Have you ever wondered what thoughts gave rise to the Idle No More movement? Well, one of them is surely the work of Taiaiake Alfred; the movement’s advocates are in many ways responding to his declaration that “it is time for our people to live again.” Alfred is from Kahnawake, Québec and is a Kanien’kehaka (Mohawk) intellectual who heads up the University of Victoria’s Indigenous Governance program. His latest book is entitled \textit{Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom} (2005).

In this book, Alfred contends that Onkwehonwe (OH-nk-WAY-hohn-WAY, the First Peoples of North America) can look to the figure of the warrior as a means of facing and responding to contemporary challenges. “The way of the new warrior is as much a tactical battle against the patterns of our modern existence as a philosophical and political struggle,” explains Alfred. He draws upon the concept of the warrior as a means for Indigenous peoples of underscoring the ethic of courage, self-protection, and struggle needed to “move forward heeding the teachings of the ancestors and carrying a creed that has been taken from the past and remade into a powerful way of being in their new world.” As you might have guessed, Alfred is completely unsatisfied with the status quo. In contrast to the current band governance structures defined by the Canadian State and its attendant legislation, he argues for a \textit{reorganization} based on original Indigenous principles of governance. In comparison to the existing fiduciary relationship with the State, he argues for a form of \textit{self-sufficiency} completely divorced from any reliance on the State. As opposed to the cooperative approach of working with the State through its departments, he suggests that
Onkwehonwé must engage in a reculturation premised not on the State’s interpretation of indigeneity, but on one from ancestral teachings.

Fundamentally and perhaps most importantly, Alfred contends that the socio-economic framework laid out by capitalist and materialist logics is deeply foreign to Indigenous ways of being and that this framework is at the heart of the problematic that exists between Onkwehonwé and the State. However, the challenge arising from this argument is very much at play in the Idle No More movement as well. Being a broad movement composed of advocates with beliefs from across the political spectrum, Idle No More has struggled with two conflicting tendencies: a return to traditional ways of being (which often brings with it a rejection of the socio-economic framework laid out by capitalist and materialist logics and many of the current policy priorities of the Canadian State) on the one hand, and a renewed conversation about how the economic benefits of resource development ought to be shared on the other.

This is a very difficult question to answer. In fact, Alfred himself struggles with it when considering the success some Onkwehonwé have had in achieving self-sufficiency by running profitable casinos on their lands; while he is surely pleased with the self-sufficiency that such avenues bring, he is nevertheless displeased and uncomfortable with the means in which it is achieved. For in his eyes, such avenues necessarily constitute a dangerous step away from the traditional way of guarding collective interests and a small but significant step towards pursuing individual interests and profits — things that run counter to the Onkwehonwé way. Perhaps the balance between tradition and entrepreneurism negotiated by Onkwehonwé in the Northwest Territories might offer a glimpse of how the two tendencies can be reconciled. However given his stance, it is unlikely that Alfred could be persuaded of this; perhaps Idle No More advocates — with their goal of providing a better future for Onkwehonwé — might have a more receptive view of such approaches.

You are absolutely correct if you detect a hint of militancy in Alfred’s words. Part of it comes from Alfred having served as a United States Marine in the 1980s and part of it stems from his philosophical view which rejects the State’s current recognition of, and relationship with, Indigenous peoples. And this is the key implication for those involved in the State development of public policy; holders of this philosophical view will always be suspicious of the State’s motives and question its authority. Notwithstanding that, Alfred’s words do provoke one to think. There’s value in that. One of the most impressive things about Alfred’s work is its inspirational nature. He manages to combine criticism with the offer of positive paths forward. And those paths are important. For while criticism can uncover a problem, only contention — through action — offers a means of resolving it. In this way, he inspires Indigenous people to be true to themselves as Onkwehonwé first and foremost.

Alfred’s work is interesting and provocative in that he invokes the figure of the warrior held up proudly by many Indigenous peoples and develops it into a nuanced concept beyond potentially gendered limitations or simple understandings. Instead, Alfred offers a concept of the warrior that foregrounds the wise, righteous, and courageous traits needed for the challenges of today. Regardless of the uneasy relationship that Alfred seems to have with some elements of the Idle No More movement, one must think that he can’t help but identify with some of its advocates; isn’t a warrior someone who makes a decision and takes action on behalf of her/his people?

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How can Canada justify its assertion of sovereignty and jurisdiction over the country’s territory and the Indigenous peoples whose ancestors first occupied and used that territory? Is power, money, and majority rule enough? Do these questions even still matter as we embark on the 21st century? Michael Asch addresses these questions in his new book, On Being Here to Stay: Treaties and Aboriginal Rights in Canada. His focus is on the relationship between Indigenous peoples and Settlers (i.e., non-Indigenous people), and how — in order to achieve reconciliation — that relationship must be grounded in the spirit and original intent of the treaties negotiated just after Confederation. Asch is
a professor emeritus in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Alberta, and a professor (limited term) in the Department of Anthropology and adjunct professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Victoria.

