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Lincoln, Kenneth

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example, when Nixon gave the January 1972 State of the Union Address, he mentioned all of his initiatives—restoration of Blue Lake, Alaska Native Claims, and Indian preference—but excludes the Indian Education Act. Even though the bill was going through, he won't tell the nation because it is a Democratic (Kennedy) initiative. So partisanship cuts both ways—Castile does not explain this in a clear and concise way.

Castile's writing style is clear and well-presented and the endnotes are substantive. The text is organized and reads well for the most part. The book presents an exciting time in Indian political history and thus contributes something to us all. Unfortunately, the book is limited by the author's bias. He has added his opinion to Indian policymaking by arguing that Indians were not a part of the process. I would recommend this book, but only to those who have read other accounts of the period. These readers would be able to benefit from the contribution this book makes. However, they would also be able to look past Castile's slanted view of Indian policy under President Nixon.

*Michelle LeBeau (Pit River, Maidu, Cabazon)*  
University of California, Davis

**Watermelon Nights.** By Greg Sarris. New York: Hyperion Press, 1998. 432 pages. \$21.45 cloth; \$13.95 paper.

#### JOHNNY SEVERE

It was only after her and the boys was gone that I seen how her face was just then: plain, without the little smile she had before; not worried or upset, just plain, the way a field is solid yellow in July (p. 25).

Imagine Huck Finn on a raft with Injun Joe, floating down the Sacramento River, getting along. Imagine Lipsha from Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* crossed with Sethe in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Imagine a three-generational Native American epic fed by William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Washington Carver, and Mae West. Just imagine something you've never read before.

The first section's narrative voice experiments with regional dialect and Red English among California Indians, the least understood Native Americans of all. Outside government treaties, off the reservation, mixed with Filipinos and Portuguese, confused with Mexicans and Blacks, these California Natives are preliterate, street-smart, mixed-blood, now-day Indians. Johnny Severe and Felix no-father sell used clothing and modern beadwork. They bisexually cruise the streets, scam tribal casinos, live on castoffs, scrounge for paternity and pride, and survive the back alleys of the American Dream and Great Depression. Regional genius rises up here with challenging cultural materials—off-rez, anti-romantic, gossipy, endearing, back-stabbing, desperate, enduring, ravaged Indians, neither noble nor savage. These characters are real people among the rest of us, for better or ill, corruptible and courageous all at once. So too wrote Faulkner of racial despair, regional pride, and ethnic freedom in *The Bear*.

“humility through suffering,” he said of southern Blacks, “pride through the endurance which survived the suffering.”

*Watermelon Nights* offers a new paradigm of Native fictional realism, from Ernest Hemingway and John Steinbeck, through Ralph Ellison and Ray Carver, to Leslie Silko and Alice Walker. The history and culture of many Others in the Americas becomes documentary fiction, the street-mixed ethnic poor of our suburban limits. Delayed-stress grandmothers—surviving as indentured pickers and field hands on rancherias, as whores and trash-cleaners through the Depression, and as housemaids and cannery bottlers in “better” neighborhoods today—raise hell-raising kids brought up on Pepsi, frybread, church charities, and television soap matinees. Mammoth-angry sisters, gang-raped by white high-school boys driving red convertibles, terrorize neighborhoods calling everybody’s mother a whore and father a pimp. Dangerous cousins show up, take over, pillage the kitchen table crumbs, then leave without so much as a goodbye. What’s America come to?

Northern California history and computer-chip nouveau riche—Clear Lake, Santa Rosa, Sebastopol, Stewart’s Point—a 7,000-year Native history figures as Pomo Country along the Russian River, north of San Francisco’s Muir Woods, southeast of white-collar retirement Sea Ranch, all with natural taste and professional grace among some 3 percent of the bare-root survivors of a Native holocaust. There are no living conjurers, no warriors or dusky maidens or wise elders; instead, cunning dudes, bossy sisters, conniving pimps, scared young girls, homeless con men, rat-fink friends, white bullies, a few gays, many fatherless kids, and some straight but dumb scouts among a mess of mixed-blood, off-rez humanity. It is a novel chock-full of character and surprise—all-American.

