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Surfing the Tsunami

Deborah A. Miranda

In the ten years since *Bad Indians* was published, I've been asked countless times, *How long did it take to write? Why did you decide to research your own family? What's been the response to such a strange, multigenre, hybrid memoir that covers almost 250 years?*

All these questions make me think about tsunamis.

A tsunami isn't a single event; it's a series of extremely long, powerful waves created by some massive, sudden displacement of the ocean—an earthquake, landslide, volcanic activity. The waves can travel thousands of miles through the ocean from their place of origin, but when they hit land, they form long walls of water that are indiscriminately destructive, with far-reaching floods that pound and drown and rush—then they return to the sea, pulling anything in their path back with them.

What's left behind—survivors, debris, the precious and the damaged—is irrevocably changed. In the Andaman Islands in the Indian Ocean, the Moken tribe calls this wave the *laboon*, "the wave that eats people." Such a wave, they know, washes over everyone and every *thing* on their island, cleansing it of impurities and evils. They believe that the laboon, like so many other forms of destruction, is also an opportunity for renewal and rebirth. The two forces are linked together, inseparable, awe-full, almost beyond comprehension. The laboon reminds me a lot of Coyote, that trickster creature whose powers are equal parts creation and chaos.

I often think of the missionization of California Indigenous people as being that abrupt, brutal displacement in the earth, triggering a tsunami of trauma, traveling through generations in enormous wave after enormous wave. Whether or not anything good can come of the aftermath, I believe, depends on how we ride out that wave.

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Officially, I began the project that would become *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* on my very first academic sabbatical, 2007–8. I'd sent out many applications for financial support of my research, and was grateful to be awarded a fellowship at the UCLA Institute of American Cultures. I rented a small studio apartment in Westwood and moved, with boxes of research books and materials, to LA for ten months. It felt like coming full circle: I was born at UCLA Medical Center in 1961, and had lived in Los Angeles for the first five years of my life. I quickly discovered that my body had stored deep memories of LA streets; hot beaches with warm, salty waves; riding buses with my mother; the scent of roses in December; street names; little brown lizards scuttling out from under giant agave stalks; the slant of sunrise; and the cool tendrils of desert nights.

These body memories helped me realize that the book had started long before 2007; even before I inherited the boxes of genealogy and cassette tapes from my mother in 2001—even before I'd entered grad school and begun to explore the possibilities of the archives. Maybe, I thought, this book went all the way back to the first story I'd written, at seven years old.

"How the John Rabbit Familys Lived in the Tall Grass" was my first attempt at voicing the trauma of my own childhood, and the trauma I'd inherited from my Indigenous father. The story goes like this: Two baby rabbits are born to a nice mother and father who feed and protect them. Then "it was rabbit season and the mother and father had to leave the baby rabbits. . . . They were scared. They asked if they could go with [the parents] but they said no because it would be too dangerous because it was a rough journey. The babys were very very sad. Soon their Mother and father had to leave. The babys ran and hid. They almost got shot but they were too fast." The babies survive, grow up, and soon have their own batch of baby rabbits (giving them all nice names); the new family settles into celebrating birthdays, holidays, finding food, and staying warm. But hunting season comes along again. This time, the family stays together, "but five got wounded and soon died and father rabbit was the only one left." Undaunted, father rabbit bravely starts over again, creating another large family; luckily, before another hunting season falls upon the rabbits, a small girl rescues them all, and keeps them safely in a cage inside her house. "She gave them all the feed and water they wanted. They were very happy to be with the little girl, and they lived happily ever after. the end."

At sixty years old, I look at that narrative as a kind of map through my own childhood. I see all the familiar landmarks: my father's disappearance (incarceration), my mother's disappearance (breakdown), and the disappearance of my two older siblings (foster care). I see my own fears about disappearing (being taken in by my aunt and uncle, losing our family home). I see an older history, too, a palimpsest of genocide and death marking the generations of my father's family. At seven years old, I had already learned that injustice and violence, followed closely by competing desires for security and freedom, are central to my own survival narrative. But I also see the beginnings of my path as a writer: words helping me make sense of chaos, transforming the tsunami of trauma into something I could hold and examine. I bound this story with a linoleum sample for a cover and green yarn, then took it to my second-grade classroom

at Wickersham Elementary, where my beloved Mrs. Freeman read it to the classroom at story time. I was the only Indigenous child in that entire school, and I knew it. But sitting on that braided rug, watching my teacher turn those pages I'd written, I was empowered.

