In some significant ways, Canada is a different place than it was in 2013, the year *Clearing the Plains* was first published. Despite the official apology for the Indian Residential School system in the early days of the Stephen Harper government, there was a growing sense of frustration among many that simply saying sorry was not enough. Idle No More brought a new spirit of hope and activism to Indigenous peoples and it moved them into the national media’s spotlight. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, itself born of legal action in the aftermath of the apology, was making its way across the country, bearing witness to the thousands of lives still affected by residential schools. Ian Mosby’s explosive article on nutritional experiments conducted on the children of residential schools was front-page news.\(^1\) The horrific number of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls fuelled an ever-growing call for an official response to address the issue. The horror of Indigenous young peoples choosing to end their lives, rather than continue to endure the humiliation of poverty, the pain of alienation from both their own traditions and mainstream Canadian society, and the hopelessness for any real change for their future, was a relentless reminder to all of us of the depth of inequity in our nation. In official circles, the impending bicentennial of the birth of Sir John A. Macdonald was seen as an opportunity to celebrate our success as Canadians that would culminate in the Canada 150 celebration in 2017. Canada—as the realization of Macdonald’s vision, tenacity, and

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political acumen—was to be feted as “Strong, Proud and Free,” and the envy of the world.

How things have changed since 2013. The release of the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 2015 and its Calls to Action have provided us all—Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike—with a plan to create a new relationship, perhaps a new Canada. “Reconciliation” has become a watchword for governments, schools, universities, community groups, and even corporations. Another, more provocative concept, “cultural genocide,” entered the national consciousness when used by then Supreme Court Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin just days before the tabling of the interim report of the TRC. Since then, from sea to sea, commemorations of historic figures—like Edward Cornwallis in Halifax and Macdonald himself in Victoria—are being debated or, in some instances, the statues themselves removed altogether. Those monuments, and the emotional debate surrounding their place in contemporary Canadian society, serve as proxies of our larger history and collective identity.

And how have things not changed since the release of Clearing the Plains in 2013? As I write this new introduction, tuberculosis rates in northern Canada are almost three hundred times the rate of Canadian-born non-Indigenous people. A year after the publication of Clearing the Plains, Maclean’s estimated that if the United Nation’s Human Development Index criteria were applied to reserve communities, they would rank 72nd, on par with Romania—a significant decline from the ranking of 63rd, when I wrote the introduction to the first edition. In January 2018, a federal cabinet minister conceded that Indigenous life expectancy was fifteen years shorter than other Canadians. Since 2016,
the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal has issued five non-compliance orders to the Government of Canada for racial discrimination against First Nations children.\(^7\) A national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls has been organized. In many communities, Indigenous youth continue to take their own lives.\(^8\) Here, in Saskatchewan, the killing of Colten Boushie in 2016 and the acquittal of his killer deepened the racial divide that continues to cut across the province like a wound that will not heal.\(^9\)

Across the country, Canadians are facing a reckoning with both their present and their past. Having these conversations is an uncomfortable but necessary first step in what will be a long and arduous journey. I take heart in the ever-growing number of citizens that are engaging in a debate over who we are as a nation. It means that history matters, and so we better stare it in the face, learn it well, and do better for our shared future on these lands.

Since 2013, I have spoken more than two hundred times in universities, schools, churches, libraries, and other venues across the country. I want to thank the many people who took the time to organize the events and those who cared enough to come out to them. It has been a humbling experience.

I also want to thank my colleagues who have contributed to this new edition, whose contributions you’ll find in both the opening and closing pages. I am honoured to be in their company. Elizabeth Fenn and I have been in contact for more than a decade and I hold her work in the highest regard. Niigaan Sinclair nominated my book to the Literary Review of Canada’s list of the 25 most influential Canadian books of the past 25 years. Mary-Ellen Kelm, Ian Mosby, and Susan Neylan participated in a Canadian Historical Association roundtable discussion on Clearing the Plains. That too was a profound honour, though the experience was a little like attending my own funeral. Andrew Woolford’s review essay situating my work in the growing body of sober and serious scholarship on genocide taught me some lessons.


about *Clearing the Plains*. I also thank the *Literary Review of Canada* and the *Journal of Canadian Historical Association* for the permission to reprint these essays here.

