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**Review of *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics: The Indian Land
Question in British Columbia, 1849-1989* by Paul Tennant**

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Aboriginal Peoples and Politics: The Indian Land Question in British Columbia, 1849-1989. Paul Tennant. Vancouver, British Columbia: University of British Columbia Press, 1990. xvi + 305. References. \$39.95.

Aboriginal peoples have received unprecedented attention in Canada in the last five years. Violent confrontations and constitutional negotiations have combined to remind non-Native Canadians that the land they now call theirs was once defined and controlled by a wide variety of vibrant and creative Aboriginal groups. This new awareness has meant that many people have attempted to look beyond the headlines and sound-bites to understand the fundamental importance of the Aboriginal land question in Canadian history. Political scientist Paul Tennant's *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics* is a welcome contribution to this ongoing dialogue and provides many answers for those who wish to place contemporary events in a historical context.

Tennant's goal is to outline the development of political activism among British Columbia's Aboriginal people. He begins with the establishment of the Colony of Vancouver Island in 1849 and proceeds to revise the historical interpretation of the land policies of Governor James Douglas. Douglas has long been viewed as a champion of Aboriginal title in British Columbia; a province whose record on the question has been the embarrassment of the entire country. Although Aboriginal title was acknowledged in the rest of Canada over 200 years ago by the Proclamation of 1763, British Columbia has steadfastly refused to follow suit and has continued to deny Aboriginal people their heritage. After arguing that Douglas was not the enlightened politician many have described, Tennant traces the growth of Aboriginal political protest in British Columbia and the frustration experienced in the face of governmental paternalism and bureaucratic intransigence into the 1980s. He concludes by analyzing the state of contemporary court challenges and land claims negotiations.

The strength of Tennant's account is the length of the time period he covers. For the first time British Columbia has a single volume that draws together the scattered writings on the Aboriginal land title question that have been accumulated over the years, and combines them with important new research in an attempt to sketch the history of Aboriginal political protest in the province. But it must be stressed that the result is not more than a sketch. Tennant's book is most often a description of the treetops as he skips from one treetop to the next at a frantic pace in an attempt to measure the entire forest. We are left with only an occasional glimpse of the forest below and a vague understanding that the roots of the question run much deeper. This is exemplified by Tennant's narrow and restrictive definition of politics. He follows the lead of previous studies by concentrating on government officials and prominent Aboriginal political activists. This leads him to ignore the fundamental political nature of Native/non-Native interaction in British Columbia that centered around the control of the land and developed long before the introduction of the first politician in 1849. The actions of selected politicians were only a gross simplification of this process of interaction. While a description of their policies is an important beginning, a broader analysis of the primary importance of the Aboriginal land question in British Columbia is required before Canadians can begin to appreciate the historical context of contemporary Native protest. **Bruce Stadfeld**, *Department of History, Simon Fraser University*.