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Review of *American Indians and the Fight for Equal Voting Rights* by Laughlin McDonald

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American Indians and the Fight for Equal Voting Rights. By Laughlin McDonald. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010. xiii + 347 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$55.00.

The continuing relevance of the landmark 1964 Civil Rights Act in the Deep South is an open question for many people, but the importance of the Act in Indian Country cannot seriously be questioned. Laughlin McDonald's powerful book provides a frontline view of the cases brought by American Indians in Nebraska, South Dakota, Montana, and elsewhere. McDonald, the head of the ACLU's Voting Rights Project, himself litigated these cases to successful conclusion on behalf of his Native clients.

In parts of the United States, many state and local governments quietly excluded Indian people from the suffrage until after World War II. Even where Indian people could vote, non-Indian governments used the same techniques used in the South that effectively undercut Indian political participation. In classic examples, governments established at-large voting for county commissions, rendering significant Native minority votes null by electing only the top vote-getters. The hated literacy requirements used to exclude African Americans in the South appeared in the Great Plains as well, with local governments either outright excluding Indians who spoke their Native language as a first language, or only printing ballots in English. These techniques were so effective that in some districts with a Native majority no Indian person was elected to any office for many decades.

McDonald details these various techniques used to undermine American Indian political participation, as well as the complex and cutting-edge litigation tactics used to defeat many of them. Managing the demographic data and voting experts needed to demonstrate American Indian political power and the effectiveness of the means by non-Indians to undermine that power is difficult work. McDonald's success in Indian Country is not to be underestimated.

Indian Country voting is timely and controversial, as the Indian vote in places like Todd County, South Dakota, helped ensure the elections of Senator Tim Johnson—invoking the scorn of editorialists from the *Wall Street Journal*.

McDonald's writing, devoid of indecipherable legalese, is easily comprehended by the general reader. But McDonald's greatest strength is the passion he brings to his subject.

It was McDonald who litigated the first Indian Country voting rights case spearheaded by the ACLU in 1983, and his continuing work in the field is nothing short of inspiring. The book he's written documenting this work deserves to be highly commended.

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