We will not be saved

by Mitch anderson and Nemonte nenquimo · Language: EN

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Overview

We Will Not Be Saved" is a profound and urgent call to action co-authored by Nemonte Nenquimo, a leader of Ecuador's Waorani people, and Mitch Anderson, founder of Amazon Frontlines. The book fundamentally challenges the prevailing Western approach to the climate crisis, arguing that solutions cannot come from the same mindset of exploitation and separation from nature that created the problem. Instead, Nenquimo, drawing on millennia of indigenous wisdom, posits that true salvation lies not in technological fixes or external saviors, but in a radical shift in worldview towards interconnectedness, respect for the Earth, and the defense of indigenous territories and ways of life.

The core argument asserts that Western civilization's belief in its own ability to "save" the planet is a dangerous delusion, perpetuating a cycle of control and commodification. Nenquimo's voice offers a powerful counter-narrative, emphasizing that indigenous peoples are not merely victims or beneficiaries of conservation efforts, but possess the deep ecological knowledge and spiritual understanding necessary for humanity's survival. The book serves as both a memoir of Nenquimo's life and her people's struggles against oil extraction, and a manifesto for a different way of relating to the world, urging readers to listen to the Earth and its original guardians before it's too late. It matters because it reframes the environmental crisis as a crisis of perception and relationship, demanding a fundamental re-evaluation of human values and priorities.

Key Takeaways

- The climate crisis is fundamentally a crisis of worldview, stemming from a Western mindset of separation from and domination over nature.
- Indigenous peoples offer vital wisdom and practical solutions for living sustainably, rooted in deep ecological knowledge and interconnectedness.
- True environmental action requires defending indigenous land rights and empowering their self-determination, as they are the most effective guardians of biodiversity.
- Relying solely on technological fixes or "green capitalism" to solve ecological collapse is a dangerous delusion that perpetuates the problem.
- We must reject the notion of external saviors and instead cultivate a radical shift in our relationship with the Earth, recognizing ourselves as part of nature.

• Listening to the Earth and its ancient guardians is paramount for humanity's survival, demanding humility and a willingness to learn.

• The fight for climate justice is inseparable from the fight for indigenous rights and decolonization.

Chapter Summaries

Prologue: The Forest Speaks

The book opens with Nemonte Nenquimo's powerful voice, immediately immersing the reader in the Amazon rainforest and the Waorani people's deep spiritual and physical connection to it. She introduces the urgent crisis facing her ancestral lands and the planet, setting a defiant tone for the narrative. Nenquimo emphasizes that the Waorani have always been guardians of the forest, living in harmony with its rhythms, and that their survival is inextricably linked to its health. This section establishes the book's central premise: the indigenous perspective as a crucial, often overlooked, solution to the global ecological crisis, and the immediate threat posed by extractive industries.

Our Home, Our History

This part delves into the rich history and vibrant culture of the Waorani people, describing their traditional way of life, their intricate knowledge of the forest, and their unique language. Nenquimo recounts stories passed down through generations, illustrating how the Waorani have thrived in the Amazon for millennia, relying on hunting, gathering, and their profound understanding of the ecosystem. It details their initial isolation and the dramatic impact of first contact with outsiders, including missionaries and oil prospectors, which brought disease, violence, and the beginning of the erosion of their traditional territories and autonomy. The narrative highlights the stark contrast between Waorani values and the encroaching industrial world.

The Invasion of the Black Gold

Nenquimo describes the escalating threat posed by the oil industry to Waorani lands. She details how the Ecuadorian government, without free, prior, and informed consent, began auctioning off vast tracts of the Amazon for oil exploration, including Block 22, which overlaps directly with Waorani territory. This section vividly portrays the environmental destruction, cultural disruption, and social conflicts that accompany oil extraction, from seismic testing to road building and pollution. Nenquimo shares personal anecdotes of seeing her ancestral lands scarred and her people's way of life jeopardized, fueling her resolve to fight for their survival against powerful corporate and governmental interests.

Finding My Voice, Finding Our Strength

This chapter traces Nemonte Nenquimo's personal journey from a young Waorani woman to a formidable indigenous leader. It describes her early experiences, her growing awareness of the threats to her people, and the pivotal moments that led her to activism. She recounts learning from elders, observing the impacts of external forces, and the realization that the Waorani needed to unite and speak out. This section highlights the challenges she faced, including cultural barriers and the patriarchal structures within her own community, as she stepped into a leadership role, advocating for her people's rights and the protection of their ancestral lands against overwhelming odds.

