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Review of *Termination Revisited: American Indians on the Trail to Self-Determination, 1933-1953* By Kenneth R. Philp

Warren Metcalf

University of Oklahoma, wmetcalf@ou.edu

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Termination Revisited: American Indians on the Trail to Self-Determination, 1933-1953. By Kenneth R. Philp. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999. Photographs, tables, notes, bibliography, index. xv + 247 pp. \$55.00.

As the title suggests, *Termination Revisited* evaluates the short-lived policy to terminate the trust relationship between the federal government and Indian tribes. In keeping with his earlier work on this subject, Philp contends that termination grew out of the functional shortcomings of the Indian Reorganization Act, which failed to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse Indian population. After World War II, Indian advocates clamored for a new direction in policy, and BIA Commissioner Dillon S. Myer sought to provide it in the form of termination. Philp argues that Myer's authoritarian tendencies and

bureaucratic ineptitude undercut the position of like-minded conservatives and redirected federal policy towards self-determination.

The underlying issue in this debate centered on the true nature of the trust relationship. According to Philp, key Indian leaders believed that federal guardianship emanated from solemn treaties and that protection should never be removed. Members of Congress and BIA officials, on the other hand, believing that indefinite wardship status retarded Indian advancement into the broader society, viewed the trust relationship as a transitory oversight responsibility.

Unfortunately, Philp never clarifies his own position on this issue. His main contention is that vastly changed conditions in the United States required new policy initiatives, especially in light of the failures of the Indian Reorganization Act. Bolstering his argument with a chapter on the disasters that befell the Navajo Tribe in the 1940s, he implies, whether intended or not, that the Navajo suffered from the shortsightedness of former Commissioner John Collier's New Deal agenda. Yet the Navajo hardly serve as an adequate example of the failures of the IRA, since they did not ratify it. Moreover, as the author concedes, the Navajos' "greatest achievement was to persuade the federal government to design a comprehensive plan to develop reservation resources" which resulted in the \$88.7 million Navajo-Hopi Rehabilitation Act of 1950. In other words, the solution to the Navajo problem in that era came in the form of massive assistance and continued federal involvement, rather than an effort to sever the trust relationship.

Philp notes that the BIA exercised "virtually absolute power over Indians in places remote from public surveillance," and that when Indians were asked to participate in policy formulation they did so "merely as rubber stamps" for BIA initiatives. Quoting John Embree, he contends that the indirect rule of the Indian Reorganization Act did not encourage self-reliance or personal initiative;

rather, it gave Indians only the "illusion of governing their own affairs."

Subsequent chapters on the commissionership of Dillon S. Myer do not clarify matters. Philp portrays Myer as a rational bureaucrat who sought an orderly, timed withdrawal from federal guardianship as a means of liberating Indians from government paternalism. In this Myer was opposed by National Congress of American Indian leaders who emphasized that federal trusteeship, combined with self-government, constituted vested legal rights for Indian tribes. But Myer could never quite see it that way. Philp concludes that Myer never fostered self-determination "because of a credibility gap between his rhetoric and the reality of his performance."

WARREN METCALF
Department of History
University of Oklahoma