Who claims these people if they won’t claim themselves? No generalizations hold, no stereotypes survive, no order pieces it all together: the expatriate novelist Henry James would be fascinated and perplexed by these updated and hybrid Indians fictionalized—Filipinos, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Blacks, Pomos, Miwoks, even an Apache married into the hybrid riot of humanity now seen as West Coast Native America. Take this brash big novel and go figure.

#### ELBA GONZALES

Old-timers warned: Watch yourself outside your home. Which, I guess, in the old days, before people got scared and hungry, made you respect one another, made you remember each tribe had something powerful. And that make me think of something else the old ones said, which explained the predicament we was in: Love your home, know every person, every plant and animal, for without your home, you’re like a person without a family, less than a dead fly on the road. At least with that—a dead fly—you could poison somebody (p. 173).

Elba’s ghost-mother memories of childhood haunt the second-section narrative: Chum, the rancher son’s forbidden Indian lover epitaphed in graffiti as the “Hanged Woman,” and Clementine, the taken-in, dying mother being sung Pomo angel songs by Old Uncle in a new Packard, a cross between a gay

con man and magic realist healer. Elba's own mother freezes to death, drunk on the porch.

"Hanged herself," I heard a man say.

"Froze," I hollered (p. 169).

The novel opens in our time then works backward through three generations of dislocations, then closes with all this culture-tattered history on the porch of a new millennium, no small questions about where it's all going now. The old ones got it the way we hope to get it, if we are to endure. "Got to be better than ever if we is to survive this exile. Got to survive so that we can go back one day like the second Rosa. This is prophecy, this is history" (p. 180).

Rancheria Indians make do in a scrap-heap camp, sneaking over to the hobo fire for burned crackers, rough whiskey, and oral sex, while older girls grope for miscegenated intimacy in a barn and give birth to mixed-blood, father-abandoned kids. Kicked off the rancheria, Big Sarah relocates the round house center-pole and rebuilds the village outside Sebastopol, only to witness the losses once more to white suburbia and tourism. The desecration of racist poverty, ignored spirituality, and cultural sovereignty leak off the reservation to crowd around day-labor indignity and mindless television. And then there's Moki, the enraged medicine spirit from the past, wreaking havoc in the round house in 1932, the poison of white culture polluting red. Throwing fire at everyone and wrecking the round house, the monster-trickster-spirit's rage is not made up.

This is a Big Real Novel, expansive, many-charactered, complexly themed, irritating, winsome, rough, lyrical, letting out the rope of the storyteller's maturing talent. Early Leo Tolstoy or late Charles Dickens, the tale carries an historical texture and a large documentary ambition: to record the changes, to explode the clichés, to detail the lives of Indians in twentieth-century California. The book challenges American readers with the reality of old-time and now-day Indians. The narrative insists that history lives through us all—our relatives still haunt our lives in the present—Indians, Whites, Blacks, Hispanics, and all the Others thrown together. It's a smart novel, deeply imagined and researched, lovingly recalled and crafted—off-rez Natives desperate in poverty and dispossession, unforgettable in wild humor and invention, surviving with endurance and integrity despite self-defeats that keep beating each new generation down with the old racist dismissals and mortal weaknesses and human forgettings. Behind all this lurks the specter of genocide and personal tragedy, the sadness that wrecks the lives of Felix and Billyrene, for example, that an earlier mid-generation of Elba and Ida and Zelda without husbands or fathers struggle to survive with dignity, grace, and good humor. "Indians, Mexicans, it's all the same," the white boy says (p. 351).

*Watermelon Nights* is a beautifully terrible fiction of cultural mixing. The novel records a West Coast history of smelly hobos and campfire-burnt saltines for wretchedly innocent Indian girls, desperate enough to snatch them from the flames. It gives us Chum and Westin Benedict illicitly copulating away their lives in the barn. It shows Big Sarah, off the makeshift home-

land, menacing the ragtag tribe to keep together and honor tribal spirits. All this despite the holocaust, rancherias, reservations, makeshift brothels, and minimum-wage canneries.

The lessons keep coming in discrete insights. A church mothers' sign—"Please Help the Homeless Indians"—keeps a girl-child from accepting the charity of white do-gooders in Sebastopol. A tribal re-gathering to legitimize genealogy erupts in name-calling and dashed dreams of coming together. Cockfights in the Filipino migrant camps, Indian girls getting along as dollar prostitutes—all the small loves and big losses keep the stories going, but where?

