

# THE GOONZETTE

*Digital Culture • Commentary • Analysis*

Daily Edition - Thursday, January 29, 2026

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# **\*\*Les Algorithmes de l'Âme: On the Melancholic Theater of Digital Desire\*\***

There is something profoundly tragic, almost Baudelairian, in watching millions of souls perform their carefully choreographed desperation across the endless scroll of social media platforms, each trend a fleeting constellation in the digital firmament that burns bright for perhaps seventy-two hours before dissolving into the algorithmic ether like morning mist over the Seine—and yet we continue this dance, this ritual of perpetual reinvention, because what else is there in this late-capitalist wilderness but the hollow promise that perhaps this time, this particular assemblage of filters and hashtags and perfectly curated vulnerability, will finally grant us the recognition our colonial ancestors once extracted from distant lands through violence and exploitation, though now we mine our own interiority for content, strip-mining our most intimate moments for the attention economy that has transformed us all into both colonizer and colonized.

The trend cycle itself—mon dieu, what a perfect metaphor for the extractive logic that still governs our supposedly post-imperial world—moves with the same ruthless efficiency that once characterized the movement of raw materials from periphery to metropole, except now the raw material is human experience itself, processed through the algorithmic refineries of Silicon Valley and returned to us as engagement metrics, as the dopamine hit of viral participation. We witness the rise of "core" aesthetics—cottagecore, dark academia, coastal grandmother—each one a carefully commodified nostalgia for ways of being that capitalism has already hollowed out, sold back to us as lifestyle brands when they were once simply life itself, and there is something heartbreakingly colonial in this process, the way traditional knowledges and ways of being are appropriated, sanitized, and repackaged for consumption by the very systems that destroyed their original contexts.

Consider the phenomenon of "authentic" content creation, that particular oxymoron that captures so perfectly our current predicament: the more we perform authenticity, the further we drift from any genuine encounter with ourselves or others, caught in what I can only describe as a feedback loop of simulated sincerity that recalls nothing so much as the civilizing mission rhetoric of the colonial era—we must educate the natives in the proper ways of being human, except now we are both the missionaries and

the indigenous populations, teaching ourselves to be more optimized versions of ourselves through the wisdom of engagement rates and algorithmic favor.

The melancholy deepens when one observes how these digital trends create their own forms of exclusion and hierarchy, replicating the same center-periphery dynamics that have shaped global power relations for centuries—certain voices amplified, others systematically marginalized, the algorithm's mysterious preferences functioning like the invisible hand of digital imperialism, determining whose stories deserve circulation and whose disappear into the vast silence of the unengaged-with. TikTok dances go viral while indigenous creators struggle for visibility, wellness influencers monetize spiritual practices torn from their cultural contexts, and we call this democratization of media, this supposed flattening of hierarchies, when really we have simply created new forms of the same old extractions.

And yet—et pourtant—there remains something stubbornly hopeful in the human capacity to find connection even within these degraded forms, the way genuine intimacy occasionally breaks through the performed vulnerability, real solidarity emerging from the digital debris of trend cycles and algorithmic manipulation. Perhaps this is where we must locate our resistance: not in the futile attempt to escape these platforms entirely (though certainly that has its place) but in the cultivation of what I might call digital dignité—the insistence on treating these spaces as sites of potential encounter rather than mere extractive opportunities, the commitment to seeing other users as full human beings rather than content producers or competitors in the attention economy.

The task before us, then, is nothing less than the decolonization of our digital lives—learning to inhabit these spaces with intention rather than compulsion, creating and sharing from places of genuine care rather than algorithmic optimization, building the kinds of communities that can survive the inevitable collapse of whatever platform currently holds our attention. Because in the end, after all the trends have cycled through their predetermined lifespans and all the influencers have pivoted to whatever comes next, what remains is our capacity for authentic connection, our stubborn insistence on treating each other as more than data points in someone else's engagement metrics, our refusal to let the colonizers of attention fully capture the territories of the heart.