I see now that my telling of that narrative, in all its complexities, had just begun with this penciled story.

Halfway through that sabbatical in Los Angeles, I realized that I had fallen into a story so big, I wasn't sure I could swim out of it, let alone contain it in a book. I remember sitting one day at the little folding table that served as my desk—surrounded by books, microfilm prints, photographs of ancestors, and a handwritten timeline that wrapped all the way around the studio walls—wondering how to create a narrative that worked. I realized that I was smack in the middle of a story whose origin went clear back to the moment my ancestors first laid eyes on those Franciscan missionaries and Spanish soldiers. What was worse, I had just admitted to myself that this book required all these fragments and visual materials—the flotsam and jetsam of that original event—to even begin to convey the complexity of what the ancestors were telling me. Questions hit me one after another: *Who will ever publish something like this? How will I ever tell it all?* In reality I was asking, *How do you surf a tsunami?*

Now, when people ask me how long it took to write *Bad Indians*, I say, "Too long!" And I add, "It's not over yet."

* * *

In September 2015, I traveled with a group of California Indians representing more than fifty tribes to Washington, DC, just before the canonization of Junípero Serra (we didn't stay for the event). We held a news conference, setting out our objections to the making of a saint from the man who had founded systemic oppression on top of our villages, sovereignty, and bodies. Though the room was mostly empty, a few reporters attended; one of them was Peter Montgomery. In his article covering our statements, Montgomery writes, "At the heart of their objection is Serra's role in creating and overseeing a system of missions that they say enslaved and brutalized Indians, forced religious conversions, and destroyed communities and culture in ways that continue to harm Native people today. Donna Schindler, a psychiatrist specializing in 'historical trauma' said . . . the result . . . will be the 're-wounding' of the descendants of mission Indians, who struggle with depression, domestic violence, substance abuse, and teen suicide rates that are triple the national average."

That psychiatrist was right . . . and wrong. Although historical trauma is real, so too are the ways California Indian peoples have grown, strengthened, and learned to be "differently Indian" as we moved into the twenty-first century. If change is a wave, historical trauma is a tsunami. Every generation, our work as survivors has been to figure out how to ride that monster wave.

By 2015, California Indians had been steadily protesting the canonization for decades, and in the nine months leading up to the actual event, we became a force to reckon with. We wrote online petitions, moderated debates, held a mock trial, created art installations, provided commentary on social media and radio shows, and

wrote letters to the pope himself. With our allies, we held vigils, protests, and news conferences; one woman and her son, as a statement against the canonization, even made a 650-mile walk through all twenty-one missions. We wrote articles, blog posts, and essays outlining—with precision and passion—our objections. Yes, there were moments of "re-wounding," moments when this felt as though we were rape victims telling our story over and over, only to be ignored, chastised, ridiculed, and pushed aside by an entity whose wealth and prestige held power and public opinion in the palm of its hand. Major news coverage of the canonization inevitably threw us just a tame headline like, "Indigenous groups oppose Serra's elevation," while the few that, like Montgomery, published in-depth, thoughtful material went mostly ignored. It often felt as if we, the very people whose lives and deaths make Serra, the priest, into Serra, the saint, were inconsequential footnotes in history; as if we—California Indians and our ancestors—were merely canonization fodder.

It should come as no surprise that none of this activism resulted in one comment (let alone action) from Pope Francis about California Indians.

Nevertheless, we educated ourselves, our communities, and the media about the fact that Pope Francis also ignored the clear thread of protest against California missionization from within the Catholic Church itself, both past and present, running parallel to the protests of California Indians—and we did this by using the Church's own archives against itself. We did this by harnessing the tsunami: by relearning the power of transformation.

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Serra, many of his supporters told us, was simply "a man of his times." In other words, colonization happens, and we should not blame those caught up in it. However, as California Indians argued on every media platform available to us, the flip-side of that argument must also be considered: if Serra was, in fact, "a man of his times" in 1769 when he founded the first California mission in San Diego, he should have known better. Bartolomé de las Casas (a wealthy Spaniard, priest, and former Indian slaveholder) knew better in 1552, when he published *A Brief History of the Destruction of the Indies* and spent the rest of his life working for the freedom of Indians and return of their lands. De las Casas's work is a document that Serra and all priests would have studied and debated.

