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Miko Kings: An Indian Baseball Story. By LeAnne Howe. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007. 221 pages. \$11.95 paper.

What an incredible piece of literature is *Miko Kings: An Indian Baseball Story* by Choctaw author LeAnne Howe. To my reading of this work of fiction I brought certain expectations; knowing Ms. Howe's previous works and something of her academics led me toward the potential *Miko Kings* promised.

Miko Kings combines two of my favorite subjects: Indians and baseball. Many potential readers may dismiss the novel based on the subject matters alone, but they would be dismissing a fantastic read. As an Indian ballplayer myself, the claim may be made that I read this work with a certain prejudice that favors the content. Although that is a true statement, the game of baseball is, to a certain point, incidental to the phenomenal story being told. By that I mean the characters could have been playing tag, checkers, or hide-and-seek and the story would remain a good story.

Miko Kings also artfully combines other concepts that are not easily conjoined: the past and the present, fiction and reality. The past and the present are woven together with all the skill and artistry of an Indian basket master. From the moment the old mail pouch is discovered until the "sacred is made manifest in the flesh of the page," these epochs come together to tell the story of the Kings, the story of Indian baseball in the twin territories of what became Oklahoma, a story of life (221).

In addition to constructing the past and the present, Howe with equal skill merges fiction and reality. This is not an easy task; many have tried and failed. Howe, I feel, succeeds in doing so with the characters she has created for this novel. Ezol Day's diary/scrapbook (chapter 7) is one of the most effective tools in making this melding of truth and fiction a reality. To put this into baseball terms, Howe calls her shot, and with Ezol Day's diary Howe delivers a towering home run. The mixture of real and fictional entries found in Day's diary is the spirit of the story. This is where I began truly to see and understand the mixture of Indians and Cavalry, Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory, loyalty and betrayal, future and past, truth and fiction.

In a way this is an extended baseball metaphor of the Indian experience under the policy of manifest destiny. When reading this novel in that paradigm how appropriate is the name of the pitcher (Hope Little Leader). Indian peoples have always held hope and still do: hope that we will one day be recognized as the vibrant cultures and significant contributors to humanity we really are. As we see in the novel, Hope fades, yet is kept alive by memories and lingers in literature, much like the hope of Indians today, and where there is hope, there is always a chance for victory.

I must admit to a bit of confusion in the early chapters. I could not yet see how Ezol Day fit into the story. "Is this a ghost story," I asked—literally talking to the book. I wanted to know how the book wished to be read, but the only answer I received was "Read, just read." I followed the advice of the novel and read more and deeper; with each turn of the page the characters became more real, telling me who they are, who they once were, and who they

will become. Though they may be fictitious, these characters are as genuine as they come within the world LeAnne Howe has created.

This story somewhat reminds me of Louis Erdrich's *The Painted Drum* (2005), and by that I mean the anachronistic concept of Indian time and time traveling. I have so often heard that phrase used in a negative context: "They're on 'Indian time'," usually meaning that Indians have a disregard for the concept of timekeeping. Howe's *Miko Kings*, as does Erdrich's *The Painted Drum*, illustrates that Indian time does not always mean "late." These works, though they may be fiction, demonstrate that time is no more a barrier than is space to an Indian paradigm. A mainstream Western paradigm may find time and space, especially when in concert with one another, as terminal barriers, an impossibility to overcome, whereas Indian paradigms see opportunities, making us visionaries rather than mystics.

In thinking about *Miko Kings* this way I am reminded of the paradox Robert M. Pirsig illustrates in his 1974 work *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. When the narrator's son asks his father if he believes in ghosts, the father answers from a Western, mainstream paradigm and clearly responds "no." Yet through continued dialogue the thought process of Indians comes up, and the father answers "yes," if he must think like an Indian. Pirsig's paradox is confusing: the readers must restructure their entire ways of thinking and knowing. To think of baseball with an Indian mind may confuse readers; I was confused at first because I was thinking of baseball in an ESPN paradigm. I had to listen to the characters and remind myself to think like an Indian.