Mapping Our Future

Nenquimo details the strategic efforts undertaken by the Waorani, in collaboration with organizations like Amazon Frontlines (co-founded by Mitch Anderson), to defend their territory. This includes the crucial process of mapping their ancestral lands using GPS technology, documenting sacred sites, hunting grounds, and areas impacted by oil exploration. This mapping project was not just about technology; it was a powerful act of self-determination, visually asserting their territorial claims and providing irrefutable evidence for legal battles. It became a critical tool in demonstrating the Waorani's deep connection to their land and the extent of the proposed oil concessions.

The Courts of Justice

This section focuses on the landmark legal battle initiated by the Waorani against the Ecuadorian government in 2019. Nenquimo describes the meticulous preparation, the gathering of evidence, and the emotional testimonies presented in court. The lawsuit challenged the government's attempt to auction off 500,000 acres of Waorani territory for oil drilling without proper consultation. She recounts the tension and hope during the proceedings, culminating in the historic victory where the provincial court ruled in favor of the Waorani, protecting their lands and setting a crucial precedent for indigenous rights and environmental protection in Ecuador and beyond.

A Message to the World

Following the legal victory, Nenquimo's voice gained international prominence. This chapter describes her journey to global platforms, including speaking at the United Nations, meeting with world leaders, and addressing climate change conferences. She shares her experiences of bringing the Waorani's message directly from the heart of the Amazon to a global audience, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all life and the vital role of indigenous peoples as guardians of biodiversity. Her speeches challenge the dominant paradigm of endless growth and consumption, urging humanity to listen to the wisdom of the forest and take urgent action to protect it.

We Will Not Be Saved

This climactic section encapsulates the book's title and core philosophy. Nenquimo argues that humanity cannot wait for external saviors or technological fixes to solve the climate crisis. Instead, she asserts that salvation must come from within, through a fundamental shift in values, a reconnection with nature, and a recognition of indigenous wisdom. She emphasizes that the Waorani, and other indigenous peoples, are not victims waiting to be saved, but active protectors of the Earth, offering a path forward rooted in reciprocity and respect for all life. It's a powerful call for collective responsibility and a radical reimagining of humanity's relationship with the planet.

The Future of the Forest

The concluding part reflects on the ongoing struggle and the enduring hope for the Amazon and its peoples. Nenquimo reiterates the importance of continuing the fight, not just for the Waorani, but for all future generations. She discusses the need for global solidarity with indigenous movements, the recognition of their territorial rights, and the adoption of their sustainable practices. The chapter ends with a powerful vision of a future where humanity lives in balance with nature, guided by the ancient wisdom of the forest, and a renewed commitment to protecting the Earth's vital ecosystems from further destruction, emphasizing that the fight is far from over.

Themes

- Indigenous wisdom
- Climate justice
- Decolonization
- Ecological interconnectedness
- Environmental activism

Frequently Asked Questions

What is We will not be saved about?

It's about Nemonte Nenquimo's indigenous Waorani perspective on the climate crisis, arguing that Western approaches are flawed. It calls for a radical shift in worldview, emphasizing interconnectedness with nature and the defense of indigenous territories as crucial for humanity's survival.

Is We will not be saved worth reading?

Yes, it's highly worth reading for anyone interested in environmental justice, indigenous rights, and a profound critique of modern society's relationship with nature. It offers a vital, non-Western perspective on the climate crisis.

How does We will not be saved end?

Spoiler: The book ends not with a promise of salvation, but with a powerful call for humanity to abandon its destructive ways, listen to the Earth, and empower indigenous communities. It emphasizes that the future depends on a radical transformation of our values and actions, not on external saviors.

Who should read We will not be saved?

Environmental activists, policymakers, students of indigenous studies, and anyone concerned about the climate crisis who is open to challenging conventional solutions and embracing a deeper, more interconnected understanding of life.

How long does it take to read We will not be saved?

It takes approximately 3 to 4 hours to read "We Will Not Be Saved" at an average reading speed of 250 words per minute, given its length of around 160 pages.

Best Quotes

“We will not be saved by you. We will save ourselves.”

We Will Not Be Saved

This powerful statement, echoing the book's title, encapsulates Nemonte Nenquimo's core message of indigenous self-determination and resilience. It rejects the paternalistic notion that external forces will rescue them, asserting the Waorani's agency in protecting their land and culture, and by extension, the planet.

