



Thomas Clarkin. *Federal Indian Policy in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, 1961-1969*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001. xv + 376 pp. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8263-2262-3.

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## From Termination towards Self-Determination: 1960s Federal Indian Policy

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Over the past two decades, historians have made a concerted effort to trace the development of twentieth-century federal Indian policy. Building on the foundation provided by Francis Paul Prucha,[1] in-depth studies of specific decades or periods have furthered our understanding of the people, events, and decisions governing United States-Indian relations.[2] Scholars of American Indians have sometimes criticized this focus on policy, noting that other topics go neglected in favor of works that tends to be top-down, depend too heavily on colonial sources, and lack Indian actors. Yet, inquiries into twentieth-century American Indian history are typically enriched when placed against a policy backdrop. Furthermore, recent work lays claim to “policy studies” without apology, showing that Indian actors, oral history, and a grass-roots focus can invigorate the genre.[3]

Thomas Clarkin’s *Federal Indian Policy in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, 1961-1969* represents another brick in the wall of policy studies. Based on his examination of numerous archival collections, most of them generated by politicians and federal bureaucrats, Clarkin argues that the 1960s was a critical period during which federal Indian policy moved away from the “termination” fervor of the 1950s and towards the principles of “self-determination” favored in the 1970s. At times, the progress of involving Indian people in the creation and implementation of federal policy was painfully slow, due to the lingering paternalism of liberal politicians and bureaucrats, in addition to the powerful influence exerted by western senators continuing to support the withdrawal of federal recognition from individual tribes. This dynamic resulted in a gap between the goals of policy and the gains that it generated. Nevertheless, the desire of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations to redefine relations with Indian peoples, the

work of key politicians and bureaucrats, new and innovative programs, and the activism of Indian people and their advocates marked the 1960s as a period of transition to the greater achievements of the following decade.

For many readers interested in twentieth-century American Indian history, much of Clarkin’s book will prove informative. Moving in chronological progression, Clarkin’s chapters delve deeply into the major policy issues of the period by reconstructing key controversies, decisions, meetings, conferences, and congressional activities. Particular attention is paid to the politics and personalities within the Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), as well as to the workings of the Senate and House Interior Committees. Clarkin’s analysis is light at times, while at others it is sharp and reflective of the author’s support for the movement towards self-determination. Some of the book’s revelations are especially striking. For instance, during the 1960s Indian groups lobbied the federal government with increasing savvy, thereby gaining new influence over the formation of policy. Furthermore, Indian peoples learned to take advantage of a variety of federal programs, such as those administered by the Office of Economic Opportunity, which freed them from the paternalism of the BIA and trained a generation of Indian professionals and bureaucrats. Both of these trends accelerated not only during the 1970s, which Clarkin suggests, but also through the turn of the next century.

For other readers, this focused and detail-oriented approach may be understood as a weakness. The minutia of how federal Indian policy developed will fail to engage scholars seeking to understand 1960s federal Indian policy within a larger context. For example, Clarkin’s claim that his work provides insights into the “workings of [the Kennedy and Johnson] administrations and into the controversial liberal programs of the contentious 1960s” (p. xii) is not developed after the introduction. Even from

the standpoint of policy studies, Clarkin's vision is relatively limited. While the book convincingly links the 1950s with the 1970s, there are few references to the policy precedents before World War Two, or discussion of how policy formulated in the 1960s had influence beyond the 1970s. These critiques aside, Clarkin has written an important history and a valuable reference that deserves a place on the shelf beside other works of federal Indian policy.

#### Notes

[1]. Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984).

[2]. Kenneth R. Philp, *Termination Revisited: American Indians on the Trail to Self-Determination, 1933-1953* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999); Donald L. Fixico, *Termination and Relocation: Federal Indian Policy, 1945-1960* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986); George Pierre Castile, *To Show Heart: Native*

*American Self-Determination and Federal Indian Policy, 1960-1975* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1988).

[3]. Daniel M. Cobb, "'Us Indians Understand the Basics': Oklahoma Indians and the Politics of Community Action, 1964-1970," *Western Historical Quarterly* 33:1 (Spring 2002): pp. 41-66; Troy R. Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island: Indian Self-Determination and the Rise of Indian Activism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996); Dean J. Kotlowski, "Alcatraz, Wounded Knee, and Beyond: The Nixon and Ford Administrations Respond to Native American Protest," *Pacific Historical Review* 72:2 (May 2003): pp. 201-227.

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