News Zero is essential reading for anyone interested in the history of nuclear issues in the Pacific and is a valuable addition to Pacific Islands studies. Keever writes clearly and passionately about her subject. Her research is meticulous and impressive in scope. Keever has placed a copy of News Zero in the hands of the government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and it should be useful in its ongoing negotiations with the United States about reparations for damages done to the Marshallese people and the restoration and return of their ancestral homelands. The history of the nuclear age in Micronesia is a tragic and never-ending story.

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Howard P Willens and Deanne C Siemer are a Washington dc–based husband and wife legal team who have served the people of the Northern Marianas since the early 1970s. Most importantly, they represented the Northern Marianas in the negotiations that made the islands a commonwealth in political union with the United States. Willens and Siemer have authored two books: National Security and Self-Determination: United States Policy in Micronesia (1961–1972) in 2000 and An Honorable Accord: The Covenant between the Northern Marianas Islands and the United States in 2002. Willens is also the principal author of The Secret Guam Study. Dirk A Ballendorf is the director of the Micronesian Area Research Center at the University of Guam.

In the course of their research for An Honorable Accord, Willens and Siemer discovered evidence that in the mid-1970s, at the direction of President Gerald R Ford, a study had been made concerning Guam’s future political status and the United States was prepared to offer Guam commonwealth political status, under terms that were at least as advantageous as those for the Northern Marianas. At a meeting in 2000 with Ballendorf and his colleagues at the University of Guam, Willens and Siemer learned that no one on Guam had ever heard of the presidential initiative. They suggested that relevant information might be obtained by requests for documents under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Ballendorf served as the plaintiff, with Siemer as his lawyer. FOIA requests were submitted to the Departments of State, Interior, and Defense in late 2000. Although the requests were acknowledged, they were stonewalled. In May 2003, thirty months after the FOIA requests, Ballendorf filed complaints against the same three departments, and they quickly produced some
documents. Nevertheless, the record seemed suspiciously incomplete, and in response to further legal action, more documents were forthcoming.

The indigenous people of all the Marianas share a common Chamorro culture and language. Guam, the southernmost of the Marianas, became separated from the others when it became a US territory in 1898 and was placed under US Navy rule. In 1950, the US Congress passed the Guam Organic Act. Guam thereby became an unincorporated territory lacking in local autonomy, belonging to but not an integral part of the United States. Administrative authority was transferred to the Department of Interior. Under the Organic Act, Guam’s people became US citizens.

At the end of World War II, the United States acquired most of Micronesia as the US Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands within the United Nations trusteeship system, and again, the Department of Interior was given the responsibility for administration. Negotiations about the future political status of the Trust Territory began in 1969. Internal differences precluded any chance that the territory would evolve as a single nation, and it became divided into four political entities. The Northern Marianas was the first to break away when it began separate negotiations with the United States in late 1972. The people of the Northern Marianas voted for commonwealth status in political union with the United States in 1975, and the status of Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas became finalized when the Trust Territory was dissolved in 1986. The arrangement provided US citizenship for the people of the Northern Marianas, the privilege of drafting their own constitution, and increased autonomy over many local affairs.

Not long after its implementation, the people of Guam evidenced discontent with the provisions of the Organic Act and lobbied for an improved political status. When US negotiators wanted Guam’s support for the commonwealth arrangement for the Northern Marianas, the White House was urged to address the issue of Guam’s political status. In late 1973, a study was commissioned to identify national objectives and policies for Guam. The unification of the Marianas was considered on more than one occasion, but it was rejected for reasons advanced at one time or another by either Guam or its neighbor to the north.

With only little consultation with Guam, the study was completed in August 1974. President Ford reviewed it in early 1975, and he issued a directive outlining several objectives. The United States would retain sovereignty over Guam, secure US defense needs, promote economic development, and move Guam toward self-government in internal affairs under a self-drafted constitution consistent with the US Constitution. The United States would offer Guam commonwealth status comparable to that of the Northern Marianas. Because security and defense interests were involved, the study was classified as secret.

