



Sequoyah Rising: Problems in Post-Colonial Tribal Governance

Steve Russell

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Since 1789, the United States has had an "Indian problem." Since 1492, the Indians have had a colonial problem. It's the same problem. The two sides of the problem typically relate to each other from their respective defensive crouches, and particularly the Indian side has been too fearful, in this atmosphere, to engage in constructive self-criticism. We demand self-determination while knowing in our private interactions that our tribal governments are not handling the degree of self-determination we have now in a way that satisfies most of the governed. Sequoyah Rising is the first book to address the democracy deficit in tribal governments directly but from an Indian point of view. Other attempts to deal with the question have typically been by non-Indians intent on portraying tribal governments as bastions of racial privilege and having as their object not reform but destruction. If democratic theories underlying the US Constitution have American Indian origins, this book argues, Indians should be able to govern themselves in the 21st century in a democratic and transparent manner. Nothing written here is to absolve the US government from responsibility for the homicides, the thefts, and the broken promises, and much of that ignominious history is recounted. However, the purpose is to help Indian nations do the best they can with what they have, understanding that the most important milestone towards a return to freedom will be an end to dependence. In the Supreme Court, the rights of Indians have proceeded in the opposite direction from the rights of other minorities, becoming less intellectually coherent and less protective of Indian rights whether asserted individually or collectively. The famous cases that memorialize the victories of the mainstream civil rights movement simply have no analogs in federal Indian law. Therefore, it will probably be necessary at some point to win our freedom the same way the former slaves did, by exhibiting the courage demanded by militant nonviolence.

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