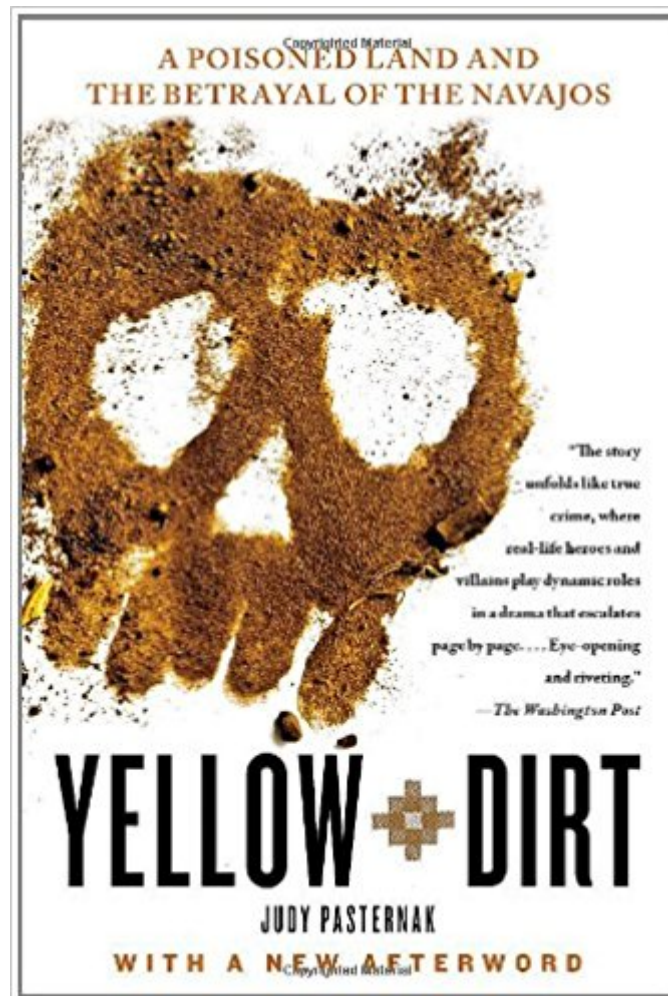




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# Yellow Dirt: A Poisoned Land And The Betrayal Of The Navajos



## Synopsis

This investigative feat tells the shocking, heartbreaking story of uranium mining on the Navajo reservation and its terrible legacy of sickness and government neglect, documenting one of the darker chapters in 20th century American history. Now in paperback, the critically acclaimed *Yellow Dirt*, "will break your heart. An enormous achievement—literally, a piece of groundbreaking investigative journalism—illustrates exactly what reporting should do: Show us what we've become as a people, and sharpen our vision of who we, the people, ought to become" ( *The Christian Science Monitor* ). From the 1930s to the 1960s, the United States knowingly used and discarded an entire tribe of people as the Navajos worked, unprotected, in the uranium mines that fueled the Manhattan Project and the Cold War. Long after these mines were abandoned, Navajos in all four corners of the Reservation (which borders Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona) continued grazing their animals on sagebrush flats riddled with uranium that had been blasted from the ground. They built their houses out of chunks of uranium ore, inhaled radioactive dust borne aloft from the waste piles the mining companies had left behind, and their children played in the unsealed mines themselves. Ten years after the mines closed, the cancer rate on the reservation shot up and some babies began to be born with crooked fingers that fused together into claws as they grew. Government scientists filed complaints about the situation with the government, but were told it was a mess too expensive to clean up. Judy Pasternak exposed this story in a prizewinning *Los Angeles Times* series. Her work galvanized both a congressman and a famous prosecutor to clean the sites and get reparations for the tribe. *Yellow Dirt* is her powerful chronicle of both the scandal of neglect and the Navajos' fight for justice.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In the 1940s, when the U.S. government was embarking on developing atomic weapons, it discovered huge uranium deposits in Navajo territory covering parts of Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona. Mines constructed there yielded uranium that would be used in the Manhattan Project and eventually in the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Navajo themselves saw little of the huge profits from uranium but as workers and land dwellers would suffer radiation exposure four times that of the Japanese targeted by the A-bomb. Award-winning environmental journalist Pasternak follows four generations of Navajo families, from the patriarch who warned against violating the land to those tempted by the prospects of jobs and money. She chronicles the cultural stoicism that prohibited them from complaining for so long about the alarming rates of cancer deaths, the betrayal of trust by corporate and government interests, the growing awareness of the tragedy visited on them in the name of national security, and the efforts to fight for restoration. A stunning look at a shameful chapter in American history with long-lasting implications for all Americans concerned with environmental justice. --Vanessa Bush --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

