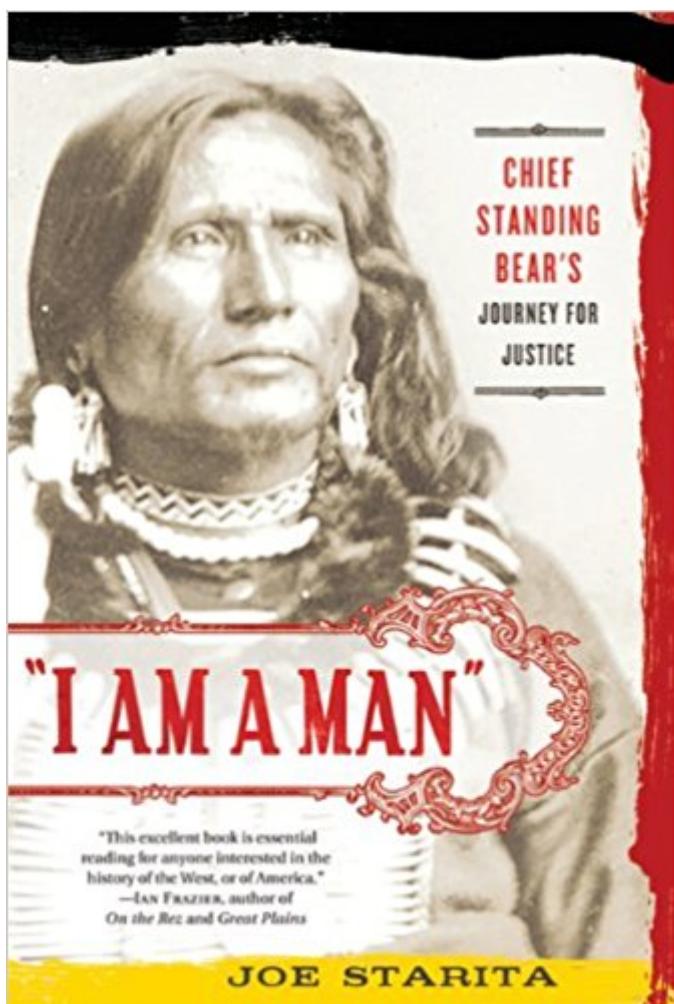


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"I Am A Man": Chief Standing Bear's Journey For Justice



Synopsis

In 1877, Chief Standing Bear's Ponca Indian tribe was forcibly removed from their Nebraska homeland and marched to what was then known as Indian Territory (now Oklahoma), in what became the tribe's own Trail of Tears. "I Am a Man" chronicles what happened when Standing Bear set off on a six-hundred-mile walk to return the body of his only son to their traditional burial ground. Along the way, it examines the complex relationship between the United States government and the small, peaceful tribe and the legal consequences of land swaps and broken treaties, while never losing sight of the heartbreakingly journey the Ponca endured. It is a story of survival---of a people left for dead who arose from the ashes of injustice, disease, neglect, starvation, humiliation, and termination. On another level, it is a story of life and death, despair and fortitude, freedom and patriotism. A story of Christian kindness and bureaucratic evil. And it is a story of hope---of a people still among us today, painstakingly preserving a cultural identity that had sustained them for centuries before their encounter with Lewis and Clark in the fall of 1804. Before it ends, Standing Bear's long journey home also explores fundamental issues of citizenship, constitutional protection, cultural identity, and the nature of democracy---issues that continue to resonate loudly in twenty-first-century America. It is a story that questions whether native sovereignty, tribal-based societies, and cultural survival are compatible with American democracy. Standing Bear successfully used habeas corpus, the only liberty included in the original text of the Constitution, to gain access to a federal court and ultimately his freedom. This account aptly illuminates how the nation's delicate system of checks and balances worked almost exactly as the Founding Fathers envisioned, a system arguably out of whack and under siege today. Joe Starita's well-researched and insightful account reads like historical fiction as his careful characterizations and vivid descriptions bring this piece of American history brilliantly to life.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In 1879, Ponca chief Standing Bear challenged decades of Indian policy when he stood in a federal courthouse in Omaha, Neb., and demanded to be recognized as a person by the U.S. government. Journalist Starita masterfully portrays the chief's story in this compelling narrative of injustices finally righted. The Ponca, relocated from their beloved Niobrara River valley to the harsh plains of Oklahoma, found unlikely allies in a Nebraska newspaper man and a lifelong Indian fighter. Thomas Henry Tibbles, an ex-preacher and editor, filed a writ of habeas corpus on Standing Bear's behalf, demanding the government show good reason why the Ponca should be deprived of their property, homeland and their very lives without due process, an unprecedented act that forced the government to grapple head-on with whether Native Americans, like the recently emancipated black slaves, were persons entitled to equal protection under the law. Gen. George Crook, an accomplished Indian fighter, supported Standing Bear and Tibbles with a harsh indictment of the very policies he had spent his career implementing. Starita transforms what could have been a dry academic survey of U.S. Indian policy into an engaging yarn, full of drama and sudden revelations.

