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*A Dark Light in the West:  
Racism and Reconciliation*

AS it happened I went west twice. When I was three, in 1948, my mother and father and my younger brother and I moved from Mamaroneck, New York—on Long Island Sound in Westchester County, outside New York City—to Reseda, California, a town in the San Fernando Valley northwest of Los Angeles. In the late forties and early fifties, the western and northern sections of this valley represented one of the most productive agricultural regions in the United States; twelve years later, agriculture had become almost vestigial there, pushed out by ambitious suburban development. The orchards and citrus groves were largely gone, and most of the irrigated hay and grain fields had been converted to blocks of tract housing. The last undeveloped, unirrigated stretch of this once semi-arid expanse, the area around Chatsworth in the valley's northwest corner, was by then no longer unsettled enough to serve as a backdrop for the TV and motion-picture westerns Hollywood was used to making there.

My first California home, on the northern outskirts of Reseda, was too isolated to have a neighborhood of its own, but close enough to the town of Encino for me to begin attending a Catholic grade school there in 1950. Reflecting on it today, I can't recall any Latino or Asian students having been in my classes—though I am relying here solely on memory—and I am aware now that the valley back then was home to few African Americans. The social world I inhabited at the time, as a middle-class, suburban white boy, was predominantly, if not thoroughly, white.

My mother began teaching in public schools in the valley two years after we arrived, first at a junior high school in the city of San Fernando and then at

Northridge Junior High. She became at these schools the confidant of young students marginalized by their social class or ethnic culture, and through her, in the early 1950s, I became acquainted with several Mexican families. These were households in which the fathers worked, typically, in the valley's orange groves or perhaps at commercial nurseries or alongside *braceros* in the fields. My mother's interest in and rapport with young people living outside mainstream American culture became part of the pattern of her teaching life, and this pattern remained unchanged until the end of her career.

My parents divorced shortly after our move from New York; in 1955 Mother remarried, and the following year we moved back east to Manhattan, where my stepfather lived. She started teaching again in 1960, this time at P.S. 155 in East Harlem, a predominantly black, coeducational school on East 117th Street.

It was obvious to me the first time I visited P.S. 155 that my mother's new students, mostly young black women, were comfortable in open-ended conversation with her and not self-conscious in her presence. I am relying on memory again, but starting with those early years in California, I am unable to recall any moment of tension in my mother's dealings with people culturally or racially different from herself—not until my stepfather came into the picture. An immigrant to America from Asturias, the "county of kings" in northern Spain, he was born into a *hidalgo* family in Southampton, England, during the years his father was Spain's First Secretary to the Court of St. James's. My stepfather was a man suspiciously alert to issues of class and race.

My mother grew up on a large farm in eastern Alabama in the 1920s. Yearning for something very different, she moved into a nearby residential college, Montevallo, in 1930. Shortly after she graduated, she married—and then divorced—a Catholic immigrant from Czechoslovakia, an artist and aeronautical engineer. A few years later she got married again, this time to my father, a first-generation Irish Catholic advertising executive from New York, whom she also later divorced. The divorces—and the men—caused her family to distance themselves from her. The circumstances she was born into in the Deep South, of course, gave aspiring women little latitude for personal expression; and it was not until later in my own life, after having seen how young, marginalized female students were attracted to her, that I recognized the parallel: her life, too, had been shaped by narrow and unreasonable judgments. These young women sensed in her, I think, a kind of empathy they found difficult to locate in other white people.

My stepfather, whose surname I was given when he married my mother, was openly prejudiced, especially toward African Americans, Jews, and gay men. His indignant pronouncements rarely emerged—within my hearing—in his business dealings, but they were apparent around the house and came more fully to the fore in conversations with other men in his private social environs—at the Essex County Country Club in northern New Jersey, for instance, and at the New York Athletic Club in the city. After my mother died in 1976, he told me—a non sequitur out of the blue one day—that he believed Mother had “had some Negro blood in her.” This was relatively common, he reassured me, even among well-born southern women.

I was uncomprehending.

“Yeah,” he continued, “you could see it in her face, in the bone structure.”

What compelled such relentless racism in a person?

As a teenager in New York I was made pointedly aware of racial and ethnic divisions that earlier, in suburban California, had had no real shape or emphasis to them. Such distinctions were routinely made there, certainly—I knew firsthand how socially constrained the lives of *braceros* could be; and whenever we went to the Farmers Market in Hollywood, I saw the unconcealed looks of contempt certain white men shot at the Japanese truck farmers there; but living in New York, a polyglot city where ethnic and racial divides in the borough neighborhoods were part of people’s everyday orientation, and living with a stepfather who frequently felt it necessary to remark on these arrangements, I experienced racial and ethnic distinctions in a different way. In the agricultural and then suburban setting of my California boyhood, living in a family where my mother didn’t discuss racial and ethnic differences in a disparaging tone, I never felt called on to take a stand. In New York, my stepfather and some of my parents’ friends encouraged me, instead, to mark these distinctions and to take them into account when dealing with people. My stepfather, for example, impressed upon me the need, especially as a young man with a Spanish surname, to distinguish between people who emigrated to the United States from Spain and Spanish-speaking people who had arrived in New York from places like Puerto Rico.