I also owe a debt to a number of artists who have used my work as inspiration for their own. Charlie Angus, a Member of Parliament and musician from my hometown of Timmins, Ontario, wrote a song, “Four Horses,” based on *Clearing the Plains*. Brett Graham, an internationally renowned Maori artist created the art piece “Pioneer” after reading my book. Micheal Langan, a Saulteaux designer and artist honoured me by including a *Clearing the Plains* deck in his Colonialism Skateboards line. It was surreal to go into the local board shop, the Tiki Room, and see my book and a skateboard shrink-wrapped together to be sold as a package.

Because so much of the research did not make it into the text, I thank the University of Regina Press for making space online for a resource guide that includes background materials, transcriptions, and notes. Nickita Longman did an excellent job of organizing them into a manageable format. My friend Kim Sadowsky was kind enough to create study questions based on the book that are included in this online guide. I encourage teachers, students, or anyone interested to use them as a starting point for their own research. I would also like to thank the entire staff of University of Regina Press for their support and work over the years and especially Karen Clark who has been instrumental in the completion of this new edition. This project has been my life’s work, and I am moved by the continued interest in it. Thank you.
For decades, Canadians have enjoyed an annual acknowledgement of their collective success. Canada consistently places among the top nations in the world according to the UN Human Development Index. In its report for 2007–08, only Iceland, Norway, and Australia ranked higher than Canada in the criteria considered by the United Nations. Yet also a regular story is the dismal condition of Indigenous people in Canada in comparison with its mainstream population. The gap between these populations is so wide that official communications of the Assembly of First Nations, the largest Indigenous organization in the country, state that the First Nations population would rank sixty-third on the same index, the equivalent of Panama, Malaysia, or Belarus. On average, Indigenous people in Canada can expect to die between five and eight years earlier than Canadians. Canadians have come to expect the highest-quality medical care as their national right, but Indigenous people routinely suffer from poverty, violence, sickness, and premature death. Substandard health conditions are so entrenched that a recent text on the social determinants of health listed First Nations status as a key predictive variable in the analysis of the country’s overall health outcomes. The chasm between the health conditions of First Nations people and mainstream Canadians has existed for as long as anyone can remember; it too has become part of who we are as a nation. The primary goal of this study is to identify the roots of the current health disparity between the Indigenous and mainstream populations in western Canada. Health as a measure of human experience cannot be considered in isolation from the social and economic forces that shape it. In Canada, the marginalization of
First Nations people has been the primary factor impeding improved health outcomes for all of its citizens.

Racism among policy makers and members of mainstream society was the key factor in creating the gap in health outcomes as well as maintaining a double standard for acceptable living conditions for the majority of the population and the Indigenous minority. In recent years, two important studies have investigated the role of racist attitudes of the dominant society as a cause of declining health conditions of Indigenous people in western Canada. In *Medicine that Walks: Disease, Medicine, and Canadian Plains Native People, 1880–1940*, Maureen Lux argued that racism and the government policies that stemmed from it were the central factors in the precipitous decline of health in the reserve population of the prairies. Mary-Ellen Kelm’s *Colonizing Bodies: Aboriginal Health and Healing in British Columbia* argued that colonial attitudes toward Indigenous people in British Columbia created a self-fulfilling prophecy based on the widespread impression that government action was justified because First Nations were seen to be on the verge of extinction. The construction of a belief in the inherent physical weakness of Indigenous people undoubtedly contributed to the physical decline of their communities. The deleterious effects of the Canadian government’s draconian policies were rationalized in light of the natural weakness of those suffering from them. The present study acknowledges the importance of racist ideology in the historical relationship between First Nations and the Canadian state. Rather than focusing on the ideas that fuelled the marginalization of the reserve population or the worldview of the Indigenous groups who were eventually subjugated, this investigation considers the material conditions, the result of long-term economic and environmental forces, that ultimately led to such divergent histories of population health in western Canada.

