A Nation within a Nation: Voices of the Oneidas in Wisconsin

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fierce in their didactic patriotism as that in the United States. Although she notes Margaret Higonnet’s conclusion that some French children’s literature was ambiguous, Kingsbury moves quickly from this point to emphasize the jingoism that sought to “undermine the socialization” that tempered “childhood cruelty lurking beneath the surface” (171). She concludes that children’s literature encouraged children to play war games, save their money, tattle on slackers, and “hate everything Germany” (169). Kingsbury overreaches when she contends that youngsters reading a particular flier “might well have been terrified that their lack of cooperation could result in a German invasion of their own territory or even to their own orphaning” (182). In addition to materials aimed at children, images of children served as emotional clubs to persuade adults to support the war effort. One poster, for example, depicted a beautiful naked toddler urging Americans to “Save Your Child from Autocracy and Poverty.” Noting that this image “cannot help but loosen the purses of patriotic Americans” (191), the author reveals a tendency to conflate prescription or intent of propaganda with actual behavior. In addition, contrary to recent French scholarship, Kingsbury does not question the extent to which propaganda percolates from the ground up through rumors and exaggeration rather than from the top down. Not surprisingly then, George Creel, head of the Committee on Public Information, emerges in her conclusion as one of “history’s villains” (263).


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Historians and anthropologists often describe American Indian groups east of the Mississippi River as assimilated or acculturated because of their long contact with Europeans, resulting in disruption of their traditional cultural practices. A Nation within a Nation: Voices of the Oneidas in Wisconsin counters this misconception through this collaborative set of essays by academics and tribal members. The essays show that native traditionalism is more than dress and ceremony; it is a broad category that includes leadership skills, experience, travel, and alliances.

A Nation within a Nation is the fourth book chronicling the migration of the Oneida Nation from their homelands in New York to a new settlement in Wisconsin. All four books were edited by tribal historian
Gordon McLester and history professor Laurence Hauptman (the first also with Jack Campisi) and underwritten by the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin, which approved funding for a series of history conferences organized by McLester over the past 25 years to stimulate scholarship on Oneida history. This final volume focuses on the years between 1900 and 1975, when Oneidas lost the majority of their 65,000-acre land base in the state and struggled to retain their sovereignty and sense of community. McLester and Hauptman have assembled a set of memoirs and articles describing the power and tenacity of Oneida leadership in the effort to establish a strong tribal government, reverse land loss, and promote their own unique cultural heritage.

The book is divided into four sections, with essays on community maintenance, alliances, the affect of federal policies on the Oneida, and portraits of Oneida leadership. The first section consists of accounts of community experiences both on and off the reservation, such as lace-making, cherry-picking, and language preservation. In the second section, veterans’ memoirs remind readers of the Oneida tradition of military service and sacrifice for American ideals that overlap with native warrior customs. Section three treats the Oneida response to federal policies such as Roosevelt’s “Indian New Deal,” termination, and land claims. The last section offers biographies of Wisconsin Oneida leaders who have worked under shifting political conditions to maintain and reinvigorate the tribe’s ability to self-govern.

The last two sections in particular speak to the thesis of a nation within a nation. Oneida leaders such as Irene Moore, Robert Bennett, and Ernie Stevens Sr. have educational and professional experience that provide information, influence, and federal money for the nation’s future security and growth. We see, too, that although the tribe often disagrees about the best way to achieve independence, tribal response to federal policy through those leaders does not waver in its desire to find the path that will lead to autonomy and control. Former tribal attorney Loretta Webster’s essay demonstrates the paradoxical and contradictory relationship of Indian groups to American federal policy-makers: traditional chiefs received little respect from the American government, but governmental reorganization under the New Deal created a legacy of paternalism; the Great Depression devastated America but actually lifted the income of the Wisconsin Oneida through Works Progress Administration jobs; Americans want to honor the treaties that bear the mark of their founders but have found that doing so often clashes with business interests and popular opinion and aggravates still potent local grievances. Tellingly, Webster emphasizes that economic security is closely tied to tribal ownership of a land base.
McLester and Hauptman’s series of books using the community history method are a rare and successful collaboration between academic scholarship and community memory. They have refined their approach with each succeeding book.


Reviewer Sarah Jane Eikleberry is a Ph.D. candidate in sport studies at the University of Iowa. She is the author of “A ‘Chief’ Year for the ‘Iowa Braves’: Mayes McLain and the Native American (Mis)appropriation at the State University of Iowa” in the Annals of Iowa (Spring 2011).

In Triumph and Tragedy, publisher, author, and public speaker Mike Chapman adds to the body of popular writing on intercollegiate athletics in Iowa. His latest work jettisons the single-institution approach in exchange for vignettes of four celebrated competitors whose impressive lives were cut short. Chapman pays tribute to four great men, chronicling their origins, accomplishments, and honors and the memories that Iowans hold of the departed. As in his Iowa History Journal, Chapman attempts to deliver a historical product that is both educational and entertaining.

Chapman’s finest contribution to Iowa’s historical record comes in the first chapter, where he resurrects Iowa’s first All-American athlete, Fred Becker. After two years (1915–1916) at the University of Iowa, the Waterloo native enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in 1917, later falling in combat at the Battle of Chateau-Thierry. American Legion Post 138 in Waterloo took his name, and in 2009 the University of Iowa Athletics Hall of Fame recognized him for his athletic performances.

Next, Chapman retells the recruitment and brief career of Iowa State University’s Jack Trice. Trice, an Ohio native, followed his high school football coach, Sam Willaman, to Iowa State University in 1922, breaking the color line as the school’s first African American football player. Trice died days after suffering fatal on-field injuries in his second intercollegiate contest. Trice is the only African American in the United States to have a college football stadium named in his honor.

Chapman’s third chapter revisits the life of the University of Iowa’s 1939 Heisman recipient, Nile Kinnick, an Iowa native. Kinnick’s Heisman acceptance speech and letters to loved ones help readers understand how the entire nation swooned over the pride of Iowa, who tragically perished in a training mission in 1943.