In July 1990, my four-year-old son and I drove from Batoche to Kingston. All the way along, I listened to the radio and read the papers, following the Oka Crisis and believing that things were going to be different, that finally Canadians, and even North Americans in general, were going to see that after five hundred years of survival and resistance, Indigenous peoples were—had always been—entitled to control their destiny, as much as any humans ever can. And that controlling their destiny meant something other than assimilation and “vanishing” into the Amer-European whitestream culture. Then we took the ferry down to Wolfe Island and over to New York State, and as CBC faded off our radio, all news of Oka disappeared. Even the New York Times, it seemed, had never heard of Oka or Mohawks. It was a parable not only of American blindness toward everything Canadian but also of whitestream willed oblivion to anything Indigenous that did not fit stereotypes.

When Europeans began sustained contact with what they called the New World after 1492, they almost immediately put into place the
rhetoric of deficiency and punishment that they had already developed for the “infidels” against whom they had been staging “crusades” for centuries. Despite the splendours of Inca or Aztec civilization, Euro-Christian rhetoric condemned the Indigenous peoples of the western hemisphere as deficient beings whose lands and possessions were automatically forfeit to the Europeans and whose lives and liberties, if not absolutely forfeit, were still so badly in need of improvement that they were only to be enjoyed at the pleasure of the civilizers. That this was both inaccurate and unfair, by the civilizers’ own rules, was rarely thought and even more rarely expressed by the Europeans, save for those who, for whatever reason, threw in their lot with that of the Indigenous people. The basic attitude that “Indians” had no rights that a white man need respect really changed little over the next half millennium, though as Michael Murphy has shown, different nineteenth-century European thinkers had various theories about whether Indigenous individuals were inherently inferior to Europeans or whether environmental and cultural deficiencies had rendered their social relations inferior, even if individuals were capable of improvement and assimilation.¹

Only in the second half of the twentieth century, when the horrors of the Final Solution made inescapable the fallibility of the idea of racial superiority and even of Euro-Christian enlightenment and its imperialist attitudes to “lesser breeds without the Law,” did Amer-Europeans begin to listen seriously to the intellectual arguments of global decolonizers, including Indigenous leaders in the United States and Canada, though those arguments took over half a century fully to register and are still not clear in all quarters today. Despite my experience with Oka’s disappearance from my airwaves, July 1990 was approximately midway in a series of crises that reshaped Indigenous affairs in Canada and prompted a wholesale reconsideration of the relationship between Indigenous and whitestream Canadian laws and ideals. Although the United States is now lagging far behind Canada in recognition of Indigenous rights, the Canadian lessons apply to the States as well.

The purpose of this chapter is to review the discussion that has ensued over the last twenty years and to mine it both as a model for how deficiency can come to be understood as sufficiency and as a source for Aboriginal ways of viewing the contemporary world that provide us with
a specific way to reconceptualize our relationship with that other deficiency, the Great Plains. To understand *The Terrible Summer*, as Richard Wagamese called the summer of 1990 in a collection of newspaper columns he wrote at the time, it is useful to examine the Oka Crisis in the context of other “Native News.” What issues were Indigenous communities across Canada pursuing? How did Indigenous artists conceptualize decolonization? How can we use the continuing rhetoric of colonialism to defeat itself? What is the contemporary rhetoric of decolonization, especially as it relates to common, criminal, and constitutional law, themes that repeatedly arise from the news stories? And finally, how does this serve as a model for reimagining and justifying the Great Plains?

We can find a context for the Oka summer in texts produced by and for Native communities in western Canada in *Windspeaker*, an Edmonton newspaper that has survived tumultuous times to remain an influential Native voice. A central theme running through most of the discourse is that Indigenous issues are holistic, that one cannot isolate one strand from another. At the same time, it is impossible always to talk simultaneously about everything, so the human brain is forced to create distinctions even for the purpose of reuniting them. Although I will focus on events from the Prairies, many of these issues, like Oka, were national in scope but produced particular responses on the Prairies. One could start in many places, but let us choose the early morning of 9 March 1988, when Cree leader J.J. Harper was shot and killed by a Winnipeg city policeman with a reputation for being a cowboy and a racist. Manitoba empanelled an Aboriginal Justice Inquiry (AJI) the following April to look into Harper’s death and also into a vicious murder in the Pas in 1971, in which a young Cree student, Helen—called Betty—Osborne, had been kidnapped and killed by four white men who remained invisible to authorities for more than a decade, even though they were well known in the community. Also in 1988, the Lubicon Lake Cree band organized a widely publicized boycott of the *Spirit Sings* exhibition at Calgary’s Glenbow Museum during the Winter Olympics to call attention to their unresolved land claims in northern Alberta and to the physical and economic degradation of their territory by oil drilling operations.²

In 1990, matters accelerated. The Nova Scotia Justice Inquiry began the year on 26 January by exonerating Mi’kmaq Donald Marshall, Jr., for
the 1971 murder of Sandy Seale, for which Marshall had been wrongly convicted and had served eleven years in prison. The province apologized, not only for the wrongful conviction, but for the statement of the judge who finally acquitted him, that Marshall had been the author of his own misfortune. In March, the federal government slashed funding for Aboriginal communications networks, including publications like *Windspeaker*, and for Friendship Centres and Aboriginal government organizations nationwide. The Province of Alberta persisted in building a dam on the Oldman River without fulfilling the environmental requirements that courts had demanded and without the permission of the Peigan people, whose land and river would be affected and whose people were divided over the dam. Mohawks in Kanesatake protested plans of the neighbouring municipality of Oka to enlarge a golf course onto an area the Mohawks called The Pines, which the Mohawks had reforested in the nineteenth century after the failure of European agriculture on the sandy soil. The Mohawks had used The Pines as a community sacred site ever since. A land claims suit was wending its way through a court in British Columbia. Wilson Nepoose was still in an Alberta jail for the 1986 murder of Rose Desjarlais, though his conviction would eventually be overturned. Brian Mulroney’s window of opportunity for the ratification of the Meech Lake Accord to reconcile Quebec to the 1982 patriation of the Constitution was coming to a close when Elijah Harper, a Cree MLA from the North, refused unanimous assent to its passage in the Manitoba Legislative Assembly on 12 April 1990. The accord, Harper accurately pointed out, did not deal with Aboriginal rights, and Canada could not afford to conclude constitutional dealings with Aboriginal rights still in abeyance. Harper never gave assent, and Meech Lake ran out of time on 23 June. It had never been particularly popular outside of Quebec, but the image of Harper holding an eagle feather aloft as he refused assent would inflame Quebec’s resistance to the Mohawks’ claim to their land.