The title of the book comes from Chief Justice Antonio Lamer’s closing words in the seminal Supreme Court of Canada judgment in Delgamukw v. R. in 1997: “Let’s face it, we are all here to stay.” Lamer was speaking of the basic purpose of s. 35(1) of the Constitution Act, 1982 — the reconciliation of the pre-existence of Indigenous societies with the sovereignty of the Crown. While the Supreme Court has emphasized that goal in a number of its decisions, it has not provided any concrete or detailed guidance as to how that reconciliation might be achieved. Asch sets out to determine what needs to be done to effect that reconciliation. Asch’s position is that, at least with respect to colonized peoples, it is wrong legally as well as morally to move onto lands belonging to others without first obtaining their permission. His book attempts to reconcile this principle with the obvious fact that Canada is already occupying land that was originally occupied by Indigenous people by exploring what permission from those Indigenous peoples might involve and, in particular, how Indigenous peoples may have perceived those original treaties with the Crown.

He begins by reviewing the history of political relations between Indigenous peoples and Canada from 1973 (the year of the Supreme Court of Canada’s decision in R. v. Calder) to the present. For the first time in Canadian law Calder recognized that at the time of European settlement in Canada, Indigenous peoples had rights based on the fact that they were already here, living in organized societies, and had a form of title to the land. It is with Calder that the question of whether Indigenous rights survived European settlement came to the foreground. Asch then goes on to consider whether Indigenous rights might also include political rights (i.e., rights of self-determination and self-government) and discusses the implications of taking the view that they do. He concludes that the implications are so extreme that the principle could be applied only with the consent of those who now constitute the majority of the population in this country. To square legitimacy with principle, he argues, does not require Settlers to choose between our right to be here and our recognition that Indigenous peoples have a similar right to self-determination as do others who have been subjected to colonialism. Asch offers treaties as one alternative in that they encourage Settlers to see the legitimacy of their settlement on these lands as linked to the fact that they gained permission to settle them from Indigenous people who had the authority to grant such permission.

The balance of the book advances that possibility and concentrates on the history of Treaty 4. He concludes that the agreement reached in Treaty 4 (and, by extension, the other historical treaties) was one in which we were permitted to settle on lands that we were to share with Indigenous peoples, and in return we would promise to treat them “with kindness”; second, that notwithstanding our conventional view that they surrendered sovereignty and jurisdiction to us, the treaties did not effect such a transaction. Instead, they established a nation-to-nation relationship between Canada and Indigenous peoples which parallels that between Canada and other ex-Dominions: that is, “brothers to each other” or “children of the Queen.” Subsequent chapters investigate the possibility of implementing a “nation-to-nation” relationship based on principles in contemporary Western political thought. Asch closes by seeking a way to ensure that governments live up to the commitments made to Indigenous peoples at the time the treaties were made. He acknowledges that a secure method would be to gain sufficient public support for holding governments to account, and suggests a place to begin is to retell the story of Canada in such a way that the treaties are better understood as part of the founding documents of this country. In this regard Asch quotes the Earl of Dufferin, Canada’s third post-Confederation governor-general: “We acknowledge that the original title to the land existed in the Indian Tribes so that before we touch an acre we make a treaty with the chiefs representing the bands... but not until then do we consider that we are entitled to deal with a single acre.” This statement continues to guide us both on lands where treaties have been concluded and those lands where, over 150 years after Confederation, the Crown has yet to do so.

On Being Here to Stay is a timely addition to Indigenous scholarship in this country, and offers a path forward for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to re-establish the relationship in terms of the original treaties and principles underlying those treaties. That such a relationship might be based on mutual consent and understanding instead of the might and power of a Settler majority may strike some as a radical way of re-imagining the founding of this country. That Asch’s prescription is “strong medicine” may be an inevitable conclusion, equally so his statement that strong medicine of some sort is needed to resolve the dilemma at the heart of Canada’s relationship with its Indigenous peoples. It is easy, even for a court, to state that “we are all here
to stay”; what is harder is finding a way to achieve a reconciliation based on mutual respect and understanding. Michael Asch has suggested how we might find our way.

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In The Big Shift, Darrell Bricker and John Ibbitson argue that the Laurentian Consensus, which ran the country for most of its history, is dead, and that the Big Shift in Canada’s demographics killed it.

