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Review of *The Indian Reorganization Act: Congresses and Bills* Edited by Vine Deloria Jr.

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The Indian Reorganization Act: Congresses and Bills. Edited by Vine Deloria Jr. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002. xvii + 434 pp. Tables, index. \$75.00 cloth.

Federal Indian policy has always been cyclical and often at opposite ends of a spectrum defined by tribal values. The treaty era, when tribal land holdings were reduced and tribes confined to reservations, and the General Allotment Act of 1887, designed to break up and further reduce tribal land holdings, and the termination era, when some tribes and their reservations were legislated out of existence, occupy the lower level of those cycles. The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, also known as the Wheeler-Howard Act, has always been seen as containing some of the most enlightened and positive policies.

The Indian Reorganization Act came about at a time when many traditional forms of tribal government had been seriously damaged, if not destroyed, by federal policies. The act is widely known today for its provisions that assisted tribes in defining and establishing constitutional forms of government—a step perceived as important for both internal and external purposes. One might assume that the Indian Reorganization Act was simply drafted in the machinery of the federal government and passed by Congress. That was not the case.

As originally framed, the act was designed to remedy the multitude of ills inflicted by the allotment policy over the previous forty-seven years, including the loss of over 90,000,000 acres of land to tribal ownership. Radical to Indian and non-Indian alike, the proposals were consequently controversial. The loss of allotments concerned some Indians. “Socialism and communism in the rankest sense” concerned some non-Indians.

Federal officials held unprecedented regional meetings (congresses) to explain the bill to tribal representatives and to receive their comments. Deloria’s book contains the minutes of those congresses where tribal concerns, hopes, and fears about the concepts within the legislation were voiced. As a result, some of the most weighty provisions were deleted.

The Plains Congress, held at the Rapid City Indian School from March 2 through 5, 1934, was the first. John Collier later wrote that the tribal representatives who attended brought “a deep and strong movement of the human spirit and of applied intelligence.” Comparisons of the bill drafted to the bill passed and the reasons for the changes make for an interesting study. Deloria’s book provides important historical perspectives that will be of interest to tribal leaders, historians, scholars, and attorneys. **Douglas Nash**, *Of Counsel, Holland & Hart, Boise, Idaho*.