This is not a work of ethnohistory, a comprehensive narrative of each of the First Nations cultures living in western Canada. Instead, it answers the call of Theodore Binnema in *Common and Contested Ground: A Human and Environmental History of the North American Plains* to go beyond what he called the “culturalist preoccupations” of recent scholarship that have focused on the study of individual First Nations. As such, this study presents the Canadian northwest as a whole and considers the ebb and flow of different First Nations in the region from the early 1700s to the end of the nineteenth century. Some groups perished while others greatly increased their territory under the combined influences of epidemic diseases and market economics.
The study does not claim to present an “emic,” Indigenous perspective on the growing influence of the global economy on health outcomes in western Canada. To a significant extent, this is an investigation of what First Nations people did, where they lived, and what they ate over approximately 160 years as the global economy, described by Immanuel Wallerstein as the “modern world system,” took hold on the Canadian plains. Building on Wallerstein’s concept, American geographer Jason W. Moore asserted that economic and environmental changes are inseparable: “the rise of a capitalist world-economy and the rise of a capitalist world-ecology were two moments of the same world historical process.” In western Canada, these two “moments” were at the heart of changes in the health of the Indigenous population. Ultimately, the shift of the dominant economic paradigm from the fur trade to agriculture and industrial capitalism displaced the Indigenous people from their once lucrative position on the periphery of the global economy. It was the alienation of First Nations from a viable economic base in the world system and the imposed environmental constraints of the reserve system that played a key role in the decline of their health in the late nineteenth century.

Prior to being excluded from participating in the agrarian economy that later emerged on the Canadian plains, the First Nations in western Canada had been active participants in the modern world system for at least 200 years. As the commercial fur economy took hold, Indigenous people increasingly made choices based on the demands and opportunities presented by market forces. Along with the invisible hand of the marketplace came unseen microbes that brought unprecedented sickness and death to the region.

The singularity of the encounter between the ecosystems of the Old World and the New in the past 500 years is hard to fathom. Never has there been a comparable environmental and human transition. The equivalent exchange of goods, flora, fauna, people, and microbes could only be repeated if there was an exchange of life forms between planets. Alfred Crosby argued that introduced Old World diseases were the fundamental determinants of the demographic history of Indigenous Americans for up to 150 years after their initial exposure. In western Canada, the epidemic history to the 1870s corresponds to the Crosby model. Paul Hackett’s “A Very Remarkable Sickness”: Epidemics in the Petit Nord, 1670–1846 provides an excellent description of the period of introduced infectious disease in the boreal forest region east of the prairies.
The importance of introduced infectious disease cannot be overstated in the history of Indigenous America. In the Canadian northwest, epidemics of introduced contagious diseases swept through the region with regularity from the 1730s to the 1870s. The generational cycle ended when medical intervention curbed their impacts. During that time, *Variola major*, the smallpox virus, and other pathogens were key factors in shaping the historical development of the region.

The secondary goal of this book is to consider the role of disease in shaping the territorial history of the country between the Missouri River and the boreal forest in the years before Canada’s acquisition of the west. Differential mortality and survival in epidemics provided the foundation for territorial change and the emergence of new ethnic identities under the process known as “ethnogenesis.” Disease and death came as unintentional but inexorable parts of the exchange between previously separated ecosystems. As survivors regrouped in the wake of repeated epidemics brought about by the “biological unification” of the planet, they responded to the ever-increasing influence of the global trading network. Expansion of the world economy and its attendant diseases shaped the responses of the surviving communities on the plains to the new economic realities. What brought death to some often translated into economic opportunity for others.

The inseparable forces of trade, epidemic mortality, and reconstitution of survivors provided the context for widespread territorial change among First Nations by the early eighteenth century. In considering what Arthur Ray called “spatial dynamism” on the eastern margins of the plains, this study revisits the debate over the westward migration of the Cree.

Whether or not the Cree were the long-standing inhabitants of the eastern plains is a significant issue. In the academic literature, the view that the Cree expanded west with the fur trade has been around since the publication of David Mandelbaum’s *The Plains Cree: An Ethnographic, Historical, and Comparative Study* in 1940. His conclusions were based on interviews with members of Plains Cree communities and secondary literature on the fur trade period. A generation later studies grounded in the Hudson’s Bay Company Archives buttressed the interpretation that the Cree and Ojibwa moved west as agents of the global economy.

