

“A History of Environmental Justice in New Mexico: Counting Coup” takes the reader on a journey that starts with the history of land use which transformed New Mexico’s landscape and paved the way for an era of mass resource mining, extraction, and environmental degradation. The first section of the book focuses on the environmental legacy of uranium and the impact on communities that have been affected by its extraction, dumping, testing, access to water, and storage. The following section focuses on environmental injustice related water issues highlighting the stories of Isleta Pueblo, the Gila River, Zuni Salt Lake, the Rio Grande, Las Animas River, and Santa Fe. Land contamination issues such as illegal dumping, Superfund sites, immigrant farm workers, and the preservation of historic cultural resources and archaeological sites such as Chaco Canyon illustrate other types of social and environmental justice issues within the state.

This book highlights case studies in which environmental degradation has resulted in controversial battles regarding health disparities in disenfranchised communities of color throughout the state. There is a need to voice present struggles and concerns of New Mexican communities and disseminate knowledge of these issues to a wider audience. The stories of strife and struggle shared in this book have shaped the character of the people, their traditions, and reactions to environmental and social issues within New Mexican communities. The book highlights the victories and on-going battles over sacred sites, presents public health and environmental concerns, as well as the perspectives of local residents.

10 most interesting data from the book:

- Historical facts about some of New Mexico’s most notable landmarks and tourist draws, are featured in the book and include places such as Church Rock, Santa Fe, the Las Animas River, the Rio Grande, Mount Taylor, Zuni Salt Lake, and Los Alamos.
- Zuni Salt Lake and the Sanctuary Area were listed on the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s list of Eleven Most Endangered Historic Places in America
- Content from my book’s chapter on militarization at Fort Wingate Army Depot Activity Area was published and referenced in Winona LaDuke’s book, “The Militarization of Indian Country,” in 2011 printed by Makwa Enewed Press.
- After decades of tribal members becoming sick from having contact with the Rio Grande river water, the first woman governor of a Pueblo, Verna Olgin Teller, was determined to regain use of river water for her tribe’s agriculture, ceremonial, and religious purposes. This story is the focus of the chapter titled, “David and Goliath: Isleta Water War”, and shares how a tiny tribe of 500 members won a battle in the Supreme Court over the metropolis of Albuquerque, in a war over water quality standards, religious freedom, and tribal sovereignty.
- New Mexico is one of the wealthiest states in mineral resources with mines located in some of the poorest communities of color.
- An estimated population of 70,000 Navajos presently do not have access to safe sources of water and lack running water in their homes.
- The places where the first atomic bomb was researched and tested in New Mexico have affected the health of many downstream and downwind communities, and aggressive uranium mining led to the largest uranium mine tailings spill in the United States at Church Rock, NM.

- New Mexico contains invaluable archeological treasures such as Chaco Canyon which presently face threats from oil and gas extraction.
- Although New Mexico markets its scenic landscapes and waterways for tourism, even though its rivers have been listed as “endangered” due to lack of in stream water flow, pollution, damming, and diversion. According to the World Wildlife Fund, inadequate water supply is cited as the main reason that the Rio Grande-Rio Bravo continues to rank as one of the world’s 10 Most Endangered Rivers.
- The National Trust for Historic Preservation listed Mt. Taylor as the one of the ten most endangered historic sites in America.

Presently, there are no other books on the market today that focus on New Mexico’s environmental land use and history, through present day on-going battles, that include community perspectives. The book, “History of Environmental Justice in New Mexico: Counting Coup” uses humor and published research facts to “count coup” and shed light on uncomfortable truths regarding policies and decisions that have impacted the socio-cultural history and land use of the state.

This is a particularly poignant time in history, to share the voices of New Mexico’s communities of color; their successes, adaptation, survival and reactions to forced changes and the pressures of the dominant society that continue to persist. There is great concern for the immediate present health dangers and the integrity of natural systems. Together, with a revived sense of reverence for sacred places, environmental stewardship, and belief in the interconnectedness of the web of life on Earth, New Mexico communities continue to battle for justice.

For more information, please contact me at c.(505) 449-7498 e. suqae@yahoo.com

Valerie Rangel