

*There*



*A novel*

*There*



*Tommy Orange*



# There There

---

TOMMY ORANGE

---



ALFRED A. KNOPF New York

2018

THIS IS A BORZOI BOOK PUBLISHED BY ALFRED A. KNOPF

Copyright © 2018 by Tommy Orange

All rights reserved. Published in the United States by Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York.

[www.aaknopf.com](http://www.aaknopf.com)

Knopf, Borzoi Books, and the colophon are registered trademarks of Penguin Random House LLC.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Orange, Tommy, [date] author.

Title: There there : a novel / Tommy Orange.

Description: First edition. | New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 2018.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017038125 (print) | LCCN 2017051406 (ebook) | ISBN 9780525520382 (ebook) | ISBN 9780525520375 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781524711405 (open market)

Subjects: LCSH: Indians of North America—Fiction. | Interpersonal relations—Fiction. | Powwows—Fiction. | BISAC: FICTION / Literary. | FICTION / Political.

Classification: LCC PS3615.R32 (ebook) | LCC PS3615.R32 T48 2018 (print) | DDC 813/.6—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017038125>

Ebook ISBN 9780525520382

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Cover photograph by olio/E+/Getty Images

Cover design by Tyler Comrie

v5.3.1

ep

# Contents

*Cover*

*Title Page*

*Copyright*

*Dedication*

Prologue

## Part I: Remain

Tony Loneman

Dene Oxendene

Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield

Edwin Black

## Part II: Reclaim

Bill Davis

Calvin Johnson

Jacquie Red Feather

Orvil Red Feather

Interlude

Tony Loneman

Calvin Johnson

Dene Oxendene

Jacquie Red Feather

### Part III: Return

Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield

Octavio Gomez

Daniel Gonzales

Blue

Thomas Frank

### Part IV: Powwow

Orvil Red Feather

Tony Loneman

Blue

Dene Oxendene

Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield

Edwin Black

Calvin Johnson

Daniel Gonzales

Jacquie Red Feather

Octavio Gomez

Edwin Black

Thomas Frank

Loother and Lony

Daniel Gonzales

Blue

Dene Oxendene

Orvil Red Feather

Calvin Johnson

Thomas Frank

Bill Davis

Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield

Jacquie Red Feather

Blue

Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield

Tony Loneman

*Acknowledgments*

*A Note About the Author*

*Reading Group Guide*



*For Kateri and Felix*

# *Prologue*



In the dark times

Will there also be singing?

Yes, there will also be singing.

About the dark times.

—BERTOLT BRECHT

## Indian Head

There was an Indian head, the head of an Indian, the drawing of the head of a headdressed, long-haired Indian depicted, drawn by an unknown artist in 1939, broadcast until the late 1970s to American TVs everywhere after all the shows ran out. It's called the Indian Head test pattern. If you left the TV on, you'd hear a tone at 440 hertz—the tone used to tune instruments—and you'd see that Indian, surrounded by circles that looked like sights through riflescopes. There was what looked like a bull's-eye in the middle of the screen, with numbers like coordinates. The Indian's head was just above the bull's-eye, like all you'd need to do was nod up in agreement to set the sights on the target. This was just a test.

In 1621, colonists invited Massasoit, the chief of the Wampanoags, to a feast after a recent land deal. Massasoit came with ninety of his men. *That* meal is why we still eat a meal together in November. Celebrate it as a nation. But that one wasn't a thanksgiving meal. It was a land-deal meal. Two years later there was another, similar meal meant to symbolize eternal friendship. Two hundred Indians dropped dead that night from an unknown poison.

By the time Massasoit's son Metacomet became chief, there were no Indian-Pilgrim meals being eaten together. Metacomet, also known as King Philip, was forced to sign a peace treaty to give up all Indian guns. Three of his men were hanged. His brother Wamsutta was, let's say, very likely poisoned after being summoned and seized by the Plymouth court. All of which lead to the first official Indian war. The first war with Indians. King Philip's War. Three years later the war was over and Metacomet was on the run. He was caught by Benjamin Church, the captain of the very first American Rangers, and an Indian by the name of John Alderman. Metacomet was beheaded and dismembered. Quartered. They tied his four body sections to nearby trees for the birds to pluck. Alderman was given Metacomet's hand, which he kept in a jar of rum and for years took around with him—charged people to see it. Metacomet's head was sold to Plymouth Colony for thirty shillings—the going rate for an Indian head at the time. The head was put on a spike, carried through the streets of Plymouth, then displayed at Plymouth Fort for the next twenty-five years.