Arthur Ray’s *Indians in the Fur Trade: Their Role as Trappers, Hunters, and Middlemen in the Lands Southwest of Hudson Bay, 1660–1870* and Charles Bishop’s *The Northern Ojibwa and the Fur Trade: An Historical and Ecological Study* were effective in arguing that groups that acquired European trade goods, particularly firearms, expanded into
areas inhabited by other groups, causing the territorial and cultural dislocation of many Aboriginal societies. *Indians in the Fur Trade* was also a pioneering study in its recognition of the role of disease as a significant historical force in western Canada. The economic specialization of groups such as the Cree and Anishinaabe (Ojibwa) led scholars to interpret their economic histories in terms of growing dependence on European trade goods and, by extension, the global capitalist system for their well-being. Because of their place on the periphery of the world economy and their eventual marginalization and poverty, First Nations in Canada were seen as analogous to people in the developing world. Historical studies dealing with economic change and eventual dispossession became associated with “dependency theory,” a Marxist interpretive approach that gained considerable influence after the publication of André Gunder Frank’s *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* in 1967. Dependency analysis traced the growing imbalance of power and wealth among the core of the world system, the colonial powers that became the developed world, and the periphery of the system, the colonized and impoverished developing world.

The goal of materialist histories of First Nations people was to situate their experience and eventual subjugation in a global context. By the 1980s, however, a growing perception that dependency studies stressed weakness and abandonment of cultural traditions of First Nations led to a backlash in the academic and Indigenous communities. Studies emphasizing the strength and resiliency of Indigenous cultures in the historical period turned the notion of dependency on its head, showing that it was the Europeans who were dependent on local people for their survival. Paul Thistle’s *Indian–European Trade Relations in the Lower Saskatchewan River Region to 1840* was among the first monographs to stress the reliance of the newcomers on Indigenous people for their day-to-day survival. Eleanor M. Blain addressed the issue head on in her paper “Dependency: Charles Bishop and the Northern Ojibwa,” published in 1991. Blain’s discussion centred on the agency of the Ojibwa in resisting HBC attempts to manipulate the trade. Others, such as Laura Peer’s *The Ojibwa of Western Canada, 1780–1870*, stressed the cultural autonomy of the Ojibwa even as they moved west in response to changing conditions of the monopoly trade period. As studies emphasizing the cultural integrity of First Nations took hold, others argued that the territorial changes described in the works of Ray, Bishop, and others were overblown. The issue of Indigenous territorial occupation took on a new importance with the recognition of Aboriginal rights
in the Constitution Act of 1982. The longer a First Nation inhabited a
territory, it was thought, the stronger its claim to the land.

One of the most significant post-Constitution conflicts over land
and resource rights was led by the Lubicon Lake Cree Nation in north-
central Alberta. They sought recognition of their inherent ownership
of their territory, which they saw to be under threat from oil and gas
development. James G. E. Smith, an advocate for the Lubicon, wrote “The
Western Woods Cree: Anthropological Myth and Historical Reality.”
Arguing that the westward movement of fur-trading Europeans had
created the erroneous historical impression that the Cree too had moved
west, Smith asserted that the ancestors of the Lubicon had been in the
disputed region for hundreds of years. He concluded his discussion with
an acknowledgement of the value of his research to the Cree legal case:
“However ‘pure’ our research, it may have later practical consequences.”

By the early 1990s, the view that the Cree were long-standing inhabit-
ants of western Canada was gaining strength. Dale Russell’s *Eighteenth
Century Western Cree and Their Neighbours* argued that the Cree had
not migrated west but been ensconced on the lower Saskatchewan River
for several hundred years. Russell also critiqued what he considered to
be the misinterpretation of the fur trade record, and that the descrip-
tions of western land showed that not the people but the European
reporters were moving west. The study was among the first to focus on
the occupation of specific Cree groups on the parklands just east of the
plains, including the Pegogamaw, the Cowanitow, and the Basquia, who
had inhabited the region before the arrival of traders. Russell’s work
had such a significant impact on the historical community that at least
two contemporary reviewers used variations of the term “demolish” to
describe its impact on the literature grounded on geographical change
in relation to the fur trade.

Soon after the publication of Russell’s work, studies focusing on the
territorial shift of the Cree, such as John Milloy’s *The Plains Cree: Trade,
Diplomacy, and War, 1790 to 1870,* were being damned by reviewers. In
a review of *The Plains Cree*, David Smyth asserted that ethnohistorical
studies arguing for long-term occupation of the Cree in the west had
“virtually destroyed the credibility” of all interpretations of Cree migra-
tion into the region and that the debate over migration and economic
dependency was “historiographically out of date.”

