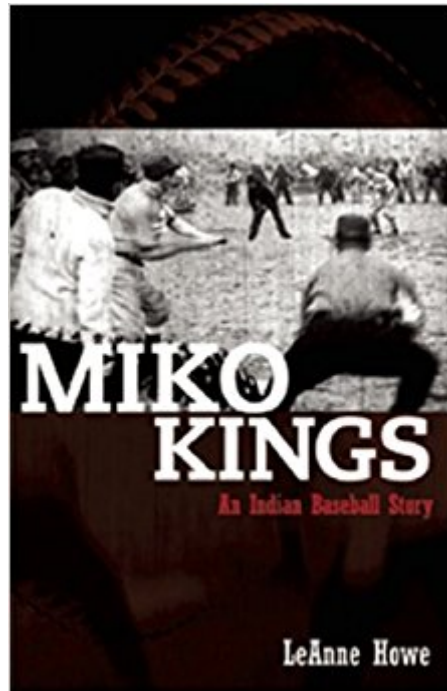


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# Miko Kings: An Indian Baseball Story



## Synopsis

Fiction. Native American Studies. MIKO KINGS: AN INDIAN BASEBALL STORY is an homage to the dusty roads and wind-blown diamonds of America's first moving picture about baseball, His Last Game. Just as Henri Day and his team, the Miko Kings, are poised to win the 1907 Twin Territories' Pennant against their archrivals, the Seventh Cavalrymen from Fort Sill, pitcher Hope Little Leader finds himself embroiled in a plot that will destroy him and the Indian team. Only the town's chimeric postal clerk, Ezol Day, understands the outcome of Hope's last game and how it will affect Indians and baseball for the next four generations. Set in Indian Territory that is about to become part of Oklahoma, MIKO KINGS tells of the turbulent days before statehood when white settlers and gamblers are swindling the Indians out of their land and what has already happened will change its course. "They're stories that travel now as captured light in someone else's telescope," Ezol Day will tell the woman who should have been her granddaughter. In MIKO KINGS, LeAnne Howe bends the pitch of time to return us to the roots of a national game.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

LeAnne Howe is an enrolled citizen of the Choctaw Nation and a Professor of American Indian Studies and English at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She writes fiction, poetry, screenplays, creative non-fiction, plays, and scholarship that primarily deal with American Indian experiences. Her short fiction has appeared in The Kenyon Review, Fiction International, and Story among other journals and has been translated into French, Italian, German, Dutch, and Danish. Her

novel, *Shell Shaker* (Aunt Lute Books, 2001), received an American Book Award in 2002.

*Equinoxes Rouge*, the French translation, was the 2004 finalist for Prix Medici Estranger. She is the author of two additional titles from Aunt Lute, *MIKO KINGS: AN INDIAN BASEBALL STORY* (2007) and, most recently, *CHOCTALKING ON OTHER REALITIES* (2013). As a 2010 -2011 William J. Fulbright Scholar, Howe lived in Amman, Jordan to research her forthcoming novel. In 2012, she was honored with the Lifetime Achievement Award by the Native Writers' Circle of the Americas, and in December 2012, Howe received a USA Ford Fellowship to continue her research.

I live and teach in Oklahoma, so this novel about turn of the century Oklahoma(19th to 20th century, that is), with its Native American and feminist themes, is a natural. I've chosen not to enter any answer for "How is the story narrated?" because figuring out the narrative voice, or perhaps figuring out the degree of complexity in that a voice, is kind of the point, if you'll allow a colloquial phrase. Read it if you love late modern/ postmodern literature, but perhaps above all if you want a sensitive evocation of Native American history at the time of Oklahoma statehood.

LeAnne Howe's *MIKO KINGS* truly represents a new direction in Native American fiction. She takes the manipulation of time to the next level, seamlessly moving through different temporal spaces and different characters' perspectives, and despite these quick shifts, I never got lost. In the Native American novels of past decades, many writers have worked with a distinctly Indian sense of time, one that isn't linear, one that folds in upon itself, and here, Howe has created an experience in which time has extra wrinkles. The use of found documents, fantastical elements, and the seldom-covered topic of baseball in Indian Country really make this a special book. I didn't grow completely attached to all the characters in the small space of the book, which was its only drawback, but otherwise, this is an impressive achievement and I look forward to unpacking it once again when I re-read it. This book is much like the bag full of documents that Lena discovers at the book's beginning: so rich with information to decode.

A beautifully written story about a piece of United States history that I never knew about. It was assigned reading for a college class and I'm so glad it was. LeAnne Howe is a talented and thoughtful writer. I enjoyed the way she took me on a journey of discovery.

