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Review of "*I Am a Man*": Chief Standing Bear's  
*Journey for Justice* by Joe Starita

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out to meet them 600 miles and two months later, Starita writes, “they were shocked at what they saw—faces hollowed from hunger and skin blackened from frostbite, gaunt children, ragged clothes, emaciated horses, and so many sick.”

Standing Bear’s journey is one of the more dramatic events in the Ponca saga, an important but tragic story of government bungling, the peaceful tribe’s forced removal from Nebraska in 1877, Standing Bear’s return in 1879, and a court battle in which an Indian was declared—for the first time in U.S. law—a legal person with “rights whites were bound to respect.”

Starita, a former reporter who now teaches journalism at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, constructs a colorful account of the trial and its significance. Besides Standing Bear himself, Starita describes key Ponca supporters, including the Omaha Indian woman Bright Eyes, minister-turned-newspaperman Thomas Tibbles, lawyer Andrew Jackson Poppleton, Judge Elmer Dundy, and veteran Indian fighter Gen. George Crook. On the government’s side, Starita finds inept Indian agents and the well-meaning but inflexible Interior Secretary Carl Schurz.

Starita’s account is sensitive and well paced, an attraction for general readers. More serious readers, however, will be dismayed by the book’s lack of citations. Although Starita provides an extensive bibliography, the lack of footnotes means that many passages have to be accepted on faith, a problem when he attributes thoughts to Standing Bear that do not seem fully knowable.

With its abundant human suffering, an important courtroom victory, and extended wrangling over Ponca land claims, Standing Bear’s story deserves a larger place in public memory. In fact, much of this material was covered in another recent study, Stephen Dando-Collins’s 2004 *Standing Bear Is a Person*. Unlike Dando-Collins, Starita adds to the story by incorporating interviews with contemporary Ponca elders, including eighty-year-old Rosetta Le Clair. She sums up the Ponca struggle succinctly: “All our fights were for survival.”

*“I Am a Man”*: Chief Standing Bear’s Journey for Justice. By Joe Starita. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2009. x + 257 pp. Photographs, bibliography, index. \$26.95, \$14.99 paper.

On the night of January 2, 1879, Standing Bear and thirty other Ponca men, women, and children slipped away from their disease-ridden new home in Indian Territory. Standing Bear was on a mission, leading his band back to the tribe’s ancestral lands along the Nebraska-South Dakota border where he could honor his dying son’s last wish, to be buried near the sacred chalk bluffs above the Missouri River.

As author Joe Starita explains, Standing Bear’s journey was plagued by subzero temperatures and gales. When their Omaha Indian friends went

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