By the mid-1990s, studies based on the economic history of First
Nations were increasingly marginalized. In “As Their Natural Resources
Fail”: *Native Peoples and the Economic History of Northern Manitoba,
1780–1930*, economic historian Frank Tough declared that the “discussion
of political economy of the subarctic has essentially been shut down by ethnohistory. Soon postcolonial scholars turned on ethnohistory because its focus on Aboriginal agency was thought to diminish the subjugation of Indigenous people with the establishment of Canadian hegemony. Ethnohistorians such as Toby Morantz countered that the discourse of colonialism, anchored “in concepts of ‘power’, ‘appropriation’, ‘territorialization,’ and ‘coercion,’ creates a powerful appropriation of this early history, leaving little scope for the representations of less violent, dynamic and competitive encounters.” Morantz, while admitting that the language of colonial discourse was compelling, nevertheless observed that it “submerged” the particular circumstances of indigenous people “into a more universal style of rhetoric.” In a sense, the sheer force of colonial discourse makes it a blunt tool of analysis. As postcolonial studies took on greater sophistication, their methodology became increasingly influential in what was once the exclusive domain of ethnohistory. “The White Man’s Gonna Getcha”: The Colonial Challenge to the Crees in Quebec, by Toby Morantz, and Jeffery Ostler’s The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee are examples of the convergence of ethnohistorical and postcolonial discourse.

In the introduction to the second edition of Indians in the Fur Trade, Ray attempted to find common ground with the critics of his earlier approach by positing that the concept of “interdependency” best described the growing relationship between Indigenous peoples and traders. On the issue of migration, though, Ray stood firm, arguing that “there is overwhelming evidence in the documentary record to support my conclusion that significant population relocations took place before the early nineteenth century.” He argued that “new conceptual approaches” and further research were required to go beyond the “simplistic notion that population movement took place in a wave-like fashion.” This book presents an interpretation of territorial realignment based on differential outcomes of eighteenth-century epidemics. Any serious consideration of Indigenous land tenure in western Canada must consider mortality from epidemic disease as a central determinant in the occupational history of the region.

The first half of this book addresses economic, demographic, and territorial changes among First Nations in the west prior to Canada’s acquisition of the territory in 1870. It argues that the spread of foreign diseases among highly susceptible populations comprised a tragic, unforeseen, but largely organic change. Those who place human agency and greed and the expansionism of colonial powers at the centre of the
decline of Indigenous nations in the western hemisphere are missing half of the story; the role played by biology cannot be ignored. It was a fundamental principle in the history of Indigenous America.

Chapter 1 provides a brief description of Indigenous societies and their health in the centuries before the arrival of Europeans. As Indigenous nations across the eastern half of the continent reeled from a long period of climatic deterioration beginning in the thirteenth century, the northern Great Plains served as a refuge to many whose communities in the woodlands to the east were no longer sustainable. Both long-standing inhabitants and newcomers to the region were large-scale, sophisticated, tribally based societies that managed bison herds in order to maintain semi-sedentary residence patterns, alternating between valley complexes in winter and open plains in summer. Water, a critical resource in the arid plains, was maintained through the purposeful non-exploitation of beaver, whose dams buffered human communities from droughts. With a dependable supply of high-quality food, the regional population probably experienced good health, especially in relation to societies in the east that were undergoing severe hardship in the centuries prior to the arrival of Europeans. While prehistoric North America was far from a disease-free paradise, the burden of disease was minuscule compared with the biological onslaught unleashed with the arrival of Europeans. Because of its effect on hard tissue, we know that tuberculosis was present, though probably rare, in the prehistoric population of the Canadian plains.

Chapter 2 argues that First Nations in western Canada underwent profound demographic and territorial changes in the first half of the eighteenth century. Smallpox and other diseases had already transformed the Indigenous landscape west of the Great Lakes. In the 1730s, infection originating in Europe spread as far west as Manitoba and the Arikara villages on the lower Missouri River. Taking hold in “virgin soil,” these epidemics brought unprecedented death to groups such as the Sioux, Assiniboine, Anishinaabe, and Cree in the boundary waters region and the Winnipeg River, Forks, and Interlake areas of Manitoba. On the eastern plains, disease spread along transportation corridors used by Europeans and the Aboriginal trade networks connected to them. Communities along the Rocky Mountains as far north as Alberta were also attacked by smallpox even though they had yet to see their first European. The equestrian trade network controlled by the enigmatic group known as the “Snakes” delivered horses to the northern plains from their source in New Mexico with such efficiency that the disease spread to the war zone on the Red Deer River sometime around 1740.
Before the first European had even laid eyes on Alberta, the local native population had already experienced the greatest demographic shock of its history.

