DECOLONIZING THE HISTORIES OF HELEN HUNT JACKSON AND GERTRUDE SIMMONS BONNIN

by

BARBARA R. BILEK

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THESIS APPROVAL

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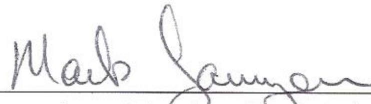
COMMITTEE APPROVALS:

Committee Chair, Dr. Patti Loughlin



Committee Member, Dr. Mark Janzen

Committee Member, Dr. Doug Hurt

Abstract

What is decolonization and how does it work? The concept of decolonization surfaced during "the global Indigenous activism in the 1970s."[1] Although the idea is not new, it has been given little attention by mainstream historians. A discussion of the meaning of decolonization begins with an understanding that colonization means to settle in a colony or colonies. For example, England and Spain began establishing colonies on the lands of the Indigenous Nations of the Americas in the 16th and 17th centuries. Thus, the United States began as a loosely united group of colonies making decolonization a logical consequence. As such, decolonization means to remove or mitigate the consequences of colonization. According to Susan A. Miller (Seminole), "decolonization is a process designed to shed and recover from the ill effects of colonization."[2] In this thesis, I utilize case studies of two women to demonstrate how decolonizing history using an Indigenous lens can construct a more comprehensive history and produce a distinct narrative from a Native American perspective. I argue using this methodology recasts the activism of Helen Hunt Jackson and Gertrude Simmons Bonnin (Yankton Nakota) as the progenitor to modern Native American rights movements. The political activism of Jackson and Bonnin resides within literary journals shadowed by analyses of their fiction and poetry. Utilizing a different perspective revealed the stories of two women whose work made a significant impact on relations between the United States government and Native American nations that was generally less celebrated among historians.

The object of this research project is to use an Indigenous perspective to decolonize and reclaim the histories of Helen Hunt Jackson and Gertrude Simmons Bonnin (Yankton Nakota) and their activism for Native American rights. The historical importance of the reform work of

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[1] Susan A. Miller, "Native America Writes Back, The Origin of the Indigenous Paradigm in Historiography," Wicazo Sa Review 23, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 10.
[2] Miller, "Native America Writes Back," 14.

both women went unnoticed for a few decades, but the activism of the 1960s resurrected their legacy.[3] Preliminary research indicated scholars focused primarily on the literary achievements of these Victorian Age women not their efforts to change the assimilation policies of the U.S. government. American historians infrequently accept Helen Jackson as a historian even though the production of her book *A Century of Dishonor* (1881) required hours of work analyzing primary source documents such as survey maps and treaties. Some Native American scholars put Jackson in the company of people called “do-gooders” or those people who supported the practice of assimilation as the best outcome for Native American tribes.[4] In recent decades, scholars such as P. Jane Hafen (Taos Pueblo) began producing work that focused on the political importance of Bonnin’s activism. Robert Warrior (Osage) labeled her as pro-assimilation because she worked for the Society of American Indians (SAI) whose constituency was comprised of Native American leaders that believed assimilation was the best way for Native Americans to articulate with the dominant culture.[5] However, further analysis found that Gertrude left the SAI because she did not agree with her peers.[6]

This project produced a manuscript that provides an example of how to apply the principles of Indigenous discourse, as set forth by Susan Miller specifically regarding decolonization. This researcher’s perspective saw Jackson and Bonnin’s activism as the progenitor of modern day Native American rights movements. Jackson produced the first investigative effort to catalogue the broken treaty provisions and land misappropriations inflicted

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[3] Franci Washburn, “Zitkala-Sa, A Bridge between Two Worlds,” in *Their Own Frontier, Women Intellectuals Re-Visioning the American West*, ed. Shirley A. Leckie and Nancy J. Parezo (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 271.
[4] Note: My undergraduate degree is in Native American Studies from the University of Oklahoma. One class discussion was about the philanthropists and “do-gooders” of the early twentieth century and their impact on Native American tribes. Helen Hunt Jackson was listed as one such individual.
[5] Robert Allen Warrior, *Tribal Secrets, Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 8.
[6] Zitkala-Ša, *Dreams and Thunder: Stories, Poems, and The Sun Dance Opera*, ed. P. Jane Hafen (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), xx.

on Native American tribes by the U.S. government. Her enduring non-literary legacy was the work she did as an Indian agent for the Mission Indians of California where she worked to ensure the government treated the tribes equitably. Among Gertrude Bonnin's many accomplishments, her last and most significant was the creation of the National Council of American Indians that she co-founded with her husband in 1926. This organization preceded the modern day National Congress of American Indians. Thus, the result of this project is a decolonized narrative focused on the reform work of Helen Hunt Jackson and Gertrude Simmons Bonnin. Decolonizing the history of two very different women with synchronistic goals may encourage other historians whether Native American, western, or American to present alternative perspectives in the histories they write.

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Introduction

What is decolonization and how does it work? The concept of decolonization surfaced during "the global Indigenous activism in the 1970s."[7] Although the idea is not new, it has been given little attention by mainstream historians. A discussion of the meaning of decolonization begins with an understanding that colonization means to settle in a colony or colonies. For example, England and Spain began establishing colonies on the lands of the Indigenous nations of the Americas in the 16th and 17th centuries. Thus, the United States began as a loosely united group of colonies making decolonization a logical consequence. As such, decolonization means to remove or mitigate the consequences of colonization. According to Susan A. Miller (Seminole), "decolonization is a process designed to shed and recover from the ill effects of colonization."[8] For instance, "recovering important elements" of a lost tribal heritage such as the Sun Dance, whale hunting, languages, and social structures empowering Native women are decolonizing activities.[9] Miller defined the Indigenous methodology used in Indigenous research projects. First, research should be done for the benefit of the Indigenous community that is the focus of the project. Second, the project should adhere to the protocols of the people or communities for whom the research is done. Third, the Indigenous community reserves the right to apply its standards to the use of the project results. Fourth, the historiography must be critically analyzed to remove anti-Indigenous sentiments or words. Fifth, the researcher should privilege the work of Indigenous scholars as primary sources leaving non-Indigenous scholarship as secondary sources. [10]

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[7] Miller, "Native America Writes Back," 10.
[8] Miller, "Native America Writes Back," 14.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid., 15-7.

In this thesis, I utilize case studies of two women reformers to demonstrate how decolonizing history using an Indigenous lens can construct a more comprehensive history and produce a distinct narrative from a Native American perspective. I argue using this methodology recasts the activism of Helen Hunt Jackson and Gertrude Simmons Bonnin (Yankton Nakota) as the progenitor to modern Native American rights movements. The historiography of the political activism of Jackson and Bonnin resides within more literary journals than history journals. Both women were educated in literature, poetry, and prose. The bulk of any analysis of their writings belongs in the literary field simply because most of their writings are not necessarily historical. Even so, literary scholars have contributed to the discussion of the reform efforts of both women outnumbering historians in the critical analysis of Jackson's novels and Bonnin's activism. A critical review of the histories of these two reformers revealed the stories of two women whose work made a notable impact on relations between the United States government and Native American nations.

This research project uses an Indigenous perspective to review the histories of Jackson and Bonnin and their reform work. This process adds their reform work to Native American historical discourse for future discussion and debate. The historical importance of the reform efforts of both women went unnoticed for a few decades, but the activism of the 1960s resurrected their legacy.[11] Preliminary research indicated scholars focused primarily on the literary achievements of these Victorian Age women, not their efforts to change the assimilation policies of the U.S. government. American historians infrequently accept Helen Jackson as a historian even though the production of her book *A Century of Dishonor* (1881) required hours of work analyzing primary source documents such as survey maps and treaties. Some Native American scholars put Jackson in the company of people called the "do-gooders" or those who

[11] Washburn, "Zitkala-Sa, A Bridge," 271.

supported the practice of assimilation as the best outcome for Native American tribes.[12] In the past couple of decades, scholars such as P. Jane Hafen (Taos Pueblo) began producing work that focused on the political importance of Bonnin's activism. Robert Warrior (Osage) has labeled Gertrude as pro-assimilation because she worked for the Society of American Indians (SAI) whose constituency was comprised of Native American scholars that believed assimilation was the best way for Native Americans to articulate with the dominant culture.[13] However, further analysis found that Bonnin left the SAI because she did not agree with her peers.[14] "Decolonizing the Histories of Helen Hunt Jackson and Gertrude Simmons Bonnin" provides an example of how to apply the principles of Indigenous discourse, as set forth by Susan A. Miller and James Riding In (Pawnee), specifically regarding decolonization. This researcher's perspective saw Jackson and Bonnin's activism as the progenitor of modern day Native American rights movements. Jackson produced a book that catalogued the broken treaty provisions and land misappropriations inflicted on Native American tribes by the U.S. government. Her enduring non-literary legacy was the investigative research she did as an Indian Agent for the "Mission Indians of California" where she worked to ensure the government treated the tribes equitably.[15] Among Bonnin's many accomplishments, her last and most significant one was the creation of the National Council of American Indians that she co-founded with her husband in 1926. This organization preceded the modern day National Congress of American Indians. The result of this project is a decolonized narrative focused on the reform work of Helen Hunt Jackson and Gertrude Simmons Bonnin. Anthony Tyeeme Clark (Sac and

[12] Note: My undergraduate degree is in Native American Studies from the University of Oklahoma. One class discussion was about the philanthropists and "do-gooders" of the early twentieth century and their impact on Native American tribes. Helen Hunt Jackson was listed as one such individual.
[13] Warrior, *Tribal Secrets*, 8.
[14] Zitkala-Ša, *Dreams and Thunder*, xx.
[15] The term "Mission Indians of California" is not the proper name for the different Native Nations living in California during the era. However, it is commonly used throughout the literature on Jackson. This manuscript only uses this term when quoting or paraphrasing a source.

Fox of the Mississippi of Iowa) declared, "contemporary historiography is still in 2007 deeply rooted in the residue of colonization and racism."[16] The intent of this project is to contribute to the historiography of post-contact Native American history and stimulate scholarly debate among Indigenous historians on how to use the precepts of decolonization. Decolonizing the history of two very different women with synchronistic goals may encourage other historians whether Native American, western, or American to present alternative perspectives in the histories they write.