—

In 1637, anywhere from four to seven hundred Pequot gathered for their annual Green Corn Dance. Colonists surrounded their village, set it on fire, and shot any Pequot who tried to escape. The next day the Massachusetts Bay Colony had a feast in celebration, and the governor declared it a day of thanksgiving. Thanksgivings like these happened everywhere, whenever there were what we have to call “successful massacres.” At one such celebration in Manhattan, people were said to have celebrated by kicking the heads of Pequot people through the streets like soccer balls.

—

The first novel by a Native person, and the first novel written in California, was written in 1854, by a Cherokee guy named John Rollin Ridge. *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta* was based on a supposed real-life Mexican bandit from California by the same name, who was killed by a group of Texas Rangers in 1853. To prove they'd killed Murieta and collect the \$5,000 reward put on his head—they cut it off. Kept it in a jar of whiskey. They also took the hand of his fellow bandit Three-Fingered Jack. The rangers took Murieta's head and Jack's hand on a tour throughout California, charged a dollar for the show.

---

The Indian head in the jar, the Indian head on a spike were like flags flown, to be seen, cast broadly. Just like the Indian Head test pattern was broadcast to sleeping Americans as we set sail from our living rooms, over the ocean blue-green glowing airwaves, to the shores, the screens of the New World.

### Rolling Head

There's an old Cheyenne story about a rolling head. We heard it said there was a family who moved away from their camp, moved near a lake—husband, wife, daughter, son. In the morning when the husband finished dancing, he would brush his wife's hair and paint her face red, then go off to hunt. When he came back her face would be clean. After this happened a few times he decided to follow her and hide, see what she did while he was gone. He found her in the lake, with a water monster, some kind of snake thing, wrapped around her in an embrace. The man cut the monster up and killed his wife. He brought the meat home to his son and daughter. They noticed it tasted different. The son, who was still nursing, said, My mother tastes just like this. His older sister told him it's just deer meat. While they ate, a head rolled in. They ran and the head followed them. The sister remembered where they played, how thick the thorns were there, and she brought the thorns to life behind them with her words. But the head broke through, kept coming. Then she remembered where rocks used to be piled in a difficult way. The rocks appeared when she spoke of them but didn't stop the head, so she drew a hard line in the ground, which made a deep chasm the head couldn't cross. But after a long heavy rain, the chasm filled with water. The head crossed the water, and when it reached the other side, it turned around and

drank all that water up. The rolling head became confused and drunk. It wanted more. More of anything. More of everything. And it just kept rolling.

—

One thing we should keep in mind, moving forward, is that no one ever rolled heads down temple stairs. Mel Gibson made that up. But we do have in our minds, those of us who saw the movie, the heads rolling down temple stairs in a world meant to resemble the real Indian world in the 1500s in Mexico. Mexicans before they were Mexicans. Before Spain came.

We've been defined by everyone else and continue to be slandered despite easy-to-look-up-on-the-internet facts about the realities of our histories and current state as a people. We have the sad, defeated Indian silhouette, and the heads rolling down temple stairs, we have it in our heads, Kevin Costner saving us, John Wayne's six-shooter slaying us, an Italian guy named Iron Eyes Cody playing our parts in movies. We have the litter-mourning, tear-ridden Indian in the commercial (also Iron Eyes Cody), and the sink-tossing, crazy Indian who was the narrator in the novel, the voice of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. We have all the logos and mascots. The copy of a copy of the image of an Indian in a textbook. All the way from the top of Canada, the top of Alaska, down to the bottom of South America, Indians were removed, then reduced to a feathered image. Our heads are on flags, jerseys, and coins. Our heads were on the penny first, of course, the Indian cent, and then on the buffalo nickel, both before we could even vote as a people—which, like the truth of what happened in history all over the world, and like all that spilled blood from slaughter, are now out of circulation.



## Massacre as Prologue

Some of us grew up with stories about massacres. Stories about what happened to our people not so long ago. How we came out of it. At Sand Creek, we heard it said that they mowed us down with their howitzers. Volunteer militia under Colonel John Chivington came to kill us—we were mostly women, children, and elders. The men were away to hunt. They'd told us to fly the American flag. We flew that and a white flag too. Surrender, the white flag waved. We stood under both flags as they came at us. They did more than kill us. They tore us up. Mutilated us. Broke our fingers to take our rings, cut off our ears to take our silver, scalped us for our hair. We hid in the hollows of tree trunks, buried ourselves in sand by the riverbank. That same sand ran red with blood. They tore unborn babies out of bellies, took what we intended to be, our children before they were children, babies before they were babies, they ripped them out of our bellies. They broke soft baby heads against trees. Then they took our body parts as trophies and displayed them on a stage in downtown Denver. Colonel Chivington danced with dismembered parts of us in his hands, with women's pubic hair, drunk, he danced, and the crowd gathered there before him was all the worse for cheering and laughing along with him. It was a celebration.

