

National Security and Self-Determination: United States Policy in Micronesia (1961-1972), by Howard P Willens and Deanne C Siemer. Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 2000. ISBN 0-275-96914-2, x + 312 pages, maps, photographs, tables, notes, appendixes, bibliography, index. US\$65.

Willens and Siemer are a Washington, DC based husband and wife legal team with extensive experience with a variety of federal agencies and the private sector. As noted in their introduction, since December 1972 they have had a “close professional and personal relationship with the people of the Northern Mariana Islands” (ix). They represented the Northern Marianas in the negotiations that resulted in the covenant that made the islands a commonwealth in political union with the United States, assisted with the development of the commonwealth’s constitution, and served the Marianas as legal counsel in a variety of other assignments. The work at hand covers the decade immediately preceding the authors’ involvement with what is now the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas.

The 1960s were pivotal for the future of the US Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, commonly referred to as Micronesia. At the beginning of the decade, decolonization was at the forefront of concern at the United Nations, and the United States was under severe criticism for its administration of the trust territory. The authors discuss that territory as a whole, but their focus is on the Northern Mariana Islands.

Willens and Siemer begin with an account of President John F Kennedy’s address to the UN General Assembly in late 1961. Kennedy, whose interest in the Pacific was shaped by his wartime experiences there, recalled that the United States had once been a colony and pledged unequivocal support for the self-determination of all people. Shortly thereafter, a presidential directive was sent to the three departments most concerned with the trust territory—Defense, Interior, and State—outlining new directions for the territory that reflected Kennedy’s UN message.

Much of the book deals with the rivalries among the Departments of Defense, Interior, and State. In the postwar era, Defense would have preferred an outright annexation of Micronesia. There was considerable congressional support for such an arrangement, and Defense concerns largely prevailed. However, administration of the trust territory was given to the Department of Interior in 1951. For many years, Interior had been responsible for American Samoa, Guam, and other American territories. The department also had strong advocates in Congress, was reluctant to relinquish any turf or authority, and was often insensitive to the issue of decolonization. In contrast, the Department of State was concerned that the United States not acquire new territory as a result of the war and wanted a political solution that would be acceptable to the international community.

For a brief time after Kennedy’s UN address, Defense, Interior, and State managed to reach some accord. In

April 1962, Kennedy issued National Security Action Memorandum 145. The two-page document was highly confidential and remained tightly under wraps for many years. The executive branch thought it unlikely that the trust territory “could ever become a viable independent nation,” and suggested that Micronesians “must become an educated people, prepared to exercise an informed choice, which means a choice by people capable of weighing the realistic alternatives.” From the American point of view the most realistic alternative was for the islands to “move into a new and lasting relationship to the United States within our political framework” (30).

In this context, the secretary of Interior created the Congress of Micronesia, a territorial legislature patterned after the American model. The first elections were held in 1965, and in the following year, the congress petitioned President Johnson to establish a commission to explore Micronesia’s political future. Receiving no response, it acted and established its own six-member Micronesian Future Political Status Commission in 1967.

The six men formed a strong negotiating team, three of whom would become presidents of their nations (Amata Kabua of the Marshall Islands, Tosio Nakayama of the Federated States of Micronesia, and Lazarus Sali of Palau). According to Willens and Siemer there was some feeling among Americans that the Micronesians “were always two steps beyond where we were at any particular point,” and by the time the Americans “got authorization to meet their last position, they had gone on to some-

thing, not necessarily more extreme, but with further sovereignty on their part or with less control on the U.S. part” (175).

In 1969, the commission hired the well-known James W Davidson, professor of Pacific history at Australian National University. Davidson had largely been responsible for charting new directions for Pacific history, but he had also helped Western Samoa and Nauru obtain independence and assisted the Cook Islands in achieving self-government in free association with New Zealand.

Willens and Siemer indicate that Davidson also played an important role in Micronesia. In early 1969, he was instrumental in arranging a tour of several Pacific nations for the status commission to learn how others had handled self-determination. By then, with the exception of the Northern Marianas, Micronesians had rejected the notion of becoming another American territory and were favoring free association. By 1970, they had arrived at four principles that were “non-negotiable” with respect to that arrangement, and the authors note that the Micronesian position “undoubtedly reflected the input of Professor Davidson” (173). The four principles reflect how far the Micronesians had moved beyond what had been envisioned in National Security Action Memorandum 145 of 1962: (1) that sovereignty in Micronesia resides in the people of Micronesia and its duly constituted government; (2) that the people of Micronesia possess the right of self-determination and may therefore choose independence or self-government in free association with any nation or organiza-

tion of nations; (3) that the people of Micronesia have the right to adopt their own constitution and to amend, change, or revoke any constitution or governmental plan at any time; and (4) that free association should be in the form of a revocable compact, terminable unilaterally by either party (173).