The decolonizing principles utilized in this project are Indigenous language when possible, a bibliography focused on the scholarly works of Indigenous scholars, and whose intent is to provide an example of writing decolonized history for analysis and debate by Indigenous scholars. Chapter 1 provides a discussion of the historiography of decolonization, Helen Hunt Jackson, and Gertrude Simmons Bonnin. Chapter 2 gives the reader a look at the life of Jackson from birth until 1879 focusing on her education and character. Chapter 3 offers a discussion of Jackson's years of activist work from 1879 until her death in 1885 with a discussion of her novels *A Century of Dishonor* and *Ramona* (1884). Chapter 4 presents a short biographical essay on Gertrude from life on the reservation with her mother to 1900 when she began publishing her autobiographical essays. Chapter 5 continues the discussion of Bonnin's reform work from 1900 until her death in 1938. Each chapter provides the reader with a look at these two reformers and their work from an Indigenous perspective. The theme of decolonization has been woven throughout the text. In the end, the reader should be able to identify the tenets of decolonization and discuss how it benefits researchers of Indigenous history.

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[16] D. Anthony Tyeeme Clark, "Decolonization Matters: Feature Review Essay," *Wicazo Sa Review* 22, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 102.

Lastly, the required disclaimer is that I have some things in common with Bonnin. My mother was non-Indian and my father was Lumbee making me bi-cultural. Like Gertrude, education has always been absolutely the most important thing in my family and among. As well, like Bonnin, I have walked the walk between cultures. The story of my people is a story of colonization continually in process because the federal acknowledgement process forces tribal governments seeking recognition to conform to colonized definitions of Indian identity, tribal governance, and tribal structure. My tribal council has literally rewritten our history to strengthen the chances of gaining recognition. Malinda Maynor Lowery (Lumbee) stated, "The government promotes a kind of standard narrative of Lumbee history that emerges in testimony before congressional committees."[17] The story of the Lumbee Nation is an example of colonization in process and exemplifies why it is critically important for Native historians to decolonize the narratives and rewrite Native American history.

[17] Melinda Maynor Lowery, "Telling Our Own Stories, Lumbee History and the Federal Acknowledgment Process," *American Indian Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (Fall 2009): 511.

Chapter 1

Decolonizing the Historiography of Helen Hunt Jackson and Gertrude Simmons Bonnin

The Victorian Age (1837-1901) and the Era of Assimilation (1887-1943) converged and fueled a revolution culminating in securing voting rights for women in 1920 and citizenship for American Indians in 1924. At the crossroads of these two distinct eras in American history stood the women whose voices were barely heard above the bravado of the politicians in Washington DC. A review of the reform activities of Helen Hunt Jackson and Gertrude Simmons Bonnin (Yankton Nakota) revealed the impact of their work for Native American sovereignty and land rights. Bonnin wrote prolifically, frequently gave public speeches, and co-founded one of the first organizations to lobby Washington for Native American rights, the National Council of American Indians. Jackson became a poet, a mother, a widow, an author, an activist, and an Indian agent for the Native people in California. Her legacy lived in the popularity of her romance novel *Ramona*, but her outspoken fight for treaty rights and tribal sovereignty was never acclaimed. Jackson conducted exhaustive research into primary source documents such as treaties, maps, and surveys as she prepared to write her groundbreaking book *A Century of Dishonor*, a historical account of the atrocities committed against Native American tribes by the United States government.

One way to decolonize the histories of Helen Hunt Jackson and Gertrude Simmons Bonnin is to rewrite the history of their work as activists for Native American rights to encourage debate among Indigenous historians. Historically, Bonnin was known for her oratorical recitations of the popular poem, “Hiawatha” and Jackson was remembered for her romance novel *Ramona.* Native historians can contribute to the decolonization process by rewriting the histories of the women reformers that had an impact on government policies affecting Native Americans

at the turn of the twentieth century. The following historiography has been arranged chronologically illustrating changes in interpretation over time.

Decolonization

Decolonization is one of four concepts of the Indigenous paradigm as discussed by Susan Miller (Seminole). The Indigenous paradigm is the framework for researching or writing about Indigenous historical events and people.[18] The Indigenous paradigm and it's components developed during the activism of the 1960s and 1970s inspired by notable Native American scholars such as Vine Deloria, Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux) and Clyde Warrior (Ponca).[19] Miller stated, "The paradigm has grown with time, gaining detail and clarity and it's representation within historiography reflects that development."[20] Frequently, if talk of decolonization enters into a discussion with non-Natives, they invariably assume it means Indigenous people wish to live as their ancestors did before colonization.[21] Unfortunately, that assumption depicts the thinking of a colonized mind and continues to relegate Native Americans to the past as relics. Miller stated, "It [decolonization] is a movement to rid the tribes of colonized relations with nation-states and the destructive effects of those relations."[22] In other words, to decolonize is to reclaim Indigenous languages, cultural practices, ceremonies, oral traditions, and history.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the pervasive view of Native American women came from the chronicles of "heroines" like Pocahontas and Sacagawea. During the 1960s and 1970s women and Native American scholars began publishing their work adding to the historiography of women's history and Native American history. Rayna Green's 1975 article on the image of

[18] Miller, "Native America Writes Back," 10.
[19] Susan A. Miller, "Native Historians Write Back, The Indigenous Paradigm in American Indian Historiography," *Wicazo Sa Review* 24, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 26.
[20] Ibid., 27.
[21] Ibid., 34.
[22] Ibid.

Native American women in American culture stated that images like Pocahontas became a "model for the national understanding of Indian women."[23] She described the model of Native women as, "exotic, powerful, dangerous, and beautiful—and as a representative of American liberty and European classical virtue translated into New World terms."[24] Over two decades later, in 1996, Devon Mihesuah (Choctaw) published *American Indians Stereotypes & Realities* to dispel American Indian stereotypes. She blamed television, movies and literature, and non-Indian Americans for perpetuating the use of such images. Regarding Native women Mihesuah claimed Indian women were perceived in one of "two contradictory ways: 1) they are ugly, dirty, subservient, abused "squaws" who love to torture white men; or 2) they are beautiful exotic "Princesses," often Chiefs daughters, usually willing to leave their people to marry dashing Europeans."[25] Essentially, coming from the colonized mind these pervasive images continue to relegate Native Americans and Native American culture to the past. Today, Native Nations challenge sports alliances such as the Kansas City Chiefs (NFL), Washington Redskins (NFL), and Golden State Warriors (NBA) to stop using racially based mascots mimicking America's first inhabitants. Mihesuah's discussion of the media in the perpetration of such images is compelling. "It will take years of cinema to mitigate the influence of the stereotypes that Hollywood has created for profit."[26] Lobbying Congress to prevent the use of racially based images of Native Americans is a decolonizing activity similar to repatriation efforts. Decolonization efforts should not be defined as an academic effort only. Lobbying for the removal of race-based mascots, language revitalization, building Native American schools, developing culture retention programs, and rewriting history are all decolonizing enterprises.

[23] Rayna Green, "The Pocahontas Perplex: The Image of Indian Women in American Culture," *The Massachusetts Review* 16, no. 4 (Autumn 1975): 701.
[24] Ibid., 703.
[25] Devon Mihesuah, *American Indian Stereotypes and Realities* (Atlanta: Clarity Press, Inc., 1996), 64.
[26] Mihesuah, *American Indian Stereotypes*, 14.

Any endeavor to add to Native American intellectual discourse must include Robert Warrior's (Osage) *Tribal Secrets* (1995). Warrior's focus was primarily concerned with Native intellectual pursuits in literature and critical studies. One question he posed seemed pertinent to explaining decolonization. He questioned, "How much responsibility do Native intellectuals of today have for addressing such issues as economic and social class, gender, and sexual orientation within Indian life, issues that have been for the most part overshadowed by academic and popular fascination with Native Americans?"[27] How will the efforts of decolonizing the historical past contribute to the future of Native intellectual traditions? It will recapture the history of Native nations post-contact and place it into a context suitable for Native American scholarly debate. A successful future for Native nations requires building upon histories pertinent to Native culture. Mihesuah asked, "Where are the Indian voices? Where are Indian views of history?"[28] "Decolonizing the Histories of Helen Hunt Jackson and Gertrude Simmons Bonnin," presents one more Indian voice that contributes to reclaiming Native American history.

In *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Maori) provided a framework for field research among Indigenous people that incorporated the basic principles of decolonization. Smith wrote specifically about the Maori people of New Zealand and Native American scholars incorporate her work because colonized thought is not a uniquely American phenomenon. Susan Miller stated the historiographies of New Zealand and Canada "are more developed…and show less colonial influence."[29] Smith's work contributed critical understanding about decolonization and it's place in any Indigenous discourse. Two scholars used in this monograph, Devon Mihesuah and Susan Miller, utilized Smith's work in their discussion of

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[27] Warrior, *Tribal Secrets*, xiii.

[28] Devon Mihesuah, ed., *Natives and Academics, Researching and Writing about American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 1.

[29] Susan A Miller and James Riding In, ed., *Native Historians Write Back: Decolonizing American Indian History* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2011), 4.

decolonizing history. Smith argued for, “the restoration to [Indigenous] women of what are seen as their traditional roles, rights, and responsibilities.”[30] In *Indigenous American Women, Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism* (2003), Mihesuah wrote,

> In our AIS (American Indian Studies) program, it is crucial to include discussions about the strength and power of Native women in tribal traditions. It is not a maneuver to subsume men; rather, students must be taught that colonialism and patriarchal thought affected—and still affect—Indigenous women.[31]

She maintained that a reinstatement of Native women’s roles in the power structures of Native nations would be a step towards decolonization.

In 2004, there were few examples of the practical use of decolonization as a scholarly tool. It seemed as if everyone talked about decolonization but few had practiced using it. Maureen Konkle, however, joined Robert Warrior regarding Native intellectualism when she argued the work of Native scholars “define a Native intellectual life that reconciles past with present and envisions a future for Native peoples.”[32] Konkle focused primarily on the politics affecting Native intellectualism in the early nineteenth century and utilized a number of Native scholars in her bibliography. In 2004, *Waziyatawin* (Angela Wilson, Dakota) published, “Decolonizing the 1862 Death Marches,” which may be the first practical example of how to decolonize a historical event. The article rewrote the narrative of the forced relocation of the Dakota people to the reservation set aside for them. It is an excellent example of how to write decolonized history. She explained the difference in perspectives regarding the colonized version of the removal of the Dakota people and her decolonized version.

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[30] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies, Research and Indigenous Peoples* (New York: Zed Books Ltd, 1999), 152.
[31] Devon Abbott Mihesuah, *Indigenous American Women, Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 34.
[32] Maureen Konkle, *Writing Indian Nations, Native Intellectuals and the Politics of Historiography, 1827-1863* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 40.

