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BOOK REVIEW

Samuel F. McPhetres (1997) *Self Government and Citizenship in the CNMI*. CNMI Public School System, Saipan.

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reviewed by

James M. Vincent
Northern Marianas College

Although written as a high school civics textbook, Sam McPhetres' work will also serve as a reliable and handy reference for anyone interested in the CNMI's unique political status with the United States.

The Covenant, which governs the Commonwealth's relations with the U.S. Federal Government, merits three chapters. We learn that the Commonwealth's control of its own immigration, labor laws, and taxation (privileges not granted other U.S. territories except for Samoa) can be rescinded by the U.S. Congress, without CNMI consent. Yet land ownership, so central in Pacific cultures, receives Section 805 of the Covenant: such ownership can be legally limited to those of Northern Marianas descent. At present, a Guamanian Chamorro can no more own land in Rota or Saipan than a Connecticut Yankee or Singapore entrepreneur can. Yet sovereignty was lost in the Covenant; the CNMI, unlike its former Trust Territory companion districts Belau and the Marshalls, will never have a UN seat nor host Asian embassies. America's motive in admitting the Northern Marianas into its constitutional protection shows clearly in the provisions concerning 50-year military land leases on former B-29 airfields on Tinian.

Other chapters review Northern Marianas history. In 1945 Saipan hosted over 100,000 U.S. military, four airfields, and detention camps filled with Japanese civilians and POW's. Camp Susupe housed the 3,000 Chamorro and Carolinian survivors of storms of steel that enveloped the island the previous year. From this Ground Zero, the indigenous peoples, now some 25,000, have achieved relative prosperity, political control, and a viable economy based on tourism and the garment industry. Graphs at the book's end illustrate the Commonwealth's rapid demographic expansion, historical overviews of budgets, even each ethnic group's share of Food Stamp benefits.

The book is such a large compendium of documents, photos, graphs, and chronologies that it would well serve in any Pacific reference collection. The author, a participant in Northern Marianas educational, economic, and political circles over three decades, observed at first hand the birth and early development of the CNMI. He has given workshops on the Covenant to the local legislature. Researchers might save time and avoid false paths by starting out with accurate reference work.

This contribution is not peer-reviewed.

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