

Kimo Sabe

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My childhood imagination was full of pioneers and cowboys. I heard stories about my great-grandparents crossing the Great Plains, pulling handcarts through the bitter winter. I watched Gene Autry ride the range with “Tumbling Tumbleweed,” sung by the Sons of the Pioneers, as the sound track.

Hovering over it all were the men who rode bareback, pouring over the hilltops with feathers in their hair and cries that raised the hackles. I knew there were Good Indians. Tonto was one. His English language skills were minimal, but he was smart.

Maybe that’s why I became an anthropologist. I wanted to know another world. I wasn’t alone. Black Elk spoke and my generation listened. I learned that the land my ancestors saw as empty belonged to someone else.

*I imagine an army holding both coasts of North America. The Chinese government decides it would be to everyone’s advantage if they settled the continent, not only gaining access to many resources, but also bringing the benefits of civilization to the American people.*

*Residents of Los Angeles are moved out of the city and given farmland in Nevada. The Beijing government ships millions of their own dissidents and unemployed to the San Joaquin Valley, where they work under contract for Chinese who have been given million-acre land grants.*

I have a hard time imagining my forebears as exploiters. They were poor people. The Danish peasants barely scraped by in the Old World, and some of my English ancestors were indentured servants. A few made the crossing into Kentucky only to have the land they had cleared stolen by slick lawyers from the East Coast. They had no idea they'd stolen it first.

*Many Chinese run away to find land in areas ceded by treaty to the Americans, resulting in a series of bloody border wars. Young American hotheads, led by former Marines and vowing to fight to the death in defense of their country, attack Chinese settlements, killing women and children. The Chinese, in turn, send army units to burn American towns.*

My relatives have few memories of Indians. The one story I heard was about my great-grandmother trapped with her children in a cabin surrounded by Indians. She frightened them off by shaking her hair into a plume around her head, then pulling out her false teeth and waving them as she opened the door.

*The Chinese Government, deeply concerned about the welfare of Americans, establishes boarding schools for their most promising children. There they will learn to speak Mandarin (no English permitted), which will allow them to move into the mainstream. It will also allow them to shed their primitive beliefs, like Individualism.*

What would I do in such a world, I ask myself? Would I join a guerilla brigade in the mountains of southern California? I imagine my granddaughter keeping house for a Chinese family, knowing Mandarin well enough understand as the master tells his grandchildren about

the pioneer days, the hair-raising struggles against the violent and wily Americans. The mistress stops him with a quick kindly glance at my granddaughter. They must remember, she says, that although some still resist becoming civilized, there are many, many Good Americans.