At this point in my life I began to comprehend that an awareness of cultural and racial differences, and of the social divisions maintained to differentiate among several economic classes, partly determined the expression and display of one’s social manners. And further, however insensitive any stereotypic

characterizations rooted in such perceptions might be, I saw that they helped people navigate in a multicultural, urban society without, they believed (or hoped), giving offense. Still I was puzzled initially by the nuanced judgments my stepfather frequently felt compelled to offer concerning relative strangers—that, say, the building superintendent next door was in fact not “Italian” but a Sicilian, and that he took the train in every day from Borough Park, a Jewish neighborhood in Brooklyn—and by his listing of the behavioral traits one might expect to observe in such individuals. Generally, I continued to feel only embarrassed or vaguely naive whenever the mention of anyone’s religion or cultural origins or race automatically generated an assumption about them in everyday conversation.

When I was seventeen, my stepfather enthusiastically supported my interest in attending Notre Dame, his alma mater. He felt its white, middle-class, Catholic student body would provide me with an edifying environment in which to mature. As a student at Notre Dame in 1962, I didn’t fully grasp how intellectually constraining the university’s exclusionary racial and religious politics were, nor how severely this limited the opportunity to learn about people different from myself. These insights would not come until later; in the meantime, I tried to abide by my mother’s dictums: pay attention to individual people, not categories; accept and honor obvious differences; and then begin to imagine, “Where do we go from here?”

After I graduated, knowing I would likely always remain blind to certain dimensions of my own racial and cultural prejudices (or preferences), I made a conscious effort to explore unfamiliar racial and cultural circumstances. I tried to be deliberate and thoughtful about this, with the intuition—and this I did get from a university education dominated by European thinking and history—that another sort of national and international politics was coming, one not shackled by assumptions of racial and cultural superiority, and that this politics would change everyone’s ideas about privilege.

When I moved west a second time, in 1968, it was to enter graduate school at the University of Oregon in Eugene, and to begin, as a newly married man, an independent adult life. I felt strongly attracted to the landscape’s heavily forested and snow-capped mountains, to its lush emerald valleys and white-water rivers, and was immediately comfortable there. In some ways, moving to Oregon felt like coming back to California. I quickly became familiar, as any immigrant might, with the publicly traded narrative of Oregon’s early settlement, but I

discovered, too, the much more obscure chronicle of its history of racism and domineering cultural imposition, the fuller story of settlement that every state seeks to diminish or manipulate in presenting itself. In Oregon, this disconcerting history included the plundering of Indian lands; the rescinding, in 1868, of the state's 1866 ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment (guaranteeing citizenship and basic civil rights for African Americans); the formation of violent anti-Chinese leagues in Portland in the 1880s; and, later, the state's collusion in the development of a reckless system of commercial exploitation of the region's natural resources, especially timber. This uncomplimentary account tended to undermine the twentieth-century image of western Oregon as a modern American Eden, an idyll many young people invested in and believed would unfold there in the years following Woodstock and the Summer of Love.

When I arrived in Eugene, the deep wounds engendered by Manifest Destiny were still healing, especially on the Indian reservations. In southwestern Oregon, an area some historians believe drew a disproportionate number of immigrants from the American South after the Civil War, *de facto* sundown laws (no nonwhites present after sunset) were still in effect in many of the small towns. Also, a general shift in the state from small-scale agrarian and ranching life to a more corporate, industrialized economy had, by then, created obvious and extensive environmental damage. On the other hand, harsh criticism of commercial logging and of ranching and agricultural practices that had degraded Oregon's landscapes—an objection to the status quo especially strong in the late sixties among western Oregon college students, many of whom were attending the University of Oregon—spawned one of the earliest and best-organized environmental movements in the country. This movement's political activism—focused on contentious issues like logging and the pattern of urban growth—and such regulations as newly mandated bottle deposits, changed the state's political landscape during the governorship of Tom McCall. The popular backlash against these changes—against the implementation of land-use planning, the protection of roadless areas, and the passage of recycling laws—had a distinct “native Oregonian” component to it. Reactionaries, self-identifying as “real” Oregonians, regarded the state's young environmental leaders (many of them from California, Michigan, New England, and the mid-Atlantic states) as nothing more than carpetbaggers. The reactionary voice was anti-progressive, anti-environmental, and anti-government, a sometimes belligerent jingoism strongly supported by the timber industry and real estate developers.

In the national conversation, at least as I have listened to it over several decades, people often assume that the western states have had a history of settlement more or less in keeping with that of the eastern states; but this is untrue in a fundamental way. Most of the West lacks water; vast stretches of its lands are managed by the federal government; and many local economies have been shaped by mining, logging, and ranching, not manufacturing and industry. Further, the major events that influenced much of the molding of the American character—the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, the Industrial Revolution—hardly affected the West. The War of Independence occurred before there was an American West; the War between the States was contested a thousand and more miles away; and the Industrial Revolution, as defined by the textile mills of Massachusetts and the steel mills of Pennsylvania, never arrived. The West's principal contributions to the shaping of the American character, arguably, were its promotion of a folklore of self-reliance and independence; its championing of unlimited development, linked to a philosophy of endless financial opportunity and unrestrained personal freedom; and its support for the taming of all things wild—Indians and land in particular—as an unalloyed social good. Unacknowledged in this western *laissez-faire*, entrepreneurial, and opportunistic promotion of the good life, however, was an *ipso facto* strain of racism.

