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Book Review: *The State of the Native Nations: Conditions under U.S. Policies of Self-Determination* By The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development

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The State of the Native Nations: Conditions under U.S. Policies of Self-Determination. By The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. xxii + 394 pp. Tables, figures, maps, photographs, index. $59.95 cloth, $29.95 paper.

If ever a text should be required for a foundational American Indian Studies course, *The State of the Native Nations* is such a book. The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development has produced a remarkably comprehensive yet eminently accessible description of Indian Country in the 21st century. This book stands in stark contrast to much of the scholarship in American Indian Studies, which seems intellectually paralyzed by a sense of victimhood. While the authors

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fully acknowledge the centuries of mistreatment, cultural suppression, disenfranchisement, and deleterious federal policies that left many tribes dependent on a paternalistic federal government, the main thrust of the book is a discussion of what tribes have been able to accomplish in spite of that history.

The State of the Native Nations is organized around four core elements of what its authors refer to as Nation Building. The book highlights how tribes are

- Working to strengthen their institutions of governance to more effectively assert their sovereignty
- Diversifying their economic activities to better improve their citizens' well-being
- Crafting innovative social policies by drawing upon the experience of both the Indian and non-Indian worlds
- Tapping and developing their cultural resources—both traditional and emergent

The first section is a discussion of tribes as nations, focusing on tribal governmental development, tribal efforts to maintain jurisdiction, and the complex relationships among tribal governments, the federal government, and the states. Rather than a cursory treatment, however, the authors provide concrete examples such as the tribal laws governing the operation of tribal courts in South Dakota (Cheyenne River Sioux) and Oklahoma (Chickasaw and Citizen Potawatomi Nation).

The book is also full of examples of tribal economic diversification. The case study on Ho-Chunk, Inc. discusses how the Winnebago tribe successfully diversified its economy beyond gaming and into long-term self-sustaining endeavors. Other examples include the Cheyenne River Sioux development of a buffalo management corporation and the development of Native Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) throughout Indian Country, but particularly in the Great Plains.

In addition to the rich descriptive material throughout *The State of the Native Nations*, the book is also filled with empirical data not readily available anywhere else, particularly in the area of economic development. In the discussion of gaming, for example, the book notes how gaming operations at Standing Rock helped the tribe double its on-reservation employment levels.

While much of the volume is focused on the governmental and economic components of Nation Building, it does include substantive chapters on environmental management, education, health, family support, arts, and culture, as well as excellent chapters on Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and urban Indians.

The State of the Native Nations stands alone as a comprehensive discussion of the efforts, obstacles, and accomplishments of tribal leaders who are shaping Indian Country by developing and implementing strategies of self-determination in response to contemporary federal policies. Packed with both practical and scholarly insights, it is a must-read for anyone interested in Indian Country in the 21st century. **Gavin Clarkson (Choctaw/Cherokee)**, *University of Houston Law Center.*

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