



I Do Not Apologize for the Length of This Letter: The Mari Sandoz Letters on Native American Rights, 1940-1965

Kimberli A. Lee, Editor

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This collection of Mari Sandoz's correspondence, introduced and edited by Kimberli A. Lee, is the closest most will come to sitting with the writer and historian, listening to her talk about that which mattered most to her: historical accuracy regarding American Indians, especially the Indians of the Northern Plains, and justice and dignity for all Native Americans.

Mari Sandoz grew up in the Sandhills of northern Nebraska at the turn of the 20th century. Educated at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, she spent much of her long adult life as a writer, historian, and researcher living in New York City and traveling throughout the US. She was most noted for her books *Crazy Horse*, *Cheyenne Autumn*, and *Old Jules*, the latter a memoir about her father. But her heart and soul never wandered far from the Indian neighbors she grew up with in rural Nebraska.

This collection is in four parts. In the first and longest chapter, Sandoz advocates for accuracy in accounts of American Indian history, giving short history lessons that demonstrate the rigor of her own research. In the second section, Sandoz works as an activist on behalf of the Plains Indians, writing letters to whomever will give attention to the dire straits in which Indians lived at mid-20th century. Sandoz directly confronted the twin evils of the period: the termination program under which the federal government unilaterally abandoned its obligations to the Indian tribes, putting them at risk of exploitation by those coveting their land and natural resources; and the relocation program that abruptly thrust Indians into white culture without any substantive preparation or assistance. The third chapter chronicles Sandoz's efforts to take on the film and television industries in an attempt to counter the insensitive, degrading stereotypes of Indians fostered by the dominant white culture. These stereotypes were not only historically and culturally incorrect, Sandoz argued, but harmful to the dignity and self-respect of the American Indians. Lastly, the book focuses on Sandoz's efforts to encourage Native American writers and artists and introduce their work to a larger audience.

Sandoz's beliefs—that Indian tribes and their members are worthy of respect; that Indians could take care of themselves if given a real opportunity to do so; and that Indian history is not a separate history but an integral part of American History—are clearly articulated in this collection. Mari Sandoz led no influential or powerful group seeking political power. Rather, she was a writer and historian who was passionate about exposing and correcting the mistreatment of Indians in this country. She did what she was trained and inclined to do: she wrote about it. And along the way, she pointed out that what was done to American Indians could be done to any minority group.

Ted Kennedy said, eulogizing his brother, Robert: "My brother need not be idealized, or enlarged in death beyond what he was in life; to be remembered simply as a good and decent man, who saw wrong and tried to right it; saw suffering and tried to heal it..." Those words apply to Mari Sandoz.

This book will appeal to anyone interested in American and Indian history; the development of the civil rights era of the 1960s; and the development of culture, literature, and the arts in mid-twentieth century America.

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