On 11 July 1990, the Terrible Summer began in earnest, when Sûreté du Québec troopers attempted to clear out the Mohawks blocking the golf course expansion. A quiet and peaceful occupation turned immediately into an armed standoff, and somehow one policeman was shot and killed. All of a sudden, Indigenous issues were front and centre in Canada.
The newspapers, the radio, the television all devoted time and stories to the Oka Crisis, especially when the Canadian Army was dispatched to . . . do something—whether to bring peace or just to end the blockade is not entirely clear. Mohawks from Kahnawake blocked the Mercier Bridge and shut off the southeastern approach to Montreal. Aboriginal people felt that finally non-Native Canadians were paying attention to what they had been saying all along. Elijah Harper had stopped Meech—with a feather. A few determined Mohawks were holding the Canadian Army and the Province of Quebec and the City of Montreal at bay. Aboriginal groups enacted their own blockades—including a brief and symbolic stoppage of the Louise Bridge in Calgary.4

But as the Terrible Summer wound down, solutions did not seem near. Residents of Chateauguay stoned the Kahnawake Mohawks. Milton Born-With-A-Tooth and the Lone Fighters managed to dig a diversion ditch around the dam site and free the Oldman River on 3 August 1990. But they were surrounded by police and shots were fired on 7 September. Milton Born-With-A-Tooth was arrested on 12 September. Despite winning some battles against the oil companies, the Lubicon Lake Cree were losing the war. The federal government was angling to recognize a band, whom the Lubicons believed were malcontents organized by the government, with rival claims to the area, and the Japanese conglomerate Daishowa was moving ahead with a giant pulp plant for Lubicon territory. On 26 September 1990, the Mohawk Warriors left the treatment facility where they had taken their last stand at Kanesatake. Most were arrested.5

On 28 January 1991, in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Leo LaChance, an Aboriginal trapper, was shot and killed by Carney Nerland, the former leader of a white supremacist group. There was conflicting testimony as to whether this was an accident or a deliberate and racially motivated slaying. (At Nerland’s trial and subsequent inquiry, despite police attempts to maintain secrecy, it became apparent that Nerland had been a police informant. He received four years for manslaughter and disappeared into a police protection program after his release.) On 8 March 1991, Justice Allan McEachern of British Columbia handed down a verdict dismissing Gitksan and Wet’suwet’en land claims. Canada, he said, was under no obligation to accept oral tradition in a land claims case nor, really, to

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respect any Aboriginal claims not backed up by European written treaties. Indigenous people, like everyone else, could casually use Crown lands not otherwise under lease or contract. But that was all. Delgamuukw would appeal McEachern’s decision—and the condescending manner in which it had been reached and written—to the Supreme Court of Canada. On 11 December 1997, the Supreme Court would overturn McEachern on every particular and grant oral tradition—be it story or dance—and the underlying relationship between the people and the land full standing in Canadian courts. On 25 March 1991, an Alberta judge sentenced Milton Born-With-A-Tooth to eighteen months in jail—apparently for firing a gun in the air in the presence of police. The Oldman Dam would be completed. On 29 August, the AJI of Manitoba presented the results of its three-year investigation. Like the inquiry in Nova Scotia and similar inquiries in BC, Alberta, and Saskatchewan (and in fact some thirty inquiries in twenty-five years, as counted by Windspeaker) the AJI would conclude that the Manitoba justice system consistently and across the board failed Aboriginal people who were victims of crimes, victims of police brutality, perpetrators of crimes, wrongly charged or convicted, or “criminalized” by child protection services or job discrimination. It could not have been more plain in its condemnation nor more precise in its suggestions for change. (Twenty years later, few of those changes have been made.) That same August, the federal government authorized a Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) to study all the issues raised by the Oka Crisis and the Nova Scotia and Manitoba justice inquiries. While RCAP considered many issues in addition to the justice system and its failures, the revisions the commission and others suggested show the greatest capacity for immediate, effective system change—although implementation lags far behind inspiration.

The five hundredth anniversary of the Columbian invasion was in October of 1992—ironically, on Thanksgiving. No celebration for Indigenous peoples of the western hemisphere, the anniversary was, however, a chance to look back over five hundred years of survival and resistance, which Indigenous artists did in two travelling exhibitions: Indigena, mounted by the Canadian Museum of Civilization, and Land, Spirit, Power by the National Gallery of Canada. Both surveyed the past as a way of building a better future. And of course, life went on and was recorded in the
pages of *Windspeaker*. Young Aboriginal artists won awards. People went to powwows and rodeos and hockey games. Students won scholarships and graduated from programs in nursing, law and corrections, and forest management. People started new businesses. Students wrote and performed their own plays. Tony Thrasher, the “Skid Row Eskimo,” died in Edmonton in July 1989. AIDS was stalking Aboriginal communities, and Ken Ward, the first treaty person to be diagnosed with full-blown AIDS, went public in 1990 and began to visit prisons and schools and communities to talk about AIDS prevention. Although the “scoop-up” of the 1950s and 1960s was over, Aboriginal families still lost children to “welfare” agencies, and adult children who had been adopted out of Indigenous communities came back, struggling to find and know and be claimed by their birth families. In August 1991, a mother staged a hunger strike to protest the decision to have her children adopted by non-Native parents instead of by the family members to whom she had entrusted them. Prostitution and substance abuse ruined lives, and people got off the streets and sobered up and reclaimed their lives. Incarceration rates rose more rapidly for Aboriginal people than for other segments of the population, especially in the Prairies, and people fought to get a Healing Lodge for women started in the Prairies because Aboriginal women were dying in the antiquated Prison for Women in Kingston. Aboriginal birthrates were among the highest in both Canada and the United States, and while Aboriginal dropout rates were also high, more and more Aboriginal students completed high school and succeeded in post-secondary education. Videographers scrutinized the valour and the horror of Indigenous life—kids committing suicide and communities coming together to provide hope for the kids. In 1992, Wilson Nepoose’s murder conviction was overturned and he was released from jail, but Alberta never ordered a new trial, leaving him in limbo, neither guilty nor exonerated. A year and a half after the RCAP reported its considerable findings and recommendations, which have never been implemented, Wilson Nepoose, in early January 1998 (or perhaps the very end of December 1997), died in the bush near his sister’s house. His remains were not found until the following summer. (The murder of Rose Desjarlais remains unsolved.)