California missionary Fr. Antonio Horra's testimony is still more interesting: in 1799, he protested soldiers' rapes and beatings of Indian converts at his California mission, writing, "The treatment shown to the Indians is the most cruel. . . . For the slightest things they receive heavy floggings, are shackled, and put in the stocks, and treated with so much cruelty that they are kept whole days without a drink of water," adding that, because he had spoken out against the cruelty of priests and soldiers and had openly opposed the mismanagement of Church resources, mission administrators had charged him falsely with insanity. In closing, Horra asked to be sent back to Spain because he feared for his life—threatened not by wild Indians but by his own Franciscan brethren.

Further support of this protest may be found in Jeremiah Sladeck's research examining instances of internal resistance against missionization in California. His resulting work, *Padres Descontentos: Spanish Imperial Policy, Franciscan Decline, and the California Mission System, 1784–1803*, is well worth reading in this regard. Sladeck meticulously follows the thread of shock and outrage *on the part of priests* concerning treatment of Indians in the missions. Sladeck documents that a significant number of California missionaries protested, in person and in writing, the violence and cruelty they witnessed daily. These priests were inevitably silenced by their own Church, declared insane by mission administrators and sent back to Mexico or Spain.

In our own protests, we California Indians also noted that, during Serra's lifetime, "the state's first governor, Felipe de Neve—[was] a man completely opposed to Serra's approach to the Indians. Neve thought that Indians should be emancipated from mission rule, made citizens, and incorporated into the Spanish Empire in independent villages. All of this was to be accomplished in ten years. This approach was dubbed the New Method, and Serra opposed it vigorously" (James Sandos, "Writing Missionary Biography in the Post-Colonial Turn: Junípero Serra"). Neve, too, was a man of his times, yet his vision was wide enough to see Indigenous peoples as intelligent human beings capable of autonomous, if colonized, lives. (Since missionization had already happened, this was a pragmatic approach.) At the very least, Neve trusted that, as fellow humans, Indians were capable of adapting to the new situation, could negotiate cultural differences without corporal punishment and imprisonment, and could bridge cultural gaps without need of the relentless, patriarchal, hour-to-hour control by the missionaries. No doubt, the "New Method" would have had its difficulties, but the opportunity for more autonomy and the right to improve the quality of life for themselves and their families may well have looked like a decent option to missionized Indigenous people.

Many letters, diaries, and records of others traveling in California during Serra's tenure and afterward left behind testimonies of the brutality brought on by the missions. Often mentioned are the observations of French explorer Jean-François de Galaup, comte de La Pérouse, who noted during his visit to Mission Carmel a mere three years after Serra's death, "Everything reminded us of a habitation in Saint Domingo, or any other West Indian slave colony. . . . We mention it with pain, the resemblance to a slave colony is so perfect, that we saw men and women loaded with irons, others in the stocks; and at length the noise of the strokes of a whip struck our ears." Other visitors in the same era noted that Indians were beaten with a whip or cane when they did not attend worship. These people saw through "the eyes of their time," and what they saw disturbed them deeply.

To quote Sandos again, these "men of their time" and others knew that "what the Franciscans achieved came through the use of force—military action to return Indian runaways and discipline raiders; enforced living arrangements; and application of corporal punishment for both men and women that included floggings (women were whipped in private), use of shackles to punish and prevent runaways, and placing miscreants in the stocks for public display and ridicule. Missionization came at the price of forced cultural change" ("Writing Missionary Biography," 452). Throughout the canonization process of 2015, Serra's supporters denied that he could be held

culpable for cultural habits of his time (particularly useful when Serra's work as an inquisitor during the Spanish Inquisition comes up), while refusing to listen to reasonable arguments otherwise. Contemporary mission scholars write about the political and economic forces behind Spain's need to missionize Indigenous California as being secondary to the Christian imperative to convert. Sadly, nothing had changed as Serra's canonization was fueled by the Church's PR machine pumping out images that declared "love is our mission" without the slightest hint of irony.

