While *The Law of the Land* is not of compelling relevance to the history of Indiana, there is much in it to commend it to students of public land policy. Chapters dealing with railroads, arid lands, water, and California are especially interesting. In view of the recent drought in the nation's heartland, the concluding chapters are prophetic, perhaps even ominous.

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This book is a general history of American Indian agriculture from its ancient origins to the 1980s. As its bibliographical essay and copious notes testify, there is a wealth of historical, anthropological, legal, and economic literature about Indian agriculture, but nobody has tried to tell its whole story in one place. R. Douglas Hurt has performed a real service by summarizing so much diverse scholarship and making the results available in a clear, readable form.

He tells a “story of supreme achievement and dismal failure” (p. 228). The achievement came early; mesoamerican farmers domesticated plants at least seven thousand years ago. Corn, their most important crop, spread into the present United States sometime after 3400 BC. Ancient farmers also developed agricultural processes of various kinds, including irrigation and systems of land tenure. There ends the achievement, which occupies five of Hurt’s fourteen chapters. The rest of the book chronicles a long series of failures that resulted from white people’s actions and from government policies in particular. Chapters summarize the tactics used to acquire Indian land, generally unsuccessful efforts to instruct Indians in white farming methods, the reservation system, severity, New Deal reforms, termination, and current struggles over scarce western water. Each topic is presented with exemplary clarity and abundant but not bewildering detail. A brief epilogue offers a convenient summary of Hurt’s principal conclusions.

Indian farmers fade into the background when the book’s focus shifts from their early achievements to government policy. Eleven photographs show exceptionally successful southwestern Indian farm operations, but the accompanying text depicts Indians as generally passive victims of white blunders, indifference, and cupidity. The United States government tried to make nomadic peoples into
farmers, fostered grain production where livestock might have had a better chance, tried to limit overgrazing on Navajo ranges in ways that nearly starved some herders, and allowed much of the Indian land base to pass into white ownership or use. Indians have been unable to respond to white initiatives successfully. Few of them farm now, although most Indians still live in rural areas.

This is not an inspiring or entertaining book, but it deserves a wide audience among students of agriculture, Indians, and American history in general. It should be especially helpful to teachers who try to take some account of Indians in United States history courses. Specialists in Indiana history will find few direct references to this part of the country but nevertheless may learn something about the western experiences of peoples, such as the Potawatomi, who were forcibly removed from this area.

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In 1810 Tecumseh allegedly told William Henry Harrison, “The Earth is my mother and on her bosom I will repose” (p. 6). Other Indians later expanded on the Mother Earth theme, describing her as an ancient and universal goddess/creator who provides a primordial and spiritual base to the Indian identity.

Scholars and observers familiar with Native American beliefs have documented and acknowledged the Mother Earth story for more than a century. Now Sam D. Gill, professor of religious studies at the University of Colorado, has come along to contend that not only does this emperor have no clothes but that there may be no emperor at all.

Gill argues that there was no Mother Earth goddess common to all Native American tribal cultures. At best, he suggests, one can find numerous female religious figures, whose great diversity makes it “unproductive to collapse [them] into a single goddess . . .” (p. 151). According to Gill, most of the arguments for Mother Earth rely on a few questionable sources (statements by Tecumseh and Sinoia and specific evidence from Zuni, Luiseño, and other tribal religions), which often reflect white attitudes more than Indian and suggest Mother Earth was the result of Indian-white contact in the New World. Yet scholars basing their studies on those materials or simply citing each other developed and continue to perpetuate Mother Earth's story. By the twentieth century, Native Americans had embraced Mother Earth as their own as the basis for their identity and relationship to the land.