In the United States, the pages of *Lakota Times* (now *Indian Country Today*) included many similar stories, but the events that, like
Oka, had shone a national spotlight on Indian affairs had happened about two decades earlier, and they had arisen from a somewhat different political and cultural context than the events in Canada. As we have seen, in 1932, Black Elk and John Joseph Mathews had articulated powerful visions of Siouan world views as exemplary, even as they worried about the possible disappearance of the people who understood those traditions. The thirties, however, were a hopeful decade for American Indians. In 1934, as we have also seen, the Indian Reorganization Act had de-outlawed the Sun Dance and other ceremonies, ended allotment, provided for tribal sovereignty—if not always on tribal terms—and in many ways ended direct colonization of American Indians. The federal and even state arts and other employment projects of the Depression did employ some Native people and included Native motifs as the “universal” heritage of the United States. One of the most striking examples is the Nebraska State Capitol, a singularly beautiful building with Indian themes developed by University of Nebraska professor Hartley Burr Alexander, including a senate chamber intended to inspire high-minded political thought with exclusively Native themes and images. Although this was to some extent simply cultural appropriation, it did show a genuine willingness of whitestream power to learn from Indigenous philosophy. During the 1940s, Native American intellectuals could still retain some optimism. As had happened in World War I, Native men volunteered for the armed services in very high proportions, while Native women moved to the cities and took on Rosie-the-Riveter roles. World War I service had been rewarded with full US citizenship for Native people in 1924, and it was reasonable to expect social improvement after World War II as well. In 1944, Ella Deloria published Speaking of Indians, an eloquent explication of “A Scheme of Life That Worked” and a prescription for a better postwar society that would at least accept Native people’s right to live by rules based on kinship and sharing, and perhaps inform whitestream society as well. Unfortunately, that would not happen. Instead, the postwar years were marked by the federal policies of Termination and Relocation, which attempted to open up remaining reservation resources to non-Indians, to terminate the Indian status of tribes and individuals, and to move Indigenous people off the land and into the cities. Although couched in
terms of assimilation, these programs for the most part resulted instead in marginalization, alienation, and increased poverty and welfare dependence. Public Law 280 replaced federal jurisdiction over reservations in some states—including Nebraska—with state jurisdiction, often leading to selective enforcement and a lack of protection for reservation residents. The ensuing disorder hastened the breakup of Indian families as children were taken away and put into foster care or entirely adopted out. As we have seen, the Pick-Sloan dam projects systematically flooded reservations on the Missouri mainstem, including Crow Creek, flooded out twice, leading to more social and cultural disruption and the apprehension of children for placement in often brutal foster and institutional settings. (Some were my claimed family.)

Not surprisingly, Native Americans fought back. Ella Deloria’s nephew, Vine Deloria, Jr., was the most influential Native American intellectual from the late 1960s to the end of the century. Just the titles of his books—also bumper stickers—give the flavour of his discourse: *Custer Died for Your Sins*; *We Talk, You Listen*; *God Is Red*; *Red Earth, White Lies*. Unlike Black Elk, Mathews, or Ella Deloria, Vine Deloria was less interested in arguing or delineating the exemplary nature of Lakota or Native society in general—he pretty much took that for granted—as he was in pointing out the deficiencies of both government and academic treatment of Native Americans and how Indians themselves would organize to go about resolving their own issues. His *Custer Died for Your Sins* is a strong parallel to another book published in 1969, one that also used irony and humour to point out government mistakes and how Indian-controlled programs could redress them: Harold Cardinal’s *Unjust Society*. While Deloria and Cardinal and others provided theory, during the 1960s and 1970s, thousands of Native people from all over the continent provided the specifics of a Red Power movement that took inspiration from the more general civil rights struggles, mostly in the United States, and from specific responses to Indigenous issues such as Relocation and Termination, the infamous “White Paper” put forth by the Trudeau government in 1968 that would have effectively terminated Indian status in Canada, ongoing problems with residential schools and education in general, fishing and hunting rights guaranteed in treaties but abrogated in practice, the needs of a new
class of urban Indians, and the loss of subsistence and the resulting welfare
dependency on reserves and reservations.

Cardinal was nothing if not blunt in his first paragraph, and his basic
premises are similar to Deloria’s:

The history of Canada’s Indians is a shameful chronicle of the white man’s
disinterest, his deliberate trampling of Indian rights and his repeated
betrayal of our trust. Generations of Indians have grown up behind
a buckskin curtain of indifference, ignorance and, all too often, plain
bigotry. Now, at a time when our fellow Canadians consider the promise
of the Just Society, once more the Indians of Canada are betrayed by a
programme which offers nothing better than cultural genocide.10

Both Deloria and Cardinal saw the missionaries and their schools as fail-
ures and travesties, and both, especially Cardinal, demanded education—as
the Indigenous treaty makers of the nineteenth century had—in the trade
and professional skills necessary to earn a competence in whitestream
farming, resource extraction, and other fields. Deloria particularly disliked
anthropologists, who, he believed, tended to sentimentalize Native people
and hinder their mainstream success by locating them in a romantic past.
Both Deloria and Cardinal looked for peaceful solutions but noted that
violence was possible if whitestream society did not acknowledge Native
rights. Deloria distinguished between Indian nationalists—who “are pri-
marily concerned with the development and continuance of the tribe” and
were not much influenced either by whitestream assumptions or blacks’
aspirations of inclusion in whitestream society—and militants, who were
“reactionists.” The nationalists might use violence if necessary, but militants
used violence only to attract attention to themselves and thus had nothing
but violence to provide. Cardinal noted that Canada’s Indians were watch-
ing television to learn about the successes and failures of Black Power in the
United States. They were doing their best to organize, despite generational
differences, funding deficits, and divisions between status and non-status
Indians, and urban and reserve populations. He warned Ottawa to honour
its own words. The White Paper had been a particular affront because it
contravened all the promises of consultation that the government had
made to Canada’s Indians and handed down a mandate that had nothing to do with what Native people in Canada wanted. He warned of a “Red Explosion” if Ottawa proceeded on its heedless way.\textsuperscript{11}