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The key here is what I learned while researching and writing *Bad Indians*: that transformation is the most powerful action that we, as Indigenous people, possess. With transformation, we can counter oppression while simultaneously adapting. Transformation, a willingness to ride waves of change rather than sink beneath them, is what allows us to survive, thrive, and outlive an attempt to use us as canonization fodder. This is the paradox of colonization: survivors are often sharpened to a fine edge by the sacrifices of their ancestors and love for their descendants. While I eventually came to believe that nothing short of an actual miracle could have stopped the canonization (yet another wave of erasure), I was proud of, and empowered by, the ways that California Indians took that dominant narrative apart, adobe brick by adobe brick, like total bosses—and we were! We made ourselves the bosses of our own narrative about missionization, utilizing both European archives and the archives of our own bodies. We created powerful networks, engaged in spiritual renewal, connected with our ancestors and our ancestral lands, and once again reinvented our Indigeneity under enormous pressure. We came out of the crucible of 2015 stronger than we had entered it. We rode that tsunami as if Coyote himself had carved our board.

Published almost exactly two years before that canonization, *Bad Indians* went into the world on that wave of activism and transformation—and was embraced in ways that still, to this day, make my knees shaky with amazement and gratitude.

* * *

During my 2007–8 sabbatical, I took field trips throughout the state, attending California Indian storytelling festivals, the Breath of Life Institute for Indigenous California Languages, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families meetings, council meetings, basketry gatherings, and meeting with young people at universities and elders at barbecues. At every event, I offered to read from this new material. I wanted to know whether I was breaking any protocols; whether, in fact, I had "permission" to tell stories about our collective griefs, victories, silences. Overwhelmingly, all these groups responded with appreciation and enthusiasm for the project, sharing their sorrow, grief, and amazement that any of us survived, expressing appreciation for the histories they had never learned—or mislearned—and showing a determination to change how those histories were told. Many individuals approached me to say, "You're telling *my story*!" "This was my dad's story," "We need to talk about sexual assault in our communities," "My family has stories like the one about . . ."

Someone once told me that I was brave for offering such new work to critics whose opinions I valued so highly. I responded that, on the contrary, I didn't think I could keep going without my community's backing! What other California Indians felt about this work was my primary concern. We were all hungry for our own story, and I wanted the input of my family and larger community so that I could do my absolute best.

It is also true that, once the book was published and I began giving readings, I've had occasional encounters with those who take issue with something in particular. One man, a professor, took me aside and instructed me, "Don't trust anything J. P. Harrington says," especially the narrative from Isabel Meadows about a young girl named Vicenta being raped in the church, adding, "I wouldn't pay too much attention to that one, it's just gossip—Harrington liked those dirty stories." Aside from the fact that most scholars note (admiringly or in frustration) that Harrington was obsessive about accuracy, no matter what the topic, this man completely dismissed the power of storytelling, the courage of Vicenta, the analytic genius of Isabel Meadows, and the use of rape, violence, and intimidation of Indigenous women as a colonizing weapon. I was not impressed. His comment did, however, encourage me to write a separate essay about Vicenta. It didn't fit into *Bad Indians*—I began a separate file on my computer titled "Spawn of Bad Indians" to hold such things—but it was eventually published in a scholarly journal: "'Saying the Padre Had Grabbed Her': Rape Is the Weapon, Story Is the Cure" (Deborah A. Miranda, *Intertexts* 14, no. 2, Fall 2010). Thanks, buddy.

In addition, my use of the figure of one million Indigenous people present in precolonial California has been disputed. Part of this is my own fault: although I document my source in published essays examining materials from Isabel Meadows, I didn't include that documentation in *Bad Indians*. I'm addressing that flaw now: I came across reference to the higher estimate in William L. Preston's essay "Serpent in the Garden: Environmental Change in Colonial California." Preston, in turn, cites Russell Thornton's essay "Population History of Native North Americans," published in *A Population History of North America*. I immediately tracked down Thornton's work to verify the numbers for myself. Next, I wrote to Preston, asking whether he could confirm what I thought I was reading—precisely because it was so different from what I had always seen from other scholars. Preston was then teaching in Cal Poly's Social Sciences Department, focusing his research and teaching on human impacts on the environment, the diffusion and impact of disease in colonial California, and the influence of climate on human activities, historical geography, and military history. In other words, Preston has a particularly good foundation on which to judge Thornton's work.

Preston responded to my email, writing, "At this point I think that Thornton's high number is totally reasonable. In fact, keeping in mind that populations no doubt fluctuated over time, I'm thinking that at times one million or more Native Californians were resident in the state [in precolonial times]."