## Hard, Fast

Getting us to cities was supposed to be the final, necessary step in our assimilation, absorption, erasure, the completion of a five-hundred-year-old genocidal campaign. But the city made us new, and we made it ours. We didn't get lost amid the sprawl of tall buildings, the stream of anonymous masses, the ceaseless din of traffic. We found one another, started up Indian Centers, brought out our families and powwows, our dances, our songs, our beadwork. We bought and rented homes, slept on the streets, under freeways; we went to school, joined the armed forces, populated Indian bars in the Fruitvale in Oakland and in the Mission in San Francisco. We lived in boxcar villages in Richmond. We made art and we made babies and we made way for our people to go back and forth between reservation and city. We did not move to cities to die. The sidewalks and streets, the concrete, absorbed our heaviness. The glass, metal, rubber, and wires, the speed, the hurtling masses—the city took us in. We were not Urban Indians then. This was part of the Indian Relocation Act, which was part of the Indian Termination Policy, which was and is exactly what it sounds like. Make them

look and act like us. Become us. And so disappear. But it wasn't just like that. Plenty of us came by choice, to start over, to make money, or for a new experience. Some of us came to cities to escape the reservation. We stayed after fighting in the Second World War. After Vietnam too. We stayed because the city sounds like a war, and you can't leave a war once you've been, you can only keep it at bay—which is easier when you can see and hear it near you, that fast metal, that constant firing around you, cars up and down the streets and freeways like bullets. The quiet of the reservation, the side-of-the-highway towns, rural communities, that kind of silence just makes the sound of your brain on fire that much more pronounced.

---

Plenty of us are urban now. If not because we live in cities, then because we live on the internet. Inside the high-rise of multiple browser windows. They used to call us sidewalk Indians. Called us citified, superficial, inauthentic, cultureless refugees, apples. An apple is red on the outside and white on the inside. But what we are is what our ancestors did. How they survived. We are the memories we don't remember, which live in us, which we feel, which make us sing and dance and pray the way we do, feelings from memories that flare and bloom unexpectedly in our lives like blood through a blanket from a wound made by a bullet fired by a man shooting us in the back for our hair, for our heads, for a bounty, or just to get rid of us.

---

When they first came for us with their bullets, we didn't stop moving even though the bullets moved twice as fast as the sound of our screams, and even when their heat and speed broke our skin, shattered our bones, skulls, pierced our hearts, we kept on, even when we saw the bullets send our bodies flailing through the air like flags, like the many flags and buildings that went up in place of everything we knew this land to be before. The bullets were premonitions, ghosts from dreams of a hard, fast future. The bullets moved on after moving through us, became the promise of what was to come, the speed and the killing, the hard, fast lines of borders and buildings. They took everything and ground it down to dust as fine as gunpowder, they fired their guns into the air in victory and the strays flew out into the nothingness of histories written wrong and meant to be forgotten. Stray bullets and consequences are landing on our unsuspecting bodies even now.

## Urbanity

Urban Indians were the generation born in the city. We've been moving for a long time, but the land moves with you like memory. An Urban Indian belongs to the city, and cities belong to the earth. Everything here is formed in relation to every other living and nonliving thing from the earth. All our relations. The process that brings anything to its current form—chemical, synthetic, technological, or otherwise—doesn't make the product not a product of the living earth. Buildings, freeways, cars—are these not of the earth? Were they shipped in from Mars, the moon? Is it because they're processed, manufactured, or that we handle them? Are we so different? Were we at one time not something else entirely, *Homo sapiens*, single-celled organisms, space dust, unidentifiable pre-bang quantum theory? Cities form in the same way as galaxies. Urban Indians feel at home walking in the shadow of a downtown building. We came to know the downtown Oakland skyline better than we did any sacred mountain range, the redwoods in the Oakland hills better than any other deep wild forest. We know the sound of the freeway better than we do rivers, the howl of distant trains better than wolf howls, we know the smell of gas and freshly wet concrete and burned rubber better than we do the smell of cedar or sage or even fry bread—which isn't traditional, like reservations aren't traditional, but nothing is original, everything comes from something that came before, which was once nothing. Everything is new and doomed. We ride buses, trains, and cars across, over, and under concrete plains. Being Indian has never been about returning to the land. The land is everywhere or nowhere.

## PART I

# Remain



How can I not know today your face tomorrow, the face that is there already or is being forged beneath the face you show me or beneath the mask you are wearing, and which you will only show me when I am least expecting it?

—JAVIER MARÍAS

# Tony Loneman



THE DROME FIRST CAME to me in the mirror when I was six. Earlier that day my friend Mario, while hanging from the monkey bars in the sand park, said, “Why’s your face look like that?”

