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REVIEWS

American Indian Politics and the American Political System. By David E. Wilkins. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001. 384 pages. \$85.00 cloth; \$28.95 paper.

American Indian Politics and the American Political System is a wonderful book—a much needed, and long overdue general text that compellingly depicts the nature of the political relationship between the American Indians and the United States. The work also covers—not in depth, but with enough attention to give a good introduction—the nature of intratribal politics. This is one book in which the glowing reviews on the back cover are not hyperbole. David Wilkins did, as the back cover asserts, succeed brilliantly in tackling what anyone at all familiar with the subject knows is an extraordinarily complex topic, full of paradoxical turns. Wilkins plunges straight to the heart of that complexity and paradox, first with illustrations of their nature, then using four “quandaries” of American Indian politics as an analytical cornerstone to construct this wonderfully rich and comprehensive, yet accessible general text on indigenous politics in America.

The text begins with four brief portraits of current relations between American Indians and the political systems of the dominant society. First is the 1999 Makah whale hunt and the furor that that it aroused among environmentalists and in the media. Second: the current fiasco over the BIA’s handling of tribal trust funds and individual Indian money accounts. Third is New York State Governor Pataki’s aborted “Operation Gallant Piper,” which in 1995 contemplated sending thousands of military personnel onto Indian lands to collect taxes. A struggle between the Clinton Administration and the judicial branch over an order to accommodate the religious rights of American Indians at Devil’s Rock in Wyoming rounds out this thumbnail contextualization of Indian affairs. These portraits offer brief but sophisticated presentations of the multiple fissures and fracture points between American Indians and the larger society, and is a prelude to Wilkins laying out the structure of the book.

An equally brief, equally thoughtful “Tour of Indian Peoples and Indian Lands” introduces students to basic, but critical questions: What comprises a tribe? Who is an American Indian? What are Indian lands? What is Indian

Country? Demographic charts help to establish whom this book covers. But it is in chapter two that, in a sense, the book properly begins. Here, Wilkins's key themes and analytic stances are introduced; they will run as a thread throughout the remainder of the book. "Indian Peoples Are Nations, Not Minorities" is the title of this chapter. In it, Wilkins lays out the premise of this book: that tribal nations have an extraconstitutional relationship to the United States that no other group possesses; that they relate to the United States principally through their treaties; that the treaty relationship is paramount; and that,

while tribal sovereignty is not beholden to or rooted in American constitutional law, a tribe's treaty rights are, at least in constitutional theory, the supreme law of the land and should be subject to full protection under the Constitution's rubric (p. 44).

This, of course, is the premise advocated with such clarity and force in *Nations Within: Past and Future of American Indian Sovereignty* (1984) by Vine Deloria Jr. and Clifford M. Lytle. Since Wilkins refers to Vine Deloria as a leading scholar of Indian affairs on numerous occasions in this book, and since Deloria's praise for the book graces its back cover, one can assume that he has had a powerful influence on Wilkins's own reading of Indian affairs. Wilkins uses the premise of Indian nationhood as the bright line against which the messiness of the federal and state governments' acknowledgment of tribal sovereignty is repeatedly contrasted throughout the book. That bright line, crucially, is balanced out by what will become the analytical cornerstone of the book: four quandaries for the tribes that arise out of the federal government's vacillation between respect for the internal sovereignty of the tribes on the one hand and its attempts to bring tribalism to an end by assimilating individual Indians into the American body politic on the other.

For Wilkins, these four quandaries arise from: (1) the way tribal governments must act both as governments and as the entity running the tribes' business ventures; (2) the fact that tribes must exercise their sovereignty in the face of the federal government's paternalistic reading of its own role in protecting the tribes under the trust doctrine; (3) the tensions between the extraconstitutional standing of the tribes and the fact that American Indians are American citizens; and (4) the jurisdictional dance (Wilkins calls it a minuet) that arises because lands within the boundaries of the Indian tribes' territorial reach have become home to members of the dominant society, which insists on retaining jurisdiction over its non-Indian American citizens. This last jurisdictional dilemma, perhaps the most difficult quandary of all, leads to what Wilkins calls "federal indeterminacies"—the contradictory, ambivalent responses by the federal government to tribal sovereignty.

At the end of this keynote chapter, Wilkins reiterates the message that Indian peoples are nations, not minorities. He writes that he intends to bring clarity to the status and internal and external powers of tribal nations "as the First Nations in the Americas, nations who have entered into distinctive economic and political relations with other tribes, interests groups, the states, and the federal government" (p. 62). This he seeks to accomplish,

[b]y unbraiding and closely examining the four quandaries discussed as well as the issue of treble citizenship for indigenous peoples, the national or sovereign status of indigenous politics, and the federal government's inconsistent understanding of its relationship to tribes. (p. 62)

What then follows in the chapters is an immensely rich survey of Indian politics, both intratribal politics and the politics of relating to the American state and federal governments, in which Wilkins accomplishes an ongoing analytical "unbraiding." The chapters cover the following ground: the actors in American politics; the history of federal Indian policy; the form and working of indigenous governments past and present; Indian political economy; Indian interest-group activity and activism; and, finally, a chapter on Indians, images, and the media. The final chapter, "Indigenous Nations and the American Political System," offers a final rounding out of the whole. By using this analytical framework, Wilkins is truly able to explore the multiple facets of his topic in ways both rich, nuanced, and immensely thoughtful. This is as good as it gets for a general text.

