secwépemc voices and stories in order to illustrate and document the ways in which the Secwépemc people have maintained a connection with their homeland, laws, language, and lifeways despite centuries of oppression and territorial contestation.

A prominent theme throughout the text is the importance of Secwépemc language in telling and understanding Secwépemc stories, oral history, and intimate relationships with their land. Besides the Table of Contents and the List of Figures, the first section a reader sees is Table 0.1, which lists the sounds of the Secwepemctsin language written in the practical alphabet, followed by a section detailing the spelling conventions of the Western dialect of Secwepemctsin and providing a brief history of the orthography currently used to write the language. The placing of this section underscores the importance of the Secwepemctsin language in understanding and articulating Secwépemc ways of being and knowing, their relationship to the land, and their laws. When possible, Secwepemctsin is included before English translations or equivalents; the chapter titles and many headings—as well as the introductory prayer, traditional stories, and personal accounts—appear first in Secwepemctsin and second in English. When possible, locations are primarily referred to by their Secwepemctsin or Indigenous place name, and followed by the English place name in parentheses. Throughout the book, the Ignaces include tables highlighting how an understanding of the linguistic features of Secwepemctsin can provide additional insight into Secwépemc values, laws, and their understanding of and relationship to their homeland. For example, Table 5.3 illustrates how calendar and place names often index seasonal activities (196-197); Table 7.1 illustrates how Secwépemc place names often identify specific locations associated with specific natural characteristics, activities, or events that took place there (237-239); and Table 9.2 illustrates the meaning and importance behind personal names that are given and passed down through generations (355). The prioritization and use of Secwepemctsin throughout the text also reasserts that, although the book is written in English, it is grounded in Secwepemctsin language, oral history, and its intimate and enduring relationship to Secwépemc homeland.

Even though each chapter is densely packed with historical, cultural, and scientific information as well as explanatory images, maps, diagrams, and tables, there is something deeply personal about how this knowledge is presented and how it might be used. If the long-term goal of this work is not to create a document that overtly argues for Secwépemc rights and title to land or

documents the oppression Secwépemc people have endured, then it opens up the possibility that this text, in fact, was not produced to be used in a wider political arena but rather was created for Secwépemc people to share their history with each other. For example, the authors often use the first-person plural pronoun “our” to refer to Secwépemc stories, practices, and events, and at times it is not clear whether “our” is exclusive of the reader and refers to the Ignaces as members of the Shuswap Nation, or whether “our” is intended to potentially include a reader who too is Secwépemc. Explained in another way, at times I wondered whether I—as someone who is not Secwépemc—was imposing on someone else’s story, which prompted me to contemplate what it means to be an invited guest in this process.

In the last paragraph of the work, the Ignaces answer the above question when they explain that “to make them accessible and to make them heard, we have turned the oral histories and stories of past generations of Secwépemc people into written words. However, we hope that this way of commemorating them will inspire present and future generations of Secwépemc to learn them, memorize them, and tell them to one another and the next generation in the spirit of oral tellings of the past. For all others, we hope that the stories and knowledge we have presented, never complete, have provided more than a fleeting glimpse at the depth, meaning, and wisdom that they have entailed for generations of Secwépemc people” (501-2). Even though this book was written to be read and used by both people who are Secwépemc and people who are not, one last important accomplishment of this text is to (potentially) convey that this history is Secwépemc people’s to share, not someone else’s to take or impose upon, which is a subtle, but nonetheless powerful, ending message.

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