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### Book Review: Rebuilding Native Nations Strategies for Governance and Development

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**Reviewed by Bronwyn Fredericks, Monash University & Queensland University of Technology.**

#### **Abstract:**

This book covers work undertaken over the last 20 years by a diverse range of researchers, nations and communities and is produced by the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development and the Native Nations Institute for Leadership, Management, and Policy at the University of Arizona. The book according to Stephen Cornell came from the response to numerous requests for a resource about rebuilding Indigenous governments, launching nation-owned and citizen entrepreneurs, building sustainable Indigenous economies and developing new relationships with governments (University of Arizona).

The title *Rebuilding Native Nations Strategies for Governance and Development* is a reflection of the US- centred orientation of the book where the terms 'Native' or 'Native American' are used to describe the Indigenous peoples of the United States of America (USA). While this book is more suited to the USA in terms of language, examples and specific legal and historical frameworks, the content is highly accessible for use in Australia. This book focuses on how Indigenous nations can enhance their capacity for effective self-governance and for self-determined community and economic development. There are numerous examples that share empirical facts, development strategies and practical stories for mobilising communities for real change and not change driven by short-term government, political or economic agendas. In essence, this book is about Indigenous peoples in the USA asserting their rights to govern themselves and doing it their way. It offers Indigenous Australians a means to learn from the best USA experiences and research in Indigenous governance and economic development. Moreover, it provides options that Indigenous Australians might trial or utilise in reclaiming our rights to determine our own futures, including our own governance and economic futures.

The book begins with a foreword by Oren Lyons, Faithkeeper, Onondaga Indian Nation. It is Lyons who offers the term 'rebuilding nations' from the premise that "We've always been here; we're not newly built" (Jorgensen: viii). He explains that it is through the processes of colonisation, dispossession, paternalism and enforced acculturation that left nations powerless and in extreme poverty. It is the actions of nations today that can maintain the status quo or rebuild. Lyons argues that in the rebuilding "We're falling back on the instructions and on the principles of government given to us by the old ones", and that in order to move into the next century in a strong position nations need to rebuild "the architecture of our nations to meet contemporary problems, to deal with contemporary concerns". He does state that "The forms may change to meet new terms" (ibid: viii) as they have done over the centuries that have past. The words of Lyons set the scene and resonate throughout the chapters.



There are four sections which cover a total of twelve chapters. The four sections are Starting Points; Rebuilding the Foundations; Reconceiving Key Functions; and Making it Happen. Part one contains two chapters, the first and most critical in establishing the foundation of development approaches is by Stephen Cornell and Joseph Kalt. They provide a critique of the historical 'standard approach' taken by governments and nations before the era of self-determination. Elements of this approach still exist in some USA communities and numerous examples can be found within Australia. The standard approach is characterised by: decision making that is short-term and non-strategic; persons or organisations other than Indigenous nations setting the development agenda; development that is treated as primarily an economic problem; beliefs that Indigenous culture is an obstacle to development; and an elected leadership that serves primarily as a distributor of resources (ibid: 8). The national 'building approach' is characterised by: nations asserting decision-making power; nations backing up that power with effective governing institutions; governing institutions match Indigenous political culture; decision making is strategic; and leaders serve as nation builders and mobilisers (ibid: 19). What this chapter and the subsequent chapters demonstrate is that the nation building approach provides effective access to and use of resources; increased chances of sustained and self-determined economic development; appropriate development projects and programs; more effective defence of sovereignty; and societies that work – economically, socially, culturally and politically. Chapter two by Manley Begay, Stephen Cornell, Miriam Jorgensen and Joseph Kalt concludes part one and explores the terms development, governance and culture and how they interconnect in the process of rebuilding nations.

Rebuilding the Foundations (part two) includes four chapters and is about the foundations of nations, that is, the institutional structures on which Indigenous nations are built (or rebuilt if we use the words of Lyons). Stephen Cornell shows and puts forward that if the current forms of government that nations are using are incapable then nations have or can develop new tools or invigorated old ones. He states that "Rebuilding Indian nations may require both restoration and innovation, drawing on past principles and practices and, at the same time, on the adaptive skills that native peoples long employed as they adjusted to new ecosystems, new trade opportunities, alien cultural influences, and unexpected problems" (ibid: 72). Cornell links all of this and explains how nations can address real-world issues impacting on nations. I particularly like how he describes nations being held hostage to non-Indigenous government decision-makers and then explains how nations can undertake a process of constitutional and organisational reform to regain power over their lives. Joseph Kalt adds to Cornell's work and asserts that in order to do this nations need to "invest in the creation of a shared community conversation about the need for and desired direction of change" (ibid: 111).