Sex? It's something people do instinctually. Procreation is an unquestioned drive in all its obsessive disruption—the men getting off and running on, the women mothering bastard offspring as best they can, whether cherished or dismissed, gay men making do with what they can in homophobic suburbia. Among all the other honesties, this book opens the closet door of sexual candor—uncannily natural and gracefully puzzled, without prurience or exhibitionism. Just imagine unabashed sexuality in Puritan, white-picket-fence, West Coast America alongside the miscegenation, cultural meshing, and racial fears of mixing commonly shared blood.

The losses are terrible, the judgments disastrous, the consequences barely endurable. Zelda sacrifices the child, Charlie, to save her own by leaving a burning lantern on his blankets. And can Elba forgive her?—in an instant, no looking back, with the stillborn courage to keep walking on through *our* common suffering. And it is *ours*, not theirs—all of our histories dislocated together.

#### IRIS PETTYJOHN

She caught me off guard. She turned and tossed a handful of potato salad into my face with all her might. "I should've let you starve," she growled (p. 403).

The book rounds out with the mid-generation middle-classing of off-reservation Indians from the 1950s through the 1990s. Their mothers have stumbled out of hell's ditches and made hard scrabble homes on the raggedy fringes of suburbia. These disappearing Indians reject the old stories and medicine songs and tribal superstitions as they trash the abandoned round house where Billyrene's gang-rape ruins her for life. The rez down by the river has become lover's lane for high-school neckers. Sex becomes something that wannabe nice girls get wrong from watching soapy daytime television and they regret their actions lifelong as they dream of Wonderbread princes, along with their white-washed, fatherless kids. The boys go crazy with the drive for real contact. The girls end up speaking with an artificial affect and pretension that proper English will save them from being no-good Indians. Their ragtag children talk street trash and air-wave dis-speak.

Some things don't change. Despite the losses, sticking power, and small gains, the Pocahontas syndrome is still with us. A pre-war dusky Native girl became John Smith's abandoned lover, then John Rolfe's New World mistress and Christianized wife, Lady Rebecca, in the court of James I. Only four cen-

turies later, Iris lives with the myth of a proper non-ethnic husband, a get-rich melting-pot amnesia, and soapbox melodrama. Johnny's parodic mother Iris is the Native American run off the reservation, miscegenated detritus from the Presley, gang-rape, end-of-the-war Eisenhower 1950s. Indians, Americans, what's the difference now?

"We're Americans," I told him.

And do you know what he told me? He told me how I am one of the lost generation, that all my problems have to do with my being lost between two cultures, white and red. "You're on the fence, nowhere," he told me (p. 422).

English betrays Iris and her people, including her only son. So this third generation recoils to grandma's rough-loving ways. Johnny skips over Iris for her Natively *real* mother, Elba.

With this suburbanizing of the Native princess, what will Johnny do? Stay home with grandma, reconcile with his permed mom, or go off to Stanford with Edward the homosexual airhead? Sidekick with the ghost of closeted Patrick, the sensitive "friend" who doesn't want sex with Iris, then blows out his brains from white-boy rejection in back-alley San Francisco? Scam a tribal casino with Felix, the streetsmart cat, and get dangerously rich quick?

Where's Dad with any of them? Where's Old Uncle now? What's become of the Noble Savage? Where will Sarris take these up-to-date, quirky, hard-edged, boundary-blurred stories of now-day Indian mixed-bloods? *Watermelon Nights* ends,

"Look," Johnny says.

But I see already.

Heaven, the far stars?

No, a wish (p. 425).

Wishful thinking, or real dreaming? Read the book and then we'll talk.

*Kenneth Lincoln*

University of California, Los Angeles

**With My Own Eyes: A Lakota Woman Tells Her People's History.** By Susan Bordeaux Bettelyoun and Josephine Waggoner. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998. 187 pages. \$35.00 cloth.

With the publication of *With My Own Eyes: A Lakota Woman Tells Her People's History*, a long overdue perspective on the history of the Lakota people has become available. Susan Bordeaux Bettelyoun and Josephine Waggoner met at the Old Soldiers' Home in 1933 and began their collaboration on a history of the "Ogalala and Brulé Lakota during the last half of the nineteenth-century" (p. xv). Bettelyoun was concerned about the errors and omissions in the records written by predominantly white historians. The two women worked to record