I was stunned. Demographer Sherburne Friend Cook's work, *The Population of the California Indians: 1769–1970*, has long been referred to as *the* definitive source for precolonial Indigenous populations. His figure of 310,000 has formed the basis on which many assumptions have been made about the impact of colonization,

missionization, and the California gold rush (and this figure is an *increase* from his initial estimate of 135,000).

While it's true that we cannot measure suffering and injustice in the numbers of deaths, when we consider the massive mythology that defines California history and contemporary culture—the erasure of Indigenous suffering, past, present, and future, the land theft and trauma that continues in the lives of descendants to this day—the difference between 310,000 and one million is vast indeed.

Think about it this way: the European rhetorical act of declaring the North American continent as pristine "virgin land" going to waste—unpeopled, unused, without "real" towns, cities, or culture, has been acknowledged as a way to rationalize the dehumanization of an entire culture and theft of their lands, resources, and lives. Likewise, declaring that the entire state of California (as rich in resources as it was) could support only 100,000 people does the same work of minimizing Indigenous existence to the point where our euphemistic "absence" makes complete sense to those looking for a way to excuse colonization's violence, their own privilege, and crimes against Indigenous peoples.

To be clear, my argument is not with Cook; it is with those who, in the twenty-first century, continue to use a number that is so clearly outdated, created by a man whose scholarly resources have since been outstripped by contemporary tools. Why do scholars, or anyone else for that matter, continue to insist on that inconceivably low estimate of the number of Indigenous lives in the precolonial era?

That's a good question. I am still challenged by other scholars for my use of the one-million-Indigenous-lives estimate. I ask them: for just a moment, imagine that this number is more accurate than Cook's. What would that tell you about the deeper story of California? What does resisting that story tell you about what's at stake in believing a more contemporary, accurate, and reasonable number?

* * *

In 2013, six years after that first sabbatical, the book was published; I spent the 2013–14 academic year traveling the United States on a DIY book tour powered mostly by contacts made through my blog, Indigenous networks (particularly Heyday Books and *News from Native California*), and academic colleagues. Never underestimate word of mouth and goodwill; I used the honorarium from one university to get to the next, and paid my own way to indy bookstores, book festivals, poetry readings, Indigenous events, even genealogical societies. It was a grueling and fantastic time; I met with attentive audiences, Indigenous professors and students, and, everywhere, tremendous welcome. What a blessing, to be able to dedicate my second academic sabbatical to the work of introducing *Bad Indians* to the wider world. Young Indigenous people, in particular, had powerful responses to the stories in the book; for some, this was a rare opportunity to openly express the grief so many of us have held locked within.

This happened when my book tour took me to a university in Oregon where three events were planned. Between nonstop touring and a cold coming on, my voice finally gave out. I made it through a reading and a classroom visit, but by the second classroom, I could not continue. One young Indian woman, Clara, had been at each event,

so I asked her if she would read "Novena to Bad Indians" aloud for this last class. She had already heard me read it twice, and we'd had some good conversations that made me feel that it was all right to ask; sure enough, she agreed willingly. What a learning experience it was for me to listen to her; she read with so much heart that my words became her words, became *our* words. But by "Day 3" of the novena, Clara broke down in front of the whole class, sobbing. "It's too real," she whispered; these slurs and this pain were too much like real life for her as an Indian woman.

I had forgotten. I had been reading these pieces repeatedly on this tour, and I had forgotten the visceral power of these stories. I had grown to know the scenes of death, suffering, courage, anger, and love, and had had years to process those emotions. Clara had not. I rushed to put my arms around her, to apologize, to tell her that I should never have asked a student to read that poem aloud. I realized that, between the tour itself and my familiarity with the history, I had become desensitized to the intense emotions and events that "Novena" carries. This is a danger I hadn't anticipated, and which I have worked ever since to remember. I don't want to stop feeling that connection with our history, that sense of brutal honesty—it's a fine line to walk, to speak that reality into the world and yet not allow those words to become simply performative.

But Clara reminded me that sometimes the most honest thing a person can do is cry. She told me firmly that she wanted to finish reading the poem. "It's important," she said, swallowing her tears. I found that I knew what she meant, and respected her strength. This is where the joy and pride and love come in; choosing to continue *telling* is where we connect. We do it for the ancestors, for ourselves, for our community. The story deserves to be told, shared, spoken. And we deserve to grieve. This was a crucial lesson for me, and I have thanked Clara many times for being my guide.

