

THE GOONZETTE

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When Treaties Become Weapons: The Strategic Erosion of Tribal Sovereignty

The recent flurry of state legislative attacks on tribal sovereignty should surprise no one who understands the cyclical nature of American colonialism. What we're witnessing isn't random political theater—it's a coordinated strategy to chip away at the legal foundations that protect Indigenous nations, disguised as concern for "fairness" and "uniform application of law."

Take Oklahoma's latest gambit. The state legislature is pushing bills that would essentially nullify portions of the *McGirt* decision, the 2020 Supreme Court ruling that reaffirmed the Muscogee Creek Nation's reservation boundaries. Their argument? That tribal jurisdiction creates a "patchwork" of law enforcement that confuses citizens. This is rich, coming from a state that has spent decades creating exactly the kind of jurisdictional maze they now claim to oppose.

But here's what they're really saying: when tribes exercise the sovereignty they never ceded, when they actually use the jurisdictional authority that treaties guaranteed them, suddenly it becomes a "problem" that requires state intervention.

This isn't about confusion. This is about control.

The same pattern is emerging in Montana, where legislators are attempting to tax tribal members on reservation lands for the first time in decades. Their justification? "Everyone should pay their fair share." It's a masterclass in gaslighting—Indigenous peoples who have paid the ultimate price for American expansion, who continue to see their resources extracted and their lands exploited, are suddenly not paying enough.

These attacks share a common DNA with the termination policies of the 1950s, when Congress attempted to dissolve tribal nations entirely under the guise of "freeing" Indigenous peoples from federal oversight. Then, as now, the language was cloaked in liberation rhetoric while the intent remained elimination.

What makes these contemporary assaults particularly insidious is their strategic sophistication. Rather than the blunt instruments of previous eras, today's opponents of tribal sovereignty employ surgical strikes against specific aspects of tribal authority. Gaming revenues here, environmental regulations there, criminal jurisdiction in another arena. Death by a thousand cuts, each justified by narrow technical arguments that obscure the broader assault.

The Supreme Court's recent decisions signal dangerous terrain ahead. The Court's increasing hostility to tribal sovereignty—evident in cases like **Ysleta del Sur Pueblo v. Texas** and the ongoing challenges to the Indian Child Welfare Act—suggests that even our most fundamental treaty rights are no longer secure at the federal level.

This reality demands strategic recalibration from tribal leadership.

First, we must stop playing defense exclusively. Every assault on sovereignty should be met with corresponding assertions of tribal authority. When states attempt to tax tribal lands, tribes should expand their own taxation of non-Indian activities within reservation boundaries. When states challenge criminal jurisdiction, tribes should strengthen their own court systems and law enforcement capabilities.

Second, we need to build coalitions that extend beyond Indian Country. Environmental groups, civil rights organizations, and constitutional scholars all have stakes in preventing state governments from unilaterally nullifying federal treaties and Supreme Court decisions. The precedent being set threatens far more than tribal sovereignty.

Third, economic leverage remains our most powerful tool. Tribes that have built successful enterprises—whether in gaming, renewable energy, or other sectors—must be willing to use that economic power strategically. When states attack sovereignty, they should feel immediate economic consequences.

The federal government's response has been predictably weak. The Biden administration talks a good game about government-to-government relationships while allowing state governments to systematically undermine federal Indian law. This administrative passivity forces tribes into expensive defensive litigation while states gain momentum through legislative action.

But history offers perspective. Indigenous nations have survived far more comprehensive assaults than these current attacks. We've outlasted termination policies, boarding schools, and countless other attempts to eliminate our distinct political status. What's required now is the same strategic thinking that allowed our ancestors to negotiate treaties in the first place—the recognition that sovereignty isn't just a legal concept, but a lived practice that must be exercised to be preserved.

The question isn't whether these attacks on tribal sovereignty will continue—they will. The question is whether tribal leadership will respond with the strategic sophistication these attacks demand, or whether we'll continue to treat each assault as an isolated incident rather than part of a coordinated campaign.

Our treaties weren't gifts from a benevolent government. They were negotiated agreements between sovereign nations. It's time to start acting like it.

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The Vikings Are Playing Like They're Still Lost in Ragnarök, Bro

Kia ora, whānau! Your boy Tommy back at it with another hot take that's gonna hit harder than a Brian Urlacher blindside blitz. Today we're breaking down the Minnesota Vikings, and māori, these purple people eaters are looking more like purple people pleasers right now.

Now before all you skoldiers come for me in the comments, hear me out. I got nothing but respect for Vikings culture - both the ancient Norse warriors and this NFL franchise. But right now? They're serving up some seriously mid energy, and as we say back home, "Kāore he kupu māku" - I got no words for this mess.

Let's start with the obvious - Kirk Cousins situation was messier than trying to explain TikTok to your koro. The man had more guaranteed money than some small countries' GDP, but couldn't deliver when it mattered most. That's like having the best waka on the river but being too scared to paddle through the rapids, you feel me? The front office finally cut ties, which was probably overdue by about three seasons. Sometimes you gotta know when to let the taonga go, even if it hurts the wallet.

But here's where it gets spicy - drafting J.J. McCarthy in the first round while having Sam Darnold as your bridge QB? That's some galaxy brain stuff right there. Don't get me wrong, McCarthy's got potential, but throwing a rookie into Minnesota's expectations is like asking someone to perform a proper haka after watching one YouTube video. The fundamentals might be there, but the mana? That takes time to develop.

The defense though? *Chef's kiss* Brian Flores is cooking something special over there. This unit hits different - they're flying around like they actually watched film instead of just doom-scrolling on their phones. When your defense can create turnovers and get after the QB, you're already halfway to winning games. It's giving me major 2000s Ravens vibes, where the D could literally carry a mid offense to relevance.

Speaking of offense, can we talk about Justin Jefferson for a hot minute? This man is absolutely generational - like watching highlights of Jerry Rice in his prime but with modern drip. JJ's route running is cleaner than fresh whites, and his hands? Softer than my nan's fry bread. But even prime Randy Moss couldn't save some of those Vikings teams, and that's the reality Minnesota's facing. One elite receiver doesn't fix systemic issues, no matter how many ankle-breaking routes he runs.

The O-line situation is still sus though. You can have all the skill position talent in the world, but if your QB is running for his life every snap, you're just setting up a lowlight reel for defensive ends. It's like that whakataukī goes: "He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tangata, he tangata, he tangata" - what is the most important thing in the world? It's people. In football terms? Your offensive line are your most important people, and if they're getting cooked every Sunday, your whole offense collapses.

Here's my real talk prediction for Minnesota: they're stuck in football purgatory for at least two more seasons. Not bad enough to get a top-3 pick, not good enough to make noise in January. It's the most frustrating spot for any fanbase - being aggressively average while watching your division rivals (looking at you, Detroit) actually figure it out.

The NFC North is absolutely stacked right now. The Lions are legitimate, the Packers always find a way to be annoying, and even Chicago is building something interesting. Minnesota feels like they're still trying to figure out their identity while everyone else is already executing their plans.

But hey, NFL seasons are wild, and I've been wrong before (don't check my 2019 predictions, please). Maybe that defense really is elite enough to carry them, maybe McCarthy develops faster than expected, maybe the O-line gels and becomes functional. Football's beautiful because on any given Sunday, anything can happen.

Until then though, Vikings fans gonna have to embrace that rebuild energy. Sometimes you gotta go backwards to go forwards - trust the process, even when it looks mid from the outside.

Ka kite anō, stay blessed whānau!

Tommy out 🙌