Lane County, Oregon—Eugene is the county seat—was one of the whitest counties in the United States when I moved there in 1968. If you happened to see a young black man walking down the street in Eugene, you assumed he was an athlete at the university. In that same year my surname became the fourth Lopez listed in the telephone book for a county of 206,000. And when I attended Mass in the city for the first time, I was told I should be aware that Catholics were a distinct minority in western Oregon. The oddest thing to me about this cautionary remark, back then, was the assumption that I would need such information in order to get along.

Even a callow newcomer to Eugene might easily have discovered in those years that another, minority community lived on the social and geographical outskirts of the city—Indians, Asians, blacks, and Mexicans who either chose to keep their distance or who felt compelled to. This historical chasm between white and nonwhite cultures throughout Oregon has remained largely intact down to the present. According to legal historian Cheryl Brooks, the gap is so pronounced that many white Oregonians are able to regard themselves as racially tolerant today only because they so rarely encounter anyone who is not white.

Oregon, the only free state ever admitted to the Union with a black exclusion clause in its constitution, has a long, virulent, and occluded history of racism. Not until 1948, following a U.S. Supreme Court decision, did the state revoke its Alien Land Law, making it possible for an Asian immigrant to purchase property. Marriage between whites and nonwhites was illegal until 1951. And the state legislature, in addition to withholding its re-ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment until 1973, did not ratify the Fifteenth, protecting African Americans' right to vote, until 1959.

During my first few years in Oregon I noticed not only how infrequently I encountered African Americans, even on the streets of Portland, but also how often I met Native Americans in the general population. This was a different mix of cultures from the ones I'd known in California and New York, and also from the one I'd become familiar with while visiting my mother's relatives in Alabama and Georgia.

Today, looking back at the racial situation I encountered in Oregon at the age of twenty-three, I can see that it was consequential in determining the direction of my life.

The most affecting teacher I had in graduate school at the University of Oregon in the late 1960s, Barre Toelken, was a white man from Massachusetts married to a Nisei Japanese (on her father's side) named Miiko (née Kubota). Toelken taught medieval English literature, American folklore, and what would later be called Native American literature. At that time, whatever was going on in the very small world of university blacks, Asians, and Native Americans in Eugene was news to be gleaned around the Toelkens' table. Several of us, mostly graduate students in the English department, were always glad to get an invitation to visit their home, where we might meet a black musician just in from Memphis, or a visitor from Japan. During those years, the Toelkens introduced the shifting group of us to traditional people from Eskimo communities in Alaska and to Native American artists and leaders from throughout the West. (Barre's second family, his first wife's relatives, were Navajos from the area around Blanding, Utah.) A few years after I left the university, when I was writing a book about wolves and looking for guidance, Barre sent me to the Bitterroot Valley in Montana to meet his close friend Joseph Epes Brown, a professor of comparative religion. Brown had lived with Black Elk during that Lakota elder's final years and had also written *The Sacred Pipe*, a definitive work on Lakota ceremony.

What Toelken taught, in and out of his classroom, was in effect comparative epistemology. As nearly as I can understand it at the distance of forty years, if my mother had brought me to the notion of amicable ease and common sense with people who were culturally different, Toelken brought me to an awareness of other people as ultimately unknowable. Because of the range of individuals the Toelkens invited to their home, however, I also began to grasp the intrinsic value behind a familiarity with different ways of knowing.

I was also fortunate in those same years to work as a writer alongside other people whom I came to admire for the breadth of their cultural views. One was Bob Stephenson, a large-mammal biologist at the Alaska Department of Fish and Game in Fairbanks and one of the first American field biologists to suggest bringing the empirically based knowledge of native peoples into mainstream discussions about wildlife behavior and management. Later, I would become friends with Richard Nelson, an Alaskan anthropologist and another pioneer in elucidating how deeply informed indigenous oral natural histories could be. Even as my own circle of contacts and friends grew, however, I continued to reflect on Toelken's formative and unobtrusive guidance, on how he had helped me to frame my questions.

When I left the University of Oregon in the spring of 1970 I embarked, without really understanding what I was doing, on a lifelong course of being tutored—or instructed—by people different from myself on subjects I was eager to explore and about which they were knowledgeable and also curious. I learned about wolves from Nunamiut Eskimos in Alaska's Brooks Range (through Bob Stephenson's friendship with those people), and about narwhal behavior from Inuit on northern Baffin Island. I learned from Toelken's Navajo friends about shape-shifting, and about fossil evidence for hominid evolution from Kamba men working with paleontologists in Kenya. From Warlpiri people in the Northern Territory in Australia, I learned how a small endangered marsupial, the rufous hare-wallaby, fit into the Dreaming of these Aboriginal people. My excitement at these encounters didn't derive entirely from being informed by individuals who knew what I didn't, nor from the fact that, frequently, the impressive and complex systematics and genealogy of their ideas were not ones formulated by Plato and Descartes. Rather, the encounters inflamed a passion in me for coming more fully to life. I felt that my enthusiasm for immersion in the mystery of everything surrounding us—myself and the informant—was shared; and that the unity of this pervasive mystery, in the

end, was as unpredictable for the most adept of shamans as it was unfetchable for the most studious of cosmologists.

In those moments when I thought I understood what another person meant—someone of a different race, or from a different culture or with different spiritual beliefs, or someone who had lived long in a geography altogether different from my own—I also came to believe that racial or cultural exceptionalism was a deceiving way station, a comfortable place you finally had to leave if you hoped to get anywhere. What I learned from these exchanges, I think, was that racial or cultural superiority was, in the end, a refuge erected by the fearful.

