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Red Bird, Red Power: The Life and Legacy of Zitkala-Ša by
Tadeusz Lewandowski (review)

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Reviews



Red Bird, Red Power: The Life and Legacy of Zitkala-Ša. By Tadeusz Lewandowski. Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 2016. xi + 276 pp. Cloth, \$29.95.

Zitkala-Ša's autobiographical essays "Impressions of an Indian Childhood," "The School Days of an Indian Girl," and "An Indian Teacher Among Indians," originally published in the January, February, and March 1900 issues of the *Atlantic Monthly*, are now regularly taught in post-secondary classrooms, thanks both to their frequent anthologization and their inclusion in modern collections of her works by Penguin (2003), the University of Nebraska's Bison Press (2003), and Dover (2014). During the past thirty years, too, a flood of scholarly articles about Zitkala-Ša have been published, including a number of excellent articles about particular episodes in her life.

Thus far, however, only one biography of her—a non-scholarly one which provides no documentation and is intended more for school-age readers—has thus far appeared: Doreen Rappaport's *The Flight of Red Bird: The Life of Zitkala-Ša* (1997). *Red Bird, Red Power* is thus the first full-length, scholarly biography of this important Native American writer. Lewandowski argues that instead of taking one of the polarized views of her—either she was a champion of Native American rights and expression or she threw in her lot with whites and sold out her culture—we should more fully acknowledge the difficult conditions in which she fought for Native Americans. Doing so, she contends, allows us to recognize that Zitkala-Ša did often take positions on Native issues similar to those of certain white "reformers" and officials, sometimes even engaging them as her allies: "Through writing, rhetoric, organization, lobbying, and activism, she ably formulated a response to white rule very similar to that of subsequent generations" of Native American activists. Indeed, Lewandowski contends, Zitkala-Ša's positions and strategies were little different from those taken many years later in the 1960s and 1970s by those involved in the Red Power movement. Although those people may have been unaware of Zitkala-Ša's work (and Lewandowski thankfully does not overstep and try to assert her direct influence on them), this book makes a persuasive case that she was a woman well ahead of her time.

Lewandowski begins her comprehensive, cohesive, and highly readable narrative with Zitkala-Ša's early years on the Yankton Sioux reservation in

South Dakota and then proceeds chronologically. Each chapter provides fascinating details about particular episodes of her life, setting them within their larger contexts and establishing their connection to her writings. Lewandowski draws not only on a wide variety of archival sources, such as correspondence by Zitkala-Ša and others, but also on a number of her previously un-examined and under-examined publications. In fact, this is one of the book's greatest strengths, for almost all previous scholarship has focused only on what Zitkala-Ša published in mainstream publications intended for white audiences. Lewandowski's presentation and analyses of many Zitkala-Ša essays and poems published in less prominent venues (especially *American Indian Magazine*) demonstrated to me that they not only deserve to be read by more scholars but also taught to students.

Also worthy of commendation is the way that Lewandowski, unlike previous scholars who have generally devoted little attention to the years of Zitkala-Ša's life after she married Raymond Bonnin in May 1902 and moved with him to the Uintah and Ouray Reservation in Utah, devotes the bulk of his biography to her life after that year. There are a few places where the narrative gets bogged down with too much detail about internecine battles among various parties (such as those involved in the Society for the American Indian), but Lewandowski usually provides just the right amount of information about Zitkala-Ša's efforts to combat white corruption in the agencies charged with overseeing reservations (and especially those cheating Oklahoma Indians of their oil and gas rights), her work to ban peyote, and her advocacy for Indian citizenship and voting rights.

When Zitkala-Ša died in Washington in 1938 at age 61, she was relatively unknown, and her lifelong efforts on behalf of Native Americans were underappreciated. This book makes a strong case that not just because of her early writings but also because of her later political activism (including publications), she and her work deserve much more prominence in Native American, and American, history than she has thus far been accorded.

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The End of Eden: Agrarian Spaces and the Rise of the California Social Novel. By Terry Beers. Reno: Univ. of Nevada Press, 2018. 252 pp. Cloth \$49.95.

The End of Eden continues Beers' decades-long study of the Golden State and its rich social, environmental, and literary histories. In this most re-