

reality. In the book, we can hear yesterday's conservative rhetoric still resonating in today's Canadian-Indian relationship. "Two much is spent on Indians" and "work for rations" exist alongside the other illusion of "Indians being pampered" by government policy and treaty. These provoked then, and in their contemporary form stimulate resentment in the mind of the Canadian general public and harden stereotyped notions of Native idleness and squandered wealth in direct support of Cultural Darwinist theories. Ultimately, this line of thinking allows political ambitions to make policy that directly undermine First Nations treaties and governmental responsibilities. Indians are forced thereby into direct legal and physical conflict with Canadian authorities, thus fulfilling a Canadian dysfunctional prophecy. If we read this book carefully we will see sharp historical parallels and contrasts with today's First Nations political and public struggles. Perhaps, we can finally learn from history.

Stonechild and Waiser have made a very important contribution to Canadian history. By adding the First Nations perspective on the events that led up to the 1885 conflict and its tragic aftermath, we can finally see a whole story. A story that shows the dynamic of those uncertain times. The First Nations voice is clear and very focused about their unwilling involvement during that conflict. The authors' presentation of the oral record invites the reader to re-examine popular myths and half-truths about an important time in Canadian, Métis, and Indian relations. This book will encourage Aboriginal scholars and scholars in Aboriginal studies to look deeper into oral history as a legitimate contribution to a more complete vision of history.

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Tibbles, Thomas Henry: *Standing Bear and the Ponca Chiefs*. Edited, with an introduction and epilogue, by Kay Graber. (Originally published in 1880 as *The Ponca Chiefs: An Account of the Trial of Standing Bear*.) Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995, ISBN 0-8032-9426-3 Paper US \$ 7.95.

In May 1879, in Lincoln, Nebraska, Standing Bear, a Ponca Indian, successfully sued the American federal government for his release from

Army custody, and for the release of approximately thirty other Indians with him as well. In early January of that year, he and his party had left a Reservation in the Indian Territory, in what is now northeastern Oklahoma. In mid-March they had settled on an Omaha Indian Reservation near Omaha, Nebraska. After word of these events reached the Department of the Interior, the Army commander in the region, Brigadier General George Crook, received orders to remove the Poncas from the Omaha Reservation and to ensure that they returned to the Indian Territory. Standing Bear filed a writ of *habeas corpus* against Crook and the federal government, maintaining that, as none of the Indians arrested had violated a law or treaty, and none posed a threat to the peace, their being detained violated their constitutional rights as persons. The result of this suit was of broad, though not of unambiguous, significance, for the judge's decision entailed that at least some adult male Indians are indeed persons under American law.

The story behind Standing Bear's day in court is as simple as it is sad. By 1876, the Poncas had for twenty years been farming on a Reservation in what is now northern Nebraska. In that year, however, the American federal government, in violation of its treaty with the Poncas, expanded a Sioux Reservation to include the Poncas' land. In May of 1887, the Poncas were marched under gun to a barren patch of ground in the Indian Territory. They were compelled to leave behind not only their crops in the field, livestock and houses, but also their furniture and farm equipment. They were obliged on arriving to begin to make their lives all over again, in an unfamiliar climate on inferior soil with few plows or other tools. It was too late in the season to get in a crop for a good harvest, and few preparations had been made to see them through. They had been promised compensation for their property, but none came. The death toll was staggering: after a year, over 150 of the original 710 Indians were dead. Many of those still alive were seriously ill, suffering mainly from malaria and malnutrition. Standing Bear and the others with him decided to try to return home in time for spring planting, figuring that it was better to take their chances with the Army than to remain in the south any longer. They quietly left on the second of January, 1879; ten weeks later, exhausted, cold and sick, they had got only as far as the Omaha Reservation in central Nebraska. The Omahas persuaded the small band of Poncas of the futility of their quest, or at least of the wisdom of putting it off until they regained their strength, and invited them to settle on their Reservation. The Poncas accepted. The ill began to recuperate, and the fit went to work farming or building. A few weeks later the soldiers arrived.

Thomas Henry Tibbles's *Standing Bear and the Ponca Chiefs* is an eyewitness account of the hearing at which Standing Bear won his release.

Tibbles worked on an Omaha newspaper at the time, and in fact was instrumental in launching the suit and arranging for the Poncas' legal representation. He assembled this short book from his own newspaper reports and interviews soon after the court rendered its decision. Tibbles's book is just the right length; the particular text in hand, though, could use some editorial fattening up. A chronology of events to refer to when reading Tibbles would be useful, as would a map or two. More important, a few too many questions raised, either in the text or by the editor herself, go unanswered. Just what role did, or did not, the "Indian Ring" conspirators in the Indian Bureau play? What sort of precedents did the outcome of the hearing set? What sort of precedents did it fail to set? These final two questions are especially important, as the decision in this case rested heavily on the judge's determination that the Poncas in Standing Bear's group had renounced their tribal membership. How did it apply to those Indians who insisted on their tribal alliances? The editor's discussion of the aftermath of the hearing gives us little help with these questions.

The question I want to address here, though, is this: What in Tibbles's book remains of interest to present-day readers? Two or perhaps three things do, I think. First of all, there is the tale itself. The story of the Poncas' relocation and return is full of incident and emotion, and involves a variety of remarkable characters, Standing Bear and Tibbles himself just two of them. Unfortunately, Tibbles's own telling isn't the strongest possible, but it's not hard for a reader to imagine the good historical novel his report of the events leading to the hearing would make.