An enigmatic but defining figure in Oregon's nineteenth-century racist history was an attorney named Matthew Deady. In 1859, with the arrival of statehood, Deady was appointed Oregon's first federal district judge. His special place in the judicial history of the American West derives, in part, from a series of opinions he wrote during the three decades he spent on that bench. His rulings reinforced principles of fair treatment and equal rights in a political climate that was strongly—even on occasion violently—critical of any sort of equality for nonwhites, especially the Chinese. During the years of his adjudication (1859–93), while Oregon's legislature continued to pass laws to legitimize and protect white racism, Deady ruled in favor of Chinese plaintiffs who had been abused and penalized by discriminatory labor laws and by taxing and licensing ordinances. He was openly critical of a prominent strain of "nativist" hostility in Oregon's politics, an anti-Indian, anti-black, anti-Chinese, anti-Catholic position taken, Deady believed, by an uneducated "pisantry" (as he put it in a letter to his friend James Naismith). Prior to Deady's appointment to the federal bench, however, his publicly stated political views were often blatantly racist. Only after his federal appointment by President James Buchanan did he gradually begin to assume, from our modern perspective, a disinterested stance on racial issues—and to become an enigma to some of his longtime friends.

Deady's "conversion," according to Ralph Mooney, a legal historian and emeritus professor at the University of Oregon's law school, had no Rubicon moment; but his change in point of view is an important episode in a larger story of racism, one unique to the West: the harassment and sometimes deadly violence directed against Chinese immigrants, starting at the time of the Cali-

ifornia gold rush in 1849 and symbolically culminating in the passage of a series of federal Chinese Exclusion acts in the 1880s.

Some social critics argue today that nations around the world will continue to reject any American critique of the ethnic repression that occurs within their borders until America, in an official public ceremony, acknowledges the role racial prejudice and genocide have played in its own development. Although such a ceremony, regrettably, is unlikely to take place, we have made some progress toward the goal of at least making more public the inventory of early unethical behavior.

The modern effort to achieve this kind of transparency in the record of American history, one might logically argue, begins with the civil rights movement of the 1950s and '60s. With the publication of popular revisionist histories of the West such as Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (1971), and testimonies like James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), many, if not a majority of, American college students, including myself, became aware of the long history of intolerance and injustice that lay behind pivotal events in the country's social evolution—among them the 1965 voter registration drive in Selma, Alabama, and the 1973 occupation of Wounded Knee, South Dakota. By now, more have looked into such things as the Christian religious fervor that drove an unprovoked military attack on Southern Cheyenne and Arapahoe families at Sand Creek, Colorado, in 1864, in which dozens of people were killed; or they have read extensively about the lethal psychopathology of the Middle Passage. Still, the gap in public awareness between what *actually* happened to Native Americans and to minorities in America and what is popularly *believed* to have happened to them remains sufficiently great to draw the continued attention of national and international social critics.

In the same way that many well-meaning Oregonians, unaware of how small the African American population of the state is, came to believe that theirs was a "colorblind" society, so have most Americans overlooked, denied, forgotten, or "moved on" when it comes to questions about the nation's history of racial brutality. (Most of us, of course, having read school-board-approved histories, were never exposed to this history to begin with.) The worst unprovoked massacre of Indian people in the West, for example, still remains a virtually unknown incident. This attack, on a Shoshone winter village by a restive group of California Third Infantry and Second Cavalry volunteers—whose offer of military service in the Civil War had been declined by Union officers—took place at Bear River, Idaho, on 29 January 1863. More than three

hundred Indian men, women, and children were bludgeoned, raped, tortured, and shot to death by this cadre of white men spoiling for any sort of fight. Similarly, although many Americans might be aware that Chinese laborers played a role of some sort in building railroads in the West, and that they worked in western mines, and opened laundries and offered domestic services in many western towns and cities, few among us today, even in the West, are aware of the number of wanton, racially driven mass murders that occurred. Twenty-eight Chinese coal miners were killed at Rock Springs, Wyoming, in 1885; five Chinese men were hanged by white vigilantes at Pierce, Idaho, in 1886; and thirty-one were robbed and murdered near Deep Creek, Oregon, in May 1887. An amateur historian of this last event, H. R. Findley, reports that one of the ringleaders of the massacre felt that he and his accomplices were simply “doing their country a favor” by ridding it of Asians who were, by the murderers’ lights, “stealing” gold that belonged to local white people.

During the first few years I lived in Oregon, I read and heard stories of how native people had been driven off their lands, how these lands had been confiscated and parceled out to others, how some of the tribes had later been forced onto confederated reservations, and how articles in their treaties with the United States had been selectively and unilaterally annulled, effectively closing Indian people out of their traditional hunting and fishing grounds. This framework initially organized my thoughts about a history of racial prejudice in the state. Early on I had learned that southwestern Oregon was not a place where African Americans should ever travel alone (the region’s largest town, Grants Pass, had been a nationally recognized Ku Klux Klan stronghold). And I had read about anti-Chinese rioting in Portland in the mid-1880s, when arsons had been committed and beatings administered by nativist xenophobes egged on by the city’s mayor, Sylvester Pennoyer (soon to be elected the state’s governor), and by such local publications as the *Catholic Sentinel*, whose editorials were written to appeal especially to working-class Irish. But for many years I remained largely unaware of what had actually been done to Chinese people in Oregon in the nineteenth century.

