

“*Hearts Unbroken* is a rare blend of teenage romance and social consciousness. . . .  
Smith’s engaging, intelligent, and principled teenage heroine is aware of being  
Native American in a modern world.” —Joseph Bruchac (Abenaki), author of *Code Talker*

“This story will dissolve boundaries and knock down walls.”  
—Guadalupe Garcia McCall, winner of a Pura Belpré Author Award

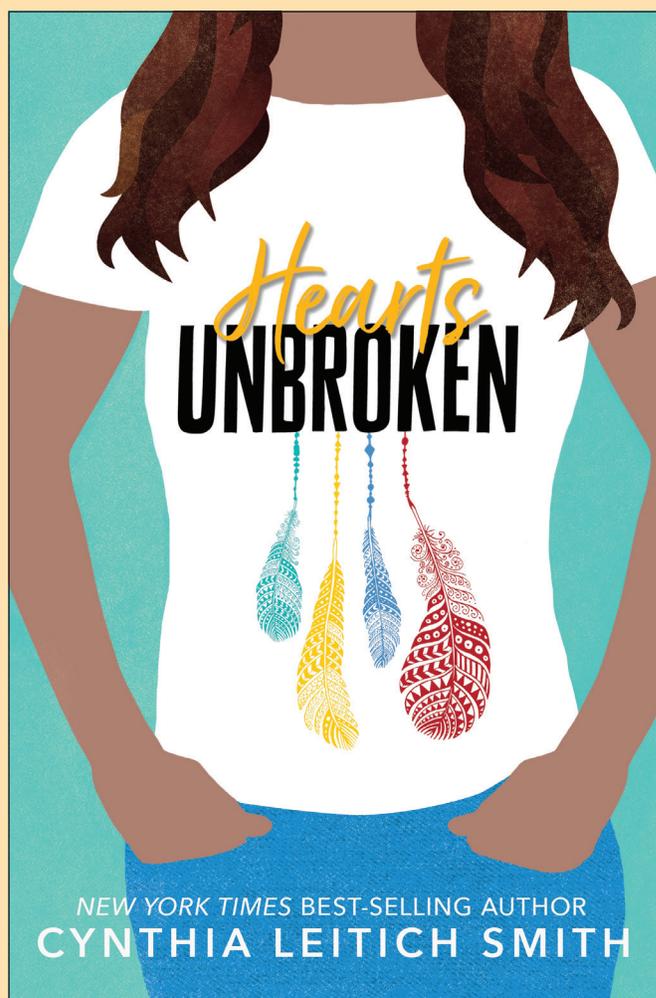
# Hearts UNBROKEN

CYNTHIA LEITICH SMITH

When Louise Wolfe’s first real boyfriend mocks and disrespects Native people in front of her, she breaks things off and dumps him over e-mail. It’s her senior year, anyway, and she’d rather spend her time with her family and friends and working on the school newspaper. The editors pair her up with Joey Kairouz, the ambitious new photojournalist, and in no time the paper’s staff find themselves with a major story to cover: the school musical director’s inclusive approach to casting *The Wizard of Oz* has been provoking backlash in their mostly white, middle-class Kansas town. From the newly formed Parents Against Revisionist Theater to anonymous threats, long-held prejudices are being laid bare and hostilities are spreading against teachers, parents, and students—especially the cast members at the center of the controversy, including Lou’s little brother, who’s playing the Tin Man. As tensions mount at school, so does a romance between Lou and Joey—but as she’s learned, “dating while Native” can be difficult. In trying to protect her own heart, will Lou break Joey’s?

**CYNTHIA LEITICH SMITH** is the best-selling, acclaimed author of the Tantalize series and the Feral series. She is an enrolled member of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and is on the advisory board of We Need Diverse Books. She lives in Austin, Texas.

New York Times best-selling author  
Cynthia Leitich Smith turns to  
realistic fiction with the thoughtful  
story of a Native teen navigating  
the complicated, confusing waters  
of high school—and first love.



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# A note from CYNTHIA LEITICH SMITH



*Hearts Unbroken* began as a long overdue apology to a high school boyfriend.

We'd met as teen journalists. I was a reporter. He was a photographer. One who'd recently quit varsity football in favor of the student newspaper and weathered the social fallout.

I was impressed, charmed. We quickly bonded over brainy movies, classic Ford Mustangs, and our shared love of storytelling.

Then one cloudy afternoon, in a fit of adolescent nerves, I stammered the worst possible thing with the best possible intentions. In attempting to take our relationship to the next level, I deeply insulted him instead.

Today, I'd say the impact of my words was far more important than my intent. But as a fumbling, flailing teenager, it had all felt much more complicated. We were both insecure, riding a wave of hormonal chaos. (In other words, we were typical teens.)

What's more, I was a Native girl, and he was an Arab-American boy.

Society insisted that I was either a mythical enviro-goddess or a savage marauder or— not to put too fine a point on it— extinct. Hundreds of years extinct, because that was my *manifest destiny*. So, outside of Indian Country, I tended to keep quiet about

my Muscogee (Creek) Nation citizenship and intertribal heritage.

Society insisted that he flew magic carpets or was a hijacker/terrorist. He was a second-generation American on his father's side. Yet his ancestry and surname supposedly marked him as forever foreign. He tended to keep quiet about his Lebanese-American father and grandparents.

Navigating our awkwardness and anxieties against the backdrop of Waspy, suburban Kansas at times felt overwhelming. Like my characters, we were flawed and, at times, failing. Put another way, we weren't magical or monsters. We were oh-so-young human beings, facing pressures that still plague teens today.

Back then, I also learned that L. Frank Baum, who'd written *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, was reprehensible, that he'd called for "the total annihilation" of people like me. Having largely grown up in Kansas, surrounded by Oz imagery, only heightened the impact of this discovery on me. Emotionally, I recoiled. Intellectually, I wondered if the artist and the art could or should be separated. How was I supposed to think and feel about a "wonderful," fantastical world created by someone who'd advocated for genocide?

On one level, *Hearts Unbroken* is an exploration of speech—journalistic, political, artistic, religious, and interpersonal, as well as speech rooted in hate—and on another, it is a romantic story about two teenage reporters asking whether everyone deserves a chance in the spotlight.

#heartsunbroken