Chapter 3 describes the changes that followed as the middleman trade gave way to the widespread presence of European traders in the region in the 1770s. By then, equestrianism had spread to most First Nations of the prairies. The physical presence of hundreds of newcomers in the region not only undermined the middleman fur trade but also created a burgeoning demand for meat that would prove to be the foundation of the commercial economy of the region for almost a century. The new economic niche created by equestrian hunting drew many from the marginal lands of the boreal forest to the parklands and plains. A continental pandemic of smallpox spread to the boreal forest, killing untold thousands in its path. On the margins of the plains in Saskatchewan, several Cree groups were so depopulated that they ceased to exist as distinct entities in the aftermath of the epidemic.

Chapter 4 investigates changes in the Indigenous societies of the region during the “Fur Trade Wars” amid a protracted and escalating struggle among competing fur trade enterprises that spanned the period from 1780 to 1820. Epidemic mortality contributed to the ethnogenesis of new communities as survivors and incoming Indigenous groups came together to meet the demands of the commercial economy for beaver pelts and provisions. New regions, particularly in the north, were opened up to the commercial trade. The period when Canadians dominated the Athabasca and Mackenzie Rivers proved to be one of the most repugnant chapters of native–newcomer relations in Canada. To secure their trade, Montreal-based traders relied on alcohol, violence, murder, and the slave traffic of women. Eventually, the local population turned on their tormentors as game depletion and environmental degradation were threatening the stability of groups across the region. Although the bison remained plentiful, the emergence of equestrian dependency among all hunting groups on the plains exposed one and all to severe privations during some of the coldest decades of the climatic period known as the Little Ice Age. In the last and coldest decades of the eighteenth century, horse herds were unsustainable, and intertribal violence increased as a result of raiding. By the 1790s, owing to competition and violence over horses, the Gros Ventre were permanently exiled to below the forty-ninth parallel. By the early decades of the nineteenth century, the people and environment of the northwest were seriously undermined by forty years of unrestrained fur competition. Serious social pathologies, including alcoholism and violence, had
taken hold in many communities. Elsewhere, game depletion brought many to the verge of famine and beyond. In the far northwest, disruption of the seasonal cycle that was the foundation of many Athapaskan communities forced many to adopt the harshest measures to survive. The extirpation of furbearers and large game changed the ecology of many regions for decades if not forever. As the struggle for fur trade supremacy reached its climax, a combined epidemic of measles and whooping cough brought sickness and mortality to the region in levels not experienced since the smallpox outbreaks of the 1780s.

Chapter 5 addresses the interaction of economics and health outcomes among First Nations during the five decades that the Hudson’s Bay Company controlled Rupert’s Land. During the monopoly period, the company tried, with varying degrees of success, to manage the people and environment of its domain. In response to game depletion from overhunting and the debauchery associated with the unrestrained availability of alcohol, the company closed posts, cut its workforce, set limits on fur production, and in some areas imposed a prohibition on liquor. First Nations communities responded to the changes in a variety of ways, ranging from violence to abandonment of fur lands in favour of new opportunities on the margins of the plains. In an attempt to counter what officials feared would be an exodus from the hinterland, missionary groups were allowed into the region to provide material assistance to groups in depleted or unproductive areas. The decision to open the region to the churches was not altruistic. Rather, the HBC sought a cheap alternative to supporting producers in need of help. Indigenous communities in areas that were particularly depleted, such as Red River, underwent the transition to settlement and farming by the 1820s. Among the first to adopt the new life on the margin of the European colony was the Ojibwa band led by Chief Peguis. In a portent of what would become the dominant health trend across the west decades later, the Peguis band was one of the first to manifest clinical tuberculosis.