This lack of awareness became apparent to me in the spring of 1995 when I began researching a story near Astoria, the site of the fur-trading post John Jacob Astor had had built there in 1811 at the mouth of the Columbia River. I’d gotten to know a local ceramic artist, Richard Rowland, through Lillian Pitt, a Wasco artist from the Warm Springs reservation on the east side of

the Cascade Range who regularly fired her ceramic masks and other work in a wood-burning kiln Richard had constructed at his home. A community of potters from Portland and northwestern Oregon had coalesced around this anagama-style kiln, which employed a sloped-tunnel technology developed in China about 1000 BC and later refined in Korea and Japan.

Richard's father was a white veteran of World War II, his mother a native Hawaiian. Richard was born and raised in the Coast Ranges south of Astoria, in the drainage of the Nestucca River on what was once Tillamook land, but he had spent most of his adult life near the mouth of the Columbia. In middle age he traveled to Tasmania to earn a Master of Fine Arts degree in ceramic art at the University of Tasmania at Launceston. When I asked him why he had traveled so far to get his degree, he told me that in a dream he had seen his grandmother standing up in the Hawaiian islands, one hand stretched out to him in Oregon, the other pointing to Tasmania.

Richard and I were cutting wood for his kiln one day when he said he had something he wanted me to see. We drove to a stretch of alder woods on the south side of Astoria, land that forms part of the north bank of the Youngs River. During the halcyon days of the Columbia River commercial salmon fishery, just after the turn of the nineteenth century, Chinese cannery workers built a settlement here. Given a choice, they preferred to live away from white domiciles; white people, for their part, preferred not to see the Chinese in public except at work in the canning factories or out on the tidal flats of the Youngs River, building dikes to create pasturage. Prevented from using Astoria's city dump, the Chinese set up one of their own.

The remains of the dump, now a kind of reliquary, lie in an open copse of red alder. The space between clumps of trees is overgrown with Himalayan blackberry vines and clusters of native salal and sword fern. The day I explored the site was overcast, and the flat gray light encouraged feelings of melancholy as Richard and I pushed our way through the blackberry thickets. Here and there on the forest floor weak beams of sunlight picked up the sheen of something broken or discarded. Neither of us said much, but the objects we picked up to examine (and then replaced)—part of a child's toy, one shank from a pair of pliers, cracked medicine bottles—spoke poignantly of the complex sense of loss and disruption that is part of *barrio* life all over the world.

Not until that day with Richard did my imprecise and unorganized sense of Oregon's Chinese history begin to come into focus. The fragile quality of a child's sense of self still adhered to the derelict toys; and who knows what pal-

liatives had once filled the empty medicine bottles? The undistinguished trash before me triggered an acute awareness of the tenuousness of human existence.

Chinese workers began arriving in Oregon in the 1850s, initially looking for mining opportunities and for work on the railroads. Many of them came up from San Francisco under the auspices of one or another “company,” all of these, in effect, Chinese benevolent associations brought together in a consortium called the Chinese Six Companies. (Each company—there were, oddly, actually eight—represented a different geographical region in China.) Brokers for these companies made arrangements for Chinese laborers to work either independently or with Oregon employers. Occasionally company representatives traveled north with the workers to help them deal with the complicated web of exclusionary laws and discriminatory regulations that enforced white prejudice.

With late-nineteenth-century fluctuations in the economy, including a nationwide depression in the 1870s, the periodic dismissal of railroad workers, without regard to race, became routine. When Chinese workers agreed to return to work at a lower wage, they fueled resentment among lower-class white railroad workers who refused to do so. In the worst cases of scapegoating the Chinese for the economic hardships every worker faced, Chinese laborers and their families throughout California and the Northwest were intimidated and harassed until many of them moved away. Some, as happened in Tacoma in 1885, were forced to board passenger ships bound for elsewhere while their homes and belongings were put to the torch. Others were simply murdered.

The most outrageous episodes of violence—the shootings at Rock Springs and Deep Creek, a series of seventeen lynchings in Los Angeles in 1871, thirteen Chinese murdered over a three-month period in San Francisco in 1885—come to mind only hazily today for many who nevertheless identify themselves with the heritage of the American West. One presumes the majority of such people are at least aware of, and perhaps less indifferent to, the long catalog of horrors visited upon Native Americans west of the Mississippi, which includes the “virgin soil” epidemic of smallpox that came up the Missouri River in the summer of 1837, devastating thousands of Mandan, Arikara, Gros Ventre, Pawnee, Hidatsa, Assiniboine, Blackfeet, and Yankton and Santee Sioux; the burning of Comanche, Kiowa, and Cheyenne winter villages at Palo Duro Canyon, Texas, in 1874; and the relentless pursuit of fleeing non-treaty Nez Perce by cavalry troops in 1877.