The Laurentian Consensus, they contend, saw Ontario and Quebec dominating federal politics. The two provinces would generally decide between themselves what was, in their view, in the country’s best interests and implement the resulting policies nationally, without consulting the other provinces (whence “the West wants in” of yore). Ontario would contribute financially to the rest of Confederation through equalization programs, and would in turn receive disproportionate power; while Quebec would be a partner in Confederation in return for being one of the financial beneficiaries and having its linguistic and cultural differences catered to, thereby ensuring that national unity, national identity, and a nascent pluralism would be part of the national discourse. This Laurentian Consensus was centred in urban areas in the two provinces, and was particularly espoused in media, academia, and, of course, politics (including by the authors include themselves).

Increasing immigration and a long-term demographic and economic shift westwards together constitute the Big Shift. With Canada taking 250,000 immigrants per year for the last 20 years — equivalent to two Torontos and the highest rate since WWII — our politics have necessarily shifted, particularly as these new voters shift their allegiances from the Liberal to the Conservative Parties. Besides mostly coming from more socially conservative countries, these new immigrants tend to be more focused on jobs, the economy, and justice, traditional conservative issues, rather than on bilingualism, national unity, and soft power, which have long guided politics of the Laurentian Consensus.

The second part of the Big Shift is the gradual but substantial increase in the West’s population and wealth, which is increasing its power within Confederation. This differs from the relative demographic and economic decline east of what the authors call the Ottawa River Curtain, with Quebec and the Atlantic provinces having unsustainable budgets heavily reliant on federal transfers.

The different regions tend to have similar concerns — healthcare, jobs, poverty, the economy, the environment, etc. — but the West has very little confidence in government’s ability to handle them, and considers government more an hindrance than a help; this is in contrast to the more interventionist Quebec and Atlantic Provinces, which become less able to effect national policies primarily in their interests, such as equalization. As many suburban voters, including a great many of Canada’s immigrants, found their concerns tending to align with those of the newly powerful West rather than the languishing East, and having similarly little faith in government’s ability to solve major problems, the Liberal Party’s Laurentian base eroded. Bricker and Ibbitson argue that the Conservative Party identified these demographic trends first, and carefully shaped its messaging, policies, and electoral strategies around it, enabling them to build a strong, stable electoral coalition. In contrast, they argue, the Liberal Party did not see it, being overconfident, gleefully distracted by the divisions among the right, and reflecting the general Laurentian refusal to accept that their hegemony over Canadian politics could come to an end.

There are several consequences to this. First, it’s no longer Quebec vs. the Rest of Canada (ROC). As previously marginal regions now have greater power in Confederation, the ROC is no longer some monolithic entity (not that it ever was), and we move closer to the notion of a Confederation of equal parties, something I think can only be for the better, regardless of one’s politics. Second, they argue that the Conservative Party has built itself a powerful, stable electoral coalition that will turn

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them into Canada’s natural governing party for the foreseeable future, notwithstanding inevitable interregna such as the Progressive Conservatives had despite the Liberal Party’s dominance throughout the twentieth century. They side with those who argue that the only reliable way for Canada’s “progressive” forces—to which the authors adhere—to defeat the Conservatives is for the Liberals and NDP to merge. Only time can tell whether this is sagacious, but it seems difficult to envisage given the parties’ different histories, ideologies, and governance structures, as well as the difficulty for any merged party to retain the more right-leaning groups of the Liberal Party and the more left-leaning ones of the NDP, thereby reducing any such party’s electoral effectiveness.

Particularly relevant to the public service is Bricker and Ibbitson’s argument that the federal public service’s bilingualism requirement necessarily recruits disproportionately from the narrow bilingual belts along the Quebec-Ontario and Quebec-New Brunswick border, and is thus necessarily unrepresentative of the country at large, particularly with the Big Shift. I would add that the present fiscal climate limits mobility within the federal public service, further limiting awareness of and responsiveness to issues that continue to be considered regional rather than national, understood as Laurentian.

Bricker and Ibbitson’s arguments about Aboriginal issues are important to the North. They identify improving Aboriginal education and employment as one of the best ways of improving both the Canadian economy and Aboriginals’ lower standards of living, given their statistically lower rates of education and employment relative to other Canadians. At the same time, they argue that Canada’s new immigrants, who often come from countries that were also subject to European imperialism, may well sympathize with Aboriginals’ disempowerment by colonialism, but will feel very little collective responsibility for it. With that and the increasing power of a more conservative West, the political will for government to settle claims and ameliorate the harms done to Aboriginals will decline. If this is true, Aboriginal groups may be best served by trying to settle claims and other reconciliation matters swiftly.

Bricker, CEO of Ipsos Global Public Affairs, and Ibbitson, chief political correspondent for the Globe and Mail, rely on extensive demographic data and their collective knowledge of Canada’s political climate. I’m glad they show their data, but, liking data, I would sometimes prefer more of it, though that would likely turn off some readers. My chief criticism is that the chapter on how the Big Shift will affect business seems shoehorned into a book otherwise about politics, but the rest of the book remains strong.

