



# High Stakes: Florida Seminole Gaming and Sovereignty

*Jessica Cattelino*

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In 1979, Florida Seminoles opened the first tribally operated high-stakes bingo hall in North America. At the time, their annual budget stood at less than \$2 million. By 2006, net income from gaming had surpassed \$600 million. This dramatic shift from poverty to relative economic security has created tangible benefits for tribal citizens, including employment, universal health insurance, and social services. Renewed political self-governance and economic strength have reversed decades of U.S. settler-state control. At the same time, gaming has brought new dilemmas to reservation communities and triggered outside accusations that Seminoles are sacrificing their culture by embracing capitalism. In *High Stakes*, Jessica R. Cattelino tells the story of Seminoles' complex efforts to maintain politically and culturally distinct values in a time of new prosperity.

Cattelino presents a vivid ethnographic account of the history and consequences of Seminole gaming. Drawing on research conducted with tribal permission, she describes casino operations, chronicles the everyday life and history of the Seminole Tribe, and shares the insights of individual Seminoles. At the same time, she unravels the complex connections among cultural difference, economic power, and political rights. Through analyses of Seminole housing, museum and language programs, legal disputes, and everyday activities, she shows how Seminoles use gaming revenue to enact their sovereignty. They do so in part, she argues, through relations of interdependency with others. *High Stakes* compels rethinking of the conditions of indigeneity, the power of money, and the meaning of sovereignty.

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