> When examined within the framework of colonization, the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 is just one point on a continuum that carries through to the present day, but it also provides a possibility of change for the future. At the most basic level it challenges the narrative that seeks to justify policies of invasion, forced removal, and genocide. In doing so the narrative shifts from one of white innocence and Dakota guilt to one of white oppression and Dakota subjugation.[33]

Waziyatawin's work stands as a testament to the perils of speaking up for Native American histories and traditions. In 2008, *Waziyatawin* organized a campaign to tell the people of Minnesota the truth "about the genocide, ethnic cleansing, and land theft that paved the way for non-Indigenous occupation of our lands."[34] The FBI arrested Wilson and others in response to a complaint by one individual claiming she issued terrorist threats. Her website, http://waziyatawin.net/, posted a press release dated August 15, 2008 stating the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) dropped "charges stemming from a protest at the [Minnesota] State Capitol on May 18, 2008 during the State's kick-off to their Sesquicentennial Celebration."[35] As such, this suggests that Native nations need to continue to assert their sovereignty, Native intellectuals need to continue to write resistance, and Native people need to continue to decolonize their history.

In 2011, Susan Miller and James Riding In (Pawnee) published *Native Historians Write Back, Decolonizing American Indian History*, an anthology by Native American scholars on colonial thought, Indigenous historiography, and decolonization. The editors discussed the global framework of Indigenousness and the shared characteristics among all colonized nations. Indigenousness defined, according to Miller, is a "pattern of characteristics shared by polities

[33] Waziyatawin Angela Cavender Wilson, "Decolonizing the 1862 Death Marches," *American Indian Quarterly* 28, no. 1&2 (Winter/Spring 2004): 185.
[34] "Charges Dropped Against U of Victoria, Canada Research Chair," Press release dated August 15, 2008, St.Paul, Minnesota, Waziyatawin Angela Wilson, http://waziyatawin.net/commentary/?p=55 (accessed 03/01/2013).
[35] Ibid.

that have not adopted the nation-state type of organization."[36] Indigenous methodology (different from Indigenous paradigm) "privileges traditional tribal historical narratives and upholds Indigenous life ways over those of nation-states. It also privileges and upholds works by other Indigenous scholars, relegating non-Indigenous works to a secondary status."[37] Miller defined the four central concepts of Indigenous paradigm as Indigenousness, sovereignty, colonization, and decolonization.[38] She stated, "Decolonizing projects include both the recovery of lapsed Indigenous practices and the utilization of non-Indigenous practices for Indigenous purposes."[39] Decolonizing history then, is utilizing the tools of the academic historian to decolonize pertinent historical narratives for tribal nations. This project utilized the concept of decolonization.

Recent scholarship in 2012 includes Florencia Mallon (Choctaw) who echoed the sentiments of Miller and Riding In when she stated, "Decolonization, therefore, involves the questioning of the racial and evolutionary bases of colonial power, and how these have tended to underlie the construction of knowledge."[40] Also in 2012, Michael Witgen (Red Cliff Ojibwe) published an article in *The Western History Quarterly* where he argued the concept of a Native New World. Regarding western history, he stated, "Rather than focusing on the ways in which empire shaped early post contact history, we ought to tell a story that reflects the historical experience of the majority of the continent's peoples."[41] Witgen called this "the reconceptualization of the field" and has Native Americans as the focal point making his

[36] Miller and Riding In, *Native Historians Write Back*, 4.
[37] Ibid., 3. Indigenous methodologies governs researching and writing about Indigenous people. The Indigenous paradigm provides the framework within which the methodologies can be applied.
[38] Miller, "Native America Writes Back," 10.
[39] Ibid., 15.
[40] Florencia E. Mallon, ed., *Decolonizing Native Histories, Collaboration, Knowledge, and Language in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 2.
[41] Michael Witgen, "The Native New World and Western North America," *The Western Historical Quarterly* XLIII, no. 3 (Autumn, 2012): 293.

argument decolonizing.[42] Witgen summarized that the effects of such efforts would "ground the history of the west within the story of the emergence and evolution of a Native New World [and] makes the history of Indigenous peoples central to the history of North America. It also underscores the significance of settler colonialism to the history of the United States."[43] Witgen explained that most of the North American Native people were never conquered or assimilated but instead forged a "Native New World" in the American West based on trade because the settler colonies in the east depended on trade goods from the western interior. He argued that reconceptualizing history with Native Americans as the focal point "will require historians to more deeply engage Native history and Native historical subjects."[44] As such, he stated this would require producing historical analyses that "privileges Indigenous language, social constructions, spatial concepts and cultural logics."[45] So, Witgen's reconceptualizing (decolonizing) of western history parroted the principles of Miller's decolonization by putting Native people at the center of the narrative, using Indigenous languages, and privileging Indigenous social structures thus conforming to the framework of Indigenous methodologies described above. Witgen's proposal creates a new narrative with a new perspective and is similar to (if not identical) to the goal of this thesis.

Helen Hunt Jackson

Preceding Ruth Odell's biography, Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson published an article in 1885 with a short biography and nine of the last poems written by Helen Jackson (H.H.). Higginson was a friend, mentor, and editor for Helen throughout her adult life. He described her as, "The most brilliant, impetuous, and thoroughly individual woman of her

[42] Ibid., 292.
[43] Ibid., 299.
[44] Ibid., 293.
[45] Ibid.

time."[46] Ruth Odell wrote the first biography of Helen Hunt Jackson and published it in 1939. It does not appear that many Native scholars have critically analyzed her work. She is conspicuously absent from Native American discourse. Most existing scholarship on Jackson comes from literary academics who critically analyzed her poetry and prose. Some scholars mention her work as an activist but few see it as her primary contribution to academia. Decolonizing Helen's story consisted of presenting the narrative for use in debating how to perceive and use histories of non-Indigenous people whose work supported tribal sovereignty and self-determination. She was a very successful poet and published in many periodicals of the era. However, once she set her pen to the search of justice for Ponca Chief Standing Bear and his people, her focus shifted from writing for an income to writing for justice. Helen was only an activist the last six years of her life but the work she accomplished in those six years almost equaled that of what Gertrude Bonnin accomplished in a lifetime. Recanting Native American historical events at the turn of the twentieth century without including Jackson's work leaves an important historical figure in the shadows.

Several scholars have analyzed Jackson's work as an activist for Native American rights. In 1995, Valerie Sherer Mathes published a foreword to a reprint of Jackson's *A Century* and stated, "May today's reader receive it as Helen Hunt Jackson would have wanted, with caring, with sensitivity, and with the determinations that *A Century of Dishonor* will eventually give way to tolerance, understanding, and mutual respect."[47] Mathes wrote a narrative with the first comprehensive look at the reform work of Jackson. She meticulously gathered letters written by Jackson, organized them, and published them in her book, *The Indian Reform Letters of Helen Hunt Jackson 1879-1885* in 1998. One of her resources for biographical data was Ruth Odell's

[46] Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Mrs. Helen Jackson ("H.H.")," *The Century* 31, no. 2 (December 1885): 255.
[47] Valerie Sherer Mathes, foreword to *A Century of Dishonor: A Sketch of the United States Government's Dealings with Some of the Indian Tribes*, by Helen Hunt Jackson (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), xvii.

biography. However, the primary focus of the book was the original correspondences of Jackson. The letters give the reader a direct look into Jackson's fiery campaign for justice for Native nations. Evidenced within her correspondence, Helen did not promote assimilation or involuntary allotment.[48] Her research for *A Century* included primary source documents such as survey maps and treaties. In 1998, Moira Davison Reynolds published *Nine American Women of the Nineteenth Century* including Helen's work with such notables as Harriet Beecher Stowe, Louisa May Alcott, and Clara Burton. Reynolds described Helen's entrance into activism, "Her enthusiasm kindled by the Ponca Delegation, Helen put all her energy into working on behalf of the Indians. Sometimes she used the public press; sometimes she depended on private letters to ministers, Army officials, college presidents, legislatures, and the like."[49] Reynolds described a woman committed to exposing the suffering of Native people under the care of the U.S. government.

Catherine Hales Phillips and Siobhan Senier also analyzed Jackson's activism efforts. In her 1997 dissertation, Phillips argued that Jackson's activism was "not an aberration but entirely in line with her family background."[50] The literary career of Jackson was the central theme of her analysis. Phillips described *Ramona* as a tale of misery as compared to the typical description of it as a romance novel. She stated, "Jackson offers an almost unmitigated denunciation of the United States presence in California." [51] This is a strong statement about Jackson's position about Native American dispossession and land claims. Siobhan Senier analyzed the activist work of three women during the Era of Assimilation, Helen Hunt Jackson, Sarah Winnemucca, and

[48] Valerie Sherer Mathes, ed., *The Indian Reform Letters of Helen Hunt Jackson, 1879-1885 (*Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 5.
[49] Moira Davison Reynolds, *Nine American Women of the Nineteenth Century, Leaders into the Twentieth* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1988), 106.
[50] Catherine Hale Phillips, "Helen (Hunt) Jackson and Her Literary Career" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1997), 2.
[51] Ibid., 12.

Victoria Howard. She stated, “Jackson, not herself an American Indian, could nevertheless point radically to the legitimacy of Indigenous traditions and sovereignty.”[52] Senier argued that the resistance by these women was masked to comply with the expectations of their primarily non-Indian audience. Her analysis presented evidence that Jackson’s writings including *Ramona* “are sometimes ambivalent about and even openly critical of allotment and assimilation.”[53] These scholars demonstrated Jackson supported Native American nations in their battle to retain sovereignty and land holdings. The encroachment of non-Indian settlers onto Indian lands was a pervasive problem when Helen began her reform work. Jackson’s work highlighted settler encroachment and held the media responsible for stereotypically portraying Native people as the perpetrators of crimes against non-Indians.

Gertrude Simmons Bonnin aka *Zitkala-Ša*

Zitkala-Ša is probably one of America’s best-known Native American authors of the era. Similar to Jackson, the majority of the scholarship available came from literary scholars and not historians. Her popular publications were *Old Indian Legends* (1901) and *American Indian Stories* (1921). Native American history kept her story in the shadows under the label of pro-assimilation. American history relegated her to the realms of the “Indian Princess” myth. Yet, most of her life was spent fighting for tribal sovereignty and treaty rights. Ruth Spack has written several articles analyzing *Zitkala-Ša’s* writings and described them as the type of resistance writing Native American women produced during the era. One article discussed Gertrude’s decision to give herself a Lakota name. Spack stated, “she has replaced the narrow monocultural Euro-American lens with a more inclusive bicultural lens though which they can now view the

[52] Siobhan Senier, *Voices of American Indian Assimilation and Resistance: Helen Hunt Jackson, Sarah Winnemucca, and Victoria Howard* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), xi.
[53] Ibid., 36.

life an American Indian woman."[54] Spack declared part of Bonnin's resistance was in the use of the English language. "Using the language of the oppressor, she recovers the world the oppressor sought to destroy."[55] Thus, Gertrude used the English language as a tool of resistance to the dominating culture.