When I think about the positive effect *Bad Indians* has had on California Indian lives, on the horrendous "Mission Unit" in California school curriculums, on the revisioning of California history and mission mythology, and on the field of Native literatures, I am washed clean in gratitude for my collaborators. I cannot think of myself as the sole author of this material. This book is a collaboration between myself and many others: first and foremost, my ancestors, whose stories emerged from archival materials never meant to carry their voices, allowing me to interpret and document their experiences. They came to me in old papers, in microfilms, in dusty books, in Internet files, old photographs, genealogical materials. They came to me in dreams, in songs, in the scent of daybreak at Venice Beach, in pictographs painted on rocks. And they are my constant companions to this day.

Close behind the ancestors comes all the assistance that I received from others, collaborations without which the book would not exist; these include not just the contributions of family members, such as my mother's genealogical work, stories from my father, grandfather, and sisters, but also the California Indian communities whose enthusiastic and heartfelt welcome inspired me. The scholarship of others, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who came before me is an invaluable resource and encouragement. I developed a first-name relationship with research and special collections librarians in California and Washington, DC. Educators were also crucial, especially two Indigenous women: Amy Lonetree and Renya Ramirez (both

Ho-Chunk). These two professors taught at UC Santa Cruz at the time and invited me to come and speak to their classes on multiple occasions, showcasing the work in progress and giving me the invaluable benefit of not just their own feedback but that of their students. Having my work treated with such profound respect and enthusiasm was so heartening that I think their words became tattooed on my soul: "You *have* to finish this book; we need to teach it in our classrooms!"

I also include as collaborators, however tangentially, the letters and journals of Serra and his peers, charts from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, records from the missions and Catholic Church. By including them as sources of knowledge, by listening between the lines, I find more opportunities to catch fleeting voices. And of course, always, Isabel Meadows' brilliant, heartbreaking archive of consummate storytelling. Finally, I can't omit Heyday's incredible team of editors (especially Gayle Wattawa, whose internal review of the manuscript brought tears to my eyes) and designers—even the folks in the shipping warehouse read my manuscript and talked to me about it—and, of course, Malcolm Margolin.

Malcolm was publisher of Heyday Books when I first sent him a rough draft of the manuscript. (He has since retired.) I'd known of him for years from his extensive work at California Indian gatherings and Heyday events; he'd also overseen Heyday's book *Only What We Could Carry: The Japanese American Internment Experience* (2000). This anthology featured many talented authors, but what electrified me was the book's design: it featured prose, poetry, memoir, photographs, US government archival posters and publications, art, excerpts from a graphic novel, propaganda ephemera, and personal documents. Heyday, I thought, was the answer to my question, *Who would ever publish something like this?*

The truth is, however, that Malcolm turned my early manuscript down. In June 2009, he sent his regrets with typical grace, writing that, although some parts of the manuscript were polished and complete, others seemed rough and raw. "It seemed more like collage than a book," he added, "something more suited to the web, something that had the look of notes toward a book rather than a finished book. I've been wrestling with what to do, quite agonized in fact." In the end, both the economic restraints of the recession and the fact that the manuscript wasn't fully cooked played into Heyday's rejection. I was, of course, crushed—and at the same time, this honest critique lit a fire under me. I continued to write and polish the manuscript, while teaching full-time.

Two years later, I sent the completed manuscript, with a new title, back to Malcolm. His response:

> Dear Deborah:
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> I got Bad Indians (this title hits about twelve different targets at the same time—just inspired) in yesterday's mail, and I haven't had a chance to look at it thoroughly. If I were a proper publisher I'd take my cues from _____ and put it aside for nine months before responding. But I'm not a proper publisher, nor, dear friend, are you a proper scholarly writer. I'm awestruck by your courage to do something so risky, capacious, and intense. Hasn't the academic world taught you that to get ahead you have to squeeze the life out of raw material, process and refine it so it can be easily digested and won't upset or challenge? So full of anger, humor, mockery, yearning. I

salute you with all my heart, Deborah, and I'm honored and grateful that you sent the manuscript back to me for reconsideration.

The rest, as they say, is history.

After the book's publication, more people joined the project: university educators, scholars, students, book clubs, parents of young children scouring the Internet for alternatives to the mission unit, reviewers. People have carried this book into dissertations, conference panels, Indigenous homes, high schools. In 2021, I recorded *Bad Indians* for Audible. The book has moved beyond me, like a child sent out into the world surrounded by guardian angels.

