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Review of *Indians in Prison: Incarcerated Native Americans in Nebraska* by Elizabeth S. Grobsmith

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Indians in Prison: Incarcerated Native Americans in Nebraska. Elizabeth S. Grobsmith. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994. Photos and references. 196 pp. \$37.50.

Elizabeth S. Grobsmith provides an intimate glance into the relationship between the bureaucracy of the Nebraska correctional system and American Indian prisoners within the system. Prefaced by an important historical context, the insightful narratives which comprise the bulk of this work offer a detailed examination of the day-to-day struggles encountered by Indian inmates trying to survive in an environment which is, all too often, not cognizant of their needs. In general, this book is a valuable contribution to the literature investigating the relationship between contemporary American Indians and the criminal justice system.

One aspect that I found troubling, however, was the fact that Grobsmith did not succeed in grounding this work with contemporary studies which have investigated related issues. The incorporation of this literature would have provided an interpretational aid to the present work. For example, even though almost all research has noted the important role alcohol/drug use plays in a number of social problems present in the lives of American Indians, other authors have also underscored its role as intervening—not necessarily antecedent. While Grobsmith noted that alcoholism was related to other social factors such as economic deprivation, her discussion of this interrelationship was more perfunctory than I would have liked. I believe the causes and contributors to American Indian criminality are complex and multifaceted and begin with the internal colonialism and cultural genocide which began nearly two centuries ago and continue today. Economic deprivation, social

disorganization (e.g. broken families and residential mobility), culture conflict and perceived powerlessness also contribute to the propensity for Indian youth to engage in escapist behaviors like alcohol and drug use. This use, not only increases the likelihood of deviant and criminal activity but it also serves to exacerbate the other conditions. In reality, then, each of these factors may act alone or in combination with one another to increase the risk of criminality in Indian populations.

However, because these other social and psychological conditions are undoubtedly associated with alcoholism, and more importantly, because they are inextricably linked to the success of alcoholism treatment programs, I found the cursory attention given to these factors a bit disturbing. I do not find it surprising that inmates released into an environment which promises little in the way of economic opportunities and hope for the future will return to the comfort of a bottle. Alcohol and drug treatment programs, then, in the absence of tribal sovereignty and economic independence are like Band-aids for cancer.

In sum, this book does provide an excellent synthesis of a very complicated web of relationships between Indian people and the criminal justice system. Grobsmith's candidness about her inevitable vacillation between the dual roles of objective researcher and subjective participant during this project was particularly refreshing. I believe this book is both a scholastic and humanitarian achievement. **Ronet Bachman**, *Statistician and Research Analyst*, U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, DC 20531.