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**Review: The Nature of Hope: Grassroots Organizing, Environmental Justice, and
Political Change**

Edited by Miller, C. and Crane J.

Reviewed by Byron Anderson

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Miller, Char and Crane, Jeff, Eds. *The Nature of Hope: Grassroots Organizing, Environmental Justice, and Political Change*. Louisville, Colorado, USA: University Press of Colorado, 2018; viii+353 pp. ISBN: 9781607329077, paper, US\$34.95; ISBN: 9781607328476, hardcover, US\$96.00; ISBN: 9781607328483, ebook, US\$28.95.

The Nature of Hope focuses on environmental activism at the grassroots level, and is composed of fifteen stories, each with one or two contributors. These chapters or pieces, in turn, are divided into four sections: Building Agency, Spatial Dynamics, Healthy Politics, and Challenging Resources. The stories cover a wide range of locations in the U.S., with the transformation of an air base into a park in Tokyo, Japan, which readily fits in with the rest of the stories. Topics include community farming, flood control, toxic anxieties, the politics of fracking, building sustainable communities, and opposing mining operations in protected areas. The chapters intend to “clearly demonstrate that local activism is essential to the preservation of democracy and the protection of the environment” (from the back cover). The authors call for a greater democracy involving grassroots activism at the local level, as well as a much larger interconnected movement, willing to incorporate with other allies and involved citizens. This would be a broad configuration of environmental justice that includes race, class, and gender in areas including “eco-feminism, Indigenous studies, American studies and ethnic studies” as noted by scholar David Pellow (p. 28).

A good example of citizens seeking solutions to environmental problems is found in Cody Ferguson’s and Paul Hirt’s story “Power to the People”. Large waste dumps in central and eastern Tennessee created concerns about family health, property values, land, and water. Citizens created a pathway for opposition by forming Save Our

Cumberland Mountains. This piece is an eye-opener, showing the tedious demands in accomplishing laws and regulations for environmental issues like dumping waste. Activists need to be committed to both democratic rights and environmental protection. From the 1960s to mid-1990s, expanded legislation defended environmental laws, but the laws were only as good as the commitment of citizens to work to ensure their enforcement.

Notable cases of environmental injustice are included, such as Warren County, North Carolina, a poor, rural area, populated mostly African-Americans, where contaminated soil was dumped, a classic case of environmental racism. Another case was the transporting of crude oil from North Dakota to refineries in Illinois, which threatened the water quality and cultural heritage of the Standing Rock Sioux tribal members. In most of the stories the people affected did not have allies in government or access to power. The authors provide background or history for the stories sometimes going back to the early twentieth century. The most effective methods in countering environmental injustices are collaboration, information, and activism; grassroots action makes a difference.

This book is unique in providing a wide variety of experiences from the eighteen contributors, including some notables, such as Bill McKibben. The editors, Char Miller, is the W.M. Keck Professor of Environmental Analysis and History at Pomona College and Jeff Crane is dean of the Arts and Sciences at Saint Martin's University. Their efforts have brought together stories that show the true nature of grassroots organizing, environmental justice, and political change. Hope expresses itself in all the stories, including those with unsatisfactory outcomes and those that are still fighting. The stories tell how difficult grassroots organizing and political change can be. As Donna Brave Bull Allard said in representing Standing Rock Sioux, "We are still here. We are still fighting for our lives on our own land" (p. 333). Contributors include university faculty, researchers, and activists. The book is for both lay and academic readers, and is highly recommended for public, academic, and personal libraries.

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