The United States, which was under pressure from the United Nations to preserve the integrity of its trust territory, was not prepared to accept such an arrangement of free association, and it offered commonwealth status, which would have been tantamount to integration with the United States. The status commission rejected the proposal, and with considerable anti-American rhetoric, the Congress of Micronesia upheld the decision. The Northern Marianas was alarmed at this turn of events, and in the following year informed the United States that it would welcome commonwealth status. The United States reassessed its position. In 1972 it agreed to begin separate talks with the Northern Marianas, which offered a defense perimeter in the western Pacific, and indicated a willingness to discuss free association for the rest of the trust territory.

Micronesians were surprised by this unexpected turn of events, and with the exception of the Marianas, they felt betrayed by the reversal of American policy, particularly with regard to the fragmentation of the trust territory. At the same time, the negotiations with the Marianas fueled separatist sentiments in the Marshall Islands and Palau. Both had leverage with the United States because they were also vital to American defense

needs, and they were quick to follow the Marianas with their own separate negotiations. The fragmentation of the trust territory was set on an irreversible course.

Willens and Siemer conclude the seven chapters of their book with an epilogue that outlines how the Northern Marianas went on to become a commonwealth and how the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau became self-governing states in free association with the United States.

Willens and Siemer provide an even-handed, rich, and detailed account of the negotiations between the Americans and the Micronesians for the decade under review. The discussion is not an abstract or distant account of the maneuverings of faceless government agencies. Rather, patronage and other motives internal to American politics behind the appointment of some key American officials are discussed. The individuals most directly involved on both sides are portrayed in considerable depth. The authors provide a good sense of the hard-fought contest over issues of vital importance to all concerned. The Americans were often frustrated by the differences among themselves, and the falling-out among Micronesians was obviously painful. The processes that make history are laid bare, and the importance of individuals in shaping that history is made evident.

Willens and Siemer have provided the definitive account of a crucial period in Micronesian history, which will be consulted by others for years to come. The research is meticulous, the presentation is well organized, and the writing is straightforward.

Much of authors' research material, including their transcribed interviews with over 136 individuals, are scheduled for deposit in the Pacific Collection of Hamilton Library at the University of Hawai'i.

ROBERT C KISTE

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

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The French-Speaking Pacific: Population, Environment and Development Issues, edited by Christian Jost. Brisbane: Boombana Publications, 1998. ISBN 1-876542-02-0, 271 pages, figures, maps, photos, tables, notes, bibliography. Paper, A\$32. <http://www.uq.net.au/~zzjlache/boombana>

This book aims to present English readers with a synthesis of recent French research in the Republic of Vanuatu and the three overseas territories of Wallis and Futuna, French Polynesia, and New Caledonia. It is the revised and updated English version of the proceedings of a 1994 island-hopping conference organized by the French National Committee on Geography. It provides a unique combination of information on the French-speaking Pacific in terms of natural (terrestrial and marine) and human (sociocultural and economic) geography from a historical and contemporary perspective. The richness of the approach is enhanced by the multidisciplinary of the contributors.

The book begins with a large, 36-page chapter by Gilbert David, on the Republic of Vanuatu, that examines the physical geography, climate, maritime area, environment, socioeco-

omic, and human aspects, as well as the past twenty-five years of administration, politics, demography, agricultural activities, fisheries, and service-sector development. It is followed by two chapters on the French Pacific territories. The first, by Emmanuel Vigneron, asks if the three overseas territories can be considered a French "region," with specific characteristics outside their common colonial and administrative heritage. He concludes that they share very little outside their dependence on the international community. Vigneron also examines economic constraints and shows that the French Pacific contains the most subsidized entities in the world. He predicts that, due to the weaknesses of the region's economies, there will be widespread economic and social crises generated by a rapidly growing youth population with few employment opportunities. The second chapter in this group, by Christian Jost, looks at environmental constraints generated not only by the natural degradation of the environment but by other processes such as extraction (mining and deforestation); transfers (via transport and migratory routes); and concentrations of waste matter and human presence.

These chapters are followed by two comparatively large chapters on New Caledonia. In the first, Bernard Capocchi examines the physical characteristics of this Melanesian island group, and in the second, Jean-Pierre Doumenge takes a historical and geographical approach to the territory's cultural, demographic, economic, and political realities. A chapter on the "Communities and Economics of French Polynesia," by Paul Le Bour-