P. Jane Hafen (Taos Pueblo), a native literary scholar, produced some of the best scholarship on Gertrude Simmons Bonnin. Her contribution on Bonnin in Theda Perdue's *Sifters* (2001) focused entirely on Bonnin's activism. Hafen wrote, "She used the skills she had learned in the non-Indian world to fight for Indian rights, a commitment that stemmed from her memories of those long ago days on the plains. She remained, as she always signed her letters, "yours for the Indian cause."[56] Hafen came to engage with Bonnin's story when she was working on her master's thesis in the 1980s. Of Bonnin's *The Sun Dance Opera* (1913), she declared, "I was puzzled that a Sioux woman would be caught up in what appeared to be a parody of sacred ritual."[57] In 1993, the author received a Francis C. Allen Fellowship and chose to pursue the story of "the enigma of Zitkala Ša."[58] Hafen recanted the unusual circumstances under which she found unknown manuscripts of Bonnin in collections at Brigham Young University. The result of that project was the book *Dreams and Thunder* published in 2001. The introduction provided a comprehensive source for biographical information on Gertrude. Hafen provided an in depth look at Bonnin the activist and removed the mystery surrounding the history of Gertrude using letters, papers, and manuscripts to paint a complete picture without the Indian Princess handicap. Hafen summarized Bonnin's life,

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[54] Ruth Spack, "Re-visioning Sioux Women: Zitkala-Sa's Revolutionary American Indian Stories," *Legacy* 14, no. 1 (April 1997): 27.
[55] Ibid., 28.
[56] P. Jane Hafen, "Gertrude Simmons Bonnin, For the Indian Cause," in *Sifters, Native American Women's Lives*, ed. Theda Purdue (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 139.
[57] Zitkala-Ša, *Dreams and Thunder*, ix.
[58] Ibid.

> Like Charles Eastman and Luther Standing Bear, but with a female voice, she recorded her transition from a traditional culture through the Indian boarding school to a world of modernity. She utilized the education that alienated her from her roots to empower Native Americans politically.[59]

Hafen's work resurrected the history of Bonnin's life shedding new light on her activism for Native American rights. In 2005 another scholar, Cari Carpenter published an article investigating Bonnin's struggle with Native identity. Bonnin wrestled with identity issues most of her life. She was only half Native American but there is no evidence she was self-conscious about her light complexion and hair. Non-Indian culture viewed her no differently than any other Indian. Stuck between two cultures, Bonnin chose to pursue an education and suffered rejection from her family and tribe. Carpenter stated, "At a time when what it meant to be Indian was being redefined, this often meant making difficult decisions about how to represent herself to a wide—often non-Indian—audience."[60] Indian identity continues to be an issue today and as such, Carpenter's analysis was a timely addition to the discourse on Bonnin. Reviewing the historiography of Helen Hunt Jackson and Gertrude Simmons Bonnin found their stories residing mainly in the literary field. Decolonizing the historiography of this project privileged the use of Native scholarship when available and focused on the work both women did for Native American sovereignty and treaty rights.

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[59] Ibid., xxiv.
[60] Cari M.Carpenter, "Detecting Indianness: Gertrude Bonnin's Investigation of Native American Identity," *Wicazo Sa Review* 20, no. 1 (Spring, 2005): 140.

Chapter 2

A Biographical Review of Helen Hunt Jackson, 1830-1879

This chapter covers Helen Hunt Jackson's life up to 1875 when she married William Sharpless Jackson. The intent is to provide a look at the development of a young girl who would become a formidable activist for Native American rights. How do you decolonize the history of Helen Hunt Jackson? Decolonizing her story consisted of presenting the narrative for use in debating how to perceive and use histories of non-Indigenous people whose work supported tribal sovereignty and self-determination. Helen's parents prioritized her education and as such, she became a well-educated person and a skilled researcher. The events leading to Jackson's involvement in social reform seem almost fateful when reviewing the whole of her life. What made her change from mother and homemaker to a formidable activist for Indigenous rights? Why is she conspicuously missing from Native American historical discourse? Ruth Odell published the first biography of Helen Hunt Jackson in 1939. In the foreword to the book, Ruth explained Helen was intensely private and averse to publicity and had instructed her estate to allow only Mr. Hamilton W. Mabie to write her biography. Unfortunately, Mr. Mabie never wrote the life story of Jackson. Kate Phillips reported that when death was imminent, Helen instructed her associates in San Francisco and New York to clear out her desks and burn all that was there. She had also instructed her husband to destroy "every scrap of writing" found in her home in Colorado.[61] The *Burlington Weekly Free Press* reported, "There is no literary woman of the age of whom so little has been written."[62] Feeling history was lacking the story of "one of the best-known writers of her era," Ruth Odell embarked on writing and publishing the biography of

[61] Kate Phillips, *Helen Hunt Jackson: A Literary Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 5.
[62] *Burlington Weekly Free Press,* "Helen Hunt Jackson (Boston Travelier)," August 28, 1885, 10.

Helen Hunt Jackson.[63] Fortunately, she located extended family members who provided her with original materials, allowing her to write and publish the first biography of Jackson's life history. Hence, Odell used personal correspondence, a plethora of published poetry and prose, newspaper articles, and other primary sources to compile Jackson's biography. Her book combined with Valerie Sherer Mathes' book containing reprints of hundreds of letters written by Jackson concerning her activist work for Native Americans provided a well-rounded in depth look at the life of Helen Hunt Jackson.

Looking at Helen's family background presented a picture of the characteristics that turned a young woman into a fierce crusader. In 1642, Nathan Fiske, landed as an immigrant on the shores of North America at Watertown, Massachusetts. "Tradition has it that Nathan sought the shores of America for the sake of religious freedom and certain it is that a large number of his descendants were ministers."[64] Odell was unclear as to whether this was Helen's great or great-great grandfather. He was obviously independent minded and adventurous to endeavor such a hazardous journey. Captain Nathan Fiske, Helen's grandfather, fought in the Revolutionary War and after it ended, he retired to a farm in Weston, Massachusetts and fathered five children. Born April 17, 1798, Helen's father, Nathan Welby Fiske was the fourth child of Captain Nathan Fiske.[65] Young Nathan Welby loved books and studied Latin, geography, and arithmetic during winter months. At other times, when his father required him to work on the family farm, he found empty moments useful for studying. At the age of 15, a cousin convinced Captain Fiske to allow his son Nathan to enroll in classes at Dartmouth College.[66] Nathan Fiske continued his education with the ultimate goal of attending the Andover Theological Seminary,

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[63] Phillips, *Helen Hunt Jackson*, vii.
[64] Odell, *Helen Hunt Jackson*, 4.
[65] Ibid., 5.
[66] Ibid., 4-5.

an institution considered the stronghold of orthodox Calvinism since the great Theological Schism. The Fiske men were pious and possessed a strong faith. Young Nathan proved to be no exception. “By 1820, he was ready to enter [the seminary], and three years later he graduated with Phi Beta Kappa honors and was ordained at the Tabernacle Church in Salem.”[67] He began doing missionary work in Savannah, Georgia, but his love of books and his introverted nature prompted him to seek employment in academics.”[68] Receiving several offers to teach, he accepted the offer of a professorship from Amherst Collegiate. Helen benefited greatly from her father’s passion for education and inherited the Fiske characteristics of persistence and determination.

Helen’s mother, Deborah Waterman Vinal, was born on December 13, 1806. She was the only child of David Vinal and Deborah Waterman. “Like the Fiskes, the Vinals and Watermans—much intermarried—figured largely in early New England affairs.”[69] Deborah was only two years old when her mother died. As such, David felt it best for his daughter if she lived in the homes of several different Aunts. Moving from house to house until she was fourteen, Deborah moved in with her Uncle Otis Vinal and his wife and stayed with them until she married. At the age of seventeen, she enrolled in Reverend Mr. Joseph Emerson’s finishing school. Miss Grant, one of her teachers, so impressed the young student that she moved to New Hampshire when the teacher accepted a position at Adams Female Academy located in New Londonderry. Odell reported Deborah’s favorite subject was composition, and later, she encouraged her daughter Helen to love writing also. Helen’s mother completed her coursework and moved back to Boston to work in Aunt Vinal’s Park Street Church where she was inspired to dedicate herself to a religious life. Ruth stated, “Before long she met a serious minded young

[67] Ibid., 7.
[68] Phillips, *Helen Hunt Jackson*, 45.
[69] Odell, *Helen Hunt Jackson,* 7.

theologian turned professor, whose fierce piety exceeded her own, if possible, and who asked her to be his wife."[70] Nathan Welby Fiske married Deborah in November 1828.[71] Helen's parents clearly respected religion as much as education and both would shape the mental and moral character of their eldest daughter.

Soon Deborah Fiske became pregnant and the young couple began looking for lodging more suitable for a young family. Tragically, this child, a son, only lived a couple of weeks. Approximately one year later, their second child, Helen Maria was born on October 15, 1830. Helen's biographer wrote, "Helen Maria early developed a will of her own."[72] The child's willfulness proved to be a challenge for her mother. Odell described Helen as one who pulled hair, snatched eyeglasses, and laughed boisterously during chapel services frequently exasperating her mother. Once she learned to talk, "Her favorite answer to all questions was one she had overheard her father make: 'It's all nonsense.'"[73] As a young child, Helen was independent and stubborn. Even though these characteristics challenged her mother's patience, they served her well in adulthood when dealing with the U.S. government.