Writing in 1968, both authors clearly envisaged the Red Power movement that began with the occupation of Alcatraz in 1969 and culminated in the Wounded Knee takeover in the spring of 1973. Robert Allen Warrior and Paul Chaat Smith painstakingly chronicle these events and the ideas behind them in \textit{Like a Hurricane}, but their emphasis is on the rationales for the occupations and on the great significance of the occupations in arousing “Red Pride” and counteracting internalized racism. Although Warrior and Smith did not look at the Canadian participants in these events or at the occupations and other actions in Canada, Jeannette Armstrong’s 1985 novel \textit{Slash} is an excellent distillation of that Canadian story; she shows her hero in the BIA building in Washington as well as in a similar action in Ottawa and responding to Wounded Knee even though he cannot participate. Armstrong’s focus is on Okanagan tradition—and other Indigenous cultures and ceremonies when necessary—as a way of healing the alienation of colonialism for her Okanagan and other Indigenous characters, and also for providing a model of how to live with the land for the ignorant white people, whom she acknowledges, as Cardinal does, are “here to stay.” As Deloria notes in the introduction to the 1988 republication of \textit{Custer Died for Your Sins}, \textit{AIM} created a feeling of solidarity and pride in the 1960s and 1970s, but by 1988 it was virtually moribund.\textsuperscript{12} He did not note, though he could have, that it had largely been silenced by the FBI’s domestic terrorism through their \textit{COINTELPRO} (Counter Intelligence Program) initiative and a determined program of selective prosecution that ate up precious funding and time. \textit{AIM} leader Leonard Peltier still languishes in federal prison, doing two life sentences plus seven years for a crime even prosecutors acknowledge he did not commit and for which he was illegally extradited from Canada.

All of the stories of Black Elk and Mathews and Ella and Vine Deloria and Harold Cardinal and Jeannette Armstrong and many, many others are parts of the intellectual background for Native issues in Canada, and the Prairies in particular, during the 1990s. But let us look in a bit more detail at the ways both Deloria and Cardinal suggested Native society could be
exemplary for whitestream society. As Deloria noted frankly, “The United States operates on incredibly stupid premises,” so it could be influenced to more intelligent, peaceful ways “by any group with a more comprehensive philosophy of man if that group worked in a non-violent, non-controversial manner.” Deloria saw hope in urban Indians who have access to libraries and night schools, and by 1988, was particularly optimistic about “an increasing number of young people” who, with “well-organized community support [could] greatly influence the thinking of the nation within a few years.” Similarly, Cardinal saw the “rebirth of the Indian, free, proud, his own man.” While co-operation between Native and whitestream societies has hitherto demanded that all the change be on the part of the Indigenous groups, “our older people think that it is part of the responsibility of the Indian to help the white man regain this lost sense of humanity.”

Though Deloria (Dakota, Denver) and Cardinal (Cree, Edmonton) were both from Plains tribes and were living in cities on the edge of the Plains in 1968–69, they spoke for national and to some extent pan-Indian movements, as did Windspeaker and the Lakota Times. The Wounded Knee takeover was on the Plains, on the Oglala Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, but Alcatraz and Washington were on the west and east coasts. Similarly, the events around 1990 took place across Canada, and one would be hard put to identify a particularly Plains or Prairie view on issues such as Meech Lake. Elijah Harper was from northern Manitoba, and it was a federal mandate to bring Quebec into the Constitution that he stopped, but he held up his feather in Winnipeg. Local, regional, and national issues all morph into each other, which is not surprising: Native sovereignty cannot be meaningful if it is based on single reserves, since almost all important land-use and political decisions are made regionally, nationally, or even internationally. To make sense of the arguments for Indigenous customs as sufficient and even exemplary, we must see region in a global context. Let us look, then, at how these arguments are developed and sustained in the production of three artists who were working in Alberta at the time of the Terrible Summer and who were often featured in Windspeaker. Joane Cardinal-Schubert and Jane Ash Poitras are Albertan visual artists with international reputations—both took part in the Indigena exhibition and both were reviewed frequently in Windspeaker. Richard Wagamese, journalist and novelist,
was an award-winning columnist for *Windspeaker* and the *Calgary Herald* during this period. These three artists and intellectuals represent a Prairie-based creative nucleus for discussing the ethic of survival and resistance that developed in Indigenous Prairie communities during this turbulent period.

At a June 2005 gallery talk/demonstration in Calgary, Joane Cardinal-Schubert showed a series of recent works in which she juxtaposed rectangular city spaces with organic images of horses. Her talk mixed technical discussion of colour theory—how different colours work together to create the illusion of depth, of shapes protruding or retreating from the surface of the canvas—with her concern about representing images that belong to her own lived experience, such as horses, without reproducing or even suggesting stereotypes of “the Plains Indian” as mounted warrior. For *Indigena*, Cardinal-Schubert prepared a complex installation piece, “Preservation of a Species: deconstructivists (This is the house that Joe built),” which combined painting, drawing, photography, sculpture, assemblage, and text, and was completed in 1990. In her artist’s statement in the published catalogue of *Indigena*, she says that it “is an installation that visually discusses racism through an examination of labels and imposed stereotypes that I have experienced growing up in a non-Native society.” She deals with the forced assimilation of children through the mission schools and the foster care system, the systemic categorizations of people by “status” and number, the fencing in of people in the reserves, and the necessity for resistance—her own, her father’s (Joe), her grandmother’s, her brother’s (architect Douglas Cardinal). The installation includes the text of “Joe Cardinal’s message to his children from his deathbed ‘IF I HAD MADE A STAND—you wouldn’t have to/you’ve got to stand up to them. Don’t let those bastards get you. Just Stand up and Never give in . . . .’” (ellipses in original). But her father she also associates with the land, which she includes in a “large painting of the lake.” Her artist’s statement continues, “We should be thankful that the Native people have become the barometers, the ‘eco-meters’ who point out the dangers of pollution to us.” Part of the text talks about her father as hunter and “just really part of the forest.” But she concludes that text with the words, “(Eventually Joseph came to believe nature’s biggest enemy wasn’t poachers, but his employer, the Alberta government, which seemed to be in league with the exploiters).”14
The nature of the assemblage forces the viewer to see all the parts as connected—but not whole. The peaceful painting of the lake and water lilies is behind a box labelled “Foster Child” and is littered with bottles, a syringe, money, a scrub brush, and “Cultural Identity” locked in another, smaller box. Posts become women in head scarves, some wearing newspaper clippings attesting to daily realities and all with the bark on, still identifiable as trees, as part of the tree. In his 2001 book A Feather Not a Gavel, A.C. Hamilton, co-chair of Manitoba’s Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, combines memoir with research and experience to explain why Canada’s justice system is failing Aboriginal people and how it might be reconceived. He emphasizes that Native people repeatedly pointed out to the justice inquiry that no problem could be solved in isolation. Cardinal-Schubert says the same thing visually.15 Using different media and enclosing part of her installation in a house, a box, so that it must then be viewed through different windows that break things up and prevent the viewer from seeing everything at once, she actually emphasizes the wholeness. We are perfectly content not to see “the whole picture” when our little vantage points present what appears to be a complete view, but we are frustrated when we are forced to recognize that part of what we are trying to see is blocked. Cardinal-Schubert forces us to put the pieces together—the mission schools against the foster child; the clear water (which she points out in her statement can also be used as a weapon) against the bottles of despair, the weapons of oblivion for the powerless; the artistic survival and resistance of herself and her brother against her father’s defiance and his recognition that the state as keeper of the game is more destructive than the poacher.