Sensitized to the Chinese history of Oregon following that afternoon in the woods with Richard, I recalled, vaguely, having read some years before of an incident in the Wallowa Mountains in the northeastern corner of the state: a large group of Chinese men, placer mining for gold somewhere in the Hells Canyon reach of the Snake River, had been robbed and murdered. I first encountered the story, I later determined, in a historical novel by Craig Lesley called *River Song* (1989). Shortly after that day with Richard, I read a more detailed account of the massacre in the *Oregonian*, the Portland newspaper, by a reporter named Greg Nokes: thirty-one (perhaps as many as thirty-three) Chinese, he wrote, camped near the confluence of the Snake River with Oregon's Deep Creek, sixty-five miles upstream from Lewiston, Idaho, were shot to death by a local gang of small-time stock thieves and schoolboys, the youngest of whom was fifteen. Nokes references one chronicler who suspects the group robbed the men of about \$5,000 in gold dust and nuggets, a fortune at the time. In 2009 Nokes published a book about the murders, *Massacred for Gold: The Chinese in Hells Canyon*. In the book Nokes is as much concerned with how his efforts to investigate the crime were thwarted by county officials as he is with what happened to the Chinese; he exposes, for example, the determination of some local residents to preserve, down to the present, a distorted version of their pioneer history, dismissing both the heinous nature of the crime and their ancestors' anemic effort to arrest and charge the perpetrators.

Precisely what happened to these thirty-some Chinese miners at the mouth of Deep Creek in May 1887 is unlikely ever to be made clear. The names of only eleven of the victims are known, all immigrants from the Punju district of Guangzhou (Canton). The men were working under the aegis of the Sam Yup Company of San Francisco, whose inquiries into the crime and demands for justice were frustrated at every level of government, including the office of the secretary of state in Washington, D.C. The killers were led by a twenty-one-year-old man named Tightly Canfield, already suspected of murder and robbery in Idaho, and by his older sidekick, thirty-two-year-old Blue Evans, a foundering rancher. The gang seemingly acted with impunity, if not indifference. They knew that if they were caught, strong, local, nativist prejudice against the Chinese would stand them in good stead. Three of the gang were arrested and then acquitted in a summary trial; the others, including Evans and Canfield, were never charged.

In deadly human encounters like this, one is tempted to try to make guilt and innocence elementary, but such an approach rarely serves any deeper

truth. Researching these particular long-forgotten murders, we can never learn how premeditated the violence was, or whether some of the victims were also tortured, or who among the gang was actually present during the shootings, or whether all this took place on May 25 or over a period of several days. Neither can we ever know what constituted the sequence of thinking that culminated in the crime.

The insidiousness of racism, in circumstances such as these, resides in part with an illusion that somehow the slate can be wiped clean, the injustice purged, if the guilty are simply brought to a just trial. In the history of our country—of all the innocent men, women, and children who have suffered miserable deaths at the hands of mobs and duly appointed militias, or who were killed by bigots and psychopaths—it is hard to accept that the punishment of a culprit has ever properly made up for the crime. If any such deadly act can ever be redeemed, it will be through some kind of enlightenment that, for most of us, is still some ways off. Such an enlightenment would have to be rooted, I think, in a reexamination of ideas about exceptionalism and private property. In the end, redemption may lie only with the termination of efforts to purge one's own society of "the foreign" and of the closely aligned urge to take possession of what rightfully belongs to others.

At the start of World War II, at the same time the Imperial Japanese Navy was planning its strike at Pearl Harbor it was also planning a series of submarine attacks on the West Coast of the United States. The Japanese wanted to serve notice on their eastern flank that they would brook no interference from America—just then on the verge of entering the war in Europe—in their military quest southward, across the Indochinese peninsula, through the island chains of the western Pacific, and into the Philippines and New Guinea. Part of this plan—never fully implemented—called for Japanese submarines in the eastern Pacific to shell American installations, to torpedo West Coast shipping, and generally to disorient and scare the American civilian population, in part to encourage fears of invasion. The overall strategy included the launching of an armed floatplane, the Yokosuka E14Y-1, from massive submarines using a compressed air catapult. The mission of these small aircraft, broken down and stored for transport in a watertight extension of the submarine's conning tower, was to fly inland and drop incendiary bombs across the evergreen forests of the Coast Ranges. The hope was thereby to ignite vast, uncontrollable forest fires.

On the morning of 9 September 1942, a 356-foot Japanese I-class submarine, the *I-25*, surfaced in darkness some miles off the Oregon coast. The crew assembled and, at first light, launched its E14Y-1 aircraft. The pilot flew the single-engine plane east over the water, directly to a lighthouse marking a prominent headland, Oregon's Cape Blanco. He then turned south-southeast and flew about fifty-five miles to a spot near Mt. Emily (2,926 ft.) where he dropped two 170-pound thermite incendiary bombs in the forest, about ten miles east of the coastal town of Brookings. The morning was foggy and overcast, and the Douglas firs and redwoods on the mountainsides were damp from recent rain. One bomb apparently failed to start a fire; the other ignited a blaze that was quickly spotted and later in the day brought under control.

The pilot, Warrant Flying Officer Nobuo Fujita, took the E14Y-1 back out to sea after the bombing run and landed at a pre-arranged rendezvous site. The deck crew, quickly hoisting the seaplane aboard, broke it down and stored it. Just as the *I-25* was disappearing below the surface, it was spotted by the flight crew of an American patrol plane, a Hudson A-29, which dropped several bombs but could not confirm a hit or locate the submarine again because of low cloud cover. The *I-25*, suffering only minor damage, moved undetected into a cove near Cape Blanco—the outer harbor, actually, of the town of Port Orford—where it sat on the bottom for most of the day while repairs were completed.