Nathan and Deborah were devout Calvanists and passionate about education. As such, Helen's love of reading and composition developed early. Deborah attempted to instruct Helen at home but found it to be a difficult task to keep up with her young daughter. Thus, in the spring of 1835, five-year-old Helen toddled off with her cousin Martha to attend classes at Miss Hannah White's school. Soon though, Cousin Martha moved back to Boston and a letter from Helen revealed that her mother was to teach her once again.[74] The Fiske home often doubled as a small boarding house for students and extended family who attended Amherst College. Running a

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[70] Ibid., 8-10.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid., 12.
[73] Ibid., 12-3.
[74] Ibid., 15-7.

boarding house and teaching Helen kept her mother very busy. On December 25, Deborah gave birth to Helen's only sibling, Ann Scholfield Fiske.[75] Ruth Odell described Ann as a sweet and shy girl who hardly ever gave her parents any hardship so she was the quintessential opposite of Helen. Helen Maria's love of books was illustrated by a handwritten list dated July 1839 and titled "Catalogue of Books belonging to Helen Maria Fiske's Library, July 1839." Some of the titles on the list were *The Pastor's Daughter*, *The Child's Books of Repentance*, *A Child's Scripture Question Book*, two volumes, and *Scripture Animals*.[76] These books were not entirely unexpected considering her parents were devout orthodox Calvinists. However, it was still an impressive collection for a nine-year-old child.[77]

Helen attended several private schools, Miss White's, Miss Baker's and Miss Nelson's, but also received instruction from her mother in composition, reading, and spelling while her father instructed her in foreign languages, especially Latin.[78] Education of their daughters was of the utmost concern to both Nathan and Deborah. However, the health of Helen's mother declined over the next few years and she frequently succumbed to periods of exhaustion confining her to bed. When she was no longer able to continue teaching at home, her daughter Ann began going to school with Helen at Miss Nelson's next door. Occasionally, Deborah traveled to Boston for family visits and in fall of 1841 while there, she arranged for Helen go to a school in Hadley. Ann stayed with her parents and continued to go to school at Miss Nelson's place. [79] In Hadley, Helen enrolled with Miss Austin, "whose lack of sectarian bias won out over the Baptist Seminary, where students were strongly under the Baptist influence."[80] Helen adapted to the new

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[75] Ibid., 20.
[76] Ibid., 22.
[77] Phillips, *Helen Hunt Jackson*, 11.
[78] Ibid., 50.
[79] Odell, *Helen Hunt Jackson*, 27.
[80] Ibid.

school quickly. She made new friends and spent her afternoons knitting or visiting local places such as Harvard Yard, Mt. Auburn Cemetery, and an Indian camp located behind Medford Hill.[81] Paradoxically, decades later, Helen embarked on her campaign for Native American rights after hearing the Ponca Chief Standing Bear speak in Boston.

In summer of 1843, Helen enrolled in another school located in Pittsfield following her mother's instructions. Within a year, on February 19, 1844 Deborah succumbed to tuberculosis and died. The oldest Fiske daughter was only thirteen when she lost her mother.[82] Failing health took Nathan Welby Fiske a few years later. He taught his last class on September 26, 1846, after twenty-six year tenure at Amherst. Shortly thereafter, Nathan travelled to Beirut hoping to regain his health. Unfortunately, on May 16, 1847, a severe case of dysentery ended his life.[83] Before Nathan's death, he had originally decided Helen would attend the new woman's college at Mount Holyoke. However, in the summer of 1846 he reconsidered and enrolled her in the Ipswich Female Seminary.[84] Odell remarked, "Her talents were pronounced, she did well at school, and it had been the earnest wish of her mother that she receive a good education."[85] Helen lived with her Aunt Hooker while attending day classes at the seminary. The curriculum for seniors, as reported by Ruth Odell, consisted of courses in philosophy, logic, analogy, psychology, astronomy, and Kame's *Elements of Criticism* in three volumes.[86] A letter dated February 1, 1847 from Helen to a cousin revealed her opinion about Ipswich. The school, she said, "was the worst of all places in the world." [87]Odell provided an excerpt from the letter, "Nothing happens here from morning till night, from one weekend to the other; nobody dies,

[81] Ibid., 28.
[82] Phillips, *Helen Hunt Jackson*, 14.
[83] Odell, *Helen Hunt Jackson*, 34.
[84] Phillips, *Helen Hunt Jackson*, 54.
[85] Odell, *Helen Hunt Jackson*, 35.
[86] Ibid., 36.
[87] Ibid.

nobody gets married, nobody comes, nobody goes, nobody does anything as far as I have been able to judge."[88] Only seventeen years old, the young scholar possessed a character unlike most young women of her era. In her letter, she complained that Ipswich paraded the girls up and down the streets "with nothing better to do than learn to flirt with male students."[89] Helen's parents provided the best education for their daughters, and as such, their eldest child came to expect nothing less than excellence from her educators. Clearly, Ipswich was not meeting her expectations. Happily, in 1849, Helen moved to New York City into the home of a close family friend, Mr. John Abbott. The move suited Helen well as evidenced in a letter to her sister encouraging Ann to come to New York City.[90] By the age of nineteen, Helen Maria Fiske had been in several boarding schools and both of her parents had passed away.

In the summer of 1851, Lieutenant Edward Bissell Hunt, Helen's future husband, arrived in New York to present a paper at the sixth annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science held in New York that year.[91] The Hunt family claimed a well-known position in social circles because Edward's brother held the propitious title of Governor of the state of New York. Odell stated the Hunts belonged to the "Northampton Massachusetts branch of the Hunts, a family of good yeoman English stock."[92] Edward was born the youngest of ten children on June 15, 1822. He graduated near the top of his class from West Point in 1845 then spent one year of engineering duty in New York. Edward returned to West Point and served as an assistant professor of engineering for the next four years. In 1849, he secured new employment as an assistant engineer on the construction of Fort Warren in Massachusetts. Two years later, in 1851, Edward was transferred again to Washington to work in a subdivision of the

[88] Ibid., 37.
[89] Ibid., 36.
[90] Ibid., 41.
[91] Odell, *Helen Hunt Jackson*, 46.
[92] Phillips, "Helen (Hunt) Jackson and Her Literary Career," 45.

Treasury Department called the Coast Survey. That same year, the annual Governor's Ball provided the perfect opportunity for Helen and Edward to meet.[93] Odell explained that Lt. Hunt was reticent about attending, "But the sacrifice of his inclination was not without its reward, for he met there an acknowledged belle, who was introduced to him as Miss Helen Fiske."[94] Ruth Odell described Helen as vivacious and flirtatious. [95] In the coming weeks, Lt. Hunt frequently visited Helen at Deacon Palmer's house. Edward eventually proposed and the young couple married on October 28, 1852 at Mt. Vernon Church in Boston. After the wedding, the couple left for Washington by way of Albany with a planned stay over at Edward's parents' farm home in Hunt's Hollow. They reached Washington on November 12 and took up residence at Mrs. Reed's boarding house.[96] Helen's life was the perfect picture of a prominent young newlywed couple in New England. However, a series of tragedies over the next few years changed her picture perfect world.

Moncure Daniel Conway, the minister of the First Unitarian Church, met the Hunts soon after they moved into the neighborhood. He became Helen's first literary mentor. Odell revealed that at the same time, the young bride discovered her husband was against abolition making Helen feel forced to control her penchant for controversial debate. However, Helen was an abolitionist evidenced later when she expressed hope that her novel *Ramona* would spur social change for Native Americans the same as Harriet Beecher Stowe's work *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) did for African Americans. Soon after the New Year holiday, the Hunts began looking for new housing because Helen was pregnant with their first child. Once again, Edward received orders and this time he left his pregnant wife alone in Washington. When Edward was away,

[93] Phillips, *Helen Hunt Jackson*, 74.
[94] Odell, *Helen Hunt Jackson*, 46.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid., 50.

sometimes Helen felt lonely and traveled to visit family. Phillips reported that Edward's bride delivered their first child on September 30, 1853 and named him Murray Hunt.[97] The following summer, the army stationed Edward back in New York so Helen took Murray and moved to Tarrytown, New York to be near her husband. Unfortunately, Murray died that summer due to a brain tumor. Blaming herself for the infant's death, Helen fell into a deep depression. Ruth Odell said, "Only her sister's approaching marriage was finally sufficient to dispel her almost morbid gloom."[98] In 1855, the military gave Edward orders to go to Rhode Island where he was stationed until October 1857. Helen was still struggling to cope with the death of her son when she was introduced to Mrs. Vincenzo Botta. Mrs. Botta established weekly meetings at her home specifically for the "literati" of the era. Odell stated, "all the intelligentsia were present for these 'at homes'."[99] Some of the notables present for these gatherings were Edgar Allen Poe, Longfellow, Lydia Maria Child, Francis Osgood, Margaret Fuller, and Elizabeth Oakes. Lydia Child advocated for women's rights, Native American rights, and abolition of slavery. Elizabeth Oakes and Margaret Fuller also supported the women's rights movements. These influential people and their ideas probably laid the foundation that launched Helen into the political arena as an activist for Native Americans many years later.[100]

In 1855 once again, to the Hunt's delight, Helen gave birth to a second son they named Warren Horsford Hunt (Rennie).[101] After hearing a rumor that he might be ordered to a post in Key West, Florida, Lt. Hunt felt compelled to ask his superiors to allow him to stay in New York. He knew he could not take his wife and new baby to Florida and leaving would force him to postpone work on his magnum opus, *The Alphabetical Index of the Ten Annual Coast Survey*

[97] Phillips, *Helen Hunt Jackson*, 15.
[98] Odell, *Helen Hunt Jackson*, 52-53.
[99] Ibid., 54.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Phillips, *Helen Hunt Jackson*, 15.

Reports.[102] He was also afraid that his battle with dyspepsia would worsen if he moved further south. However, they denied his request and ordered him to Fort Taylor located in Key West. While working at Fort Taylor, the army sent him to several engineering projects in California and Texas.[103] Hunt's skills and expertise were extraordinary and the army took advantage of his talents utilizing his skills at locations from the East Coast to the West Coast. As such, he was away from his family for extended periods. Later that year, the Navy Department at the Brooklyn Navy Yard encouraged the Major to continue work on a design to improve the capabilities of war ships. According to Ruth Odell, on September 30, 1863, Edward met a premature death when a design flaw backfired and unvented fumes began to suffocate him causing him to fall. He died at the Brooklyn Naval Hospital shortly thereafter and was buried at West Point. The *Army and Navy Journal* reported the death of her husband in the March 19, 1864 issue. Helen responded by writing a letter to the editor correcting errors in the article. It became the first of many letters to editors written by the inimitable activist. She wrote,

> An erroneous impression has been quite general that his [Major Hunt's] death was caused by the explosion of a shell: this is an entire mistake. There was nothing in the nature of a shell in the invention. Neither was the accident the result of an irregular or unforeseen action of any part of the apparatus—nor did it in the least imply an inherent danger in the working of it.[104]

Clearly, she pointed out every error in the publication's rendition of the circumstances of the death of Major Edward Hunt.[105] In years to come, she used this same weapon, the media, in her attacks on the government's failures in dealing fairly with the Indigenous people of the United States.