Love this story, but the end was confusing. I had to do it for a class project but was really happy to read this story. Great book!

My attention was snagged by the cover, which features a grainy black-and-white photograph of a game of baseball, the players wearing uniforms harking back at least a century. The subtitle - "An Indian Baseball Story" - clinched my purchase. My fascinations with both baseball and American Indians date back to my boyhood; they undoubtedly are highly romanticized, but that does not make them less compelling. Well, MIKO KINGS turned out to be more about American Indians than baseball, and it did not quite live up to my perhaps unreasonably high expectations. Author LeAnne Howe is an American Indian, half Choctaw and half Sac and Fox. As a young woman she left the reservation in Oklahoma, with no intention of ever returning. After a career as a freelance journalist and a horrific experience in the Middle East, she returned to live in her grandmother's house. In MIKO KINGS Howe mixes together elements of her own life and elements from the history of the Indian Territory along with generous doses of imagination, some akin to magical realism, to create this novel about an Indian baseball team from Ada, Oklahoma, the Miko Kings. The central event of the novel is the ninth and final game of the championship series in 1907 between the Miko Kings, champs of the Indian Territory League, and the Fort Sill Seventh Cavalrymen, winners of the Oklahoma Territory League. Will the Indians repeat their Little Bighorn vanquishment of the U.S. Seventh Cavalry? If so, they will have to do so on the arm of Hope Little Leader, their star pitcher who, legend tells us, was able to reverse the flight of the ball. But Hope Little Leader is the target of Chicago-based gamblers, who, if the Miko Kings lose, will give him \$5,000 and a ticket out of Indian Territory to New Orleans in order to save his wife, the once-notorious Justina Maurepas (known in New Orleans legend as "Black Juice"), from the predations of the KKK. The novel covers not only happenings of 1907, but it also goes back in time to the childhoods of Hope Little Leader and Justina Maurepas (they met at the Hampton Normal School for Blacks and Indians) and forward in time to 1969 and even to 2006. Howe blends fact and fiction. She interpolates into the novel historical photographs, a film about Indian baseball from 1909, and pseudo-historical (or are they real?) newspaper clippings, as well as events supposedly from her own life. The interweaving of fact and fiction is rather deftly handled. And a lot goes on in the novel, especially for 221 pages. But I was not truly engaged by the story. There are too many strands to it, and, for me, it was a little too weird. Further, the twists given to the story at the end struck me as contrived. (And I have one small correction to page 191: The television sportscaster who called Game 5 of the 1969 World Series was Curt Gowdy, not "Goudy".) The strength of the novel is in its fictional portrayal of some of the ways in which American Indians were mistreated in the decades after Little Bighorn. Without being particularly preachy, the novel underscores the injustice of the allotment program under the Dawes

Act (through which Indian reservations were "privatized" and large chunks of them sold off to Anglos) and the Indian boarding schools. As a novel about baseball, however, MIKO KINGS is less successful. Still, it does include an extract from something called "Anompa Sipokni" that resonates with me, from my own long-gone days of sandlot baseball:

After the bases are gone  
After we've all come home  
Nothing but red dirt in my skivvies  
My back and ribs is sore  
May I never go back for  
another crack at the bat, Honey  
until the bases are loaded once more.

Miko Kings is a unique book in literary history. The author's seamless blending of history, spirituality, linguistics, colloquialism, personal memoir and so much more provides a multi-layered text that fascinates even as it informs, corrects and offers consolation. Those assuming that this is only a regional tale for Oklahomans, or just another Indian story, will be impressed the way the text speaks fairly and authoritatively about the past as well as to a contemporary world.

Great book

I'm afraid the book's topics of baseball and Native American culture may cause some people to overlook it, which is too bad because this is a beautifully written, original work that is so much more than its story elements. Physics, spirituality, personal and cultural transformation and redemption are all here, told in a way I haven't seen before by a gifted writer. It will appeal to women, baseball fans, those who appreciate Native American culture and history and anyone who enjoys good writing and a good story told in a truly unique way. It is at its heart, I think, a metaphor for the Indians' experience in America, with a style that reminds me of writers like Leslie Silko or Larry McMurtry. Howe has two qualities one doesn't often find as a combination in a writer - the ability to write in a seemingly effortless yet memorable way and to tell a story in a truly original way. The storyline includes shifting narratives told in non-chronological order and even includes diaries and newspaper clippings that are used to accomplish a brilliant bit of storytelling. She treats her readers as intelligent people who can follow along even on an unconventional path. Halfway through I was wondering 'will she be able to tie all of these threads together?' And of course she did beautifully with a harsh yet touching, real but spiritual ending that still has me thinking about what it means months later.

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