For years I have traveled around the nation and given lectures to many groups and individuals about the humanness of American Indians. It seems that literature commonly portrays Natives as nonhuman; the only difference in many of these works is the direction of the nonhumanness. By this I mean some authors and their works make Indians out to be less-than-human (savages), while others portray Indians as more-than-human (mystics). LeAnne Howe's Indians are human. She allows her characters to come to life and demonstrate their humanity, faults, restorations, loyalties, betrayals, cruelty, and kindness for the reader. Howe does a wonderful job of running the readers' emotions with these characters. The pitcher Hope Little Leader, the outfielder Blip Bleen, the catcher Albert Goingsnake, postal clerk and time-traveling spirit Ezol Day, and Lena the storyteller, plus the other characters of the story, develop to reflect the disposition of Indian peoples.

Howe's Indians are funny, much like several characters found in the various works of Sherman Alexie and like many of the real-world Indians I know. American Indian peoples have a wonderful sense of humor, and I found myself laughing with—not at—Howe's Indians. I also found myself angry with them at times; however, their faults only illustrate the humanity of these and all Natives, indeed all people. Howe's fiction illustrates the reality of Indians. Most assuredly I was cheering for the Kings as they played the Cavalry. This work gave me plenty to cheer, laugh, and cry about. What an amazing literaturescape is *Miko Kings*.

Perhaps the reality this novel presented to me is enhanced by the locations of the *Miko Kings*' travels and games. I have played ball in many of the

places in this novel, and that makes it so much more than just a book. This is a map of the ball fields in Indian country. This is a play-by-play commentary and a behind-the-scenes documentary of Indian kinship. Baseball in Indian country is not merely a game, certainly not within the pages of *Miko Kings*, and certainly not even to this day. Indians may not declare war any more, but we surely declare “ball” often. But even in historical times Indians did not declare war as often as the old western movies portrayed; even then we declared “ball,” which makes ball not so much a sport as a political action—an alternative to war. That dynamic is strongly rooted in this novel.

I cannot help but think that everything an Indian does is inside of a circle. There is strong evidence of the circularity of Indian paradigms in the stories we tell. *Miko Kings* begins with “Restoration,” yet to have restoration there must be destruction. I read this novel as a metaphor of Indian history, and we know history tends to repeat itself. However, repetition for repetition’s sake may be called the mistakes of history, thus dooming us to repeat them. Indians do not repeat for repetition; Indians repeat for purpose, and where there is purpose there is hope. I highly recommend *Miko Kings: An Indian Baseball Story* to any reader interested in Indians, baseball, and humanity. Now, following my own advice and thinking like an Indian I believe I will declare this an “Ezol day” and read this novel again.

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Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians. Compiled and translated by Clark Wissler and D. C. Duvall. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008. 172 pages. \$36.95 cloth; \$15.95 paper.

Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians is a valuable collection of Amskapi Pikuni (Blackfeet) oral traditions transposed into oral literature in 1908 by tribal informant David Charles Duvall and anthropologist Clark Wissler. Originally appearing as an early-twentieth-century monograph in the anthropological papers of the American Museum of Natural History, the text includes ninety-six traditional narratives from the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. The scope and depth of these narratives is significant, as they manifest a compendium of Pikuni worldview and philosophy. For example, there are eight Star Myths and more than thirty-one ritualistic narratives that convey a traditional cosmology and tribal metaphysics. Further reflecting Pikuni wisdom traditions, there are forty-four narratives devoted to cultural origins and relations. The collection opens with twenty-three Old Man or N’api stories. These humorous tales are foundational in supplying a normative ethos by using the ironic adventures of the tribal anti-hero and creator-figure commonly labeled as the trickster. As a result, *Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians* is an important contribution attending traditional Pikuni wisdom as reproduced through oral traditions from time immemorial.

Occupying a key position within the collection of Pikuni oral narratives, *Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians* follows the works of anthropologist George