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Book Review: The Corporation and the Indian

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BOOK REVIEW

The Corporation and the Indian, H. Craig Miner, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, Missouri, 1976.

All school children in Oklahoma learn that the state of Oklahoma was formed from the land belonging to a group of sovereign Indian nation states. A question rarely asked today is what led to the breakup of these sovereign entities. Most non-Indians and presumably some Indians assume a natural law or evolutionary process to have been at work which resulted in an inevitable breakup of the Indian nation states. This type of ethnocentricity is, of course, prevalent in most societies and ours is no exception.

This book is an analysis of the relationships between corporate ventures in Indian Territory and the inhabitants of that territory. The major premise of the book is that the most important factor in the loss of tribal sovereignty was the industrialization of Indian Territory. This loss of sovereignty was caused by interaction of complex factors. This book presents these factors in an analytical and detailed manner. The author presents a historical analysis of the effect of rail, coal, cattle, and oil corporations upon Indian Territory.

Starting with various treaties made in 1866, the beginnings of the influence of the railroads is traced and the role of Indian involvement well documented. A balanced presentation is given by pointing out the effect of the support of certain national councils in consenting to the entrance of railroads. The book is much too detailed in its dealings with acquisition of specific grants of rights to the railroads in Indian Territory, which tends to detract from the readability of the book.

Several problems that beset Indian Territory resulting from the introduction of the railroad are discussed. Among these are violence, prostitution, and the taking of timber. The author also points out the role of attorneys in representing both factions in the efforts of the railroads to gain entrances to Indian Territory, and the leasing operations of coal companies is set out in detail.

An important factor in the eventual loss of sovereignty appears to be the liberality of the Indians in allowing citizens by marriage to participate in the decision-making process. The support of these non-Indian citizens, coupled with "progressives" among the Indians, resulted in a picture of total Indian support for corporate entry into Indian Territory. This was certainly not the case with tribal fullbloods and probably not the position of tribal leaders.

Arguments supporting the concepts of territorial status began to surface in the 1870's. The author sets out a variety of details concerning territorial status leading to the conclusion that "[u]ltimately, the territorial Ring gained its power from the inability of the American people to abide enclaves of significant cultural or economic variation from the Mormons through the rest of the spectrum."

The importance of the cattle syndicates is analyzed. In this area of endeavor, Indians were expected to be proficient. An unsuccessful effort at tax collection was attempted on grazing privileges. The confusion resulting from unsuccessful attempts to collect taxes led to the introduction of cattle corporations. Erosion by corporate activity of an area of endeavor in which the Indian could compete with the surrounding white society was an important factor in the loss of sovereignty.

The last major corporate activity with which the native governments had to deal was oil exploration. Again, the Indians attempted to organize native companies; however, they were not successful in competing with the advancing white society. As usual, the Indians were divided over the issues concerning oil explorations in Indian Territory.

Summarizing the corporate intrusion and loss of sovereignty, the author lists six factors of importance: tribal citizenship, not degree of blood was determinative for participation in tribal dealings; lack of unified opposition to corporate development; lack of support by the federal government of Indian sovereignty; ethnocentricity of the American industrial society; informal agreements allowing corporations to gain vested interest; and lack of time for Indians to grasp corporate impact on sovereignty.

A criticism of the book is the over-attention to detail. Readability becomes a problem due to the reliance on source material in text. Overall, though, the trends and concepts developed are informative.

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