



Red Bird, Red Power: The Life and Legacy of Zitkala-Ša (American Indian Literature and Critical Studies Series)

Tadeusz Lewandowski

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Red Bird, Red Power: The Life and Legacy of Zitkala-Ša (American Indian Literature and Critical Studies Series) Tadeusz Lewandowski

Red Bird, Red Power tells the story of one of the most influential—and controversial—American Indian activists of the twentieth century. Zitkala-Ša (1876–1938), also known as Gertrude Simmons Bonnin, was a highly gifted writer, editor, and musician who dedicated her life to achieving justice for Native peoples. Here, Tadeusz Lewandowski offers the first full-scale biography of the woman whose passionate commitment to improving the lives of her people propelled her to the forefront of Progressive-era reform movements.

Lewandowski draws on a vast array of sources, including previously unpublished letters and diaries, to recount Zitkala-Ša’s unique life journey. Her story begins on the Dakota plains, where she was born to a Yankton Sioux mother and a white father. Zitkala-Ša, whose name translates as “Red Bird” in English, left home at age eight to attend a Quaker boarding school, eventually working as a teacher at Carlisle Indian Industrial School. By her early twenties, she was the toast of East Coast literary society. Her short stories for the *Atlantic Monthly* (1900) are, to this day, the focus of scholarly analysis and debate. In collaboration with William F. Hanson, she wrote the libretto and songs for the innovative *Sun Dance Opera* (1913).

And yet, as Lewandowski demonstrates, Zitkala-Ša’s successes could not fill the void of her lost cultural heritage, nor dampen her fury toward the Euro-American establishment that had robbed her people of their land. In 1926, she founded the National Council of American Indians with the aim of redressing American Indian grievances.

Zitkala-Ša’s complex identity has made her an intriguing—if elusive—subject for scholars. In Lewandowski’s sensitive interpretation, she emerges as a multifaceted human being whose work entailed constant negotiation. In the end, Lewandowski argues, Zitkala-Ša’s achievements distinguish her as a forerunner of the Red Power movement and an important agent of change.



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