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## Review of Breaking the Iron Bonds: Indian Control of Energy Development.

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*Breaking the Iron Bonds: Indian Control of Energy Development.* By Marjane Ambler. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1990. Preface, maps, illustrations, appendices, notes, selected bibliography, index. xvi + 351 pp. \$35.00.

Few things were as exhilarating for Indian tribes in the last twenty years, or as controversial, as energy development. There has long been a need for a worthy successor to Jorgensen's critical collection, *Native Americans and Energy Development II* (Joseph G. Jorgensen, ed. [Boston: Anthropology Resource Center, 1984]). Unfortunately, Ambler does not meet the challenge.

*Breaking the Iron Bonds* contains a mountain of detail on the participation of tribal officials in development decisions but scarcely a word as to whether reservation Indians are materially any better off today as a result. Basic comparative statistics on Indian reservation resources and socio-economic conditions are lacking. Ambler indeed apologizes at one point (p. 89) that data on mineral production are unavailable. Not only are they available, but published. (See Russel L. Barsh, "Indian Resources and the National Economy: Business Cycles and Policy Cycles," *Policy Studies Journal* 16 [4]: 799-825 [1988].)

Ambler likewise fails to explore the internal social and political complexity of these decisions within the tribes themselves. Like other "developing" economies still dominated by the vestiges of colonialism and aid-dependence, reservations are undergoing rapid changes in the

nature and diversity of interest groups. Traditionalists, bureaucratic elites, revolutionaries, an emerging middle-class, and legions of consultants compete for influence. Ambler glides over this in a few pages, referring only briefly to the existence of "protests" and "factions." She assures us, without substantiation, that "most" Indians support existing tribal regimes and leadership.

The most interesting question in development economics is the relationship between structural economic change and changes in social and political institutions. How people make a living affects their culture, the distribution of power, and the nature of leadership. Change also breeds conflict. Certainly this has been true in Indian country. Controversy over the ARCO petroleum lease on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation, marred by violence, is discussed here without any hint that it involved more than a polite intellectual disagreement. The bitter controversy over the relocation of Navajos from Black Mesa coal lands is barely mentioned, although it was serious enough to be the subject of a United Nations human-rights study ("Relocation of Navajo and Hopi Families," U.N. Document E/CN.4/Sub.2/1989/35 [Parts I and II]).

Preoccupied with showing that tribal governments have gained great legal control of reservation energy resources over the past twenty years, *Breaking the Iron Bonds* does not examine the use of this power. It seems to be assumed that Indians are better off. This is a little like assuming that decolonization solved the economic problems of the Third World.

Confronted with the dynamism and contradictions of modern Indian politics, Ambler tells us "it is impossible to generalize about tribes and their attitudes towards energy development." Of course, tribes differ. But their differences are neither random nor unimportant. Would we be satisfied with a book on Africa or Latin America that concluded, simply, that these countries have gained more legal control over their own territories since 1960, and that some of them are more in favor of free-market capitalism than others, at least some of the time?

*Breaking the Iron Bonds* is a competent introduction to the diversity and legal complexity of reservation energy development, but it leaves too many of the most interesting and important questions unanswered.

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