As more and more communities in the region began to show the physical signs of declining conditions, the HBC introduced a successful and widespread disease prevention program. Vaccination procedures shaped the outcome of a smallpox epidemic in the 1830s and fundamentally changed the occupational history of the Treaty 4 area. Although smallpox could be dealt with through medical intervention, the advancing settlement frontier and changing demographic of the population of Rupert’s Land meant that other contagious diseases were striking with increasing frequency. By mid-century, hunting pressure constricted
the ranges of the herds, leading to an increasingly tense situation on the plains. Uncertainty over the future of the land grew as the Royal Charter of the HBC came under attack and the east began to view the territory as ripe terrain for the agricultural expansion of Canada.

The annexation of the northwest by the Dominion of Canada in 1870 changed the political, economic, and medical history of the region forever. Although acute contagious disease continued to strike the Indigenous population, an epidemic transition took place within a decade of the transfer. Widespread vaccination measures diminished the threat of smallpox, but almost immediately a new pathogen emerged to take its place as the primary cause of sickness and death—tuberculosis. Appearing in tandem with a region-wide famine, tuberculosis exploded and cut down the Indigenous population. An epidemic unlike anything the region had ever seen, it swept through the entire newly imposed reserve system. In contrast to smallpox and other infections that had swept through the region like wildfire, to a significant degree the TB outbreak was defined by human rather than simply biological parameters. The most significant factor under human control was the failure of the Canadian government to meet its treaty obligations and its decision to use food as a means to control the Indian population to meet its development agenda rather than as a response to a humanitarian crisis.

The second half of this book deals with the changing health conditions in the west in the context of shifting economic and political realities during the last decades of the nineteenth century. It argues that the TB crisis among First Nations could have been significantly mitigated had the dominion acted in good faith toward its treaty partners. In short, it deals with the politics of famine. The investigation is grounded on the ideas pioneered by Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen, whose *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* stressed that South Asian famines had more to do with the politics of food distribution than the scarcity of foodstuffs. It also draws on studies that have challenged the view that hunger and associated medical problems are not simply the results of environmental crises. In *The Political Ecology of Disease in Tanzania*, by Meredith Thursen, African poverty was portrayed as not “an innate or inherent problem but a product of colonial history, present dependence, and changed social relations of production.” Thursen developed a critique of the colonial model of medicine, the concept of the “unnatural history of disease,” that centred on the socioeconomic and political roots of ill health. Randall Packard’s *White Plague—Black Labor: Tuberculosis and the Political Economy of Health and Disease in South Africa* came to a similar conclusion: tuberculosis
was the result of the pathological intersection of political, economic, and biological forces.\textsuperscript{36}

In the United States, Gregory Campbell adapted Thursen’s concept of the unnatural history of disease in a paper titled “The Changing Dimension of Native American Health: A Critical Understanding of Contemporary Native American Health Issues.”\textsuperscript{37} In it, he showed that new pathologies such as AIDS, substance abuse, and type II diabetes mellitus emerged from enforced social changes on reservations after 1945. In another article, “Health Patterns and Underdevelopment on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation,” Campbell again stressed that the physical decline of the community was the “direct result of the political and economic control held by the Indian office” that deprived the Cheyenne of a viable economic base and the resources needed to maintain their health.\textsuperscript{38} In Canada, the second edition of *Aboriginal Health in Canada*, by James Waldram, Ann Herring, and Kue Young, reaffirmed that political economy was the “most appropriate” interpretive tool to balance biology, culture, historical events, and policies with the nature of the Canadian state and society.\textsuperscript{39} The present study answers this call with regard to late-nineteenth-century health conditions of the Indigenous population in western Canada.