In the weeks following, the *I-25* sank two oil tankers off the Oregon coast, the *Camden* and the *Larry Doheny*. On 10 October it sank a Russian submarine, the *L-16*, with an American liaison officer aboard, off the coast of Washington. Its seventeen torpedoes spent, the *I-25* returned to its home port on Tokyo Bay. (Prior to all these attacks, on 21 June 1942, the *I-25* had surfaced at the mouth of the Columbia River. Having successfully followed the local fishing fleet, returning that afternoon on its secret safe course through a near-shore minefield, the *I-25* then sent seventeen 5.5-inch shells from its deck gun toward Fort Stevens, directly across Youngs Bay from Astoria.)

The *Larry Doheny* was the last American ship sunk by a Japanese submarine along the West Coast during the war; shortly afterward, the Imperial Japanese Navy moved all its submarine operations from the eastern to the western Pacific. A new plan, however—one also meant to alarm and confuse the American civilian population—was soon underway. It culminated in the launching of as many as 9,300 bomb-laden paper balloons from several sites on the southeast coast of Honshu. Filled with hydrogen gas and about 33 feet

in diameter, the free-floating balloons rose swiftly into eastward-flowing jet stream winds and crossed the North Pacific in a matter of a few days. The balloons were designed to descend and release incendiary bombs over America's western forests; some also carried antipersonnel bombs.

Historians speculate that about one thousand of these balloons reached North America; for a variety of reasons, however, the apparatus proved almost completely ineffective. After part of a balloon was found on 11 December 1944, near Kalispell, Montana, the Office of War Information requested a voluntary news blackout to keep the Japanese from learning anything about the weapon's effectiveness. Between November 1944 and the end of the war, the remains of more than three hundred balloons were found, some as far north as Alaska and one as far east as Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Local rumor about the origin and purpose of the balloons was rife in Montana and across the Pacific Northwest during the winter of 1944–45, but the news blackout kept speculations from traveling very far—until a tragedy occurred. Of the forty or so balloons known to have landed in Oregon (more than in any other state), one, armed with an antipersonnel weapon, came down near the small town of Bly, in the south-central part of the state. On 5 May 1945, the balloon's weapon-and-ballast carriage was discovered in underbrush on Gearhart Mountain and probed by five curious youngsters and a twenty-six-year-old woman embarked on a picnic. It detonated almost immediately, killing everyone. The six of them became the first, and only, American mainland casualties of World War II.

Three of the five children were buried at the Linkville Cemetery in Klamath Falls, Oregon, a graveyard where ten Japanese infants were also interred during the war, in an unmarked plot. They had died of natural causes at Tule Lake, California, just over the border, the site of a Japanese internment camp.

For many Americans these stories of injustice and harm—the persecution of the Chinese, the Japanese attacks—are unremembered or unfamiliar. The same is undoubtedly true of lesser-known episodes of the mistreatment of Native Americans: the massacre of almost two hundred unoffending Indians, mostly Yurok, by ranchers at the mouth of the Eel River in northern California in 1860 (an incident that prompted Guenter Lewy, writing in the *Journal of Genocide Research*, to characterize volunteer militias and vigilante groups in California generally as sometimes displaying “a flagrantly exterminatory mentality” in murdering large numbers of Indians); and the relentless attacks on Captain

Jack's recalcitrant Modoc band in 1873 in the lava beds around Mt. Lassen in northern California. (The Rogue River Indian wars, waged in the 1850s between white miners drifting north from played-out gold fields in California and several tribes living in southwestern Oregon's Coast Ranges, were fought in the same country Nobuo Fujita would cross ninety years later en route to dropping his incendiary bombs in the drainage of the Winchuck River.)

The most widely circulated histories of wars are left not only to the victors to write, but also to the emissaries and enforcers of whatever economic order is put in place after the devastation. Such histories, of course, can be, and are, revamped by people with the patience and determination to upend these tendentious accounts; and clarifying lessons from revisionist histories about the American West have recently been set out by historians like John Unruh, in *The Plains Across* (1979), and by novelists like Cormac McCarthy in *Blood Meridian* (1985). These reassessments of violent behavior in the West have, understandably, been ignored by some who have an investment in the same kind of distorted folklore that Greg Nokes encountered in Wallowa County when he was researching the Deep Creek massacre. Analogously, recent attempts to revise the general conception of how the West was "settled," such as Patricia Limerick's *The Legacy of Conquest* (1987) and Annette Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land* (1975), have raised the ire and earned the denunciation of influential westerners in the same way that California agribusiness leaders were outraged by the publication of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). The attempt to write with greater accuracy about what happened historically, however the effort might be characterized by people with something to lose, is arguably only an expression of the fundamental impulse in every civil society to continue to pursue justice.

Reflecting on all this, I find one of the lessons that has grown out of many late twentieth-century revisionist histories of the West—revisions that have taken into account the lives of native peoples and haven't overlooked the experience of *braceros* and Wobblies and Chinese laborers—is a lesson about a need for tolerance. And where tolerance has been forged, a further lesson can emerge about a need for reconciliation. To my thinking, what finally proves important in our attempting to reconcile with the past is not necessarily the making of amends but our offering silenced parties the opportunity to tell their own stories without interruption, according to their own sense of timing, and without fear of refutation. For those in power simply to let what others say

stand as their truth, and to go on from there, is a critical part of the healing that might conceivably take place after racial and ethnic violence.

