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## Reviews

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**American Indian Constitutional Reform and the Rebuilding of Native Nations.** Edited by Eric D. Lemont. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006. 343 pages. \$55.00 cloth; \$21.95 paper.

Constitutional reform is a topic of much discussion in Indian Country. Many Indian nations have written constitutions that were either promulgated as a result of the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) or were modeled after those set forth in this act. Often these constitutions were implemented with little input from the Indian community, and there are many instances of problems with the approval of tribal members. But times change, and Indian nations are now finding that these previously adopted constitutions may not meet their needs in this era of self-governance.

Although this movement is ongoing in Indian Country, little has been written to inform the process. Rather, much of what occurs in a particular tribe happens in a vacuum, with little exposure to the lessons learned from the efforts of other tribes. *American Indian Constitutional Reform* seeks to remedy this by looking at the efforts of a number of tribes to address perceived shortcomings in their tribal constitutions.

The preface of *American Indian Constitutional Reform* asserts that American Indian nations “are creating new constitutions to foster greater governmental stability and accountability, to increase citizen support of government, and to provide a firmer foundation for economic and political development” (xi). The book also proposes that community-wide discussions of tribal constitutions can be an important vehicle for resolving issues, such as membership criteria and voting rights, which may also separate and alienate tribal communities.

IRA constitutions generally reflect the dominant American model for government. They tend to centralize power in a tribal council and to rely on structured levels of accountability to a strong executive. They also generally fail to recognize or incorporate elements of tradition or culture in their structures.

As a result of these issues with the IRA model constitutions, the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development undertook a research project in 2000 that studied the constitutional reform movements in four Indian nations: the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, the Navajo Nation, the

Hualapai Nation, and the Northern Cheyenne tribe. The project included in-depth interviews with constitutional activists in each of the four tribes, and later a symposium was held at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government that included representatives from eighteen American Indian nations. This symposium then commissioned an additional study, which included American Indian constitutional reformers and academics in the field of American Indian law and tribal government. This 2001–2003 study became the basis of this book.

*American Indian Constitutional Reform* is an interesting mix of scholarly articles and grassroots observations. It juxtaposes research by well-known academics working in the field of American Indian law and government with the direct experiences of American Indian leaders and practitioners. If this were all that this book did it would be invaluable. However, it does much more than that.

Scholarly books, which raise and examine complicated issues, are often written for other scholars who assume and expect certain things. Rarely does a book begin from the premise that practitioners, elected officials, and scholars have something to say to each other. It is highly refreshing to find a scholarly book that approaches a political problem from both perspectives and seeks to inform each of the other's points of view.

The scholars whose chapters are included in this book assert viewpoints enlightened by years of research and work in the field of Native governance. These scholars include Duane Champagne, Carol Goldberg, David Wilkins, Joseph Kalt, and the late Elmer Rusco. These leading scholars examine the Native political process through both academic and practical lenses.

The practitioners present in-depth analyses from their years working with tribes on a national level. The book's editor, Eric Lemont, is an attorney and research fellow at the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, where he founded and directed its Initiative on American Indian Constitutional Reform. Other practitioners include Joseph Flies-Away and Steven Haberfeld. Constitutional reformers, including tribal chairs and Indian community activists, share their perspectives of their existing governmental structure, the reform movements, and the issues of sovereignty and struggle that their individual communities faced. All in all, this makes for very interesting reading.

*American Indian Constitutional Reform* proceeds from the premise that Native nations have gone through times of culture change, which has left them without unanimity of perspective. It presumes, perhaps rightly so in many instances, that a community-wide dialogue on basic ideas of the nature of government is necessary to bring some sense of consensus to the polity. This book further presumes that this dialogue should be in regard to a written document, a constitution, which will serve as an agreement on what the rule of law entails in that community.

With 65 percent of American Indians now urban for at least part of their lives, there is widespread detachment from tribal government. Even among many reservation-based American Indians there is alienation. The culture that used to exist—the knowledge of tradition, language, and what it meant to be a member of the people—has been lost to some extent. The question

of how to keep the traditions and culture alive in the young and in those who are removed, either physically or spiritually from the community is critical if American Indian governments are to prosper.

However, although *American Indian Constitutional Reform* discusses the process of reform at length, it does not address whether or not culture change is best addressed by focusing on changing the constitution. The idea that culture change and the resultant alienation of many from tribal government could be addressed by other means is not explored. Other approaches used by some American Indian communities to enhance societal integration and satisfaction with tribal government, including the integration of elders with youth programs or community involvement in the lives of those living outside the community are not studied. Rather, the basic presumption of the book, that community dialogue should be in reference to tribal constitutions, remains the focus of attention.

Of course, other modes of addressing culture change are not the focus of this book. Rather, *American Indian Constitutional Reform* brings together scholarly research and grassroots observation of constitutional change in a highly readable text. It sets a good precedent in the involvement of different people who bring different perspectives of the reform process. It serves as a model for work in Indian Country and is a valuable contribution to the body of research in the field of American Indian Constitutional Reform.

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**American Indian Rhetorics of Survivance: Word Medicine, Word Magic.** Edited by Ernest Stromberg. Pittsburg: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006. 286 pages. \$55.00 cloth; \$24.95 paper.

It is always a challenge to review edited books, because they tend to be either too loosely organized or too repetitive; they can also present a hazard for reviews when the quality of the various chapters varies so widely that generalizations become impossible. These dangers make reviewing this work all the more pleasurable. The chapters are clearly organized around a central theme. There is enough consistency among ideas in the various chapters to render the collective cohesive but not so much as to make it redundant, and the contributions are uniformly well written and smart. In short, this book is going to be an essential part of the library of all those interested in American Indian rhetoric, indigenous intellectual history, and Native *belles lettres*.

The rhetoric of and about American Indians is receiving increasing attention in rhetorical studies and public address, and this volume will provide a much needed foundation for future work in an area that remains characterized by fragmented studies of specific cases and with little shared theory or canon. This book really has two objectives: it provides something of an intellectual history focusing on American Indian rhetoric, and it situates American Indian rhetoric within a broader tradition of American intellectual history.