Chapter 6 covers Canada’s acquisition of Rupert’s Land after the last great western smallpox epidemic in 1869–70. Thirty-five hundred people died in the outbreak, and the misery of survivors was compounded by the decline of the bison and the short-lived but intense period of alcohol smuggling in Alberta known as the “Whoop-Up” trade. Indigenous leaders made repeated requests for treaties to formalize their relationship with the crown, but the dominion ignored their calls, entering into treaty only in areas where development was imminent. First Nations saw the treaties as a bridge between their reliance on the disappearing bison and a new life based on agriculture. The recent experience of the smallpox outbreak led Cree negotiators to request that medical assistance be included in Treaty 6. In addition to assistance in the conversion to agriculture and a “medicine chest,” Treaty 6 included a clause that committed the dominion to providing assistance in the case of widespread hunger.\textsuperscript{40} But as Chapter 7 reveals, the sudden collapse of bison herds and the immediacy of the ensuing famine caught the dominion government off guard. It was ill prepared to deal with the situation on the ground. In tandem with the famine, clinical tuberculosis was being reported across the west. Because the disease took hold so quickly, the study argues, the population might have already been infected with tuberculosis owing to the role of a
hitherto unrecognized pathogen, *Mycobacterium bovis*. Before the widespread sickness of the 1880s, bovine tuberculosis had spread to the human population through ingestion of infected bison and introduced domestic cattle. Hunger then triggered the sudden outbreak of disease across the west. The re-election of the Conservative Party in the fall of 1878 hastened the development agenda for the region. To the hungry Indigenous population, this meant that officials quickly turned the food crisis into a means to control them to facilitate construction of the railway and opening of the country to agrarian settlement. Yet not all First Nations endured this transitional period of hunger and sickness. The Dakota, who did not depend on the bison and were not signatories to the treaties, were able to maintain relatively good conditions in their communities. This is evidence that the emerging TB epidemic was not an organic phenomenon but the outcome of prolonged malnutrition and failure of the dominion to meet its treaty commitments.

Chapter 8 deals with the two years preceding the Resistance of 1885. The impending completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway brought the issue of unsettled First Nations to a head. By 1883, only a few hundred people were not yet on reserves and under the control of government officials. Because those on reserves depended on rations supplied by the government, food contracts with the dominion became big business. One company, the firm of I. G. Baker, almost single-handedly controlled the commercial economy of the west in the years before railway completion. Baker used numerous unscrupulous practices to assure its control of the lucrative government trade, undermined its competition, and bought political favours. The company also abused its privileged position by delivering substandard food to reserves, probably with the collusion of government officials. By 1883, reports of tainted food and reserve deaths were common. In addition, government regulations that kept the distribution of provisions on reserves to a minimum required to sustain life exacerbated the TB problem and led to provisions rotting in storehouses even as the reserve population suffered from malnutrition. The level of control over First Nations by this time was such that even low-ranking officials of the Department of Indian Affairs often had the power of life or death over the people whom they were entrusted to oversee. The unsanctioned abuse of departmental authority led to widespread reports of sexual and other forms of exploitation in communities. As might be expected, tension mounted, and violence broke out in the winter of 1885.

Chapter 9 deals with the aftermath of 1885, when the Indigenous population of many parts of western Canada declined to its demo-
graphic nadir. Completion of the CPR signalled that subjugation of the treaty population was complete. With the infrastructure in place for large-scale settlement and the establishment of agrarian capitalism, the well-being of Indigenous people in the west largely disappeared from the public agenda. Bands considered to have been hostile during the insurrection were punished. Their food rations were cut off, and their weapons and horses were confiscated. Reserves became centres of incarceration as the infamous “pass system” was imposed to control movements of the treaty population. While hundreds fled to the United States to avoid retribution, thousands took advantage of a government plan to reduce the financial burden on the Department of Indian Affairs by renouncing their status as Indians and taking Métis scrip. Flight and the adoption of a new legal status reduced the reserve population significantly. The synergy between pre-existing sickness, hunger, and the spread of contagious diseases such as measles along the improved transportation system based on railway travel increased mortality in reserve populations that were bearing a massive disease load. In 1889–90, a global influenza pandemic spread to the region, and the spike in mortality in Saskatchewan reserve communities already weakened by years of hunger and sickness brought them to their low ebb. In Alberta, the population nadir would occur a decade later, largely the result of a lobbying campaign by ranchers to ensure government contracts for their livestock.

By the 1890s, tuberculosis was increasingly seen as a hereditary disease by government officials. Because the problem was perceived to result from the Indigenous way of life, officials and the Canadian public could downplay sickness and mortality levels on reserves because, to a significant degree, they viewed the suffering as nature taking its course. Establishment of the residential school system, now widely recognized as a national disgrace, ensconced TB infection, malnutrition, and abuse in an institutional setting that endured for most of the twentieth century. Now, in the twenty-first century, it is for all Canadians to recognize the collective burden imposed on the Indigenous population by the state even as it opened the country to our immigrant ancestors to recast the land to suit the needs of the global economy in the late nineteenth century.