Whenever I am in Southern California and have a chance, I drive past the houses I grew up in. The neighborhoods have changed. They are not so white now. The school I attended accommodates African American, Latino, and Asian students, along with students from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds. I like to think that, as a boy back then, I got some direction from my mother about how to approach the trouble that has come to us now, decades later, in a time when international cooperation concerning global climate change, nuclear disarmament, and the conservation of ocean fisheries is imperative. A child of the Deep South in the 1920s, knowing that poor white sharecroppers and unenfranchised blacks eked out a living side-by-side on her father's 640 acres, my mother chose to search out and abide by another kind of ethics. And I like to think that Barre and Miiko Toelken opened another door for me into what the future would look like, when all those years ago people from different cultures traded stories around their dinner table about the mystery and profundity, the extremes of pleasure and pain, that come with trying to live out a full human life.

On the horizon for us in the West are failing supplies of fresh water; more acres of salt-saturated and collapsing farm land; more logging and mining enterprises, some of them still driven by anachronistic, wildcatting personalities; and the continued plummeting of salmon stocks. No one I've read or heard speak seems to have an answer to this ecological catastrophe, outside of a hope placed by some in a kind of non-governmental, non-corporate, and still hard-to-define activism called "the movement toward civil society." This effort, virtually ignored by the mass media, is essentially leaderless, though it includes a number of charismatic personalities, among them Paul Hawken, who describes the movement in *Blessed Unrest* (2007). If I were asked to imagine exactly how human enclaves in the West are to cope effectively with what's coming, I would not consider first either state or municipal governments. I would point instead to the phenomenon of emergent "mestizo" spokespeople—men and women with cross-cultural or biracial backgrounds, non-affiliated visionaries who have in recent years become bridges in their neighborhoods and communities between several ways of knowing, several ways of believing. They model now the profound courtesy that is required everywhere in the world

today if our just treatment of one another, regardless of our racial and ethnic backgrounds, is to have any chance.

On 28 May 1962, six years before I moved to Oregon, the E14Y-1 pilot Nobuo Fujita stood up next to his wife at a banquet in Brookings, the invited guest of the local Junior Chamber of Commerce. Through his twenty-six-year-old son, Yasuyoshi, Fujita said, "I never dreamed that I would ever visit the United States again. But at this moment I am here. . . . This is the finest possible way of closing this story." The man who had dropped the bombs twenty years before then produced a *wakizashi* samurai sword, which had been in his family for four hundred years and which he had carried in the cockpit of his plane that day in 1942 and throughout the war. The diminutive aviator presented it, through his son, to the mayor of Brookings. He recounted the history of the sword and explained the proper way for it to be handled.

"It is in the finest samurai tradition," he said, "to pledge peace and friendship by presenting a sword to a former enemy."

Though repeatedly threatened with harm by anonymous local residents, Nobuo Fujita continued to visit Brookings until his death in 1997 at the age of eighty-six. He funded the development of a collection of books for young readers about different cultures, shelved today at the Chetco Community Library in Brookings, where the sword is also on display, and he underwrote the cost of bringing three local high school students to a science fair in Japan in 1985.

The year after Fujita died, his daughter, Yoriko Asakura, spread some of his ashes in the forest where his bomb had exploded—at a site he himself had visited several times. (Initially forgotten, the site had been located again in 1972.) In October 2008, just a few days after the long-awaited dedication of a historical exhibit erected there took place, hooligans defaced the placards, carving racist symbols and epithets into their wooden frames and into a meditation bench built nearby in front of a large redwood tree. The image of Nobuo Fujita on one of the placards, reproduced from a World War II photo of him as a pilot, was decapitated, and a crude caricature of a Japanese face was carved in its place.

I had considered Fujita's honorable actions to be singular until I learned, recently, of a gift made to the families of victims of the antipersonnel bomb that exploded near Bly in 1945. The gift was sent by a small group of elderly Japanese

women who, as innocent schoolgirls, had participated in the construction of some of the paper balloons that had carried bombs across the Pacific. They did not learn until many years after the war that the balloons were designed for this purpose. Hearing that five children and a young woman had been killed, the women folded one thousand paper cranes and mailed them to the families. In 1996, one of these women was among a small group who came to Oregon for a ceremony of reconciliation at the bomb site. Later, another Japanese woman had four cherry trees planted there. In 1989, when the unmarked grave of the Japanese infants who had died at Tule Lake was finally honored with a headstone at the Linkville Cemetery in Klamath Falls, the families of the Gearhart Mountain victims accepted an invitation to be present.

These reconciliation efforts were all initiated and facilitated by John Takeshita, a retired professor of health education at the University of Michigan who, as a boy, had been interned at the Tule Lake Relocation Center.

The first time I visited the Fujita bomb site, I made some notes about the suite of plants growing on the heavily wooded slope at that altitude. The small clearing faces southeast in an isolated part of the forest, at the end of a trail eight-tenths of a mile long. Coral root and Oregon grape, along with sword, deer, and bracken fern, grow amid Douglas firs, nut-bearing chinquapins, and coastal redwoods. Evergreen huckleberry, manzanita, wild rhododendron, tiger lily, Solomon's seal, and clumps of bear grass border the winding trail. The day I was there the woods were still. Also silent.

On 9 September 1992, on the fiftieth anniversary of his incendiary bombing, Nobuo Fujita planted a redwood seedling there, saying, as he often did according to his Oregon hosts, that the war "was such a stupid idea." Seventeen years later, the seedling I beheld had, in my eyes, taken on the look of a tree.

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