I don’t remember what I did. I still don’t know. I remember smears of blood on the metal and the taste of metal in my mouth. I remember my grandma Maxine shaking my shoulders in the hall outside the principal’s office, my eyes closed, her making this *psshh* sound she always makes when I try to explain myself and shouldn’t. I remember her pulling my arm harder than she’d ever pulled it, then the quiet drive home.

Back home, in front of the TV, before I turned it on, I saw my face in the dark reflection there. It was the first time I saw it. My own face, the way everyone else saw it. When I asked Maxine, she told me my mom drank when I was in her, she told me real slow that I have fetal alcohol syn-drome. All I heard her say was Drome, and then I was back in front of the turned-off TV, staring at it. My face stretched across the screen. The Drome. I tried but couldn’t make the face that I found there my own again.

—

Most people don’t have to think about what their faces mean the way I do. Your face in the mirror, reflected back at you, most people don’t even know what it looks like anymore. That thing on the front of your head, you’ll never see it, like you’ll never see your own eyeball with your own eyeball, like you’ll never smell what you smell like, but me, I know what my face looks like. I know what it means. My eyes droop like I’m fucked up, like I’m high, and my mouth hangs open all the time. There’s too much space between each of the parts of my face—eyes, nose, mouth, spread out like a



drunk slapped it on reaching for another drink. People look at me then look away when they see I see them see me. That's the Drome too. My power and curse. The Drome is my mom and why she drank, it's the way history lands on a face, and all the ways I made it so far despite how it has fucked with me since the day I found it there on the TV, staring back at me like a fucking villain.

---

I'm twenty-one now, which means I can drink if I want. I don't though. The way I see it, I got enough when I was a baby in my mom's stomach. Getting drunk in there, a drunk fucking baby, not even a baby, a little fucking tadpole thing, hooked up to a cord, floating in a stomach.

---

They told me I'm stupid. Not like that, they didn't say that, but I basically failed the intelligence test. The lowest percentile. That bottom rung. My friend Karen told me they got all kinds of intelligences. She's my counselor I still see once a week over at the Indian Center—I was at first mandated to go after the incident with Mario in kindergarten. Karen told me I don't have to worry about what they try to tell me about intelligence. She said people with FAS are on a spectrum, have a wide range of intelligences, that the intelligence test is biased, and that I got strong intuition and street smarts, that I'm smart where it counts, which I already knew, but when she told me it felt good, like I didn't really know it until she said it like that.

I'm smart, like: I know what people have in mind. What they mean when they say they mean another thing. The Drome taught me to look past the first look people give you, find that other one, right behind it. All you gotta do is wait a second longer than you normally do and you can catch it, you can see what they got in mind back there. I know if someone's selling around me. I know Oakland. I know what it looks like when somebody's trying to come up on me, like when to cross the street, and when to look at the ground and keep walking. I know how to spot a scaredy-cat too. That one's easy. They wear that shit like there's a sign in their hands, the sign says: *Come Get Me*. They look at me like I already did some shit, so I might as well do the shit they're looking at me like that for.

---

Maxine told me I'm a medicine person. She said people like me are rare, and that when we come along, people better know we look different because we are different. To respect that. I never got no kind of respect from nobody, though, except Maxine. She tells me we're Cheyenne people. That Indians go way back with the land. That all this was once ours. All this. Shit. They must not've had street smarts back then. Let them white men come over here and take it from them like that. The sad part is, all those Indians probably knew but couldn't do anything about it. They didn't have guns. Plus the diseases. That's what Maxine said. Killed us with their white men's dirt and diseases, moved us off our land, moved us onto some shit land you can't grow fucking shit on. I would hate it if I got moved outta Oakland, because I know it so well, from West to East to Deep East and back, on bike or bus or BART. It's my only home. I wouldn't make it nowhere else.

---

Sometimes I ride my bike all over Oakland just to see it, the people, all its different hoods. With my headphones on, listening to MF Doom, I can ride all day. The MF stands for Metal Face. He's my favorite rapper. Doom wears a metal mask and calls himself a villain. Before Doom, I didn't know nothing but what came on the radio. Somebody left their iPod on the seat in front of me on the bus. Doom was the only music on there. I knew I liked him when I heard the line "Got more soul than a sock with a hole." What I liked is that I understood all the meanings to it right away, like instantly. It meant soul, like having a hole in a sock gives the sock character, means it's worn through, gives it a soul, and also like the bottom of your foot showing through, to the sole of your foot. It was a small thing, but it made me feel like I'm not stupid. Not slow. Not bottom rung. And it helped because the Drome's what gives me my soul, and the Drome is a face worn through.

---

My mom's in jail. We talk sometimes on the phone, but she's always saying some shit that makes me wish we didn't. She told me my dad's over in New Mexico. That he