Overall, Bricker and Ibbitson present a reasonable, non-partisan, data-driven portrayal of today’s Canada as they see it. Their writing is clear, engaging, eminently readable, at time humorous, and always thoughtful. Whether one agrees with their analysis, it is well worth considering.

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Early on in Charles Emmerson’s book, the author relates the story of how President Taft, on receiving an offer from Robert Peary to claim the North Pole for the United States, replied “I do not know exactly what I could do with it.” This anecdote captures the theme of this book in a nutshell — namely, the quandary faced by countries in deciding what to do with their Arctic territories. Emerson tells of how colonial powers managed to claim vast swathes of the Arctic when the acquisition of territory was seen to be as something of self-evident value — and subsequently found themselves puzzling over what, if anything, to do with millions of square kilometres of rather inhospitable land. Emmerson explains how different countries have tried to answer this question, and at points indicates how it might be answered in the future.

The book is divided into five parts, representing five categories of essays: Visions, Power, Nature, Riches, and Freedom. The first provides historical background by explaining the process by which European powers colonized the North. The second describes how political and military power have been exercised in the Arctic. The third explains the effect of global warming on the Arctic environment, and its potential economic consequences. The fourth provides an overview of natural resource extraction activities in the Arctic, focusing on oil and gas. The fifth examines the idea of independence — Greenland’s path toward it, and Iceland’s experiences.
(both positive and negative) with it.

This book is an excellent and sweeping introduction to the Arctic as a region (Note: he uses “Arctic” as a shorthand for the global North-of-60). Emmer-son provides a mix of history lesson, current-affairs essay and travelogue, explaining to the uninitiated how the Arctic got where it is today, the purposes it has served, and its current economic potential and associated challenges. Together with a constant barrage of factual detail, Emmerson also provides the reader with mental imagery that helps keep readable what could otherwise be a dry book full of dates, numbers, and names, and that also helps to explain what those dates, numbers and names add up to in practice. Emmerson captures the feel of the present-day Arctic through vivid descriptions of his travels, from the glitz of a Russian trade fair, to the blue-collar pragmatism of an Icelandic company town, to the bleak beauty of Alaska’s North Slope. His descriptions of historical characters are also well-coloured, offering insight into their personalities and motivations.

What this book does not do, on the other hand, is provide much in the way of explicit analysis in terms of comparing the experiences of the various Arctic powers. Emmerson does not meditate, for instance, on the relative merits of different countries’ approaches to managing Arctic resources, on their differing approaches to Aboriginal issues, or on their different motivations for acquiring Arctic territories in the first place. The chapters in this book are self-contained essays that focus on one country and one topic at a time, and any comparisons are to be made by the reader (thankfully, Emmerson provides a rich trove of information and analysis that helps with this task). Nor does the book engage in much speculation on the future of the Arctic as a region. We do not hear Emmerson’s prediction as to the eventual economic viability of Russian or Canadian Northern shipping routes, the likely outcomes of the Arctic continental shelf claim process, or whether Iceland will ever get back into the banking business. This book is essentially descriptive, a reportage written in the past and present tenses that invites the reader to draw his or her own conclusions and inferences. There are certainly lessons to be learned, but they are up to the reader to discern.

The book also somehow avoids much mention of Aboriginal peoples or their relations with colonial powers (except for the chapter on Greenland). Although Aboriginal people are of course acknowledged at various points, and some historical background provided, Aboriginal issues are not portrayed as a major factor shaping past or future policy-making in the North. Perhaps the author simply considers the lack of influence of Aboriginal peoples in the Arctic to be an uncomfortable truth, but it would have been interesting if the Author had spelled this conclusion out, and treated the reader to the same vivid treatment on this topic as on others. It essentially feels like this book is missing several chapters, ones where Emmerson would no doubt have had very astute observations to make. This omission serves to perpetuate the short shrift that is often given to Aboriginal peoples vis-à-vis discussions of the North.

On the note of relevance for those engaged in policymaking in Canada, it is worth observing that our country takes up a conspicuously small amount of space in this book, compared to Norway, Russia, and Alaska. The most interesting mentions of Canada in this book are in the first chapters providing historical background on the southern conquest of the Arctic — for example, did you know that the NWT was originally seen as having a high potential for commercial game-farming? As the book progresses, and chronicles the construction of Russian shipping infrastructure, Icelandic smelters, and Alaskan oilfields, Canada fades from the scene of what Emmerson considers relevant. Then again, perhaps this absence itself sends a message about Canada’s historical lack of ambition in developing the Arctic — and perhaps the experiences of other countries can provide lessons on what might have been and on what could be. Sometimes silence can speak volumes.

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