constitutes a kind of Dena’ina encyclopedia and ethnohistorical atlas, organized not by alphabet or chronology, but rather by the Athabascan perceptions of the land itself. As such, the book constitutes an indispensable resource for students of Alaskana, ethnogeography, and place, as well as for students of Dena’ina territory, language, and culture. Given the richness of the language and land, the endangered status of Athabascan languages and ethnotoponymic genres, and the fact that much of the material in the book was originally recorded on audio and visual media, it would seem an ideal resource to convert into multimedia format for Native and cross-cultural education. For, as Linnaeus said, Nomina si nescis, Perit cognito rerum—“If you don’t know the names, your knowledge of things perishes.”

Thomas F. Thornton
Trinity College


Paul Pasquaretta builds a compelling analysis of the role of gaming in Native life through observing that “questions about gambling are inextricably linked to land claims conflicts” (p. 162). Much contemporary study of “Indian gaming” focuses on issues of sovereignty, expressed in terms of federal recognition. The history of gambling—understood both as a wager made in the hope of either gain or security and as betting against overwhelming political and economic domination—receives less attention.

Two primary analyses guide inquiries into Indian gaming. The first views participation in gaming as evidence of cultural inauthenticity, a practice that undermines traditional values, and a marker of “non-Indianness.” This perspective includes critiques of Indian gaming as a potential source of criminal activity, a product of the manipulation of Indian policy, and an industry controlled by non-Indian developers. Second, some scholarship tries to support gaming as a legitimate “Indian” practice by locating Indian gaming as the cultural continuity of earlier “authentic” games of chance. The first argument overlooks the recognition that culture is an ongoing process and that new practices will be incorporated into existing cultural spheres. The second places too much emphasis on validating the present primarily by connecting it to the past, at the expense of appreciating culture as a set of dynamic practices.

Pasquaretta recognizes these arguments but expands the field to include a closer attention to the idea of gambling. As such, he offers a way to understand the wagering taking place not only in traditional stories and practices but also in the intersection of Native and European (and later Euro-American) peoples and socioeconomic policies.

Pasquaretta first establishes that gambling and chance are themes evident from the earliest writings about Native America. He performs a dialogic reading of
primary Puritan texts to extract important contextual information about the intersection of indigenous and colonial inhabitants of the “New World.” Using nineteenth-century fiction, Pasquaretta then investigates the Pequots as metaphor, exploring the ongoing process of fixing a colonial history that depends on certain understandings of the Pequots and other Native peoples. Critically, Pasquaretta emphasizes how these conditions and relations depend on shifting readings and strategic uses of history and how they influence contemporary political understandings.

Pasquaretta performs a close reading of Pequot advocacy texts to link the growth of political agency to the development of literacy and the struggle for civil and tribal rights. He then focuses on the contemporary Mashantucket Pequot renaissance—and the formation of a modern Pequot identity—as the combined product of national Indian activism, charismatic Pequot leadership, and the strategic appropriation of legal, political, and academic forms of representation. Such representations are powerfully realized in the tribal nation’s Foxwoods Resort Casino and the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center.

The book’s final section examines Indian gambling in history, politics, and literature to explore the tension that gaming can create within “the Native American community.” Recognizing that high-stakes gaming has generated debate across Native America, Pasquaretta maps out the potential tensions realized at the tribal level. Using the Akwesasne Mohawks as an example, he examines the construction of traditionals (anti-gambling) and progressives (pro-gambling) in Native communities and how such divisions can be experienced. While the Mashantucket Pequots have come to serve as an example for discussions focused on the politics of identity and authenticity, the Akwesasne Mohawks are often cited as an example of the potentially violent and unresolvable conflicts that can come from pursuing Indian gaming.

Pasquaretta’s ambitious project ties together a number of different themes current in Native American studies. Chief among these are self-representation, gaming, authenticity, and issues of tribal and identity politics. By situating his analysis within the intersecting discourses of literary criticism, cultural studies, and Native American histories, Pasquaretta takes readers through a comparative analysis of colonial and Native written perspectives on war, subjugation, and assimilation. He also emphasizes that the conflicts involved can be understood through a framework of gambling by presenting what is at stake; in these discourses it is the ability to speak and be heard. The right to self-representation—in all meanings of the phrase—is at the heart of ongoing arguments over authenticity.

This book is a refreshing re-imagination of Indian gaming, and the breadth of Pasquaretta’s research and investigations allows for fruitful reconsiderations of central issues. It adds significant and much-needed critical literature to the subject of Indian gaming in general and the Mashantucket Pequots in particular.

John Bodinger de Uriarte
Susquehanna University