Still grieving the loss of her husband, another fatality befell Helen's family. On April 13, 1865, her beloved Rennie died of malignant diphtheria while staying at the home of his aunt in

[102] Odell, *Helen Hunt Jackson*, 55.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid., 61.
[105] Ibid., 84.

West Roxbury.[106] Of course, already a widow, young Helen was devastated. Her life had just taken dramatic turn in a different direction. Still grieving, Helen found distraction by touring New England towns such as Princeton, Dorchester, Boston, and West Roxbury. Mrs. Hunt had been coping with grief for a long time and although she experienced bouts of depression, she found solace in writing travel essays. One day, she mailed a sample of her writing on the city of Bethlehem, New Hampshire to the *New York Evening Post*. Parke Godwin of the *Post* accepted her submission and printed it on October 18, 1865. Like other women, Helen first published under a pseudonym because of the patriarchal climate overshadowing the work of women writers during that era.[107] A few of the names used by the novice poet were Marah, Rip Van Winkle, Saxe Holm, and H.H. Many of her book reviews and editorials were unsigned.[108] However, Odell explained that a few years later, Helen would abandon the use of false names when "she took up cudgels in defense of the Indian in *A Century of Dishonor*."[109]

Helen's literary career had begun and over the next few years she published many poems and made many important friends in socially and academically important circles. Soon, Helen became acquainted with Colonel Thomas Higginson. The Colonel came to live in Newport in 1864 after he was discharged from the Army due to irreparable injuries he received during the Civil War. Higginson was an enlightened individual whose interests included women's suffrage and the abolition of slavery. He became chairman of the school committee in Newport and successfully abolished separate schools for "colored children." Only a stubbornly determined person could accomplish such a feat during the late nineteenth century.[110] Colonel Higginson

[106] Higginson, "Mrs. Helen Jackson," 256.
[107] Ibid., 64.
[108] Mathes, *Indian Reform Letters*, 3.
[109] Odell, *Helen Hunt Jackson*, 66.
[110] Ibid., 68-70.

frequently visited the popular boarding house run by Mrs. Dame. Odell described the boarding house,

> Every agreeable house in those days was a "centre," and Mrs. Dame's table became a very popular one, attracting numerous gifted and charming women. Such a one was Mrs. Hunt, whose arrival Colonel Higginson chronicled in his journal February 20, 1866, adding the private hope that despite her deep mourning, which bespoke a private depression, her so-far invariable high spirits might prove her an acquisition in the group.[111]

Comprised mostly of writers, the colonel's circle of friends soon welcomed Helen. Literary circles were all the rage and the one at Mrs. Dame's boarding house claimed a long list of prominent individuals such as the popular biographer James Partons, American journalist Kate Field, poet Nora Perry, and author Bret Harte. [112]

Higginson soon began editing Helen's writing. Odell reported, "She always regarded his judgment as the final word in literary criticism, and his praise of her *Mercy Philbrick's Choice* (1876), did much to soothe her feelings, wounded by some rather harsh attacks."[113] Under his tutelage, Helen learned everything she could about her craft and continued writing. Soon, her poem 'Hagar', a biblical story, was published in the *New York Independent* on August 26, 1866.[114] Her love of composition was evident simply because of the volume of material she produced. Her first poetry came from the grief of losing her husband and her child. However, as she continued to mature, other interests began to capture her attention. Popular periodicals such as the *Independent*, *Post*, and *Nation* accepted her submissions and began publishing her work. In addition to poetry and prose, she wrote children's stories for the *Galaxy* and the *Riverside*

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[111] Ibid., 70.
[112] Phillips, *Helen Hunt Jackson*, 95.
[113] Odell, *Helen Hunt Jackson*, 72.
[114] Higginson, "Mrs. Helen Jackson," 258.

Magazine for Young People.[115] Clearly, the reading public found Helen's literary work interesting enough to promote sales.

In 1872, three years after the transcontinental railroad was completed Helen toured Northern California for 2½ months with her good friend, Sarah Woolsey.[116] Kate Phillips reported that California captured Jackson's imagination and in 1872, she wrote the first of fifteen travel essays about her travels in California for publication in *New York Independent*.[117] Helen contracted an acute case of dysentery and suffered through three sieges of diphtheria in a period of seven months. Soon, her doctors felt she should move west for the sake of her health. With the help of her doctor and maid, Helen moved to Colorado where she met William Sharpless Jackson. They both resided at the same boarding house and sometimes, the couple took long drives together visiting nearby towns and enjoying the countryside. Her health began to improve in the clean Colorado air and in 1875, Helen married William and the couple made the Rocky Mountains of Colorado their new home.[118] Four years later, after becoming familiar with the Ute Nation and the problem of settlers illegally encroaching on their lands, Helen began her career as an activist.

At first glance, the above biographic synopsis of Jackson's life appears to be nothing more than the story of a prominent woman from New England whose poetry and prose earned her a handsome living. How can you decolonize this story? Linda Smith stated, "Decolonization is a process which engages with imperialism and colonialism at multiple levels."[119] In studying "Decolonizing the 1862 Death Marches," by *Waziyatawin* Angela Cavender Wilson (Dakota), it became apparent that following the ideas for producing a decolonized version of the history of an

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[115] Ibid., 76-7.
[116] Ibid., 164.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid., 107.
[119] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies* (New York: Zed Books Ltd., 1999), 20.

event was easier than trying to apply the same principles to the history of a person. Helen Hunt Jackson played a key role in Native American history at the turn of the twentieth century. Yet, she was not Indigenous. In fact, she was a direct descendant of the original colonizers. How can her history be relevant or important to Native Americans? There are no hard and fast boundaries in the history of human activity. Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Euro Americans all took part in the events of American history, from the time of the arrival of the first Europeans. As such, the decolonizing aspect of this chapter is to write her life story into the historical record for discussion among Native American historians. The early biographic data provides a backdrop for the next chapter describing her activities with the U.S. government concerning the treatment of many Indigenous Tribal Nations. Helen was different. In December 1885, the magazine *The Century*, published an article written by Colonel Higginson titled "Mrs. Helen Jackson." He wrote this article after she died recanting her intense need for privacy especially from journalists. He always held her work in high regard and believed her to be the "most brilliant, impetuous, and thoroughly individual woman of her time—one whose very temperament seemed mingled of sunshine and fire."[120] This chapter gave the reader some information about the events that shaped the character of Jackson. Compassion, persistence, and willfulness colored the character that launched an impressive campaign for the rights of Native American people chronicled in the following chapter.

[120] Higginson, "Mrs. Helen Jackson," 255.

Chapter 3

"The Problem is with the Government and People of the United States": Jackson's Years of Activism, 1879-1885

In 1879, one woman decided to expose a truth ignored by the media and a voice for Native American people resounded. Helen Hunt Jackson was a typical Victorian age woman. Educated, respected, and socially connected, this dynamic woman was well prepared to take on the exhaustive research required to confront the United States government with all the trespasses against it's Indigenous inhabitants. Westward expansion, "Indian wars," the California gold rush, and rapid industrial growth all occurred during her lifetime.[121] What made the rebellious reformer hold the U.S. responsible for creating the "Indian problem" when so many blamed Native people?[122] Did she sanction the popular idea of allotment as the final solution to the conflicts between tribes and the settlers' demand for more land? Decolonizing Jackson's reform efforts for retention of Native land rights established the importance of her work for Native nations thus making her an important person in the study of Native American history.

In November 1879 during a visit to Boston, Helen Hunt Jackson attended the Ponca Chief Standing Bear lecture about the tragic story of the sufferings of his people.[123] The *Daily* Globe reported that Chief Standing Bear attended a reception for Jackson organized by Mrs. Botta.[124] The story of the plight of the Ponca ignited a fire in Jackson that remained lit until her death in 1885. In 1879, America lost a bard and gained a champion for Native American rights. The skilled writer assumed a new task as investigator and reporter of the atrocities committed

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[121] "Indian Wars," was the term used frequently in the media. For Native Americans these wars were actually massacres perpetrated by the US military on Native American people.
[122] The term "Indian problem" was also frequently used in the media. For Native people, it was the government causing the problem by ignoring treaty provisions and promises.
[123] Odell, *Helen Hunt Jackson*, 153.
[124] *Daily Globe*, January 26, 1880, 1.

against Native Americans. Mathes reported, “Her initial writings had been driven by her outrage at the Ponca removal; by mid-December, as she learned more, she also began quoting from official documents she found in the Astor Library.”[125] Helen wrote a plethora of letters and two novels trying to make the public aware of the suffering of Native people. Brian Norman classified her novels, *A Century* and *Ramona*, as protest novels that were often dismissed in literary studies as non-literary or political. Linking *A Century* and *Ramona* together, Norman declared *Ramona* originated in *A Century of Dishonor*.[126] However, Jackson was disappointed that neither novel created enough public sentiment to stop settlers and the government from disregarding the treaty rights of Native nations. Regarding *A Century*, John Gonzales reported that it “did not generate the political momentum to pass reform measures through Congress. Jackson found that historical outrages against Indians had no impact upon indifferent politicians while the public remained uninvolved.”[127] Hence, she involved newspapers by writing letters to editors which were often published for the American public to read.

Missionaries, Christian reformers, and eastern philanthropists felt compelled to help tribal people, but these groups favored the abandonment of traditional life, and assimilation. Although a number of peers and colleagues favored integration and allotment, Helen did not agree with those sentiments. Mathes stated,

> Incensed with the mistreatment of the Indian, particularly the illegal seizure of their land, she was interested in generating pro-Indian public sentiment and forcing Congress to implement existing treaties, thereby preventing the future theft of Indian land. Jackson did not appear to be overly committed to the destruction of Indian culture and their acculturation into American society.[128]

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[125] Mathes, *The Indian Reform Letters,* 10.
[126] Brian Norman, “The Addressed and the Redressed: Helen Hunt Jackson’s Protest Essay and the US Protest Novel Tradition,” *Canadian Review of American Studies* 37, no. 1 (2007): 112.
[127] John Gonzales, “The Warp of Whiteness: Domesticity and Empire in Helen Hunt Jackson’s Ramona,” *American Literary History* 16, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 442-3.
[128] Ibid., xii.

