

The People of the Standing Stone: The Oneida Nation from the Revolution through the Era of Removal by Karim A. Tiro

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[See table of contents](#)

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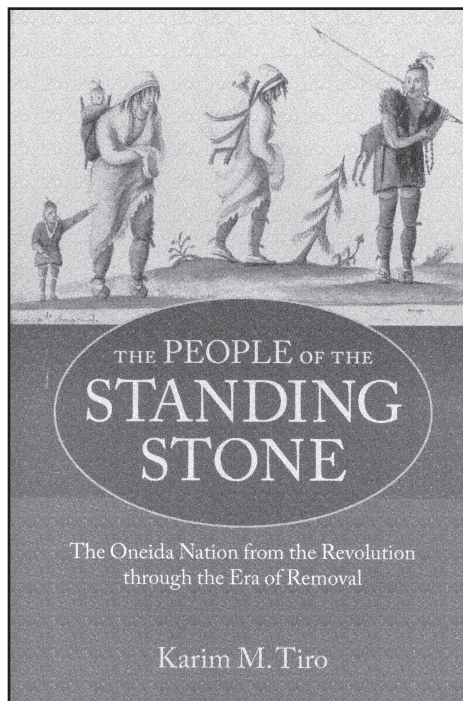
- ◆ The Oneida Nation from the Revolution through the Era of Removal
- ◆ This Great National Object: Building the Nineteenth Century Welland Canals
- ◆ Favourite Son? John A. Macdonald and the Voters of Kingston 1841-1891
- ◆ The Story of the Monteith, Ontario POW Camp 1940-1946
- ◆ Ridgeway: the American Fenian Invasion and the 1866 Battle That Made Canada
- ◆ A Biography of Robert Baldwin: The Morning Star of Memory
- ◆ Fire Along the Frontier: Great Battles of the War of 1812
- ◆ Bridging Two Peoples: Chief Peter E. Jones, 1843-1909

The People of the Standing Stone: The Oneida Nation from the Revolution through the Era of Removal

By Karim A. Tiro

Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press., 2011. 247 pages. \$79.49 hardcover. ISBN 978-1-55849-889-1. \$26.87 paperback. ISBN 978-1-55849-890-7 (www.umass.edu/umpress)

In this much-anticipated volume, Karim Tiro tells the story of four generations' worth of the Oneida Nation's engagement with the pressures of United States settler colonialism. Beginning unexpectedly in the contemporary era, which has witnessed the rise of Turning Stone casino and extensive efforts by the Oneida Nation to assert and recover sovereign national rights, Tiro endeavors to provide his readers with an explanation of how the Oneidas



maintained community (or, rather, communities) in the face of wrenching changes imposed on them from 1775 to approximately 1850. The result is not only a splendid example of what can be achieved with the classic “tribal” paradigm of writing aboriginal peoples’ history, it is an instructive case study on the experience of indigenous nations in Northeastern North America who saw settler politics surround them during and after the American Revolution.

Four principal themes inform Tiro’s narrative. He emphasizes the way in which the Oneidas’ exceptional sacrifices and contributions to the Patriot cause in the Revolutionary War failed to translate into any special protection after the war—nearly all of the Oneidas’ land base was acquired (illegally) by New York State within five years of the Treaty of Paris. Tiro also highlights how the failure of the Oneidas to find a reliable advocate from the settler population severely hindered their efforts to blunt the impact of the post-war settler invasion of their highly desirable homelands. Additionally, Tiro stresses that the division and dispossession of the Oneidas did not mean that they disappeared. While focused on those Oneidas who remained in their ancestral homelands, Tiro nevertheless pays some consideration to those Oneidas who made different choices and ultimately opted to leave in the nineteenth century for Michigan Territory (later Wisconsin) and also Upper Canada (later Ontario). Finally, Tiro adheres to long-established norms in the writing of Iroquois history by emphasizing cultural continuity, as opposed to acculturative change, over time.

Tiro’s study benefits from the author’s graceful and understated writing style – he is also more than willing to allow his Oneida sources to “speak” on fundamental points. Following an exemplary first chapter on the 1760s, in which the author

sets the ethnographic baseline to help the reader comprehend the magnitude of the pressures that the Oneidas will confront, Tiro moves to a discussion of the Oneidas’ fateful (and, within the Iroquois League, nearly exceptional) decision to side with the Patriot cause in the Revolutionary War. One of the highlights of the entire book is Tiro’s third chapter, which contains a fascinating analysis of the Oneidas’ conduct as allies in the Revolutionary War. If he offers a somewhat foreshortened perspective on the cultural imperative of Iroquois people avoiding killing one another in battle (a phenomenon that long predated the Revolutionary War), there is no better case study of that practice in action than appears in this volume. The level of detail uncovered and analyzed by Tiro regarding the behavior of the Oneidas as military allies of the United States offers an eye-opening insight into the mindset of indigenous people and emphasizes their creativity and agency in a time of great duress.

The book’s final four chapters provide the most in-depth study of Oneida post-war dispossession available in printed English. The immediate and relentless pursuit by citizens of New York State officials in pursuit of the Oneidas’ homelands in the postwar era (represented graphically on a map [p.97]), the rampant abuses and corruption in the physical alienation of Oneidas from their claimed territory (abetted by a powerless national government more sympathetic to settler-citizens than indigenous military allies), and the obliteration of the Oneidas’ efforts to resist are all detailed in painstaking fashion and a matter-of-fact tone that impacts the reader in dramatic fashion.

Readers of this journal will be especially interested in Tiro’s relatively brief treatment (pp.163-67) of the voluntary relocation of several hundred Oneidas

to a 5,400 acre tract on the Thames River (near modern London, Ontario) in the early 1840s. Tiro interprets the move as the effort of one segment of the Oneida population, arguably more “traditional” in its cultural views and practices than the so-called “First Christian” party, to escape the pressures of settler encroachment in New York and begin life anew in Upper Canada (ironically under British colonial sponsorship) as opposed to Wisconsin or Kansas. Noting that the Oneida of the Thames community quickly developed a “dynamic agricultural sector,” Tiro contrasts their experience with those who remained in New York and found ways to make a living on the margins of the dominant culture while expressing “quiet resistance” (p.186) to American mainstream ideology regarding the proper place of indigenous peoples.

All told, this book is a substantial achievement that will find an important place on the shelves of all scholars of eastern North America’s first peoples. Some historians may quarrel with the author’s insistence on pursuing an argument of cultural continuity over time, noting the diasporic character of the Oneida population and the perceived failure of the New York-based Oneida Nation to extend an open hand to their kinfolk in Wisconsin and Ontario during the political struggles of recent years regarding land claims and casino profits. Many more scholars, I suspect, will regard this study as the work of first resort in understanding post-Revolutionary Oneida history.

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***This Great National Object
Building the Nineteenth
Century Welland Canals***

By Roberta M. Styran and Robert R. Taylor

McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2012. 403 pages. \$44.95
hardcover. ISBN 978-0-773-53893-1 (www.mqup.ca)

This impressive work is for the reader not seeking a single, sequential narrative. Instead, the nineteenth-century history of the first, second and third Welland Canals (the story of the extant fourth, the Welland Ship Canal, must wait for a future volume) is told and re-told from a series of different perspectives. The authors have isolated the stories of particular engineering challenges and the roles, successes and failures of the various groups of people (including promoters, engineers and labourers) involved in the successive projects. The story of each serves as the fo-

