Winter 2011

Review of *Taking Back Our Spirits: Indigenous Literature, Public Policy, and Healing* by Jo-Ann Episkewen

Keavy Martin
*University of Alberta*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly)

Part of the [American Studies Commons](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly), [Cultural History Commons](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly), and the [United States History Commons](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly)


[http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/2646](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/2646)
Métis scholar and activist Jo-Ann Episkenew examines the potential of literature to assist Canadian Indigenous communities in healing from the impacts of colonial government policy in this, her first scholarly monograph. While the discourse of “healing” has been a central feature of both bureaucratic and academic discussions of Indigenous issues since the 1990s, Episkenew’s study appears at a time when the detrimental effects of policies like the residential school system are again gaining public attention as Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission gets underway. The book contains a useful overview of the government interventions that have impinged upon Indigenous peoples in Canada, such as the various incarnations of the Indian Act, the residential school system, and child welfare policies. Particular attention is given to the early administration of the prairies, where federally appointed farm instructors and highly suspect ideas about Indigenous societies and agriculture contributed to the severe challenges of the late nineteenth century. Episkenew also takes care to discuss the situation of Aboriginal groups whom the federal government has historically conspired to ignore: namely, the Métis and Non-Status Indians.

While the author does not delve deeply into the meaning or precise character of “healing,” she explains clearly the dual capacity of Indigenous literatures to empower Indigenous writers and readers and to reeducate mainstream Canadian audiences by promoting alter-