And now, having given what I hope is a good sense of the book and my admiration for it, I want to turn again to its central animating and analytical device: the "bright clean line" of Indian sovereignty against which the messy "indeterminacies" of federal Indian policy are juxtaposed. I find this an issue to be one that calls for the kind of care and thoughtfulness that Wilkins evinces in his fine book, for this device operates at not just one, but two levels: the analytical *and* ideological. And for the very reason that it does operate at both levels, it deserves careful consideration.

As an analytical device, Wilson's assertion that tribes are essentially the "nations within" of which Vine Deloria has written in the past operates exactly as would a Weberian "ideal type." Against the ideal, Wilkins can illuminate by comparisons and contrasts; and this he does with insights that are finely gauged, challenging, thought-provoking, and extensive. However, Wilkins goes beyond treating the statement that Indians are nations within a larger nation as merely an analytical device. It stands in a higher plane than that, as asserted fact, the "truth" of the matter. Federal Indian law—with its assertions of federal plenary power, its muddled and muddied understanding of the trust responsibility, and its "indeterminate manner" in response to the indigenous nations and their claim to sovereignty—is presented therefore as a series of smaller and larger deviations not just from an analytical "ideal type" but from something much more serious and significant: the actual fact of things. Hence the highlighting of the one Supreme Court case, *Talton v. Mayes*, which shows the greatest fidelity to this truth and is reprinted in the appendix. Yet, as Wilkins himself admits, the law's "indeterminacies" are themselves rooted in "legal precedent and political principles" (p. 58). They are, supposedly, the product of searching for a societal consensus—not a truth that stands outside and beyond the machinations of politics, precedent, and power structures, but one that stands from within those things: a societal "truth," therefore, necessarily bound to the beliefs of the moment as best they can be worked out by

the highest legal authority of the society. Necessarily, therefore—as Wilkins well knows, and in fact stresses repeatedly throughout the text—*Talton v. Mayes*' reading of the tribal status by the Supreme Court is one among many contradictory rulings by the Court on tribal sovereignty. To choose to highlight this and only this ruling because it, among all the Supreme Court rulings, comes closest to the nationhood thesis is an act of advocacy. There is nothing wrong with advocacy at all, of course, but since the book never positions itself in this role, this lack of clarity about the advocacy within the book's covers is bothersome.

Thus, as someone who supports tribal sovereignty, but who does so, quite frankly, as an outsider, a non-Indian, I find myself torn between two loyalties. One is to the ideal—the claim—of tribal sovereignty. As a claim, it is deeply rooted in history and equally rooted in justice for the American Indians. On the grounds of history and justice, it is a claim with great and, to my mind, compelling power. Nevertheless, it *is* a claim. By positing this claim as fact, Wilkins must pay a price. He is forced to sidestep both the historical circumstances of that claim and the moral principles that underlie it. As posited in this book, tribal nationhood simply *is*. That both undercuts the claim's power, in my view, and misstates it. A rhetorical device is being wielded in a book that gives no hint of its rhetoric and ideology. "So what," one might say. "Texts are never neutral. Inserting a claim as fact is nothing different from what the colonizers have done for centuries." Even more, that person could argue, Wilkins has the force of justice on his side. When the Supreme Court chooses not to recognize and uphold the tribes' status as internal nations, it does so as part of the grossly inequitable power relationship that exists between the dominant society and the tribes. All those statements would be true. Nevertheless, the use of this device is a deviation from the purest norms of scholarship. While understandable given Wilkins's clear commitment to tribal sovereignty, it also, and unfortunately, exposes the book to an unneeded vulnerability.

Having said that, I cannot praise this book too highly. This is a work that I very much hope will enjoy widespread use across this nation as a way of educating Americans about the American Indian tribes as this nation's third sovereigns. This topic is sorely in need of the kind of light that this book sheds.

Christine Gray

American Indians and the Urban Experience. Edited by Susan Lobo and Kurt Peters. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2001. 320 pages. \$69.00 cloth; \$25.95 paper.

While on sabbatical this year, I spent one month on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota, a home of the Lakota people. As a non-Indian, I came away from that rural reservation experience with the clear knowledge that I simply could not know. The intricacies and complexities of life at Pine Ridge were vast and intermingled, where adjective opposites (hopeful/hope-