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In this exceptional volume, the reader can experience something of Davidson's engagement with this art and with the living culture that nurtures it.

*Barbara Iliff Brotherton*  
Western Michigan University

**Grass Games and Moon Races: California Indian Games and Toys.** By Jeannine Gendar. Berkeley, California: Heyday Books, 1995. 125 pages. \$12.95 paper.

Reaching into natural history, the ethnographic record, colonial history, and contemporary California Indian practices, Jeannine Gendar has compiled a valuable book describing California's indigenous games and toys. *Grass Games and Moon Races* is at once a product of the current California Indian cultural renewal and a vehicle for its continuation: The book both testifies to the living vitality of traditional games in the state's Indian communities and serves as a resource for strengthening and expanding their practice. Scholars and others interested in understanding the contours of the late twentieth-century native California cultural renaissance would do well to familiarize themselves with this book.

*Grass Games and Moon Races* grew out of a special edition of *News from Native California* (volume 8, number 1 [1994]), an innovative quarterly magazine devoted to California Indian history and contemporary life (also published by Heyday Books). Gendar, coeditor of *News*, has done a beautiful job of integrating material from that special edition devoted to games and toys—which had many contributors—with additional research and illustrations. The book, whose ultimate purpose is “to promote fun” (p. 15), is aimed first of all at a California Indian audience interested in the reconstruction of traditional games, and, second, to a general audience interested in Native American cultures. Although it includes discussion of children's games and toys and provides many playing instructions, *Grass Games and Moon Races* is not a children's book per se; it is, however, a rich resource for any teacher or parent who wishes to promote understanding of California native traditions. Traditions surveyed include field, hoop and pole, hand, and dice games, along with running contests, archery and throwing contests, and children's toys and games, such as string figures. Gendar emphasizes tribal and

regional variations within the state, but she makes clear that the book is not meant to be a comprehensive treatment.

Although writing for a popular audience, Gendar offers scholars of Native American cultures—particularly folklorists and anthropologists, whose disciplines have traditionally included the study of games and toys—an example of a fresh approach to the subject. Gendar's method can be thought of as process-centered and ethnohistorical: While she is thoroughly attentive to the objects that are essential to many of the games described, she focuses on the games as practiced and the people who practice them, and she draws on the ethnographic record as well as on contemporary observations of California Indian game-playing. Her vivid prose renders the games visible in the mind's eye, and her engaging turn of phrase is rare in strictly ethnographic accounts.

The book's rich illustrations facilitate both the emphasis on process and the interrelations between historic and contemporary practices. Beginning with the bright painting on the cover, "This Is Yo Luck," by L. Frank Manriquez (Tongva/Ajachmem), the book's illustrations demonstrate how the games reflect the region's natural environments, and highlight the skill involved in their manufacture. Throughout the text are historical and contemporary photographs of California Indian people at play, which serve to both document and explicate the activities depicted. In insets with specific details and diagrams, Gendar provides the reader with a step-by-step understanding of many of the games described, such as in the chapter on hand games, which has insets on tribal variations in guessing techniques and the manufacture of playing pieces or "bones," and lists archival resources for recordings of hand game songs. A few of the illustrations in these sections could be clearer, such as those of hand game bone markings (pp. 56, 58), in which the markings are difficult to distinguish; however, the illustrations in general are outstanding.

Gendar's approach demonstrates how the ethnographic record can be of value to contemporary native communities interested in the recovery of traditional ways, yet by emphasizing tribal variation and change in particular practices over time, she acknowledges how the practice of traditional ways constantly involves transformation and a remaking of the old into the new, the past into the present. Gendar frequently foregrounds the voices of earlier California Indian people who served as ethnographic

informants and lets them speak across the generations; several chapters end, for example, with legends and myths that have games at the center of their plots. In this way, Gendar illuminates how native games are integrated with other aspects of indigenous expressive culture, particularly oral literature and song.

In part because Gendar does make reference to earlier ethnographic work and other sources, I believe the reader would have benefited from a succinct paragraph-long orientation to the scholarly literature in the book's introduction. For example, while it may become clear to the uninitiated reader that Stewart Culin's *Games of the North American Indians* (originally published in 1907 by the Smithsonian Institution, reprinted by the University of Nebraska, 1992) remains the central reference work on the topic, an explicit statement of that fact would be helpful, as would a discussion of the strengths and limitations of Culin's object-oriented and encyclopedic format. A critical assessment of the sources listed in the bibliography, in an annotated essay form, would be useful. With these minor additions, the book could have provided more instruction to the novice researcher.

The link between traditional games of chance and contemporary gaming on Indian reservations is too obvious to ignore, and Gendar, to her credit, does not ignore it. However, I find her abbreviated discussion of the legal basis of Indian casinos unsatisfactory and potentially misleading: She explains that as "sovereign nations . . . , tribes can conduct certain activities in Indian country that are not necessarily legal elsewhere" (p. 81). This statement, which is not elaborated upon, oversimplifies the complexity of the notion of sovereignty as well as the case law and legislative history behind contemporary Indian gaming, and could lead the reader to believe tribal gaming is unregulated. In her two-page treatment, Gendar touches briefly on the benefits and hazards of gaming on reservations, but neglects to provide an informative discussion of the status of specific California tribes vis-à-vis gaming. I am not suggesting that Gendar should have presented a comprehensive analysis, but I believe she missed an opportunity to clarify the background of the increasingly controversial topic of tribal gambling.

Similarly, Gendar's discussion of California Indians' boarding school experiences and their relationship to games (p. 107) introduces important issues but leaves room for further investigation. As Gendar points out, boarding schools eroded and devalued students' knowledge of traditional ways, and, further, the schools

sought to teach Indian students Euro-American games and sports not merely for recreation but as an aspect of the institutions' program of assimilation. What the school officials did not anticipate (and Gendar does not explore) is that for the Indian students who played them, such games were also essential elements in the pan-tribal socialization that occurred at the schools and even at times served to heighten a new sense of "Indian" identity. Tsianina Lomawaima discusses this process broadly in *They Called It Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School* (University of Nebraska, 1994), while David Wallace Adams, in *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875–1928* (University Press of Kansas, 1995), examines how boarding school sports programs explicitly designed to enhance Indian assimilation, such as football at Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania, also became arenas in which students could dramatize the conflict and competition between Indian and white worlds. Though beyond Gendar's stated scope, an exploration of the role of games and sports and the persistence of traditional play within California's boarding schools is long overdue.

Overall, Gendar's book, one of few recent treatments of native games and the only one to focus on California, succeeds in communicating both to California Indians and to the general public the drama and delight of the state's indigenous games and toys. Gendar's work marks the way for further research into the practice and revival of games and sports in contemporary American Indian communities. In the underrecognized area of native North American games and sports in general, we need more ethnographically informed studies such as Thomas Vennum, Jr.'s *American Indian Lacrosse* (Smithsonian Institution, 1994), a brilliant examination of the contemporary, cultural, and historical dimensions of that sport, and *Indian Running* by Peter Nabokov (Capra Press, 1981), an engaging account of indigenous running traditions that centers on the 1980 Tricentennial Run commemorating the 1680 Pueblo Indian Revolt. Native Californian gaming traditions, as illuminated by Gendar, remind us that, for native North Americans, play is not isolated from the rest of cultural life but is integral to it, for the length of the life cycle. We are fortunate to have this celebration of California Indian peoples and their traditions of sport and play.

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