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## BOOK REVIEW

Szasz, Margaret Connell (1998) Education and the American Indian, The Road to Self Determination Since 1928. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press. (326 pages.)

A quarter of a century has passed since the first edition of this book was published. In her original work, Margaret Szasz traced the evolution of federal American Indian educational policy during a critical span of time beginning with the Meriam Report in 1928 through the Kennedy Report of 1969 and the consequent passage of the Indian Education Act, Title IV of P. L. 92-318, in 1972. These two reports, which resulted from intensive government sponsored studies of conditions in American Indian life, provided the impetus for important changes in Indian Administration and ultimately influenced a federal policy shift away from the earlier assimilationist ideology toward a culturally pluralistic perspective which fostered the possibility of self determination for American Indian nations. In a second edition of *Education and the American Indian* in 1977, Szasz revised the Epilogue to encompass two more historic pieces of legislation affecting Indian education and self-determination - P. L. 93-580 which provided for the American Indian Policy Review Commission (AIPRC) and P. L. 93-638, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act. In the closing statement of that Epilogue, Szasz characterized these three pieces of legislation as "milestones for Indian people" and stated that:

They meant that the web of government control had been loosened. Henceforth, direction and leadership in Indian education should come increasingly from Indians themselves.

In the 22 years since this observation was offered, native leadership has increased significantly in all realms of Indian affairs including education, and American Indian people and nations have traveled many miles down the “road to self determination.” This latest edition of Szasz’ study has been revised and enlarged to document the experiences encountered on the most recent leg of this journey and to explicate their impact on the changing face of American Indian education.

Utilizing archival materials, congressional records, and interviews, Margaret Szasz focuses on those systems of Indian education directly impacted by the federal government and federal policy. The assimilation programs of the Dawes Act era, the reform movements of the New Deal with the accompanying positive attitude toward Indian cultures, the economic impact of World War II and the disastrous termination measures of the early 1950s are analyzed for their effects on education in day schools and the on- and off-reservation boarding schools directed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Acknowledging the large percentages of native students in public schools throughout this period, Szasz devotes two chapters to describing the passage and implementation of the Johnson O’Malley Act in 1934, which authorized the Secretary of Interior to enter into contracts with and provide funding to states for the education of Indian children, and the “federally impacted area” legislation of the 1950s which provided additional appropriations to compensate public schools for the financial burdens placed on them by federal activity. In the latter chapters, she presents the

emerging power of “Self-Determination” from the supportive legislation of the Kennedy/Johnson years and the setbacks of the Reagan era to the present administration, and the resulting growth of yet another genre of education for American Indian people - tribally controlled schools and colleges.

Szasz skillfully chronicles the history of Indian educational policy not as a linear procession of decisions and actions, but rather as an intricately evolving web being woven by individuals spinning strands of their own ideas and ideals and anchoring them in positions often dictated by conditions and powers beyond their control. While those individuals serving in the position of Education Director exert pressure to mold policy in keeping with their own ideals, they generally act in accordance with or in response to the pressures of federal Indian policy itself and current trends and movements in the national educational scene. They also necessarily administer within limitations and restrictions imposed by the administrative structure of the Bureau, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, the Secretary of the Interior Department, the President, and federal bodies outside the Bureau including most importantly, Congress and the Bureau of the Budget. Szasz notes that “the greatest changes occurred when there was the least conflict between the Director of Education and these restrictive factors.” This dynamic is clearly presented in the several chapters which focus on the work of three Directors of Indian Education: W. Carson Ryan, Willard Walcott Beatty, and Hildegard Thompson.

Ryan, a professor of education at Swarthmore and a leader in the Progressive Education movement, had directed preparation of the education section of the Meriam Report. His appointment by Interior Secretary Ray Lyman Wilbur in 1930 was loudly applauded by reformers whose views had been validated by the Report. Despite a high

level of ideological congruence among Ryan and his direct superiors Commissioner Rhoads and Assistant Commissioner Scattergood, all of whom were Quakers committed to humanitarian service and improving the conditions of Indian people, Ryan's commendable record of achievement was less than overwhelming during his two and a half year tenure as a member of this trio. His attempts at reform were limited by the "overbearing pressures of the nations' economy as it sank into the morass of the Depression," by the pressure of the "Old Guard" Education Division employees which "almost guaranteed a stultifying atmosphere of status quo," and by the ever increasing pressure of the reformists' attack on the Wilbur-Rhoads-Scattergood administration for failure to effect change more quickly.