In the same Indigena exhibition, Jane Ash Poitras also used mixed media, but in the form of two-dimensional collages. Her three-panel compilations, “Shaman Never Die” (1990) and “A Sacred Prayer for a Sacred Island” (1991), both foreground Native spirituality, which she further discusses in her artist’s statement. As does Cardinal-Schubert, Poitras combines glyphs—horses, bison, bear—with words, photographs, newspaper clippings, and chalk overdrawing. Her clippings deal directly with issues such as Oka and Meech Lake, but her glyphs and historical photographs link these closely to five hundred years of cultural survival. While her
imagery is not as explicitly land-based as Cardinal-Schubert’s—perhaps because she grew up in Edmonton rather than on the land—her third panel in “A Sacred Prayer for a Sacred Island” includes “A New and Accurate Map of the World” from about the seventeenth century, which of course does not show the northern Great Plains nor what we now call Alberta at all. Although it clearly shows the continents as islands (though not as sacred), it also represents the continuing misperception of Europeans and Euro-North Americans of what is here. The question is not whether the map is an accurate projection—though the fact that by twenty-first-century standards it is not definitely raises the question—but whether such scientific mapping can ever be commensurate to a sacred place. Above the map, as in the other two panels, are historic photographs, overdrawn with both glyphs and crosses. Despite the deliberate depthlessness of the collage—everything is melded onto the same plane—context of place remains in the backgrounds of the photographs and in the map. Poitras does not explicitly recognize “city” as “place” in the way Cardinal-Schubert paints lake and forest as “place.”

Like Jane Ash Poitras, Richard Wagamese was removed from the land by Children’s Aid when he was still a small child, but unlike her, he spent an uneasy childhood with several non-Native foster and adoptive families in several different towns and neighbourhoods. Land and memory of land became a constant for him. “For Indians,” he wrote in one of his columns, “the single most important element that defines them as individuals, bands, clans and nations is the land.” Later, looking back on the summer of 1991, which he saw as a summer of hope following the Terrible Summer of 1990, he talked about experiencing the beauty of the land.

For me, as an aboriginal person forced by circumstance to be a city dweller, it’s a vital reconnection to what my people refer to as the heartbeat of the universe.

. . .

It’s the foundation of everything, because the land is the teacher and the tool which allows us to continue to define ourselves mentally, spiritually, philosophically, and emotionally. All things are tied to it.

It’s not difficult to understand . . . And in this, we are all Indians.
In the penultimate essay in his collection, Wagamese writes, “I believe we become immortal through the process of learning to love the ones with whom we share this planet.”

*A Quality of Light*, Wagamese’s second novel, set partly during the Terrible Summer, talks in more detail of the land, both in itself and as a trope for the kinds of human knowledge protected by tribal traditions and crucial to the survival of all those “with whom we share this planet.” The present of the novel is a fictional hostage taking at the Harry Hays federal building in Calgary by Johnny Gebhardt, the militant childhood friend of the Reverend Joshua Kane, the protagonist and narrator of the novel. Johnny, though of German descent, is staking out a tribal position of solidarity with the Mohawk Warriors of Kanesatake, while Joshua, an Ojibway, seems comfortably assimilated into the Euro-Canadian mainstream. Wagamese thus vividly illustrates that loss of touch with the land and tribal ways of orienting oneself, as a human being, to the land and the universe are as destructive to non-Native as to Native North Americans. Johnny begins his healing at a traditional camp in the mountains, where he spends a winter by himself, in a tipi. “Above it, the sky is a tremendous bowl, like a pipe bowl, the universe gathered within it. . . . The land veritably pulses with energy” (emphasis in the original). In the manifesto, which is to be read on live television as the price of his surrender and the freedom of the hostages, Johnny writes, “Tribalism is an expression of the needs of one honored by the whole. We are all tribal people. We all have, within our genes, the memory of tribal fires. Some of us have distanced ourselves from that memory. . . . But it lies within each of us like a latent hope” (emphasis in the original). Responsibility to the land and to the people with whom we share it is the central motif of *A Quality of Light*, though Wagamese explores many variations on it. In particular, he deals with the specific nature of imperialism and oppression of the Indigenous peoples of North America through death, displacement, and the systematic debasement of Indigenous cultures for generations of Indigenous people. On one level, *A Quality of Light* can be read as a primer on the texts and struggles of decolonization, of those who have fallen and those who have survived, and Wagamese refers specifically to writers like Harold Cardinal and his Métis
contemporary Howard Adams. In allowing his Teutonic character to fulfill the role of warrior for the people, Wagamese points out that although the problems the Columbian invasion created for Native North Americans are real and distinct, they cannot be resolved without a spiritual change of the whole society to honour the needs of one segment of that society. Land is central and it provides inspiration, but it also requires human interpretation, which the book attempts to fulfill.\(^\text{18}\)

Oka was about land. Cardinal-Schubert’s lake and Poitras’s islands were about land. The Columbian quincentenary was definitely about land. Wagamese’s Joshua makes a joke of it, at one point introducing himself as the pastor of “St. Geronimo’s parish of Our Lady of Perpetual Land Claims.”\(^\text{19}\) The significance of Columbus was not that he “discovered” America or even that he brought it to the attention of Europe. Both of those had been done long before. The significance was that he and his backers, the Spanish monarchs, began the land grab. Other discoverers had either settled, married into the people and become at home, or visited for a while and returned whence they had come. The Columbian invasion used physical force based on a supremacist ideology that granted entitlement; the invaders used systematic methods of seemingly neutral activities such as mapping and accounting that allowed for the bureaucratic stripping of both individual and community identities, and, sometimes unwittingly, brought vast armies of microbes that devastated the previously healthy peoples of the western hemisphere. Land, justice issues, and Columbus did not just happen to coincide in the pages of *Windspeaker* and in the work of the three artists discussed above. They have always been connected.