“The forest is our home, our supermarket, our pharmacy, our school, our church.”

This line beautifully articulates the holistic and profound relationship the Waorani people have with the Amazon rainforest. It highlights how the forest provides not just sustenance but also education, healing, and spiritual connection, demonstrating its irreplaceable value beyond mere resources.

“You call it 'resources.' We call it life.”

This stark contrast reveals the fundamental clash of worldviews at the heart of the conflict. Nenquimo exposes the extractive, commodifying perspective of industrial society versus the Waorani's understanding of the natural world as an interconnected, living entity essential for survival and well-being.

“The world is burning, and you are still talking about money.”

A direct and impassioned indictment of global leaders and corporations, this quote underscores the urgency of the climate crisis and the perceived indifference of those prioritizing economic

gain over ecological survival. It reflects Nenquimo's frustration with the slow pace of action despite overwhelming evidence of environmental collapse.

“Our fight is not just for the Waorani, it is for all life.”

This statement broadens the scope of the Waorani struggle, positioning it as a universal battle for biodiversity and the health of the planet. Nenquimo emphasizes that protecting the Amazon and indigenous territories benefits everyone, linking local resistance to global ecological survival.

“The forest is not silent. It speaks to us.”

This quote conveys the deep spiritual and sensory connection the Waorani have with their environment. It challenges the Western perception of nature as inanimate, asserting that the forest communicates wisdom and guidance to those who listen, reinforcing the importance of traditional ecological knowledge.

“We are the guardians of the forest.”

This declaration asserts the Waorani's inherent role and responsibility in protecting the Amazon. It's a statement of identity, purpose, and a claim to sovereignty over their ancestral lands, emphasizing their long-standing stewardship and deep knowledge of the ecosystem.

Questions & Answers

What is the main argument of "We will not be saved"?

The main argument is that indigenous peoples, particularly the Waorani of the Ecuadorian Amazon, are not passive victims awaiting rescue but active guardians of the planet. Nemonte Nenquimo asserts that Western industrial society is driving ecological collapse, and true salvation lies in listening to and empowering indigenous voices and their traditional ecological knowledge. The book is a call to action for global society to recognize indigenous sovereignty and protect the Amazon from extractive industries.

Who is Nemonte Nenquimo and what is her significance in the book?

Nemonte Nenquimo is a Waorani leader, activist, and the primary voice of the book. She is a co-founder of the Ceibo Alliance and the first woman president of the Waorani organization of Pastaza (NAWE). Her significance lies in her powerful advocacy for indigenous rights, her people's ancestral lands, and the Amazon rainforest. The book shares her personal story, her people's struggles against oil extraction, and her vision for a sustainable future, making her a crucial figure in global environmental justice.

What specific threats do the Waorani people face as described in the book?

The Waorani people primarily face existential threats from oil extraction, logging, and other extractive industries encroaching on their ancestral territories in the Ecuadorian Amazon. These

activities lead to deforestation, water contamination, loss of biodiversity, and the destruction of their traditional way of life. The book details the legal battles, political pressures, and cultural erosion resulting from these external forces, highlighting the direct impact on their health, food security, and spiritual connection to the land.

How does the book challenge the concept of "progress" in Western society?

The book fundamentally challenges Western notions of "progress" by juxtaposing it with the devastating environmental and social consequences of industrial development. Nenquimo argues that the relentless pursuit of economic growth and resource extraction, often termed "progress," leads to ecological destruction and cultural annihilation. She presents the Waorani way of life, rooted in reciprocity with nature, as a more sustainable and truly progressive path, questioning the very foundations of modern civilization's values.

What role does Mitch Anderson play in the co-authorship of the book?

Mitch Anderson, founder of the non-profit Amazon Frontlines, co-authored the book to help amplify Nemonte Nenquimo's voice and provide broader context for her message. While Nenquimo's perspective is central, Anderson contributes to structuring the narrative, explaining the geopolitical and historical background of the conflicts, and translating the urgency of the Waorani struggle for a global audience. He acts as a bridge, ensuring the story is accessible and impactful to readers outside the Amazon.

What is the significance of the Waorani legal victory mentioned in the book?