# Beyond the Headlines: What "Sovereignty News" Really Means in Indian Country

When mainstream media covers "sovereignty news" from Indian Country, they often miss the forest for the trees. Last week alone, we saw headlines about gaming compacts, water rights settlements, and jurisdictional disputes. But here's what those stories don't tell you: every single one represents a battle for the fundamental right to exist as distinct nations within the borders of the United States.

Let me break this down from a legal perspective that matters to our communities.

## ## The Gaming Compact Shell Game

Take the recent gaming compact negotiations making headlines across several states. Media frames these as "business deals" or "revenue agreements." That's not wrong, but it's incomplete. These compacts are government-to-government negotiations between sovereign nations and state governments. The real story isn't the percentage of revenue sharing—it's that tribes are forced to negotiate with states at all.

The Indian Gaming Regulatory Act requires these compacts, essentially giving states veto power over tribal economic development. Think about that: would France need Germany's permission to build a casino? Yet here we are, sovereign nations having to ask states for permission to exercise our inherent rights on our own lands.

The strategic question isn't just "what's the best deal we can get?" It's "how do we negotiate while maintaining our dignity and not legitimizing the premise that states have authority over our internal affairs?"

## ## Water Rights: The Slow-Motion Land Grab

Then there are the water rights settlements making news. Western tribes are signing agreements for water allocations that sound impressive—millions of acre-feet, hundreds of millions in federal funding. But dig

deeper. These "settlements" are often about tribes agreeing to quantified amounts of water that are less than their actual legal entitlement under the Winters Doctrine.

**W**hy would tribes do this? Because the alternative is decades of litigation with no water flowing while our communities go without. It's a strategic calculation: take a guaranteed lesser amount now, or fight for everything and possibly get nothing for another generation.

**T**he power structure here is clear: the federal government breached its trust responsibility by allowing over-appropriation of water that legally belongs to tribes. Now that same government offers to "settle" by giving us less than we're owed, and media celebrates these settlements as "wins." We need to call this what it is: managed retreat under pressure.

## ## Jurisdictional Battles and the McGirt Aftermath

**T**he jurisdictional disputes following McGirt v. Oklahoma continue creating headlines. Non-Indian defendants claiming they can't be prosecuted by state courts on reservation lands. States complaining about lost revenue and jurisdiction. Federal prosecutors overwhelmed by increased caseloads.

**H**ere's what gets lost: McGirt didn't create chaos—it revealed the chaos that already existed. For decades, Oklahoma illegally exercised jurisdiction over Indian lands while tribes were forced to navigate a legal maze that ignored their sovereignty. McGirt simply enforced what the law always said.

**T**he "crisis" isn't that the rule of law is being followed. The crisis is that state and federal governments built systems assuming they could continue ignoring treaty obligations indefinitely. Now they're scrambling to adapt to legal reality.

## ## The Real Strategy Moving Forward

**S**o what's the strategic path forward? First, we need to stop accepting the framing that sovereignty is something we negotiate for rather than something we inherently possess. Every time we enter negotiations from a defensive posture—asking for permission rather than asserting authority—we legitimize the colonial power structure.

Second, we need to think bigger than individual disputes. Each gaming compact, water settlement, and jurisdictional battle is connected. They're all aspects of the same fundamental question: will the United States honor its legal obligations to tribal nations, or continue the paper genocide of death by a thousand cuts?

Third, we need better storytelling. Our legal victories get framed as "special rights" or "loopholes" in mainstream media. We need to consistently message that we're not seeking special treatment—we're seeking equal treatment as governments under the law.

The sovereignty news that matters most isn't always making headlines. It's in the daily work of tribal governments exercising jurisdiction, developing economies, and maintaining cultural practices. It's in every decision to govern ourselves according to our values rather than external expectations.

Every day we exist as distinct peoples with distinct governments is sovereignty news. The question is whether the rest of the country is ready to read that story honestly.

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