

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Ghost Dance

by Lisa Mullenneaux



PHOTO BY EFFREY D. ALLRED. SHOSHONE NATION CHAIRMAN DARREN PARRY NEAR PRESTON, IDAHO

Ghost Dance

"If you think the Indian wars are over, think again."
Carrie Dann, Native American activist, 2002

Blue-black raven, eyeless,
flaps and squawks
at night turned day upon
the mesa where at 5 a.m.
the wrong sun crowned an insurrection.
Now sandstone heaves and fissures,
ledges leap from mountainsides,
and rolling shock waves ripple
the desert floor charring pinyon and juniper,
jackrabbit and Gila monster.
A shot no gunslinger ever dreamed
has landed like a fist, melted sand
to poison glass. Enemy country, after all.

*We are Newe of the Shoshone nation.
Never gave them our land, never took their money.
But they came and they took. We call them
the alphabet agents—BIA, BLM, AEC, DOE.
They built and they mined but above all they bombed.
At the Nevada Test Site. Over 1000 shots with names
like Buster-Jangle, Plumbob, Teapot, Hardtack, Nougat.
Like something you'd want to eat?*

*We raise cattle and one day in 1973
my sister Mary got a notice that we were
letting them graze on government land. No,
she says, these are Shoshone lands.
If our cattle grazed on Paiute land, to the west,
we would be trespassing. They sued us anyway.*

Sing to drumbeat's thunder
of beanstalks breeding missile silos.
Jackass Flats, Skull Mountain,
Death Valley, Tombstone. Ranchers survived
with barbed wire and cheap gas, herding sheep
and tumbleweeds. Then the Firecracker Boys
invented a power brighter than the sun,
lethal for half-a-million years.
They rode in to wage war on "worthless land"
with blast sites and bunkers buried in sand.
Didn't see John Wayne in a hot spot shooting
"The Conquerors" until the Duke turned in his six guns.

*He had been dreaming, my grandfather,
of a White Rabbit fat with blood
that would eat our grass, our seed, our lives.
When it finds us, he warned,
it will weave a spider's web around us,
and we will live in square gray houses
on land too barren to grow crops.*

Sheep and cattle grew sick and died,

ranchers grew sick and died from beta burns,
heart attacks, kidney failure, anemia, brain tumors.
The Great Basin became a sponge for toxins
in the hair, skin, water, grass, corn, tumbleweeds.
Bombs in their backyards. No exceptions.
"Oh, my desert," sighs Ed Abbey's ghost.
"Yours is the only death I cannot bear."

*My grandfather ate only once a day,
burned sage, and kept on dreaming.
The Big Knives, he said, are a heartless people,
who keep slaves and paint them black
to set them apart.
Grandfather saw many visions and it was
their sorrow that killed him.*

Soldiers at Camp Desert Rock watched
the world end through clenched teeth.
Shut their eyes and saw bones in their hands.
Returned to base with bloody noses, vomiting.
The "Greatest Show on Earth" starts
with fireworks before dawn, then a red-tinted cloud.
Kids eat pink snow and their thyroid quits.
"Sacrifice babies" born scrambled by isotopes.

*The whites are like poisonous serpents,
my grandfather told us, feeble when cold
but warm them up and they'll sting you to death.
They first asked for a wigwag, then
our hunting grounds, now everything.*

Joe Mormon's 400 ewes, too sick
to make it back to Cedar City for lambing,
stood motionless on the trail, then fell dead.
New lambs had no wool or three legs
or hearts beating outside their chests.
January, minus 20 degrees,
but their bodies didn't freeze.
They were that hot.
Put a counter on the pile of bones,
the needle hit the post.
Ravens and magpies ate them
and pretty soon they died.
Sheep in the pens, sheep in Mormon churches.
Part of God's plan.
What the government don't tell us,
we don't need to know.

*Like a dervish it came from nowhere
and landed everywhere, wrenching the earth's jaw
until it howled, gouging its belly.*

*Daylight Lifter, the sky is already red.
Mainland Slayer, the earth is shaking.
A quaking caldera and bellowing wind have disarmed you.*



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