The Department of Interior was given the responsibility of implementing the presidential directive and of informing Guam officials accordingly. However, the department was more than reluctant to relinquish any of its
authority. It had firmly opposed commonwealth status for the Northern Marianas. Documents reveal that, with regard to Guam and contrary to Ford’s directive, the Department of Interior recommended a “status quo” to the Defense and State Departments. Guam officials were never informed of the secret study or the presidential directive. Instead, the Interior Department engaged in delaying tactics, refused to take any action, and left any initiative entirely up to Guam.

Delay opened the door for complications. Differences among Guamanians were exacerbated, and they were unable to speak with a common voice. Personnel turnovers at the highest level of the Department of Interior provided little continuity in the department. With the 1976 elections near at hand, the White House, preoccupied with other pressing matters, evidenced no sustained interest in the small island on the far side of the distant Pacific. The unbridled pursuit of personal power by a couple of the major political players involved was detrimental to the entire process. Lastly, territorial affairs, which never had high priority within the Interior Department, were delegated to low-level officials concerned to protect their authority over what they viewed as their own bailiwick.

When Jimmy Carter defeated President Ford in the November 1976 election, the Department of Interior never informed the incoming administration about the Guam study or the resulting directive. The few copies of the secret study were buried in secure storage, far from sight.

Guam subsequently took matters into its own hands and drafted a proposed commonwealth act by early 1984. Members of Congress advised that it be submitted directly to the House of Representatives rather than to the Department of Interior in the executive branch. The proposal was approved by Guam in 1987. Two years later, negotiations began with a federal task force of over twenty separate agencies and were continued through the first Bush administration and into the Clinton presidency. The Guam Commonwealth Act was introduced in Congress in 1997 and hearings were held, but in the end, no action was ever taken.

The record of the Interior Department’s administration of the US Trust Territory of the Pacific has been far from distinguished. It may be argued that part of the problem has been that US interests in the Pacific have largely been focused on strategic and security issues. As long as perceived needs in those areas were met, little attention was given to a broader view of US intentions in the region, and its policies were not well defined and often inconsistent. Indeed, there was some initial uncertainty as to whether or not Guam’s political status was a domestic problem or a matter of national security.

In the case of Guam, President Ford’s directive had been straightforward, and there should have been little room for ambiguity. However, Department of Interior actions were part of a larger historical pattern and essentially ignored the directive. Earlier in the 1960s, the Interior Department had undermined efforts by the Department of State to negotiate a political status for the Trust Territory that provided more self-
government. Commonwealth status for the Northern Marianas had far-reaching implications for the future political status not only of Guam but also of the Virgin Islands in the Caribbean and was resisted.

Willens and Ballendorf comment on the Interior Department’s “remarkable lack of candor” in dealing with Guam (121). In their assessment: “Even if Interior had been favorably disposed towards the Guam study and its implementation, its personnel basically lacked the capacity and the stature to handle such an assignment” (119). Their text provides a richly detailed account of events, and the most relevant documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act are found in the volume’s ten appendixes.

Well over half a century since its implementation, Guam remains under the Organic Act of 1950. For a three-year period beginning in late 1973, there was a unique opportunity to improve the political status of Guam and allow greater self-determination for the people of Guam as a commonwealth. That opportunity was intentionally thwarted by a self-serving US government agency, and the people of Guam have paid the price. The volume at hand is a valuable contribution to the history of Guam and of the relations of the United States with its overseas territories. An index would have enhanced the value of the work.

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A few years ago, at a conference on intellectual and cultural property rights, a Papua New Guinean lawyer referred to the ethnographic corpus of the country as composed of baseline studies. One can appreciate his logic from the particular concern with property rights. First-time ethnographies, often defining ethnographies in the sense of establishing a group name and boundary, map out recognizable claims to knowledge and cultural practices, which are, themselves, modified through various historical influences. In this sense, the first professional ethnography of a group of people becomes the base against which various forms of social and cultural change can be measured. The effectiveness of first-time ethnographies hinges on the establishment of the uniqueness of the cultural group in question, and various practices and institutions become iconic of the group and cultural region.

Some areas of Papua New Guinea provide better examples of this phenomenon than others. Areas such as East New Britain Province present a patchwork of studies undertaken at different historical periods and reflecting diverse interests and goals. The ethnography of this province is characterized by amateur and missionary ethnography in the early contact