"Chilling. Has the cumulative power of scrupulous truth-telling and the value of old-style investigative reportage."--Laura Miller, Salon""Studded with vivid character sketches and evocative descriptions of the American landscape, Pasternak's scarifying account of uranium mining's disastrous consequences often reads like a novel...does justice to the ethical and historical ambiguities while crafting a narrative of exemplary clarity."--"Los Angeles Times"• "This book is a masterwork. It is journalism at its very best"• a story told fully and eloquently. A story that everyone should know."• "This compelling and compassionate book could not be more timely. A gripping story of the betrayal of the Navajos, it comes at a time where once again the human costs of energy production are slighted and both the government and corporations ride roughshod over the least powerful."• "Richard White, Pulitzer Prize finalist, Recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship, and Margaret Byrne Professor of American History, Stanford University"An astounding book. Judy Pasternak has dug deeply into the archives and into the ground itself to uncover the real story behind one of the darkest chapters of the Cold War on American soil. With her dogged pursuit of the facts and an elegant prose style,

Pasternak elevates investigative journalism into the realm of literature." -- Tom Zoellner, author of "Uranium: War, Energy and the Rock that Shaped the World" "One of those stories that makes us believe all over again in journalism, in its power to bring truth to light."

•Harvard "Nieman Narrative Digest" "Disturbing and illuminating. Pasternak evokes the magnitude of a nuclear disaster that continues to reverberate. Unfolds like true crime, where real-life heroes and villains play dynamic roles in a drama that escalates page by page. Eye-opening and riveting, "Yellow Dirt" gives a sobering glimpse into our atomic past and adds a critical voice to the debate about resurrecting America's nuclear industry."--"The Washington Post" "This book will break your heart. Not only an enormous achievement - literally, a piece of groundbreaking investigative journalism - it also illustrates exactly what careful, painstaking, and risk-taking reporting should do: Show us what we've become as a people, and sharpen our vision of who we, the people, ought to become."--"The Christian Science Monitor" "This book is a masterwork. It is journalism at its very best--a story told fully and eloquently. A story that everyone should know." --Michael Connelly, author of "Nine Dragons" "One of those stories that makes us believe all over again in journalism, in its power to bring truth to light." --Harvard's "Nieman Narrative Digest" "A window into a dark chapter of modern history that still reverberates today. Transporting readers into a little-known country-within-a-country, award-winning journalist Judy Pasternak gives rare voice to Navajo perceptions of the world, their own complicated involvement with uranium mining, and their political coming-of-age. A work of the highest quality journalism, an expose made possible by meticulous research... She has taken a large cast of characters, a bulging list of corporations and government agencies, and a scientific subject and managed to unite them in a story that the average reader can comprehend."--Stacy Rae Brownlie, "BookBrowse" "This compelling and compassionate book could not be more timely. A gripping story of the betrayal of the Navajos, it comes at a time where once again the human costs of energy production are slighted and both the government and corporations ride roughshod over the least powerful." --Richard White, Pulitzer Prize finalist, Recipient of a Macarthur Fellowship, and Margaret Byrne Professor of American History, Stanford University

Only once in a great while comes along the combination of a compelling story, exquisite writing, and substantial research so lacking in these days of internet journalism. "Yellow Dirt" is the true story of the exploitation and abandonment of the Navajo people in the United States' quest to fuel their nuclear arsenal. Judy Pasternak, former report for the Los Angeles Times, has filled the book with facts and timelines, but always in the context of the families and their lives that she came to know so

well. You feel as though you are standing among them, feeling their pride, their anger, and their anguish. This story is in the hands of a very capable journalist, and the craftsmanship is evident on every page, but what makes this book unique is you feel her heart was in every carefully chosen word. YOU MUST BUY THIS BOOK, devour it in one sitting, and pass it on to someone else, with the strict instructions to do the same.

