

{ WRITTEN BY LINDA LENHOFF }

tommy orange

DAZZLES AGAIN

{ The author's new novel, *Wandering Stars*, is a tour de force that revisits the characters from his acclaimed debut, *There There*. }



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Tommy Orange burst onto the literary scene with his debut novel, *There There*, in 2018, a poetic and moving look at a constellation of Native characters in Oakland whose fate comes together in a startling conclusion. *There There* was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and won the American Book Award, putting Orange on the literary map. In his much-awaited second novel, *Wandering Stars*, Orange literally returns to the scene of the crime that so deeply affected readers: The first book concluded with a shooting at a local powwow involving 14-year-old Orvil Red Feather and his family. Using several characters' perspectives, Orange spins a tale that allows the family to rise above their trauma—both present-day and ancestral.

In *Wandering Stars*, Orange, an enrolled member of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma, also traces the history of the Cheyenne people through stories that include the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864 and their imprisonment at Pennsylvania's Carlisle Indian Industrial School in the 1800s, which aimed to strip Native people of their culture and identity.

Born and raised in Oakland, Orange skillfully channels the voices of each character. Whether it's an older Native woman struggling with addiction, a soldier running for his life through a cornfield, or a young boy traumatized by the recent shooting, each tells us their story. Storytelling is Orange's milieu—and essential to Native history. "Stories are the way that our brains and hearts form reality," Orange says. "They're the way we make sense of

the world, explain it to ourselves, talk about ourselves as a family and as a nation."

After he finished writing the first novel, Orange felt the need to continue the Red Feather family's story. "I just knew that the post-shooting was rich in what I could explore and what the characters would be going through," he says. The author recognized that their stories would "have echoes and resonance" today. "I wanted to explore how you would come back from a massacre in modern-day times."

During his research, Orange, a graduate of the M.F.A. program at the Institute of American Indian Arts, where he now teaches, says he "went down a rabbit hole" that turned out to be the origin story of the Indian industrial schools. The historical first section of the novel describes the plights of Native students, soldiers, and young women against a country set on eliminating their culture—and many of their people.

The book ties these ancestral revelations to the current Red Feather family as they try to rebuild. "Historical trauma can be something you can get right away if you have a personal experience," Orange says. "Or it can sound abstract and not hit you emotionally."

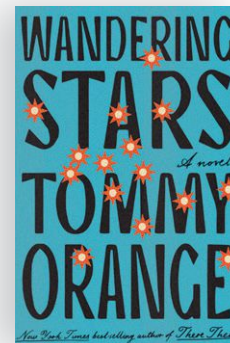
"You can feel the weight and connection between then and now," he adds, of wanting to illustrate the past to tell the whole story. "History repeats itself, and trauma continues. Especially when the history of this country is not really spoken of in an honest way."


Oakland plays a prominent role in both books, and Orange still calls it home. "I live in Oakland because it's home; it's where my memories live," he says. "I think Oakland is a really special, diverse, and complex place, and its people are beautiful and real. There should be 100 more books about Oakland."

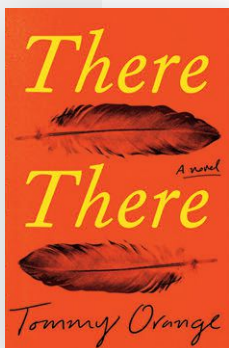
Like *There There*, *Wandering Stars* has a magnificent ending, and yet unlike the first book, it's a more soothing one. "The ending to *There There* is devastating to a lot of people," Orange admits. "It felt like what I had to write. Trump was about to get into office, and we'd just seen Standing

Rock [and the fight against the Dakota Access Pipeline]." For the new novel, Orange wanted a more hopeful resolution. "I couldn't have another devastating ending for myself, but also to some extent, because I'm not going to write a third book [following these characters]. I wanted the story to end with some sense of resolve."

In *Wandering Stars*, another major accomplishment and a book that will no doubt be taught for years, Orange concludes with a genuine, poignant ending that satisfies both the characters and the readers. Here's to whatever he chooses to write next.




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By the BOOK

Spring break is the perfect time to catch up on your reading list. Check out these five East Bay authors with must-read books published within the last six months.



AMY SCHNEIDER

Software engineer Amy Schneider takes us behind the scenes of her success as a *Jeopardy!* champion in her memoir, *In the Form of a Question: The Joys and Rewards of a Curious Life* (Simon and Schuster, 2023). The second-greatest winner in the show's history, Schneider earned \$1.3 million from her 40-game winning streak while establishing herself as an icon for queer and transgender people worldwide. The Oakland author delves beyond the game show to focus on some of her other passions, from pop culture to astrology, packing the book with the warmth *Jeopardy!* viewers came to know and love.



HILARY ZAID

Berkeley author Hilary Zaid sets her mysterious tale of secret societies, illuminated manuscripts, and a dubious social media company in Oakland. In Zaid's fast-moving novel *Forget I Told You This* (University of Nebraska Press, 2023), single queer mother Amy Black dreams of attending an illustrious artist's residency at Q, the world's largest social media company. Wandering through Oakland's warehouses and train depot, Black finds a world of crackpot philosophers along the journey to her dream come true—which is not as it seems. Zaid describes her wicked wonderland with her usual gorgeous prose.



MICHAEL LEWIS

Michael Lewis turns his focus onto the darker side of business in *Going Infinite: The Rise and Fall of a New Tycoon* (W. W. Norton, 2023), an exposé of the fallen crypto king Sam Bankman-Fried. The author of the beloved *Moneyball: The Art of Winning an Unfair Game* and *The Big Short: Inside the Doomsday Machine*, Lewis digs into crypto's gritty underside with flair and finesse, exposing Bankman-Fried's tragic, topsy-turvy ride through cryptocurrencies, philanthropy, and bankruptcy. Berkeley's Lewis serves as a fly on the wall as his subject's world comes crashing down.



OBI KAUFMANN

East Bay author and California chronicler Obi Kaufmann leads readers on an adventure through geography and time in *The Deserts of California: A California Field Atlas* (Heyday, 2023), which blends art and science into a celebratory guide of the state's arid landscape. Author-illustrator of the best-selling *California Field Atlas* and other books, Kaufmann offers hundreds of beautiful watercolor maps and illustrations of areas from Joshua Tree to Death Valley. The author meditates on how California can survive—and thrive—beyond the current climate crisis.



MARISSA MOSS

Berkeley writer-illustrator Marissa Moss introduces her young readers to the first female cryptanalyst in America. *Spying on Spies: How Elizebeth Smith Friedman Broke the Nazis' Secret Codes* (Abrams, 2024) explores a brilliant mind of the 20th century left out of most accounts in history. Smith Friedman's code breaking helped bring down Al Capone—and her efforts uncovered a network of Nazi spies in South America. Moss's delicious writing and fun graphic-novel-inspired chapter openings lead readers through monumental moments of code breaking in American history. —L.L.