The artists and the newspaper respond acutely to Native issues. I would like to end this section, however, by focusing on three texts that are comparative overviews of the large relationships between Indigenous and whitestream philosophy and practice in Canadian society. Let us begin with a text that explicitly works from a deficiency model of Indigenous thought, examine its shortcomings, and then look at the exemplary models given of Indigenous society and how they may benefit whitestream people and their institutions. This, I believe, gives us a working analogy to the Great Plains, rooted in its millennia of occupation as a humanly satisfying environment. The flaws in the deficiency model of Indigenous North America
suggest analogous flaws in the deficiency model of the Great Plains, while 
the actual strengths of the sufficiency models that Indigenous people hold 
of themselves and their land suggest analogues for “reading” the sufficiency 
of the Great Plains and thus potential ways of healing the woes we have 
been discussing. They also show us the need for Indigenous people and 
their philosophy in any humanly satisfying future for the Great Plains and, 
indeed, for all of Turtle Island and its blue-green globey earth.

Reading accounts of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century 
Canadian Indian policy is always troubling because it deals with immense 
human loss and seems to rest on a questionable premise: that Christian, 
Amer-European principles of economy, society, and culture are inherently 
superior to Cree, Blackfoot, Dakota, or other First Nations principles of 
economy, society, and culture. The twenty-first-century reader is apt to ask 
what Hayter Reed or Duncan Campbell Scott or even John A. Macdonald 
would say were he writing today. If we read Thomas Flanagan’s First 
Nations? Second Thoughts and take it at face value, we are likely to conclude 
that Reed, Scott, Macdonald et al. were on the right track all along. They 
should have changed nothing in their beliefs—they should simply have been 
more consistent in carrying out their work of civilization and not indulged 
in the paternalism of trying to treat First Nations (or Métis) peoples any 
differently than any other Canadians. While I contend that Flanagan works 
from an interlocking series of untenable premises, I believe that the rhetor-
ics of his presentation are very effective—even seductive—and thus help us 
to understand why the deficiency models of both Indigenous societies and 
the Great Plains still seem to make sense.

Flanagan’s involvement with Native issues began on the Prairies 
with his careful and intelligent translations and editions of the writings of 
Louis Riel and with an essentially positive biography of Riel. More recently, 
he has changed his point of view to one more critical of Riel, which may 
be why the federal government contacted him to carry out research relating 
to Métis land claims. That research led to Flanagan’s publication of his 
own summary of the issues in Métis Lands in Manitoba, a book that is in 
many ways a “prequel” to Second Thoughts. Métis Lands is a case study 
that ends with the sentence “To explain why I believe paternalism was and 
is not appropriate would require another publication.” Second Thoughts
is that publication, although Flanagan says in the first chapter of Second Thoughts that he decided to write the book in response to his perception of an “aboriginal orthodoxy,” presumably that contained in the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), which was both prevalent and, he believed, unuseful in discussing contemporary and historical Indigenous issues. Flanagan’s statement of his own goals is characteristically modest and reasonable sounding: “I do not claim to say the last word on these difficult and controversial issues, only to offer some viewpoints that are seldom heard today. In particular, I do not present a plan for curing all the ills besetting aboriginal peoples. I do not believe in the validity of such plans.”

The power and the shortcomings of Flanagan’s reasoning are illustrated clearly in Métis Lands in Manitoba. Here Flanagan argues that the procedures for assigning Métis land were fair and were fairly carried out for the benefit of the Métis, except in a few individual cases of fraud, which were almost all rectified in the end. Although he admits that, given the nature of the Métis economy and the way lands were parcelled out, they were of virtually no use to most of the participants, he does not consider the possibility of administering the claims so as to produce the large block settlements that the Métis actually wanted in order to create their own land base. By damning anything other than a strictly market solution as “paternalism,” Flanagan makes it impossible for the reader to engage in anything other than Flanagan’s examination of procedures. The zebras, one might say, were given their fair share of lion meat, and they could even exchange it for grass under very fair terms. An excruciatingly careful study of the parceling out of the lion meat and of the rules for exchanging it for grass would, however, probably seem odd if it never actually mentioned that zebras do not, under most circumstances, eat lions.

Some of the Second Thoughts premises are not particularly significant, except from a rhetorical point of view. In the first of eight statements that Flanagan claims encapsulate “The Aboriginal Orthodoxy,” he writes, “Aboriginals differ from other Canadians because they were here first. As ‘First Nations,’ they have unique rights, including the inherent right of self-government” (6). Flanagan seriously argues that First Nations and Inuit peoples were not really in Canada “first”; they moved around a lot.
and in some places, such as the prairies, their present locations date only from post-1492. This is simply irrelevant. A homesteader who arrived on a claim only ten minutes after another homesteader had staked it was out of luck. The movement of different groups of peoples across the continent and within regions certainly complicates the assignment of land and other rights among Native groups but has no relevance to the relation between the rights of Natives and newcomers. The current constitutions of both the United States and Canada clearly distinguish certain rights retained by Indigenous people because of their prior occupancy and sovereignty. Clearly, despite the deficiency models that the early explorers and settlers carried with them, they realized that Native people had a presence on the land and distinctive ways of land use that were systematic and understandable. As Flanagan would tell us—for word origins are an important part of his rhetoric—prior is from Old Latin and relates to such words as prime and primitive, derived from the prefix pri-., before. Prior means preceding in time. Native North American peoples possess prior rights to newcomer North American peoples. What, exactly, these rights may be is not clear from simple priority—but the priority exists. Nor are these rights, as Flanagan suggests, in some way “racially” based. Yes, they depend on inheritance within family lines, but so do most kinds of intergenerational property transfer. One could as well argue that all inheritance rights premised on passage from parent to child are racially based, and thus junior has no claim to inherit the family fortune. Collective rather than personal inheritance rights, however, do suggest alternative ways of understanding land ownership than the favoured fee simple of Amer-Europeans.