The greatest compliment one can give to a work of investigative reporting is that it captures and reveals the truth. Author Judy Pasternak has done this in "Yellow Dirt." She traces the US development of the atomic bomb during WWII and the need to find a source of uranium. Unfortunately for the Navajo and Hopi people, some of the richest uranium ore in the continental US is located in the Four Corner region of the American Southwest, the heart of the Navajo and Hopi Reservations. Some Navajo were initially grateful for the jobs as well as the opportunity to help the US to win the WWII by allowing the extensive mining and milling of the uranium ore. The tragedy is the failure of the US government to protect those same workers from the deadly effects of the radioactivity that was released into the environment as the mining proceeded. All through the Cold War, uranium was mined and provided for the development of both nuclear bombs and nuclear energy. Even after understanding the negative health effects of exposure to radioactive materials, the US government allowed workers to continue to work the mines and expose themselves and their families. Byproducts of the mining activities, contaminated sand and rock, were used in the construction of homes by the Navajo people. The resulting effects are still evident as the EPA and the Navajo Nation struggle with cleaning up the toxic wastes and the ruined health and deaths of those exposed. The challenge continues with recent attempts to continue uranium mining on the Colorado Plateau and near Grand Canyon. Other Native American tribes, stand to be subjected to the impacts of Uranium Mining. "Yellow Dirt" provides the historical context as to understand this complex issue and the shameful disregard for Native Americans.

I have given this book five stars because of its informative hair slitting tone. I felt like I was transported through time; experiencing the pain heartache and in justice of the Navajo's. Ms. Pasternak has shed light on the long sustained injustice that continues to be a health risk for those who still live in the area. I would like to express my gratefulness for her writing this book. I believe this should be read by high school and college students all over the U.S.A.

In this book, Pasternak gives both human and historical perspectives to the 20th century mining on

Navajo land and the resulting ecological disaster. Despite the non-fiction nature of the material, her novel-like writing style makes the material extremely easy to absorb because it doesn't feel at all like you're reading someone's lecture notes. This semester I wrote a 10-page paper for my English 2 and Native American History courses on the uranium mining on Navajo lands. I bought this book after seeing Judy Pasternak's LA Times articles on the topic, and it saved me a LOT of trouble. Her work is spectacularly documented, so if you find yourself needing more elaboration on a topic you can easily dig up the source document. The grades I received were 98% and 100% using this source and ones I found through it for over half of my citations. This book is a MUST HAVE resource for anyone looking to enhance their knowledge on the worst nuclear disasters in United States history, whether it's for personal or professional uses.

I picked up this book because I work in the environmental field and it was so well reviewed. It is an engaging read about a very depressing topic. The author did a great job putting human faces on the problem. The environmental and human health topics were accurate and well described. She did a great job explaining the lapses in safety and the ignoring of obvious health issues by the government in a race to meet its own needs (which are rarely the needs of the individuals serving said government). By the nature of the topic, it only touches briefly on the incredible political nature of Superfund and environmental health initiatives in general. The squeaky wheel gets the grease. It is never about the most harm and if you take anything away from this book, remember that.

Horrible book subject.

This is an eye-opener to say the least. It's one thing to know the truth behind our ancestors' destruction to this country and its people, but this book shows how we continued to neglect them ~500 years later (of course the time between there wasn't anything to glorify). Anyway, (Yellow Dirt) = (Uranium) & (Native Americans) = (Cheap Labor) ... so read this book and learn something ridiculous about the USA government. AND... if you haven't read them yet, you must read 'Lies My Teacher Told Me' & 'Savage Kingdom' (among others). The truth about America is sickening... !

How did this happen??? After treating the American natives so badly in the 19th century, how could we have done it again in the 1950's until now? Human beings are human beings regardless of the color of their skin and their speech and their culture! I read this book so fast because I could not believe what happened again after WW II. And I live in New Mexico!!! I knew that uranium had been

mined on the Navajo Reservation, but I did not know any details nor the extent of our betrayal of the Navajo! This is an excellent book! Read it!

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