Equipped with a higher level of education, as well as social connections to newspaper editors and congressional representatives, the pioneering woman chose to conduct an examination of treaties and survey maps, not taking the word of the press or government at face value. One exceptional aspect of her research was the relentless pursuit of official documents such as treaties, land maps, and legislation. Rejecting popular sentiment and media hype, investigation and primary source exploration added authenticity to her arguments and compelled officials to respond to her interpretation. As one moves through the six years of reform work from 1879 to 1885, it is important to keep in mind that this activist wanted the government to uphold treaty provisions and protect tribal lands from settler encroachment. Colleagues, peers, and authorities did not agree with this perspective. Her voice often stood alone amid the cacophony of many who supported allotment as a solution to the Indian problem. Her reform work began with the Ponca people as she crusaded for the return to their original reservation in South Dakota, lobbied for equality under the law, pressed for fulfillment of treaty provisions, and supported voluntary allotment.[129]

Jackson's letter writing campaign started with editors of prominent newspapers such as the *Independent* of New York, the *Hartford Courant* of Connecticut, the *New York Tribune*, and *The New York Times*.[130] Anyone researching treaties and documents of transactions between Indigenous nations and the United States soon became intimately familiar with the Secretary of the Interior, the department responsible for the well-being of Native Americans. In 1879, that man was Carl Schurz who served as secretary from 1877 to 1881. The secretary soon became a formidable nemesis as Jackson's investigation revealed he was not acting in the best interests of Native people. *The Washington Post* published "Carl Schurz's Report" on November 28, 1879

[129] Higginson, "Mrs. Helen Jackson," 256.
[130] Mathes, *The Indian Reform Letters*, 9-11.

and addressed his proposed solution to the conflicts.[131] The report began with, "The 'Indian problem' has become a grave one. It was probably a great mistake to treat with the Indians as distinct Nations."[132] In the discussion on how to "civilize" these people, Schurz claimed, "That all the Indians on this northern continent have been savages and that many of them are savages now is true."[133] Clearly, Schurz lacked respect for America's original inhabitants. Additionally, the report reflected the secretary's opinion about changing the status of Native land holdings from one of tenancy in common to one in severalty, thereby allowing them to be "like other inhabitants of the country."[134] Schurz reported, "We are frequently told that the tribal relations must be broken up, and the reservation system must be abandoned."[135] This statement reflected the common idea that private land ownership was better than tribal ownership. To Helen who lobbied for the return of land to the Ponca Nation and demanded the administration honor its promises, Schurz's proposal could be nothing more than inadequate. Eight years after Schurz's report was published, the General Allotment Act of 1887 passed into law and the impact irreversibly damaged tribal life.[136]

Researching and reconstructing federal policies concerning America's Tribal Nations was a complex task requiring hours of work. Jackson's book *A Century of Dishonor, A Sketch of the United States Government's Dealings with Some of the Indian Tribes* was published in 1881. A disclaimer in the front stated the "book gives, as its title indicates, only a sketch, and not a history" of a few small groups.[137] Confronted by a vast volume of material, *A Century* only

[131] *The Washington Post,* "Carl Schurz's Report, The Operations of the Interior Department Last Year." November 28, 1879, 1.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid., 1.
[136] *Transcript of Dawes Act (1887),* Forty-Ninth Congress of the United States of America; at the Second Session, http://www.ourdocuments.gov, 1.
[137] Jackson, *A Century of Dishonor*, author's note.

covered seven different Indigenous groups because "To write in full the history of any one of these Indian communities, of its forced migrations, wars, and miseries, would fill a volume by itself."[138] Each project required hours of research in the library compiling notes and interpreting treaty jargon. Her reform work focused on the Ponca, the Ute and the California Mission people. The Ponca battle was for the recovery of their land erroneously given to the Sioux Nation in the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. William Jackson and Helen married and moved to Colorado, where she then became familiar with the troubles of the people of the Ute Nation.[139] It started when a settler crossed boundary lines and trespassed into Ute territory. Settlers breeching federal land boundaries became the source of most conflicts between Native Americans and settlers. The Ute Nation exercised their treaty right to "punish as they see fit" and killed the settler for trespassing.[140] The United States retaliated by killing nearly 400 Ute people including women and children. Helen learned the justice system provided recourse for American citizens but Native people could not use the same court system to seek redress. Her findings proved shocking upon discovering tribes had no legal recourse for the protection of their borders.

Helen argued the federal government should be held accountable for its failure to prevent greedy ranchers from settling on Indian land. She reasoned that failure to provide adequate protection translated into failure of executive responsibilities. In 1880, *The Washington Post* published an article on Colorado Governor Pitkin's opinion of the Colorado Ute people. In the article, the governor stated, "The people of Colorado regard them as a menace; as a source of danger; as an impediment to the opening of the best lands in the state."[141] The "best lands in the state" was the argument many settlers used in many states to claim the right to tribal lands that

[138] Ibid.
[139] Odell, *Helen Hunt Jackson*, 132.
[140] Mathes, *The Indian Reform Letters*, 174-5.
[141] *The Washington Post,* "The Utes Must Go. Governor Pitkin's Opinion of the Colorado Barbarians," January 27, 1880, 1.

should have been protected from Euro-American encroachment. The conflicts then, for both the Ute and Ponca, centered on land, government promised provisions for land, and boundaries breached by white settlers. Frequently, settlers claimed that Natives crossed the boundaries effectively directing attention away from themselves. "The Indians do not abide on their reservation, but are constantly roaming off from it, plundering, and devastating."[142] Jackson's arguments centered on the retention of Native lands and probably irked both Carl Shurz and the governor of Colorado.

Jackson continued daily correspondence and inquiries to newspapers hoping she could stimulate public support for her crusade. On January 16, 1880, Helen wrote to the *Tribune* accusing the Department of the Interior of suppressing "all information in regard to the Indians, as the New York Tribune reporter telegraphs, 'it seems to be their intention to do'."[143] Jackson understood that only the sentiment of the American public could provide the necessary pressure to hold the United States government accountable. As such, her published dispatches were bold, frank, and expository. A letter to the editor of the *Tribune* written on January 31, 1880 exemplified her directness.

> In connection with the present attempt to rouse a sweeping sentiment of indignation and denunciation against the band of 4,000 well-nigh helpless Utes in Colorado, because twelve of their number have committed murder and rapes, and some 300 or 400 of them undertook to prevent the marching of United States troops into their lands, I wish to tell the American people a few of the atrocities which Colorado white men committed upon Indians only fifteen years ago.[144]

The same year, a letter to the editor of the *Tribune* dated February 22 addressed the Sand Creek massacre of 1864. Jackson sought to expose Major Anthony, the person responsible for the slaughter of innocent Cheyenne women and children. In a letter to the editor, she published the

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[142] Ibid.
[143] Mathes, *The Indian Reform Letters*, 90.
[144] Ibid.

major's own words taken from the transcript of a military hearing. In that transcript, the Major was quoted as saying, "he was in for killing all Indians, and that he had only been acting friendly with them until he could get a force large enough to go out and kill all of them."[145] Helen was the first person to use the media to create public awareness about the sufferings of Native people. As such, she forged a path that Native American reform organizations like the American Indian Movement (AIM) would use nearly 100 years later.

In addition to her daily letters to newspapers, Jackson published *A Century of Dishonor* in 1881. On January 26, 1881, The *New-York Tribune* reported that Helen Hunt Jackson's "book on the Indian question," was issued.[146] Believing strongly in her work, she mailed a copy of the book to every member in Congress hoping to put an end to the abuse suffered by Native people. In *A Century*, the Author's Note reflected her hopes for justice, "If there be one thing which they [Americans] believe in more than any other, and meant that every man on the continent shall have, it is 'fair play'. And as soon as they fairly understand how cruelly it has been denied to the Indian, they will rise up and demand it for him."[147] Jackson believed most citizens would support her campaign and demand justice for the offenses against Native people. On January 19, 1881, Helen wrote to Charles Dudley Warner (1829-1900), who was on the editorial staff of *Harper's Magazine,* and explained that she wanted him to print the facts detailed in *A Century*, such as the forced migrations from one location to another which killed many Natives and destroyed crops and homes. [148] She asked Warner to emphasize the facts evidenced in the letter but "above all—the clause in so many of those early treaties, giving them permission to 'punish as they see fit' any white settlers going on their lands." The authorities ignored this treaty right when they

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[145] Ibid., 100-1.
[146] *New-York Tribune,* "Literary Notes," January 26, 1881, 6.
[147] Jackson, *A Century of Dishonor,* author's note.
[148] Mathes, *The Indian Reform Letters*, 174-5.

retaliated against the Utes for murdering a white man.[149] Charles Warner did not honor Jackson's request. The *New York Tribune* published a review of *A Century* on February 4, 1881 calling the work one-sided. The reviewer sanctioned the actions of Congress and stated, "Furthermore, the government had been forced to choose between breaking 'unwise treaties' or 'blocking the civilization of a continent'."[150] Sadly, still driven by the doctrine of Manifest Destiny, most Americans agreed. Aware of those who would call her sentimental, this formidable woman wrote in the conclusion of *Century*, "It makes little difference, however, where one opens the record of the history of the Indians; every page and every year has its dark stain. The story of one native nation is the story of all."[151] Helen's disappointment in the failure of *A Century* was apparent when she stated, "There are hundreds of pages of unimpeachable testimony on the side of the Indian; but it goes for nothing, is set down as sentimentalism or partisanship, tossed aside, and forgotten."[152]

Jackson spent several years researching government documents and writing to newspapers. Although she was not a frail woman, she frequently suffered from allergies and upper respiratory discomfort. Eventually, doctors advised her to move to California for the winter months. While in California, the activist became involved with Native American communities in the area. In 1882, Carl Schurz resigned and the Department of the Interior selected a new Secretary and Commissioner of Indian Affairs. The Department of the Interior installed new administration and Jackson became a little more hopeful that the new management would correct the mistakes of the previous administration. Soon after the appointment of the new Secretary of the Interior, The *Sacramento Daily Record-Union* reported that the Federal

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[149] Ibid.
[150] *New-York Tribune,* "A Plea for the Indians," February 04, 1881, 6.
[151] Jackson, *A Century of Dishonor,* 337-8.
[152] Ibid.

authorities [the Interior Department] commissioned its first woman, Helen Jackson, as a special agent for the Mission Indians of California.[153] "In good spirits and with renewed health, she wasted no time in beginning her government assignment."[154] Soon, the Indigenous people who lived in a little village named Saboba, located in California's San Jacinto Valley became her new crusade. Helen wrote to William Hayes Ward on March 3, 1883 about her initial investigation. She exclaimed, "The little village of Saboba is already *ordered* to 'move'! And even I myself, cannot see what the Int. Dept. can do under the circumstances."[155] The *Daily Los Angeles Herald* printed an article that attested to Jackson's belief in land rights for Native Americans. The article reported that, "She recommends that the reservations in the Temecula and Pala country be extended to the exclusion of hard working white settlers."[156] This statement reflected racial bias of many settlers who believed that Native Americans were lazy savages. The frustrated reformist wrote to Hiram Price and discussed another village slated to suffer the same doom as Saboba. "I trust that there is yet time to save this village from a fate similar to that which has overtaken the village of Saboba."[157] The end of the letter revealed a measure of uncharacteristic hopelessness and declared "the Department [Interior] is powerless to interfere, – the land having been patented."[158] Helen quickly learned that the bureaucratic structure of the U.S. government made reversing the direction of any decision almost impossible.

