



Understanding Sherman Alexie (Understanding Contemporary American Literature)

Daniel Grassian

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In this first book-length examination of Native American poet, novelist, filmmaker, and short story writer Sherman Alexie, Daniel Grassian offers a comprehensive look at a writer immersed in traditional Native American, as well as mainstream American, culture. Grassian takes readers through Alexie's career, from his first collections of poetry, *The Business of Fancydancing* and *Old Shirts and New Skins*, through such novels as *Reservation Blues* and *Indian Killer*, to the recent short story collection *Ten Little Indians*. Grassian suggests that Alexie's oeuvre reflects his primary artistic challenge: how to write about Indians in a predominantly televisual country that distorts and complicates the importance and nature of ethnicity itself. Drawing comparisons with such established Native American writers as N. Scott Momaday and James Welch as well as with Generation X peers, Grassian presents Alexie's work as equally informed by Native American culture and generic, mainstream influences. He demonstrates how Alexie utilizes popular culture and connects it to the lives of Native Americans as his art transforms the conventional tools of cultural colonization into a means of Native American empowerment. Grassian explores Alexie's ability to counteract lingering stereo-types of Native Americans, his challenges to the dominant American history, and his suspicion of the New Age movement. The picture of Alexie that emerges from Grassian's text is one of a writer who is fiercely talented, intelligent, witty, and honest, a writer committed to helping readers understand contemporary Native American lives, even if his work sometimes portrays both Native Americans and non-Natives in an unfavorable light.

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