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[See table of contents](#)

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Great Lakes Indian Accommodation and Resistance during the Early Reservation Years, 1850-1900

By Edmund Jefferson Danziger, Jr.

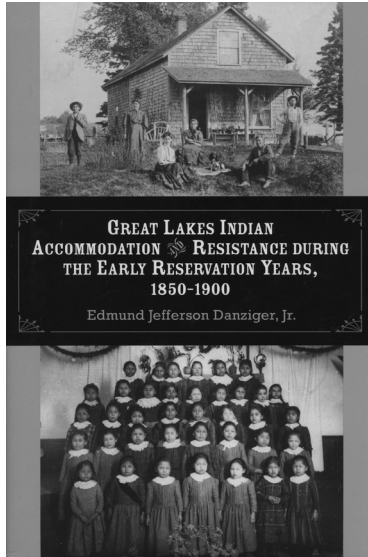
Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009. xiv + 322 pages. US\$60.00 hardcover. ISBN 978-0-472-09690-9 (www.press.umich.edu)

This is a worthwhile book. In it, Danziger takes on what at first blush seems to be an impossibly complex task in attempting to corral a half-century of histories of First Nations peoples flung across a huge territory and divided by an international boundary. However, this approach effectively illustrates the main thrust of his argument, that First Nations peoples were not hapless victims of expanding European frontiers.

Accommodation and Resistance is part of a wider intellectual movement to account for the environment in evolving histories. Danziger makes it clear that the Great Lakes region is an important construct for a number of reasons. First, though environments around the Great Lakes vary considerably, the First Nations people living in the region shared responses to a common environment as well as the connections (trade, customs, military alliances, intermarriage) arising from proximity. Secondly, the Great Lakes were the main artery along which both Euro-Canadians and Euro-Americans entered the interior of North America and, later, the region around which they developed resource extraction sites and transportation systems focused on emerging urban systems. Though Canadian and

American Indian policies were different, Danziger points out that they both derive from British roots. Indeed, as others have noted, North American Indian policy has links to British experiments in the United Kingdom and Africa.

Danziger uses this approach to good effect. *Accommodation and Resistance* connects much very good scholarship exploring late nineteenth century First Nations history at local, national, and international scales. He buttresses his arguments through an impressive grasp of disparate archival materials. In all, he delivers on his promise to explore the nuanced experiences of First Nation peoples. His broad view allows readers to understand that resistance to assimilative policies was ubiquitous to First Nations communities throughout the Great Lakes region. Danziger writes, "To suggest that aboriginal peoples were mere victims imprisoned on desolate reservations is an injustice to them and a disservice to Great Lakes history in general." (p. 93) Indeed, Danziger ably demonstrates that First Nations in the region had a good understanding of political, economic, and religious forces that formed the brunt of civilization efforts. He paints a picture of a "rough middle ground" in which First Nations peoples saw themselves as partners rather than as



clients, attempting to negotiate change and to protect extant cultural values through clandestine subterfuge and/or force.

The book's broad scope also includes a discussion of the systemic racism that coursed through North American society during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Despite the well-intentioned efforts of reformers such as teachers, policy makers, and missionaries, Danziger demonstrates how social, cultural, economic, and political processes worked against all marginalized peoples. *Accommodation and Resistance* is one of the relatively few works concerning First Nations history to explore this subject.

Unfortunately, the book's strengths also contribute to unavoidable weaknesses. Most importantly, the regional scope diminishes evidence of the subtleties of accommodation and resistance that must have characterized every community that Danziger cites. To his credit, he fully recognizes the complexity of these processes and, in numerous places, states that generalizations are nearly impossible. Yet despite these claims, the peoples in *Accommodation and Resistance* become a generalized "other," illustrating themes (seasonal rounds, traditional governance, and responses to farming, schools, churches, etc.) rather than acting as motivated authors of resist-

ance in particular circumstances.

As a survey, *Accommodation and Resistance* also tends to limit discussion of what readers might consider key points. For example, the thoughtful discussion of reserve schools seems somehow sanitized, and the issue of neglect largely circumvents discussion of the abuses that some students suffered. Also, although a less serious problem, some of the context is regrettably skimpy; for instance, Danziger sums up American and Canadian agricultural policy in less than a page each.

In all, Danziger constructs a complex narrative that sometimes supplements and sometimes unsettles accepted understanding of First Nations' history. Though broad in scope and ambitious in undertaking, Danziger does the First Nations people of the Great Lakes region justice by demonstrating their unwillingness to become unwitting victims of overwhelming, and forced, change. He writes in a comfortable tone that should be accessible to most interested readers. All those interested in the history of First Nations peoples of the Great Lakes region should read *Accommodation and Resistance*.

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