Other of Flanagan’s summaries of pro-Aboriginal arguments are oversimplifications of extremely complex issues, as in his point number five: “Aboriginal peoples can successfully exercise their inherent right of self-government on Indian reserves” (7). In a world of multinational corporations, gatt, and a US president who claims the right to act unilaterally to protect US rights, all polities are too small for self-government. Reserve sovereignty is hampered by diseconomies of scale and by the lack of an economic base that does not depend on the outside for both money and goods. One can make exactly the same statement about Canada. Even the United States is not fully “sovereign,” as the many protestors against
having American military personnel serve under non-American United Nations commanders fervently point out. Determining both the limits and the expanses of First Nations sovereignty, like Canadian sovereignty, will require negotiation, accommodation, and change, and it will rarely if ever be defined only in terms of one reserve. Furthermore, as John Borrows argues, since most discussions involving Aboriginal rights take place at the federal level, Indigenous peoples and Indigenous principles of law must become part of general Canadian constitutional and common law, or the system will fail Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons alike.21

The moral heart of Flanagan’s argument and the most misleading of his premises comes in his opposition to statement number two: “Aboriginal cultures were on the same level as those of the European colonists. The distinction between civilized and uncivilized is a racist instrument of oppression” (6). That Flanagan’s wording of his oversimplification here is more grating than that of his other statements perhaps attests to his awareness that his elaboration of the argument will be untenable. Flanagan proposes the familiar Enlightenment theory that extensive agricultural societies are superior to hunter-gatherer societies because they can support more people. Since European technologies allowed two (or twenty) people to survive where only one had lived before, Europeans were justified in taking the land. Even if the land were not useful for agriculture, as in the North, other “beneficial” uses, such as eventual uranium mining, justified the taking of the land. The worldwide spread of agriculture and the organized states that it allowed to form were essentially processes like childbirth or death, floods or drought. They happen, and there is no way to even formulate the question of right or wrong. More’s Utopia allows Utopians to set up their colonies and to assimilate the original inhabitants because all will be better off under Utopian rule. The colonists may fight and kill those of the invaded who do not wish to join the co-operative. (Flanagan acknowledges that More was writing at the beginning of English hegemony in North America but does not seem to recognize that More was speaking for colonization, not just coincidentally at the same time.) Subsequent philosophers have agreed that one overpopulated group may take land from another group with less technology and more land, as long as they allow the landed group to share their technology. Flanagan generously allows that the landholding
group would suffer real losses in having to give up their cherished hunting-and-gathering way of life, but adds, "On the other hand, I cannot see a moral justification for telling the agriculturalists that they cannot make use of land that, from their point of view, is not being used" (44).

In his article “Civilization, Self-Determination, and Reconciliation,” Michael Murphy examines the ideas of the nineteenth-century thinkers who provided the underpinnings for Flanagan’s definitions of civilization: John Stuart Mill, John Locke, Immanuel Kant, and Karl Marx. He points out that, to some extent, all four asserted the inferiority of Indigenous North American society and thought to European society and thought. Thus, Flanagan can adopt their theories to proclaim that Indigenous North Americans could not have a civilization worthy of the name or with the moral weight to establish sovereignty among nations. Murphy points out that, in fact, agriculturalists were never told that they could not make use of the land: “The central moral failing of Flanagan’s civilizationist paradigm of reconciliation is its unsatisfactory engagement with the question of consent.” Like his nineteenth-century predecessors, Flanagan is so sure that his civilization is better than the Indigenous alternatives that he does not consider the possibility that not everyone will agree. And certainly there are Indigenous people from many different tribes and walks of life who agree with him—see, for instance, William Wuttunee’s 1971 book *Ruffled Feathers: Indians in Canadian Society*, an argument against Harold Cardinal’s influential *Unjust Society*. Wuttunee accepts the White Paper’s call for the abolition of the Indian Act and treaty relationships, and the levelling of Indian identity into simple Canadian citizenship along the same lines that Flanagan lays out. Flanagan also refuses to look at the loss of life, the cultural destruction, and the loss of personal freedom and autonomy that followed whitestream domination of North America.

I would add even more qualifications to Murphy’s. The first would be to ask whether Indigenous hunter-gatherers could actually be assimilated into European agricultural society, as Flanagan suggests. In the case of Europeans coming to what they called the “New World,” one would have to answer that in practice they did not incorporate the people they found. Something like 98 percent of the population of the Americas did not survive colonization. For Canada, the population decline may not have
been so precipitous—perhaps 75 to 80 percent of the Indigenous population perished. Flanagan suggests that because of the large-scale swapping of micro-organisms from animals to humans and from Asia to Africa to Europe, “civilized” people developed immunities, while “Indian cultures” were “inexperienced” and therefore died in huge numbers when exposed to these new diseases. Most such disease was not deliberate “germ warfare,” but nonetheless, dead people do not have the choice to assimilate. Having to give up one’s attachment to hunting and fishing is quite different than surviving (provided one did survive) the deaths from epidemics and the resultant social upheaval and starvation of 75 percent of one’s community.

The assimilation assumption also requires that the colonists should welcome the hunter-gatherers, something that would not have been obvious to, among others, the Beothucks, the Plains Cree who were denied the use of agricultural equipment that alone allowed any chance of taking off a crop in the short Saskatchewan growing season, or the Blackfoot, Northern Cheyenne, and Crow ranchers who found their land leased away from them, who were prohibited from buying tractors, and who were generally harassed by the US government Indian service despite their demonstrated success at cattle raising. Certainly, it does not consider the children who were abused and died in great numbers at residential schools and continue to be abused and to die in foster care. Third, it requires that the Indigenous peoples should accept not only intensive agriculture but also a particular Protestant, European version of free market agriculture and economics in general. Variant practices that can and have worked, as shown by both economic development theory and the experiences of the “Five Civilized Tribes” in Oklahoma before allotment, are completely cancelled out of Flanagan’s account.24 In fact, the argument melts fairly dismally into an unaffected “might makes right” plaint.

Flanagan’s defence of “civilization” is not actually any more useful for the “civilized” than it is for Indigenous peoples. Although he states his belief in free market economics as at least the least worst system yet devised, he admits that something better might come along.25 Where will it come from if all competitors are ruthlessly and needlessly suppressed? Flanagan also makes occasional concessions to conservation, but if supporting more people is the highest form of land use, then all public and private parks and
green spaces would appear to be unjustified. Furthermore, it would seem that if expansion is a virtually natural process, all immigration restrictions are unjustified and only partially enforceable. The idea of rights, whether derived from Locke or elsewhere, is to set up a framework other than “might makes right” so that each of us may be protected against whoever is stronger than one of us is today. Again, Flanagan negates the possibility of choice, the mainstay of democracy.

Furthermore, European humid agriculture is not always the highest use for agricultural land. The Great Plains, as it turns out, is not particularly conducive to technological agriculture. In many years, it appears that not only was Palliser right, but groups who could move with the buffalo herds and utilize different environments of the Great Plains, including its rivers and its nearby mountains, modelled a more sustainable form of agriculture than did the sedentary farmers who moved in and began ploughing at the end of the nineteenth century. If we look at the ways that monocropping, especially on the Great Plains, damages the fertility of the land, uses excessive amounts of water and unsustainable inputs of fossil fuels and fertilizers, and produces an unsaleable (Trudeau’s wheat) or unhealthy (high fructose corn syrup or marbled grain-fed beef) product, we may conclude that the hunter-gatherers were right: the Great Plains produces more usable human food as a grazing, gathering, and horticultural area than as an intense monoculture. Obviously, the colonizers from the intensive agriculture and centralized state cultures with their belief in the free market did not choose to find ways to share the land of the hunter-gatherers with due respect for the integrity of those host societies, but that does not necessarily mean that such sharing was either impossible or undesirable. Nor is it impossible or undesirable to work back toward such a sharing today.