Second, *Standing Bear and the Ponca Chiefs* is a revealing document of a particular late 19th-century cast of mind. Tibbles was a humanist and reformer, a champion of personal liberty and the rights of the individual. For him, the treatment of the Poncas and Indians generally by the American government was to be condemned as a violation of the very rights and freedoms that the American nation had charged that government to uphold. The story of the Poncas was, for Tibbles, tragic, and not just sordid, because individual Poncas, people living and working on American soil, were being denied freedom and security. That the government dealt not with Indians as adult individuals and as equal to anyone else before the law, but rather both paternalistically and in tribal groups, was, as a practical matter, Tibbles held, clearly contrary to American ideals. As a moral matter, it was simply wrong. Ultimately, Tibbles favoured the complete integration of Indians into American society, and the dissolution of the categories "White" and "Indian." With Standing Bear and the other Poncas, he had a case he could make to the nation on his own preferred terms. Members of a group of acculturated Indians—friendly, hardworking, and playing by the rules—find

that what really counts as far as the government is concerned is that they are Indians. Even were the government sincere about having their best interests in mind, nothing could be more contrary to American ideals of justice and the rights of individuals. *Standing Bear and the Ponca Chiefs* provides us with a clear view of how the world looked through Tibbles's humanist eyes, eyes typical of many reform-minded Whites at the time.

This means, then, that within *Standing Bear and the Ponca Chiefs* we can find elements of a debate that concerns us now, the debate between those who see government as the guarantor of each individual's own rights and those who find that government has deep responsibilities to groups properly recognized as groups. The lawyer for the government argues that, in law, the Poncas are wards of the government, no more able to sue their custodians than are actual children able to sue their parents. The moral justification for denying Indians the status of persons is given by the Secretary of the Interior: since they are like children in that they understand neither the ways of the world nor their own best interests, Indians are best served by having someone who does understand these things make their decisions for them. The Secretary allows that Standing Bear's filing a writ might constitute a victory for a few individuals to do what they want, but he worries that it could as well upset the fabric of authority and security that maintains Indian life, breaking up Indian communities and forcing new ways of life on people entirely unprepared to take them up. Undemocratic authority and paternalism are not themselves always the problem, he maintains; with respect to Indians, they can be part of the solution. The Secretary of the Interior admits that the Poncas have been treated wrongly by the government in many specific ways, but insists that the judge's decision regarding Standing Bear will only make things worse. Securing the good of a few—that is, the good of the members of Standing Bear's band—may well jeopardize the possibility of securing the good of the many, of Indians generally.

But a reader today is not, I think, going to find much enlightenment on this debate in these pages. It is presented too sketchily and too starkly, and Tibbles is too partisan a guide to it, for us to make use of the book as a record of a clash of ideas. And, really, what is at the heart of the events of the story themselves, as distinct from the legal proceedings, is nothing like a debate at all. This brings me to what might be the third thing in Tibbles's book of interest to readers today. Standing Bear and Tibbles represent one side of respectable opinion, and the government lawyer another. But always in the background of events, and frequently in the foreground, is something neither respectable nor even an opinion. Hardship and death befell the Poncas not through misplaced paternalism or the law's failure to recognize

Indians as individual people equal to others before the law. In the end, the Poncas were the victims not of an ideology, but, at best, of official indifference or incompetence, and, at worse, of ambition and greed. The Poncas lost their land when reservation boundaries were redrawn, perhaps inadvertently (as the editor holds), but perhaps because the government found sacrificing the Poncas, a powerless friend, expedient in placating the Sioux, a powerful enemy. Their relocation to the Indian Territory could have proceeded humanely—though, of course, not justly—had adequate money been allocated for it and efficiently directed toward it, but most of the little money allocated got siphoned off by dishonest agents. The Poncas' possessions no doubt were looted and sold. No one in authority need have bothered with the ragtag runaways rescued by the Omaha—government officials could easily enough have looked the other way—but the exercise of power is its own reward. At every step, first the Poncas as a whole and then Standing Bear's small group were confronted by idiots and thieves. We must step lightly here, for Tibbles's book is too slight to support a heavy reading, but if we are set on finding some moral in it, maybe it is that the world contains not only competing respectable opinions, but lots of silly, corrupt and even evil people—silly, corrupt and evil people who are, that is, positioned to exercise great influence on the course of other people's lives. If our world is no different in this respect than the world in which the Poncas lived a hundred years ago, then we can find in *Standing Bear and the Ponca Chiefs* a cautionary tale of continuing relevance. While we might hold that much misery in the world is the result of ignorance and unintentional error, and that the ugliness of dignity denied can be perceived by most observers, we must remember that many of the people responsible for the plight of the Poncas knew exactly what they were doing, and were more than happy to pocket the small rewards they earned for themselves.

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Waldram, James B.: *The Way of the Pipe: Aboriginal Spirituality and Symbolic Healing in Canadian Prisons*. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1997, ISBN 1-55111-159-4 Paper CDN \$ 15.95.

James Waldram prefaces *The Way of the Pipe* by stating that "(s)ince the early 1980s, many Aboriginal offenders have been demanding recog-