



BOOK REVIEW:

David R. M. Beck, *Bribed With Our Own Money: Federal Abuse of American Indian Funds in the Termination Era*. University of Nebraska Press, 2024. 318 pages. ISBN 978-1-4962-3775-0.

Mary Klann, *Wardship and the Welfare State: Native Americans and the Formation of First-Class Citizenship in Mid-Twentieth-Century America*. University of Nebraska Press, 2024. 326 pages. ISBN 978-1-4962-1817-9.

The federal recognition of American Indian tribes in the United States is a contentious and often misunderstood system, which can be construed either as maintaining state control over Indigenous peoples or embodying treaty relationships with them. Forms of state recognition have been particularly heavily critiqued and criticized in Indigenous Studies scholarship of the last fifteen years. Most notably, Glenn Coulthard describes recognition as “a field of power through which colonial relations are produced and maintained” (17). Yet while federal recognition arguably maintains and legitimizes settler-colonial dominion over Indigenous nations, attempts to dismantle systems of recognition in the past have led to disaster. The development and implementation of termination policy in the mid-twentieth-century United States is an instructive example of this. Despite federal claims that the termination of the federal trust status of American Indian tribes would lead to Indigenous people receiving all of the rights associated with American citizenship, termination is widely recognized as having had devastating consequences. For terminated tribes, losing federal trust status led to the imposition of land taxes and subsequent major losses of land, as well as the end of social, health and educational services provided by the federal government.

Mary Klann’s *Wardship and the Welfare State* and David R. M. Beck’s *Bribed With Our Own Money*, both published by the University of Nebraska Press in the spring of 2024, are welcome new additions to scholarship on this distressing period of Indigenous history in the United States. These works help us understand why termination was implemented in the first place, why specific tribes were targeted for the removal of trust status, and how Native nations, individuals, and activists navigated federal policy in the era in order to reach their own social and political ends. In engaging with the termination era, however, the books take two very different approaches: Klann focuses on broadening the story of termination and bringing it firmly into the context of post-WWII United States welfare policies while Beck’s book hones tightly in on federal abuses of Indigenous money and ways in which tribes were coerced into accepting the termination of their trust status.

Klann does not frame *Wardship and the Welfare State* as a book explicitly about termination, but rather presents her work as situating Indian policy within a broader framework of mid-twentieth-century US domestic policy. The book is organized into roughly thematic chapters, with the first serving as an accessible introduction to the wardship relationship between Native people

and the federal government of the United States. Wardship, as Klann summarizes in her conclusion, was and is “the primary reciprocal relationship between Native people and the United States” (211). The focus on wardship, and the understandings and intersections of citizenship with that relationship in the mid-twentieth century, is what Klann offers as her main contribution to scholarship on both Native history and United States history more broadly. Subsequent chapters explore both the ideas and beliefs surrounding Indigenous life and communities held by state officials, and the different ways in which Native people navigated the intersecting and sometimes conflicting systems imposed through Indian policy and welfare policy.

Chapter two examines eleven “competency bills” that failed to be passed by the US House of Representatives between 1945 and 1955. These bills would have allowed individual Native people to sever their trust relationship with the federal government. The proponents of the bills viewed Indian wardship as dependency on the federal government and saw the granting of “competency” as a way to emancipate individuals and guide them toward so-called “full citizenship.” As far as I am aware, these failed competency bills—a key stepping stone towards the development of the broader policy of termination—have not been analyzed in depth elsewhere. In Klann’s assessment, evaluating these helps unpack what was meant by first-class citizenship in later termination rhetoric. The chapter also introduces what Klann terms the “*doxa* of Indian poverty knowledge—the assumptions, stereotypes, and ideologies that undergirded decades of Indian policy research and reform efforts on Native poverty” (212). In doing so, she builds on Alice O’Connor’s concept of poverty knowledge, arguing that the stereotypes linked to Indigenous people’s wealth or lack thereof constitute their own set of beliefs.

Chapters three and four both hone in on welfare applications and how Native people navigated the dual systems of welfare policy and Indian policy. Chapter three explores how Indigenous individuals sought support from the BIA in applying for welfare programs, while chapter four specifically highlights the additional challenges faced by Native women in securing this support. As Klann writes, “[t]he overlapping *doxa* behind Indian poverty knowledge and gendered welfare dependency did not make it easy for Native women to receive needs-based welfare benefits such as ADC [Aid to Dependent Children]” (123).