The book details the historic 2019 legal victory where the Waorani people of Pastaza won a landmark court case against the Ecuadorian government, preventing the auctioning of 500,000 acres of their ancestral territory for oil drilling. This victory is highly significant as it set a precedent for indigenous land rights and self-determination, demonstrating the power of organized resistance and legal action. It affirmed their right to free, prior, and informed consent, inspiring other indigenous communities globally.

How does Nenquimo describe the relationship between humans and nature?

Nenquimo describes the relationship between humans and nature as one of deep interconnectedness, reciprocity, and reverence. For the Waorani, nature is not a separate entity to be exploited but a living being, a provider, and a teacher. She emphasizes that humans are part of the ecosystem, not superior to it, and that disrespecting nature ultimately harms humanity itself. This worldview contrasts sharply with the dominant Western anthropocentric perspective.

What does the title "We will not be saved" signify?

The title "We will not be saved" signifies a powerful declaration of indigenous self-determination and a rejection of external, often paternalistic, interventions. It means that the Waorani people do not expect or desire salvation from the very systems that threaten them. Instead, they assert

their agency and capacity to protect themselves and their land. It also implies a challenge to the reader: if indigenous peoples are not waiting to be saved, perhaps it is the rest of the world that needs saving, by listening to them.

What is the Ceibo Alliance and its importance to the narrative?

The Ceibo Alliance is an indigenous-led organization co-founded by Nemonte Nenquimo, uniting four indigenous nations (Waorani, Kofan, Siona, Siekopai) in the Ecuadorian Amazon. It is crucial to the narrative as it represents a powerful model of inter-tribal collaboration for land defense, cultural preservation, and environmental protection. The alliance strengthens indigenous resistance against extractive industries, pooling resources and strategies to fight for collective rights and sovereignty.

How does the book address the concept of "listening" to indigenous voices?

The book repeatedly emphasizes the critical importance of "listening" to indigenous voices, not just as a courtesy, but as a necessity for global survival. Nenquimo argues that indigenous peoples possess invaluable traditional ecological knowledge and a profound understanding of how to live sustainably with the Earth. She calls for genuine listening and respect, urging the world to move beyond tokenism and actively incorporate indigenous wisdom into climate solutions and conservation efforts.

What is the book's message regarding climate change?

The book presents climate change not as an abstract scientific problem but as a direct consequence of Western industrial society's destructive practices, particularly resource extraction in places like the Amazon. Nenquimo frames the fight for the Amazon as a frontline battle against climate change, arguing that protecting indigenous territories is one of the most effective ways to mitigate global warming. She calls for immediate, radical action and a fundamental shift in human-nature relations.

What practical actions does Nenquimo suggest readers can take?

While the book is primarily a manifesto, Nenquimo implicitly and explicitly suggests several actions. These include supporting indigenous-led organizations like the Ceibo Alliance, advocating for indigenous land rights, demanding accountability from corporations and governments involved in extractive industries, reducing personal consumption, and educating oneself and others about the Amazon and indigenous struggles. Fundamentally, she urges a change in worldview, fostering respect for nature and indigenous wisdom.

How does the book portray the role of international activism and media?

The book portrays international activism and media as crucial tools for amplifying indigenous voices and struggles on a global stage. While emphasizing that indigenous peoples are the primary agents of their own defense, it acknowledges that external support, legal aid, and media attention are vital for challenging powerful corporate and governmental interests. It highlights

how international solidarity can put pressure on decision-makers and help secure victories like the 2019 court ruling.

What is the significance of the "uncontacted" tribes mentioned in the book?

The "uncontacted" tribes, such as the Tagaeri and Taromenane within Waorani territory, represent the ultimate frontier of indigenous sovereignty and the fragility of their existence. Their presence underscores the urgent need to protect vast, undisturbed areas of the Amazon. The book highlights the ethical imperative to respect their right to self-determination and isolation, as contact often brings disease and cultural destruction, further emphasizing the destructive impact of external encroachment.

Spoiler: What is the ultimate hope or vision presented by Nemonte Nenquimo at the end of the book?

Spoiler: Nemonte Nenquimo's ultimate hope and vision is not one of being "saved" by external forces, but of humanity collectively shifting its relationship with the Earth. She envisions a future where indigenous wisdom is respected, ancestral lands are protected, and the Amazon thrives, serving as the planet's living heart. Her hope lies in the power of collective action, the resilience of indigenous peoples, and the possibility for humanity to awaken to its interconnectedness with all life, choosing a path of ecological harmony over destruction.