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A few high notes from the past ten years:

- *Bad Indians* was awarded the PEN/Oakland Josephine Miles Literary Award in 2015; known as "the blue-collar PEN," and "the People's PEN," this particular honor brought me home to California in more ways than one.
- The Zinn Education Project published an online excerpt from the introduction, which brought the book to the attention of many; *Indian Country Today* reprinted it online as well, and a major publisher requested permission to include the introduction in a new textbook on race, class, and gender.
- In 2014, *News from Native California* produced a special publication titled *Saying Our Share: Surviving the Missions*. I contributed a piece that's also in this new edition of *Bad Indians*: "Dear Sonora: Writing to a Fourth Grader about Her Project." This new piece has been included in a history textbook titled *Island Visions*, about the Channel Islands—crucially, a book directed at young California students.
- In 2021, a special issue of *Studies in American Indian Literatures* focused on my work, and I was honored to read at the Library of Congress with other Indigenous writers.
- In 2016, California legislators finally encouraged many educators to drop the use of mission projects in fourth-grade classrooms. So far, the legislation has led to very mixed results. It has allowed educators to opt out of the traditional Eurocentric mythology and adapt the curriculum to more contemporary standards, but it did not forbid the presentation of mission history in a celebratory light. As such, the Mission Unit and its accompanying misrepresentations and lies often continue unabated. The reforms that have been made so far are the result of many years of lobbying and work by many Indigenous activists and allies, but certainly *Bad Indians* has played a small, meaningful role.

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How a book from a small, passionate, independent publisher specializing in local California history, natural history, and Indigenous writings has traveled the world so extensively, leaving such a trail of influences, continues to astound me. I could never have taken this journey on my own. These collaborations mean that *Bad Indians* necessarily privileges a collective voice as much as the individual, and the individual's story is deeply infused by a collective experience. Now Heyday, with new publisher Steve Wasserman at the helm and editors Emmerich Anklam and Terria Smith,

carries *Bad Indians* into the future, honoring it with a tenth-anniversary edition. *Nimasianexelpasaleki*; my heart is happy.

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I write about my ancestors to honor their humanity. Ancestors were people who figured out how to make it through something terrible because they were willing to try unthinkable solutions. The purpose of telling their stories is not solely to document cruelty or injustice (although that is its own kind of paradigm-shifting work); it is, in addition, to study how our ancestors transformed themselves. Their survival is a kind of terrible beauty, a terrible teaching (*terrible* coming from the root for *tremble*, *shiver*, and also *awe*)—perhaps another good way to describe change. Rosy Simas, a Seneca dancer and choreographer, notes that if time is nonlinear, or spiral, then healing work for ourselves returns to heal the scars on the DNA of our ancestors as well. I hope that this work provides doorways to healing in both directions: for myself and my contemporary Indigenous family and community, and for our ancestors, whose scars may be honored in the telling of their stories.

Change in the shape of a tsunami is destruction and creation in the same instant. It's *how* we surf the tsunami that affects the outcome. This morning, I went through the Esselen dictionary that my sister Louise Miranda Ramirez has been creating. I wanted to know whether anyone had captured the word for "tsunami." Surely, living on the coast, all tribes had a word for that massive event! But apparently, it was not recorded. Like most tribes, we need to take what we know about our language and use that to create a new word. This happens when a language has no living speakers or must incorporate a concept or thing that doesn't exist in the language. That metaphorical tsunami swept away the actual word for tsunami, but Louise and I will invent another word. And it will be good.

Our new Esselen word for tsunami: *ta-mashaipayisi imila*—literally, "very hungry moving ocean."

ta – prefix indicating intensity
mashaipa – to be hungry [also the Esselen word for Anglos]
-yisi – verb suffix denoting motion
imi – expanse (sea and sky), *imila*; noun for sea, ocean

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In the first edition of *Bad Indians*, I wrote, "If we allow the pieces of our culture to lie scattered in the dust of history, trampled on by racism and grief, then yes, we are irreparably damaged. But if we pick up the pieces and use them in new ways that honor their integrity, their colors, textures, stories—then we do those pieces justice, no matter how sharp they are, no matter how much handling them slices our fingers and makes us bleed."

Looking at my words now, I see how I was trying to talk about the power of transformation.

I still am.

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