In chapter five, Klann convincingly shows how the GI Bill impacted Native veterans differently from non-Native veterans, with its provisions aimed at moving Native veterans toward assimilation. Yet Klann demonstrates that some Native veterans instead used the provisions of the GI Bill to attend Indian boarding schools and remain close to their homelands and families. In this chapter Klann additionally argues that wardship “shaped the decisions that Native veterans made about their GI Bill benefits” (133). In doing so, she refers to a 1946 statement by the organization of Navajo Veterans of Foreign Wars, which refers to obligations outlined in the 1868 Treaty of Fort Sumner. Instances like this, where the term was not actually used, raise the question of whether wardship was as central to Native conceptualizations of their relationship to the settler state as Klann claims.

Chapters six and seven take a slightly different approach from the rest of the book, focusing in depth on a few key sources to explore the ideas and language around wardship from two different perspectives. Building on the growth of the idea of the taxpayer-citizen in US society following the Second World War, Klann fleshes out the views of non-Native citizens on taxation and Indigenous people, as well as expectations of poverty. Paradoxically, the non-Native reports and opinion pieces Klann identifies present

American Indians as both impoverished *and* privileged.

Finally, in Chapter 7, Klann focuses explicitly on Indigenous viewpoints, providing a close reading of two statements by Native women—Helen Peterson and Ruth Muskrat Bronson—who were key figures in the National Congress of American Indians in the mid-twentieth century. Here Klann draws on the idea of relationality that is core to much Indigenous Studies scholarship, linking this to Peterson and Bronson’s writing to argue that the women’s “relentless care work exemplifies and illuminates how discussions of both tribal sovereignty and Native people’s welfare cannot be separated from the concept of relationality” (181).

In seeking to define relationality as the importance of “relations in Native epistemologies and ontologies,” Klann cites scholars from various Indigenous nations including Donald Fixico, Farina King, Kim Tallbear, Vine Deloria, and Julie Reed and quotes poets Joy Harjo (Muscogee) and N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa). What she does not do, however, is provide the reader with additional context on the backgrounds and experiences of Bronson and Peterson—their relationships with their communities and cultures, their experiences within the United States political system, and how these shaped their views of relationality. While there is certainly a sense of relationality in the quotes Klann brings in, an anchoring in the lived experiences of these women would better support this analysis.

Klann’s book is well written and very readable despite dealing with the heavy subject matter of federal policy. She adeptly brings out individual stories of Native people navigating these systems. This connection is largely made by reading federal documents against the grain, inferring meanings from—for instance—communications with the BIA and applications for welfare put in by members of different tribes. Klann also seeks

to weave Native voices into her book by quoting Indigenous authors both as epigraphs to chapters and within the text. This allows her to “understand the intricacies, layers, and impacts of Indian policies more than any other forms” (xx) of writing do. In addition to Harjo and Momaday, she quotes, for instance, Layli Long Soldier (Oglala Lakota), Louise Erdrich (Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa) and Billy-Ray Belcourt (Driftpile Cree Nation, Canada). While these quotes bring in Indigenous voices and perspectives, removing them from their specific cultural contexts to speak to the broad theme of Native experiences of federal policy runs the risk of coming off as essentializing. How directly does, say, Muscogee poet Joy Harjo’s 2021 memoir communicate the worldview of Helen Peterson, an Oglala Lakota political lobbyist, in the 1950s? That is not to say there is no connection between the two, but rather that without careful contextualization the parallel can appear to be based solely on their both being Native women.

David R. M. Beck’s book, in contrast, takes an approach that is closely focused on specific Indigenous nations, structured around six case studies. While historiography on termination has often noted the nefarious motivations of federal- and state-level proponents of termination, Beck’s book takes up the task of methodically documenting how federal officials coerced—whether successfully or not—specific tribes into accepting termination legislation. As Beck outlines in the introduction, the book is not a comprehensive history of the termination process on a national level or for the tribes in question. Instead, it is a “study of one specific aspect of the termination policy—the continuation of federal efforts to use money belonging to tribes to push a U.S. agenda that damaged both the tribes and individual tribal members and enriched outsiders” (xxiii-xxiv).

Bribed With Our Own Money is split into four parts. The first focuses on policy, with chapters

outlining how the federal government sought to bribe tribes in the first century-and-a-half of United States history (chapter 1), the development of termination ideology as “rights and responsibilities” throughout the 1940s (chapter 2), and the role of the Court of Claims and the later Indian Claims Commission (chapter 3). Beck does not mince his words in arguing that the infusions of money these commissions could provide served as further federal justification for termination: “[u]gly as this duplicitous representation of tribal funds was, the dishonesty shown here paled in comparison to the maleficent use of those funds to attempt to force tribal nations to accept termination of their trust relationship with the United States” (57). This first part provides the necessary context, placing coercion in the termination era within a longer trajectory of federal abuses of tribal money.

