

election, "A Nation at Risk," and the so-called standards movement. But the bulk of the narrative is inward looking. Certain critical themes, such as controversies connected to race, ethnicity, and testing, receive very brief treatment, and significant historical accounts such as Nicholas Lemann's *The Big Test* are not even mentioned. This detracts from the volume's value as a balanced contribution to the history of testing and assessment. What it does represent is an informative description of the growth of a highly successful Iowa institution, one that is likely to remain important as long as post-secondary education continues to play a major role in American life.

Women Elders' Life Stories of the Omaha Tribe, Macy, Nebraska, 2004–2005, by Wynne L. Summers. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009. xxxii, 112 pp. Omaha language pronunciation guide, map, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00 cloth.

Reviewer Patty Loew is associate professor at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. She has collected oral histories of Native American and African American women in Wisconsin during World War II and is the author of *Indian Nations of Wisconsin: Histories of Endurance and Renewal* (2001).

You might call it cultural gravity — that irresistible force that pulls Native people back to their ancestral land. Re-entry brings redemption. Personal renewal promotes community revitalization.

Wynne Summers has written a lovely book, the beauty of which lies in its poetic expression. The book celebrates the lives of three Omaha elders working to protect the community through political leadership and language preservation. Eleanor Baxter was the first woman to lead the Omaha Nation as tribal chair. Alice Saunsoci and Háwate are language teachers who see Omaha culture embedded in the language. All three women were raised on the Omaha reservation, left for a period of years, and then experienced redemptive homecomings. The gravity that pulls these Omaha women back to their homeland connects them to their community and to the land itself. Each learned valuable leadership skills while orbiting the mainstream. Upon their return, their political activism and cultural spirit rarified Macy's atmosphere.

Only Summers's conclusion disappoints. The author chose this chapter to introduce a lengthy and misplaced examination of Leslie Silko's *Garden in the Dunes* and several other literary works, which distracts readers from reflecting on the three compelling life stories she has just shared. Her effort to situate the lives of Baxter, Saunsoci, and Háwate within a wider literary context is thought provoking and

meaningful but would have been more valuable if presented elsewhere in the book. This miscalculation does not detract from the overall integrity of *Women Elders*, however. The book is an honest, elegant contribution to American Indian scholarship. Note to researchers: be sure to read the preface. Summers's respectful approach to gathering data in a tribal community is commendable. *This* is the way to conduct research in Indian Country.

Great Plains: America's Lingering Wild, by Michael Forsberg with Dan O'Brien, David Wishart, and Ted Kooser. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009. 260 pp. Photographs (many in color), maps, bibliography, list of resources, index. \$45.00 cloth.

Reviewer Molly P. Rozum is associate professor of history at Doane College in Crete, Nebraska. Her dissertation (University of North Carolina, 2001) was "Grasslands Grown: A Twentieth-Century Sense of Place on North America's Northern Prairies and Plains."

Hope edges pessimism in this compelling study of North America's grasslands ecology. Part photographic narrative, part history, with interludes of personal essay, mapping, and fieldwork journaling, this book is as "mixed and complicated" as "the people of the Plains" (253). Forsberg's absorbing photographs form the core in chapters on "The Northern Plains," "The Southern Plains," and "Tallgrass Prairies," the last of which includes significant discussion of Iowa's historic grasslands. Images of buffalo grass, a "ghost" playa lake, snow geese taking flight, a snow squall, redbelly daces swimming, and black-tailed prairie dogs greeting one another reveal the "lingering wild" of the Plains and the authors' reasoned concern for "ignoble destruction" (19). Kooser introduces, and historical geographer Wishart provides a general overview, citing important regional scholarship. Novelist O'Brien's personal essays — "Water," "Wind," "Lion," and "Cemetery" — demonstrate his and Forsberg's different understandings of the environment, yet similar deeply rooted feelings for the place.

The authors advocate a "new Great Plains land ethic," one "scientific and practical" (254), notably already at work upon the region, as represented by the U.S. Conservation Reserve Program, the Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, pheasant hunters, ranchers, and philanthropists. Extinction and depletion continue by irrigation, methane gas production, wind "farms," and corn-based ethanol development. Hope resides nevertheless in individuals with diverse motivations to preserve, restore, and reconnect what at times seems a hopelessly fragmented place. For Iowa restoration is key.