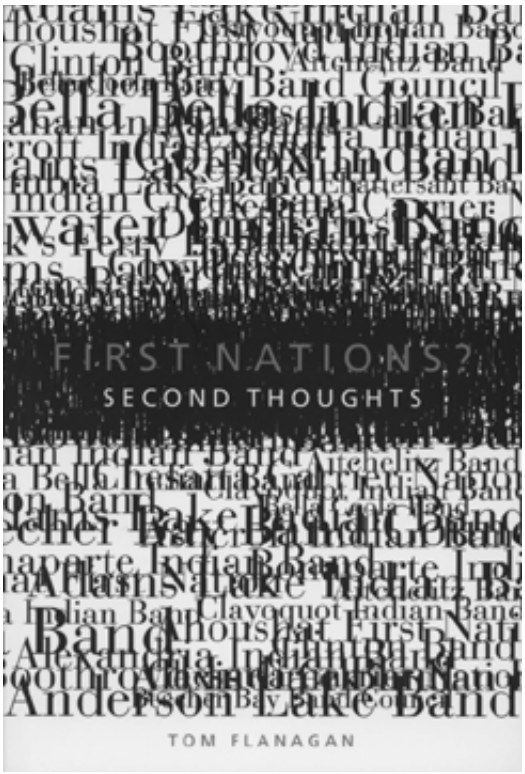
THE DONNER PRIZE/ LE PRIX DONNER

The Donner Prize for 2000 was awarded to Tom Flanagan for his book *First Nations? Second Thoughts*. Here are his remarks upon receiving the prize, May 8 in Toronto.

Le prix Donner 2000 a été attribué à Tom Flanagan pour son ouvrage *First Nations? Second Thoughts*. Voici les propos qu'il a tenus en recevant son prix à Toronto, le 8 mai dernier.



My book is entitled *First Nations? Second Thoughts*, and tonight I would like to emphasize the word "thoughts." The book is not a plan for resolving all aboriginal difficulties; nor, with very few exceptions, does it even advocate specific policies. Instead, it raises questions about the assumptions behind, and the practical consequences of, current tendencies in aboriginal policy. I have tried to contribute to public discussion by interrogating today's conventional wisdom, which I call in my book the "aboriginal orthodoxy."

The approach I took illustrates my general thinking about public policy. When I look at public life, I see very few "problems" and "solutions" but a great many intractable situations of varying degrees of complexity and difficulty—none more fraught with complexity and difficulty than the situation of aboriginal people in Canada. Indeed, most of these situations are dilemmas in the strict sense; that is, they represent a clash of human values in which we can achieve one worthwhile goal only by sacrificing other worthwhile goals. Public policy is a realm of trade-offs, not of problems and solutions.

In a constitutional democracy such as Canada, the trade-offs are made in an often raucous political process in which elected leaders, and the administrators responsible to them, are buffeted by political parties and interest groups. As I see it, the scholar's role in this process is not to pretend to offer non-existent solutions to recalcitrant dilemmas but to inform public debate by using the tools of research. This can mean testing arguments for logic and consistency, questioning the assumptions of those who make public policy, studying the real-world consequences of policy decisions once taken, and providing a comparative context from other times and places. Such scholarly work can be modestly helpful to decision-makers and administrators by producing a better-informed public debate. That is what I tried to do in *First Nations? Second Thoughts*.

The award of the Donner Prize means that the knowledgeable and experienced members of the jury must think I have succeeded to some degree in what I set out to do. For that I am deeply grateful. Having read and learned a great deal from the other books that have won Donner Prizes, and knowing how informative and insightful these books are, I am flattered to have *First Nations? Second Thoughts* counted among them.

Analyst's creed I realize that people at least as intelligent and well-informed as I am do not agree with my views. This doesn't cause me to change my assessment of the evidence, but it reminds me that I (like everyone else) may be wrong in my conclusions. Respect for individual belief and decision is important precisely because every person's intellect and knowledge is so limited. In a world where everyone might conceivably be mistaken about almost everything, the only corrective is constant testing through the confrontation of ideas and evidence.

Tom FLANAGAN, *First Nations? Second Thoughts*