The rest of the book focuses on the push for the termination of specific tribes. Beck groups these tribes thematically, combining them based on resources extracted from the tribes (“Forests and Termination”; “Land and Termination”) or development projects forced on them (“Dams and Termination”). The book’s cases include two tribes which were wholly terminated—the Menominee in Wisconsin and the Klamath Tribes in Oregon—as well as the Ute tribe on the Uintah and Ouray reservation in Utah, which dispelled so-called “mixed-blood” members in order to avoid the termination of the whole tribe. The book also brings in three cases where the federal push toward termination failed: the Three Affiliated Tribes of Fort Berthold, the Seneca Nation, and the Confederated Tribes of the Colville all managed to retain their trust status despite immense federal pressure.

The second part of the book, “Forests and Termination,” focuses on the Menominee and Klamath cases—undoubtedly the two most researched instances of termination to date. In both cases, federal officials intentionally

withheld settlements worth millions of dollars from the tribes in order to force them to accept termination legislation. Once apparent consent had been given, any further resolutions or protests against termination were ignored. As Beck points out, this was already recognized as coercion at the time and was pointed out as such by, for instance, former assistant commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs William Zimmerman, Jr. (99).

In Part Three, “Dams and Termination,” Beck brings together two cases in which reservation lands were flooded by dam projects. In 1947, the Garrison Dam flooded the Fort Berthold Reservation in North Dakota, leaving the Three Affiliated Tribes with only six percent of their former agricultural lands. In 1966, the Kinzua Dam flooded one-third of the Seneca Nation’s Allegany Reservation in New York, displacing hundreds of families and forcing the moving of thousands of graves. In both cases, federal officials attempted to tie termination bills to the payout of compensation monies for lands lost. Neither case was successful. By the time Kinzua Dam was finally constructed, Beck argues, under a new administration the tide was turning against termination. In the case of the Three Affiliated Tribes, they “stood their ground, sought allies in the national Indian community and with statewide officials, and beat back the termination threat” (120).

In the fourth and final part of the book, Beck turns his focus to the Ute Indian Tribe in Utah and the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, two cases where termination was linked to claims payments for lands forcibly taken by the United States in the 1800s and not properly compensated. Beck provides ample historical context on the abrogated treaty agreements linked to these claims cases. He draws strongly on existing literature—namely R. Warren Metcalf’s *Termination’s Legacy* and Colville historian Laurie Arnold’s *Bartering with the Bones*

of Our Dead. The Ute Indian Tribe effectively expelled the so-called “mixed-blood” members of the tribe in order to maintain federal trust status for remaining members. The Colville Confederated Tribes ultimately avoided termination by refusing to compromise and being unable to reach a termination agreement that satisfied the diverging aims of tribal members. This adds nuance to Beck’s argument, as in both cases he presents some tribal members as actively working toward termination. Beck nevertheless argues that these cases constituted coercion, with congressional representatives leading tribes to believe that termination was inevitable and that compensation could only be received by accepting it.

While the approaches of the two books are very different, they both contribute in their own ways to expanding our understanding of state-Indigenous relations in a particularly tumultuous period of United States Indian policy. The “Indian poverty knowledge” that Klann describes informed and shaped the views of Indigenous people held by federal- and state-level proponents of termination whose tactics of coercion Beck highlights. Both books highlight the differing ways in which concepts like “citizenship,” “freedom,” and “wardship” were defined and employed by state officials and Indigenous people. Here both scholars would benefit from an engagement with relatively recent scholarship documenting this exact phenomenon in the termination period, including—for instance—my own work (2017) and that of Katherine Osburn (2021). Curiously, while Beck draws on Mary Dudziak’s scholarship to highlight how termination’s language of freedom and emancipation fit into the broader ideas of Cold War civil rights (xix), he overlooks work by Daniel Cobb and Paul Rosier on Indigenous politics and activism in the Cold War era.

Also curiously, for books related to termination, both present slight mischaracterizations of

House Concurrent Resolution 108, the document through which the House and Senate announced that the federal government intended to end the federal trust status of tribes. HCR 108 did not, as Klann implies on page 31, in itself sever the trust relationship of any tribes, but rather required the introduction of various acts removing the federal trust status of specific tribes. In his conclusion on the lasting specter of termination, Beck notes that “HCR 108 has not been overturned” (194). This is an odd point since concurrent resolutions are only valid through the duration of the congress which passes them (Wilkinson and Biggs), and thus cannot really be overturned by subsequent congresses.

Nevertheless, Beck’s broader concluding message that until tribes can “operate safely under the protection of the trust relationship, the specter of termination will continue to haunt American Indian communities” (195) rings true. Likewise, as Klann points out in the epilogue to her book, mainstream conceptions of Native people as poor persist as much today as they did in the mid-twentieth century. Recent political developments in the United States, including the questioning of Indigenous people’s citizenship in the US-Mexico border region by ICE agents, shows that work on the termination period is timelier than ever.

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