Part three titled Reconceiving Key Functions moves the book from foundations to functions through four chapters. These chapters outline what nations' governments must do, and how to do these things as part of a self-determined strategy for nation rebuilding. The authors across the chapters focus on two different working examples of economic development and then move to service delivery and intergovernmental relations. Chapter nine, titled *Managing the Boundary between Business and Politics: strategies for improving the Chances for Success in Tribally Owned Enterprises*, by Kenneth Grant and Jonathan Taylor reminded me of my own attempts to generate interest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander economic development in Rockhampton, Queensland, Australia. For example, In July 1998 I visited Winnipeg, Manitoba and numerous other cities and heard First Nations peoples discussing their individual and tribal business enterprises (this was not why I visited Canada but it was and still is of interest to me). I was also taken to visit several First Nations owned businesses in Winnipeg. When I returned to Rockhampton in August, I met with some of the staff of the Central Queensland Regional Office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). I explained what I had seen and what I had heard. I handed over contact details and other information. I was advised that based on ATSIC policy, they interpreted what I had explained as 'investment' as opposed to 'economic development'. My reading of ATSIC policy was that it was indeed economic development. I attempted to take the issue up with the Queensland State ATSIC Office to no avail and was re-directed back to the Regional Office. I wondered at the time how many other opportunities Indigenous peoples had lost as a result of policy mis/interpretations of government decision-makers who more often than not live within a reality removed from the day-to-day realities of Indigenous communities. The authors of chapters nine and ten offered me an understanding as to why the mis/interpretation may have happened and link reforms of the standard development approaches to development with an emphasis on nations identifying their own priorities, motivating and empowering community members and workers and developing their capacity and skills, needs based responsive programs, financial self-determination and

long-term sustainability and on-going success (more than the standard 1-3 years).

Making it Happen the final part of the book has two chapters. These are perhaps the most challenging to individuals and communities from the perspective that they put forward the challenge that if you want it to happen, you need to take up the responsibility and make it happen. Within these chapters the reader is presented with an understanding of the reasons for inaction, the difficulties experienced in developing momentum and the characteristics of good leadership for nation rebuilding and economic development. Begay, Cornell, Jorgensen and Pryor explain that "a leader engaged in nation building changes the conversation about what is possible for the future of the nation, makes strategic decisions based on that vision, assess the governments' capacities and works to lay the foundation for capable governments" (ibid: 273). They assert that leaders in these situations see themselves as "leaving a legacy" for the future generations (ibid.). In moving to the end of chapter twelve and hence the end of the book, I gained the understanding of the long road that many Indigenous nations in the USA have been on in their resurgence, revival and rebuilding journey.

The authors of this book are all well established researchers in the fields of economics, development, policy, law and leadership. The editor is Miriam Jorgensen, Associate Director of the Native Nations Institute for Leadership, Management, and Policy at the University of Arizona and Research Director at the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development. Information about each contributor and an index is also included. The reference list is very comprehensive and I found it useful to search for other materials. The book covers a great deal of ground in a relatively small space without giving the feeling that it is skimming the surface. Although the book has a focus on Native Nations in the United States, its applicability beyond the US is vast, including the possibilities it holds as a resource for the Indigenous Peoples of Australia. It demonstrates that building self-reliant, economically strong, sovereign, community-based governments is achievable. Australia is generally considered an economically developed and technically advanced society and Australian Indigenous peoples have been exploring ways to meaningfully engage which do not compromise Indigeneity, self-determination or self-management. From this perspective, *Rebuilding Native Nations Strategies for Governance and Development* would be a useful resource for Indigenous community members and leaders, students, academics, policy makers, government officers, politicians and others with an interest in supporting and advancing the development of sustainable economies and reinvigorating Indigenous cultures.

## **Bibliography**

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