
José Barreiro, Tim Johnson, eds. *America is Indian Country: Opinions and Perspectives from Indian Country Today*.

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Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing. Pp. 338. ISBN: 13 978-1-55591-537-7

- 1 Indian Country Today is—or, better, was—the former name of what is now Indian Country Today Media Network, an online website and weekly newsletter that provides Native people across North America with an easily accessible news source over a variety of topics affecting American Indian people in the U.S., from politics and business to sports and environment. Starting in 1981, Indian Country Today remained a print weekly magazine until 2013 when it went online-only, after having moved its headquarters from the Oneida County in New York State to New York City two years earlier. The volume herein reviewed collects a selection of editorials and commentaries from the pages of Indian Country Today from 2000 to 2004. The year span is not arbitrary, since starting from January 1, 2000, the magazine was rededicated with a new ownership and editorial line, in the belief that “Indian country deserved a national newspaper that could communicate to its readership with the highest standards of editorial excellence” (xvii). Moreover, the first years of the new

century saw a widely increased visibility of Native American life and experience across a variety of fields, culminating in the opening of the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. in 2004. As stated in the introduction, though it can provide only a limited selection of pieces from those momentous years, the volume is meant “as a reference source of evolving American Indian policy and of American Indian opinion rendered on history at the time of its making” (xxi).

The book is divided into 10 chapters that cover the most relevant issues affecting the present-day lives of indigenous peoples in the United States—from the sustenance of tribal sovereignty to the challenges posed by US federal justice, from tribal participation in the political life of the country to the development of pan-indigenous networks of support across the Americas, from environmental management and protection to the global dimension of tribal existence. Within each chapter, the pieces are neatly separated in two sections, according to whether they are weekly editorials or commentary essays. The first are authored by senior editor José Barreiro and executive editor Tim Johnson, whereas the second bear the signature of various contributors, among whom are regular columnists for the magazine such as Katsi Cook, Susan Shown Harjo, John C. Mohawk, Steven Newcomb, Charles E. Trimble, Rachel Attituq Qitsualik, and others. The volume is also enriched by the cartoons of Oglala Lakota artist Marty Two Bull, which fill up the blank pages separating the chapters with bitingly ironical and intelligently provocative illustrations.

Indian sovereignty is the central idea that undergirds the pieces in the first chapter. Discussed under a variety of different declinations (political, educational, economical), it emerges once again as the primal, communal cornerstone sustaining the “eternal need to carry the goodwill of the Native peoples upon whose land, blood, and resources the country [the United States] was built” (4). The contributions in chapter 2 show that the federal recognition and support of tribal self-governance springing from the principle of tribal sovereignty cannot be seen as a given, but rather as something that “must be constantly energized” (33) by Indian people across a variety of fields, in order to avoid the throwbacks represented, for example, by federally-established criteria for defining Indian identity (blood quantum) and determining the needs of indigenous communities. As both the editorials and commentaries in chapter 3 testify, US justice and the US legal system

constitute two primary sites where such vigilance must be constantly exerted, especially in light of the history of legal disputes between the states and Indian tribes, wherein the Supreme Court has often ruled so as to erode the sovereignty of the latter to the advantage of the former. And despite what an external observer might think, the respect and support of tribal prerogatives has little to do with leaning more toward one political banner than toward another. As an editorial in chapter 4 says, “the basis of American Indian tribal rights goes beyond the left and right of the political spectrum” (107), even though a commentator in the following section argues that a Republican federal government is particularly “good for Indians”—and certainly one is quite curious to learn if such a statement (dating back to November 2002) holds more or less true at the present moment, after 13 years in which Indian country has had the chance to gauge the effects of the two-term administration of a Republican president, immediately followed by that of a Democrat now drawing to its close. The pieces in chapter 5 work toward an invitation for tribal voices to engage media opportunities in order to contrast negatively-biased views on Indian matters coming from mainstream journalism. The faith in the power of the word is also a basic premise of the editorial and commentaries in chapter 6, where the focus is on the capacity and resourcefulness of indigenous people to build networks across the two hemispheres, so that native populations may set up a common ground for social, economic, and political actions and develop strategic alliances in order to safeguard their prerogatives and avoid that the tragedies of Indian history might be reiterated. On an even wider scale, chapter 7 collects contributions showing the role that indigenous people have been playing on an international arena, as well as the contribution that an honest and non-paternalistic recognition of their issues may help sustain the present world’s arduous path toward peace and harmony. The articles in chapter 8 regard the issue of native people’s ethical relationship with the environment, dispelling the worn-out stereotype of the “ecological Indian” and providing a selection of the contemporary challenges Indian tribes have had to face in the attempt to continue “eco-systemic cultures shaped by languages and cosmologies at one with earth, sky, climate, and nature” (231). Chapter 9 features contributions that highlight the value of Indian life in the Americas, and underline the sense of interconnectedness between

individual and community, material and spiritual life, change and tradition. Illustrating the image of “returning the gift to the people,” whereby the individual achievements find their most meaningful realization when put to the service of the larger human circle, the final chapter honors the lives of some of the “heroes” of Indian country that through their actions and works contributed to sustain the future of the succeeding generations—from late journalist Richard V. LaCourse to the Navajo ‘Code Talkers’ serving in World War II.

Through its careful selection of articles and editorials, *America is Indian Country* provides the common observer (and probably even more so the non-Native one) with a thorough view of the issues that most affect Native American life in the present-day United States. It stresses the continuing relevance of a number of key-issues that have become common currency since the political activism of the 1960s and 1970s but that need constant monitoring and support by the people, such as tribal sovereignty, self-determination, land rights, environmental protection. Alongside that, the pieces in the volume also set up a dialogue on which actions are to be taken and which principles are to be followed while coping with more practical questions like the management of gaming revenues or the development of transnational networks among indigenous peoples. Underlying all the contributions in the volume is the awareness that indigenous America is the pulsing heart of the continent, and has to bear this responsibility not with slackening attitudes but through a continuous call for action. In the process of building up a sustainable future for all the American people, it is and will always be unthinkable to ignore the voices coming from the land as these are interpreted by its first inhabitants.

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