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**A Nation of Statesmen: The Political Culture of the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohicans, 1815–1972.** By James W. Oberly. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005. 336 pages. \$34.95 cloth.

Twenty-six years ago in the pages of this journal, James Clifton argued that tribal histories had outlived their usefulness (“The Tribal History—An Obsolete Paradigm,” 1979, 81–100). Clifton rightfully criticized authors of tribal histories for using methodologically primitive results that often reinforced stereotypic images of Indians. He lambasted the nearly obligatory opening chapter that many included describing a timeless traditional culture as a prelude to the disruption caused by the arrival of non-Indians. And he noted the predilection of authors to discuss authoritatively a culture whose language they did not even understand. In making such a sweeping attack, Clifton failed to consider that some tribes, when put under the appropriate lens, might prove exceptions to the rule. In *A Nation of Statesmen*, James Oberly shows that mileage can still be gotten out of the tribal history. His focus on the political culture of the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohicans is apt, and his argument that the tribe has survived by producing active and able generations of leaders is largely convincing.

The Stockbridge-Munsee Mohicans have evolved out of a long, complex history of groups uniting, fragmenting, and moving. In broad brushstrokes, the history of the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohicans within the United States has followed a pattern similar to that of many Eastern tribes. Removal from New York to Wisconsin in the 1830s preceded a period of factionalism and continued land loss, which only accelerated during the allotment era. The New Deal saw the writing of a new constitution under the Indian Reorganization Act, only to be followed by a largely successful struggle against termination that lasted into the 1970s.

This history has meant that the tribe has constantly had to seek justice, both in its relationships with outsiders and in disputes among its members. The Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican political arena has provided the epicenter for struggles over the questions of tribal membership, land, funds, jobs, and legal jurisdiction. Oberly sees these issues as central to the identity of the nation and its survival, and because generations of leaders have navigated them with dogged determination, the tribe can be viewed as a “nation of statesmen.” Oberly presents that “label literally as a description of Mohican history” (18).

The statesmen under Oberly’s microscope are a historian’s dream. The archival record for the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohicans swells with oral histories, government reports, treaties, bills, court records, and census data. And with leaders such as Hendrick Aupaumut, John W. Quinney, John P. Hendricks, John C. Adams, Carl Miller, and Arvid Miller fluent in written English, Oberly does not have to read between the lines of Indian agents’ reports or council minutes to decipher what community leaders thought. Needless to say, *A Nation of Statesmen* does not fit into Clifton’s damning generalization that the authors of tribal histories cannot penetrate the language used by their subjects.

The question does arise, however, of how a tribal history of the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohicans could have broad appeal at a time when many in the field are calling for new paradigms and synthesis. In the opening

chapter, Oberly offers us a tantalizing clue as to why his might be more than just another contribution to an arcane genre. He argues that his subject has been “a nation of firsts” (17). In addition to providing an eloquent contrast to James Fennimore Cooper’s *Last of the Mohicans*, Oberly’s observation renders the tribe of near singular importance. Many federal policy initiatives affected this tribe before other tribes. The tribe was among the earliest to incorporate Christianity and become fluent in English. It was also the first to pursue a new constitution under the Indian Reorganization Act and has recently been at the forefront of efforts to use casino income to fund initiatives that benefit the community. In theory, at least, the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohicans helped create the mold rather than simply conforming to it.

This alone makes the tribe worthy of close examination, and Oberly should have more specifically illuminated how other Indian groups and US policymakers looked to the precedents set by the tribe. Moreover, not all tribes have fared as well as the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohicans. Having managed to maintain a land base in Wisconsin and retain a degree of sovereignty—despite tremendous obstacles—the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohicans could have provided fodder for comparison to other tribes to understand why some succeed where others fail. Unfortunately, Oberly’s comparisons are fairly limited. To be sure, he nods to the Cherokees when discussing removal and acknowledges the battles over reservation lands that other tribes fought and lost with the state of Wisconsin. But these allusions, helpful as they are, highlight the need for more systematic comparison. When discussing the tribe’s internal political factionalism, his most developed frame of reference is the party system within the United States, rather than disputes within other tribes fueled by similar circumstances and issues. Oberly’s central argument, that the Stockbridge-Munsees survived “as an American Indian people through their ceaseless engagement with politics on all levels,” could be made stronger by showing how other peoples ceased to exist when they failed to do so. Further investigation might reveal continual engagement with politics to be only a necessary and not a sufficient cause of ethnic survival.

The book leaves unclear the details of the tribe’s involvement in politics in recent years. Instead of bringing his story to the present, Oberly ends it in the 1970s on a high note, with the resolution of Indian Claims Commission cases, Congress putting lands in trust, and favorable Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) rulings. Oberly sees the early 1970s as the end of an era, because the tribe finally had a “permanent and secure homeland in Wisconsin” (208). Yet the ending feels abrupt, for obviously Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican history did not end then. Oberly tells us as much: “through the Clinton administration at the end of the twentieth century, the Mohicans almost continually pressed issues of government-to-government business with the United States” (4). Indeed, in 1997 the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohicans hired Oberly, an authority in the history of public land policy, to research a boundary dispute under litigation between them and non-Indians in Shawano County, Wisconsin. Frustrated by the limited perspective that his testimony offered the courtroom audience, he wrote *A Nation of Statesmen* for “those who want to continue to learn about the history that I talked about that week in Milwaukee” (xii).

In assuming that his reader is familiar with this relatively obscure trial, Oberly misses the opportunity to end with what could have been an elegant epilogue addressing how the tribe may or may not still need to be “a nation of statesmen.” Compounding this reader’s frustration, Oberly explicitly—some might say pedantically, with phrases such as “the first task of the historian is to organize the past into discrete periods”—introduces seven historical periods of the tribe’s history (11). In arguing that the last of these ended in the early 1970s, while also noting that battles over land have continued into at least the 1990s, Oberly leaves the nature of the most recent period(s) in Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican history shrouded in mystery.

The book’s shortcomings, however, must be taken in broad context. They are not inherent to tribal histories. Oberly should be commended for proving the viability of the genre and for making a convincing argument. Hopefully, someone will build upon it.

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**Negotiating Tribal Water Rights: Fulfilling Promises in the Arid West.** By Bonnie G. Colby, John E. Thorson, and Sarah Britton. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005. 192 pages. \$35.00 paper.

Although tribal water rights predate others in the western states, tribal water was used as an incentive for non-Indian settlers to move to the West. Settlers were promised vast amounts of irrigable land with access to water. The US government promoted this westward expansion with federally funded water projects that often diverted water away from tribal lands to lands occupied by non-Indian settlers.

In the meantime, the tribal land base was withered down by federal action until only a fraction of the aboriginal land base was still in tribal control. Precious water was diverted away from the remaining tribal reserved lands with expensive water projects and diversion dams. Unfortunately, it would take years for funding to flow to tribal water projects that could protect the tribes’ ancestral claims to appurtenant water and groundwater supplies.

The federal and state courts have struggled for decades over how to allocate the increasingly scarce supply of water in the western United States. In order to allocate, the system recognizes “first in time, first in right,” a seniority system. The first step in addressing Indian water rights was taken in 1908 in the *Winters* case, where tribal rights were deemed established at the date of the establishment of the particular reservation. The so-called date of priority would seem to be enough to protect tribal water rights. However, to protect tribal water one needs not only the priority date, but also the quantity of water that is assigned to that date.

Nature’s uncertainty, combined with the prior appropriation system, requires that in time of shortage, the impact falls on those with the most junior rights. If the tribal water right is not both established and quantified,