Although I find Flanagan’s major moral premise untrue, his outlook is useful for understanding—and thus for countering—a number of neo-conservative positions on Indigenous issues and particular red flags to neo-conservatives and to a Liberal party that strives to dominate the centre of Canadian politics by absorbing neo-conservative ideas that seem to be gaining some public acceptance. Nepotism in band councils and reserve politics in general, for instance, is a tempting target, and Flanagan argues persuasively that small communities organized largely by family ties are
particularly vulnerable to abuses of those family ties. But instead of dismantling the small communities or insisting that they must work on civil service lines designed for larger, more heterogeneous communities, how might public policy enable reserve communities to put into practice the checks and balances that the cultural heritage of the communities might suggest? We have seen cultural traditions used very effectively in place of some of the European-derived justice systems.26 How might similarly imaginative groups address nepotism? Some of my colleagues who come from strongly clan-based cultures suggest that the clans, the men’s and women’s societies, and differentiated roles for women and men traditionally provided for checks and balances to nepotism and could work so again. In Akat’stiman: A Blackfoot Framework for Decision-Making and Mediation Processes, Reg Crowshoe and Sybille Manneschmidt painstakingly explain how the Blackfoot have adapted traditional bundle transfer ceremonies to use for decision making and mediation in such diverse fields as child welfare and business deals with the oil and gas industry.27 Which other groups are finding successful ways to open up band decision making that do not fall back on European-style elections? What can we find in the focussed and pragmatic arguments that Deloria and Cardinal made forty years ago? How can these processes become more visible as counters to Flanagan’s essentially ignorant argument that a paternalistic and sentimental government has prohibited Indigenous communities from complete immersion in “civilization,” which offers the only real alternative to nepotism, cronyism, and the continuing degradation of “aboriginal people”? One could ask similar questions about Flanagan’s prescriptions for economic development, resource management, and a host of other issues that are important to Indigenous communities. Although none of this may be of explicit use to our understanding of the Great Plains, it does provide us with practice in re-understanding the old deficiency arguments and moving them to ones of sufficiency.

Two books more or less contemporaneous with Flanagan’s writings and considerably more imaginative and optimistic about the strengths of Indigenous North American philosophy and practice, particularly in Canada, provide a useful overview for understanding how these might counteract dysfunctional whitestream practices. Although both refer
specifically to issues of criminal, common, and constitutional law—as do the news stories and artists we have already discussed—their counter to deficiency theories such as Flanagan’s gives us another kind of analogy for understanding the Great Plains. Rupert Ross’s Dancing with a Ghost, published in 1992, both the year after Flanagan’s Métis Lands and the five hundredth anniversary of Columbus, is a pragmatic study of “Indian Reality” by a Crown attorney from Kenora who wanted to figure out why the justice system he was bringing to isolated Cree and Ojibway communities in northern Ontario was not working. Ross argues persuasively that the system is based on a “reality” so different from the traditional and formative world view of its Indigenous clients that it is literally senseless, and therefore lacking in basic human courtesy. The Western legal system, he points out, operates on a theory of “original sin,” in which humans must be deterred, by fear and the threat of punishment, from doing the evil deeds prompted by base human nature. Indigenous people, he observes, work rather from a “doctrine of original sanctity,” in which erring humans must be nurtured, through patient listening and counselling, to regain their natural balance in the universe. The proper response to crime, then, is not punishment and exclusion, but comforting and inclusion. Ross argues that this, as well as other aspects of Indigenous philosophy and practice, arise from a subsistence lifestyle but offer necessary corrections to current whitestream philosophy and practice deriving from a technological and highly individuated way of life.

John Borrows’s Recovering Canada: The Resurgence of Indigenous Law, published two years after Flanagan’s Second Thoughts, makes a similar case for common and constitutional law. Working from the premise that “one should not found a just country on stolen land and repressive government,” Borrows argues that Canada cannot respect itself without living up to the responsibilities guaranteed in the treaties made when Indigenous people were the majority in the land. He expands the Supreme Court’s holding in Delgamuukw that oral traditions be permissible in court by suggesting that oral tradition has functioned in the same way as common law to shape society and belief, and that it ought to be given the same weight in court. Thus he presents Nanabush (Anishinaabe Trickster) stories that can be analyzed in the same way as other legal precedents for understanding
and putting into action Native law regarding such things as resource utilization. He also points out, as we mentioned in our discussion of Flanagan’s ideas about sovereignty, that since all meaningful decisions about land use—and about recognizing land as a citizen—are made at the federal level, any meaningful Aboriginal sovereignty must include joint federal sovereignty. Thus, while neo-conservative whitestream political philosophy attempts to pin us to nineteenth-century theory, reading Native news, art, law, and philosophy within an Indigenous context provides ethical, intellectual, and even spiritual and emotional alternatives to what we have. As Ross shows, Indigenous philosophy does not focus on the ills of the past but rather on the rebalancing necessary for the future.

How all this connects to the Great Plains, however, may not be intuitively obvious. Ursula Le Guin wrote a famous short story called “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” (1974). It is about an isolated utopian city where peace and plenty abound and all is fair and beautiful—except that somewhere at the centre, there is a broken and deprived child whose existence is the antithesis of all the beauty. Yet upon her continuing deprivation, everyone’s happiness depends. Those who walk away refuse to benefit from her destitution. A just society cannot be based on a fundamental and arbitrary injustice, yet as we have seen, Great Plains society (like all Western societies) rests not on historic dispossession of Indigenous peoples but on a present and continuing dispossession that has been dealt with by isolating and ignoring the people in the hope that they will simply vanish, by forced assimilation and marginalization in whitestream society, and by paternalistic and ineffective “welfare” interventions. None of these work. In most Indigenous philosophies, the people are the land. Whitestream society, especially on the Great Plains, stands to benefit from walking away from a concept of the land and its people that is based in deficiency and a punitive notion of restoration. We need paradigms and responsibilities that stem from the land and not just from the theories of Western Enlightenment that are engendered by another environment.