With the change of administration in 1932, however, these limitations were quickly and profoundly altered. Roosevelt's election ushered in a reversal of the assimilation policy, introduced the myriad New Deal programs with their critical emergency funding, and brought to the position of Commissioner of Indian Affairs the "forceful leadership necessary for change" in the person of John Collier. A long-time vocal critic of the Bureau whose "extremist techniques encouraged a polarized response," Collier had his share of both detractors and supporters in Washington circles and among Indian people themselves. However, his support among other Indian people and groups, the liberal press, key members of Congress and the Administration was sufficient to enabled him to secure the legislation to support his goals – goals which he shared and successfully carried out with Ryan and Ryan's successor Beatty.

Beatty, a prominent figure in the Progressive Education movement, "a humanist and a bold dynamic leader," was able to carry forward the goals and ideals established

by Ryan, initiating and implementing numerous successful programs in the remaining years of “this interval of hope,” the Indian New Deal. His greatest limitations came with the advent of World War II and its disastrous impact on the education division budget and reduction of manpower, and, most importantly, the federal policy shift toward termination.

When Thompson succeeded Beatty in 1952, the post-war environment was well established and the limitations on her activities as Director were clearly spelled out. The directorship had been stripped of much of its authority in a reorganization of the Bureau under Commissioner Myers in 1950 and the threat of termination had become a serious reality. Thus, “any efforts that ran counter to the push for assimilation stood little chance of success.” While apparently resigned to these restrictions, Thompson worked tirelessly to initiate programs to increase student enrollment in both Bureau and public schools and to alter curriculum to prepare students for an urban technological society. However, even under the more favorable administration of Philleo Nash who was appointed by John F. Kennedy in 1961, Thompson did little to guide her educational programs to accommodate the emerging movement toward self-determination.

These three individuals are exemplary of the many others introduced by Szasz in her analysis of the period bounded by the Meriam and Kennedy Reports. Each added their own unique constructive or destructive touches to the web of Indian educational policy, but all of these weavers held one thing in common: they were not Indian people. “Until the end of the 1960s the federal government had never considered that Indians might shape their own education.” By the decade of the sixties the native leadership

which had taken root in the aftermath of World War II and had strengthened its political savvy in the fight against termination had grown to a formidable force. The 1966 appointment of Robert Lafollette Bennet to the post of Commissioner of Indian Affairs was a milestone in federal Indian policy. Bennet, an Oneida, would be followed by a succession of native leaders establishing a clear precedent that “henceforth” the Commissioner of Indian Affairs would be an Indian.”

Responding to this shift in leadership, in the last two decades of her study Szasz alters her approach to focus on the Indian community and leadership rather than on the machinations of policy formulation, presenting the events of the 80s and the 90s as the stories of these new weavers of federal Indian policy. Szasz transmits to the reader a multitude of voices representing the new native leadership - professional educators, tribal leaders, historians, attorneys, organization directors - commenting on issues of funding and the crippling of the B.I.A. Office of Indian Education Programs and the Education Department’s Office of Indian Education Department during the Reagan years, and on the ever-present need to “educate” Congress to the legal concepts of “trust relationship” and “tribal sovereignty.” Their voices inform her thorough discussion of the events surrounding activities of the 1991 Indian Nations at Risk Task Force, the 1992 White House Conference on Indian Education, and the 1995 National American Indian/Alaska Native Education Summit which produced a revolutionary proposal for the future of Indian Education. The resulting “Comprehensive Federal Indian Education Policy Statement,” dubbed the “Red Book,” would form the basis for the historic “Executive Order on American Indian and Alaska Native Education” signed by President Clinton on August 6, 1998 to the beating of a ceremonial drum.

Szasz closes the most recent chapter in American Indian education policy with the story of the rise and expansion of tribally controlled colleges concluding that “their commitment to community, to students, and to future leadership among tribal peoples suggests that they serve as the hope for the future for American Indians.”

In this work Szasz has shown herself again to be the consummate researcher, presenting a sensitive but objective, comprehensive account of federal American Indian educational policy. Educators and scholars of Indian studies will find this book and its accompanying informational appendices an invaluable resource.

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