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“The painful, moving, inspiring, and important story of Chief Standing Bear has found a worthy chronicler in Joe Starita. This excellent book is essential reading for anyone interested in the history of the West, or of America.” Clan Frazier, author of *On the Rez* and *Great Plains* “I Am A Man,” Joe Starita’s account of Ponca Chief Standing Bear’s search for justice, is a compelling story that needed to be told, and one that all Americans should read. Standing Bear’s perseverance resulted in a legal shift in white America that was a far-reaching benefit for all native peoples, and Joe Starita has told the story with sensitivity and rare insight. Joseph M. Marshall III, author of *The Journey of Crazy Horse*, *The Lakota Way*, and *The Day the World Ended at Little Bighorn* “What makes a man a citizen of the country in which he was born? Joe Starita vividly tells the little known story of Standing Bear, whose 1879 case in Federal Court was to the status of American Indians what the Dred Scott case was to

African Americans. In Starita's book, the story of a great man from a very small tribe becomes a microcosm for the complex nineteenth century struggle that both the American Indians and the Federal government faced in trying to define the status of native people under the law. He paints an important and compelling picture of the plight of the Ponca, a tribe impaled by misguided paternalism, while hopelessly ensnared in the bureaucratic red tape of an indecisive and out-of-touch government. It is a story that needs to be told and a book that needs to be read by anyone trying to understand the complex story of America's relationship with its native people. *Bill Yenne, author of Sitting Bull and Indian Wars* "Starita paints a powerful picture of Standing Bear, the Ponca chief who, by wanting only to bury his son's bones in the lands of his ancestors, set in motion a series of events that resulted in all Native American peoples being given the full rights of American citizenship. It is a portrait of a man, a portrait of a time, and an evenhanded discussion of the complex legal and moral issues that lay beneath the struggle of our nation's first inhabitants to find justice in the land of their birth." *Kent Nerburn, author of Chief Joseph and the Flight of the Nez Perce and Neither Wolf nor Dog* "Starita is careful to cover all the legal bases, but he is more interested in reaching general readers than legal historians. He succeeds admirably, especially on noting the outcome of the case, which both established legal personhood for American Indians and allowed Standing Bear to live once again in Nebraska. A worthy, readable companion to Peter Nabokov's *Native American Testimony*, Vine Deloria's *Custer Died for Your Sins* and other modern standards of Native American history. *Kirkus Reviews* "Starita sympathetically documents the many injustices done to the Ponca people by the U.S. government during the latter portion of the 19th century through the experiences of Chief Standing Bear." *Library Journal* "Starita masterfully portrays the chief's story in this compelling narrative of injustices finally righted. Starita transforms what could have been a dry academic survey of U.S. Indian policy into an engaging yarn, full of drama and sudden revelations." *Publishers Weekly*

I am working towards my graduate degree in history and this was an assigned book for one of my courses. While most books I am forced to skim through and do not read cover to cover, this book I could not put down. I read every word on every page, and stayed up late into the night to finish it in the two days I had to read it. I can say with great confidence that Joe Starita's "I Am a Man" is the best book I have ever read across all genres. Not only is the story he tells heartbreakingly compelling, but Starita's writing style is eloquent and nuanced, giving this historical, scholarly book the readability of a novel. I highly recommend this book to anyone and everyone, whether you are a

historian or not.

I'm glad to have devoted time to reading this book. I live just across the river from Niobrara, Nebraska, which is the Ponca homeland. If I were a school superintendent anywhere around here I would make it required reading for high school graduation. It is not just the story of a remarkable human being (Standing Bear), but also the story of an important part of our young nation's history. Standing Bear's story is a courageous saga. He was a person of the highest qualities a human being can have. Gentle, yet determined; simple, yet perspicacious; reflective, yet realistic. The world gets far too few Standing Bears. Thus is the world as it is. The United States, great country as it is among nations, should never be allowed to forget its shame in the unspeakable manner it abused its native peoples. It cannot be exceeded in this sin. We will never cease to pay for it. Joe Starita has written a fine book explaining all this. He's done his research both in Indian matters, and in government and legal matters. You won't have wasted your time to read his book. Those who read it fairly will be better Americans for their effort. John McNeill, Springfield, South Dakota

A great book to learn about the tragic hardships Indian Tribes had to endure from the forced removal from their homelands to the "Warm Country". Highly recommend to anyone who wants to learn about how America past was shaped into today's modern society... How Native Americans were stuck in a foreign society and forced to assimilate and conform to western rules.

I needed it for school, was in good shape !

It gives us history that we did not get in our schools in my day and it makes us (me anyway) glad to learn that there were Nebraskans who sympathized with the plight of Standing Bear's people. It also tells me about another person who had a lot to do with securing human rights and who needs more recognition. Perhaps Nebraskans, especially Omaha people, will do something in recognizing Standing Bear and the judge who made the decision to recognize the Native American as a citizen of the United States at 15th and Douglas Streets, downtown Omaha.

Product delivered as expected. Excellent product!

Compelling narrative by a wonderfully compassionate professor and author!

This is a powerful story of individual rights, well written and relevant for our time.

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