A Century was a dismal failure and so, Helen decided to write a fictional romance novel embedded with facts concerning the conditions of the Mission Indians of California. The Indian agent published the story of *Ramona* in 1884 hoping readers would become sympathetic toward

[153] *Sacramento Daily Record-Union,* "A Graceful Act," March 26, 1883, 1.
[154] Valerie Sherer Mathes, *Helen Hunt Jackson and Her Indian Reform Legacy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 55.
[155] Ibid., 246.
[156] *Daily Los Angeles Herald,* "Another Peculiar Opinion," May 23, 1883, 1.
[157] Ibid., 247.
[158] Ibid.

the struggles of the Native Americans in California. John Havard argued that Jackson employed "the tropes of sentimentalism and interracial romance to criticize the ideology that defended the mistreatment of Native Americans."[159] "*Ramona* is now cherished as one of the tender romances of America and the world. It has become the treasured tradition of the American people."[160] Based partially on a true story, the novel was so popular it generated three movies and one stage play. Mathes stated many reviewers praised the book as "one of the most artistic creations of American literature."[161] Other reviews were not so kind; the *N.Y. Eve. Telegram* directly stated it was "dull reading" and claimed few individuals would admit they did not like the book. [162] Helen lamented to her old friend Charles Warner, "but nobody except you & the N.W. Tribune critic has seemed to care a straw for the Indian history in it."[163] In a letter dated January 13, 1885 to an unknown recipient, Helen declared the intent of the work, "I thought if I could write a story so interesting that people could not put it down; — and weave into that story, the true history of some of the Indians' sufferings, — I might thus , as [St.] Paul says 'haply [sic] convince some'."[164] Clearly, this reformer hoped to stimulate the conscience of the American public. Georgiana Strickland stated that *Ramona* was Jackson's last published novel and a "final statement of her belief in justice and human dignity."[165] It must have been disappointing for Helen when the novel won the hearts of American readers but failed to provoke them to action.

In August of 1884, Jackson fell down a flight of stairs and broke her leg leaving the poet bedridden but not without pen and paper. A letter to Senator Henry Dawes revealed feelings of

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[159] John Havard, "Sentimentalism, Interracial Romance, and Helen Hunt Jackson and Clorinda Matto de Turner's Attacks on Abuses of Native American in *Ramona* and *Ave sin nido*," *Intertexts* 11, no. 2 (2007): 101.
[160] Helen Hunt Jackson, *Ramona* (New York: Grossett & Dunlap, 1884), front cover.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Mathes, *The Indian Reform Letters*, 338.
[164] Ibid., 340.
[165] Georgiana Strickland, "In Praise of Ramona: Emily Dickinson and Helen Hunt Jackson's Indian Novel," *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 9, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 126.

regret, "It has been the greatest disappointment of my life that all my work in investigating their [Mission Indians] states, and making that Report, has accomplished nothing."[166] The report she referred to was the one sent to Washington, D.C. describing the condition of the Mission Indians and recommendations for alleviating the problems between the settlers and the tribes. Bedridden and depressed, the pen became the only weapon left in the arsenal of reform for Helen Jackson. Henry Dawes received a letter in which his friend stated "sick at heart, and discouraged. I see nothing more I can do."[167] Soon after, an appointed commission sent Senator Dawes to California to look after the Round Valley inhabitants. Helen declared he "is a good friend to Indians."[168] She was hopeful he might go visit her beloved Mission Indians. Feelings of despair did not prevent a continued writing campaign. Correspondence to Henry C. Bowen on October 15, 1884 referred to an article regarding the abundant wheat harvest in the fall of 1884. Helen declared it seemed outrageous that in the same newspaper "was a paragraph giving an account of the starving Piegan Indians! – dying at the rate of one a day, literally of starvation. – Indians on a reservation – under the charge of an agent. The reason they are dying thus, is that congress reduced the appropriation for the Indian Bureau, – and the Dept. was simply without money to buy necessary supplies."[169] Although Jackson was quite ill, she continued to write letters of admonishment to newspaper editors.

Helen was diagnosed with stomach cancer and was confined to her bed. Her broken leg had never fully recovered and Mathes reported that by November 1884, Helen had not healed enough to allow travel back to New York or Boston so the novelist "moved instead to the

[166] Mathes, *Jackson and Her Indian Reform*, 323.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Ibid., 327.
[169] Ibid., 331.

warmer climate of Los Angeles."[170] Helen's correspondence to an unknown person dated January 22, 1885, described the recuperation as "gaining very slowly in walking, and am still on crutches, and I fear likely to be so for months."[171] The author relocated to San Francisco in March 1885 fearing the recent outbreak of poisonous malaria in the City of Angels.[172] Serious illness did not prevent continued compositions nor did it dampen the ire generated by reading critical reviews.[173] Still confined to bed, Jackson penned a memo to General Samuel C. Armstrong and spoke of the reviewers of her final monograph,

> One or two other critics have said that *Ramona* was inadequate as a presentation of the Indian Question. — It is strange, to me, that anyone could fail to see, that the story was not in the least introduced as a presentation of the general Indian question. — All I hoped, by it, was to call attention to the general Indian question, by rousing interest in the fates of one little band of Indians — about who I had come to know enough in detail, to get a background & local coloring, for a story in which they should figure.[174]

Passionate, outspoken, and relentless, the activist defended the novel. On August 8, 1885, Helen Hunt Jackson wrote one last time to the president of the United States. Addressed to President Grover Cleveland, it was short. "From my death bed I send you message of heart-felt thanks for what you have already done for the Indians. I ask you to read my *Century of Dishonor*."[175] The widow talked of dying happier knowing he would be the first president to lift "this burden of infamy" from America.[176] Helen died four days later on August 12, 1885.[177]

Jackson was an individualist and an educated person whose path took a direction she never imagined. Her adult life began as a wife, mother, and homemaker. When it ended, she was an accomplished poet, social activist, novelist, historian, and ethnologist. Research in primary

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[170] Mathes, *The Indian Reform Letters*, 87.
[171] Ibid., 341.
[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid., 346.
[174] Ibid., 347.
[175] *The Waco Daily Examiner*, "A Dying Woman's Last Letter," September 29, 1885, 1.
[176] Ibid., 352.
[177] Odell, *Helen Hunt Jackson*, 219.

source official documents created a historian. Spending time with the Mission Indians in California and reporting to Washington on their condition made her an ethnologist. Education in literature and published creative works defined her as a poet. The publication of an expository book and a fictional romance story identified her as a novelist. Production of over 200 letters to various editors and congressional representatives revealing the broken treaties and land fraud perpetrated upon America's Indigenous Nations created an activist. A myriad of reform movements spanned her lifetime. There were pressure groups for civil, African-American, Native American, and women's rights. What made Helen different? Becoming an active reformer was enough for anyone of that era to claim distinction. The Indian problem wearied the general populace but this advocate chose to search for the truth. The policies of assimilation and allotment sought to eradicate tribal ownership of lands and make each adult an individual landowner but Jackson asked the government to honor the promises made to sovereign Tribal Nations in treaties. Jackson knew that merely talking about the crisis would not accomplish the goals of reform. Words alone would not make a tangible difference in the lives of the people who had become so dearly loved. She did not create a reform movement; she was the movement. Active reform for Native American rights would reappear decades later when Gertrude Simmons Bonnin joined the Society of American Indians (SAI) and began lobbying Congress to grant the right of citizenship to the Indigenous people of the United States.

Helen Hunt Jackson was involved in progressive change for a mere six years. Over time, her arguments matured and involvement narrowed to a sphere where positive changes occurred. The last portion of her life was almost frenzied with daily writings to newspaper editors, members of Congress, and other officials involved in Indian affairs. Jackson traveled as often as possible in order to witness and faithfully report on the living and economic conditions of many

Native settlements. Volumes of correspondence grew exponentially during a period of recuperation from a respiratory illness plaguing the last years of her life. Strong love and faith in the American public produced the belief that Americans only needed to know the truth before demanding justice for Indigenous people allowing them to seek redress for stolen lands and broken agreements. After accepting the job of special agent for the Mission Indians of southern California, her communications became no less poignant but did not reflect the anger and determination so evident in the earlier letters. Although she had a government job, her opinions never gravitated towards concurrence with forced allotment. She never stopped asking the United States government to comply with all treaties still in force with Native nations. The task of the historian is to report as objectively as possible, not to indulge in what if scenarios. However, one can only speculate about what would have happened to the Indian Reform movement had the poet turned activist lived a little longer.

Jackson's novels were written for the purpose of exposing government atrocities against Native American Nations, during a time when women were not participants in public policy making, when tribes were being pushed toward extinction, when the ghost dance was envisioned, and when historians were forging a new national identity. *A Century* questioned government policies at a most inconvenient moment. *Ramona* was written at a time when westward expansion and railway development demanded more and more land, pushing the Indigenous population into poverty and starvation. The poet stepped over the social boundaries that prevented most women from breeching the domestic barrier. Well educated, a successful poet, a novelist, an ethnographer, a wife, and a mother, this reform advocate loved America and believed idealistically it's citizens need only know the truth, which would spur them to demand justice for the Tribal Nations. This woman crossed all barriers that stood in the way of the truth.

As an activist, she was opposed to assimilation and involuntary allotment and supported tribal land rights and sovereignty. The complex and convoluted political status of Indian Nations made it very difficult for Congress to act quickly for change. Once the wheels of the government began to turn towards allotment, it was unlikely that any one person would be able to stop the motion or change the direction. Including the poet and her novels in the annals of Native American history will serve American and Native American historians well.

In summary, Susan Miller (Seminole) discussed the Indigenous paradigm in Native American historiography. Devon Mihesuah (Choctaw) described how writing about American Indians should be done and contributed a number of works to Native American historiography. Robert Warrior (Osage) called for the "development of a framework through which engagement with issues central to the future of Indian critical studies can occur."[178] "Decolonizing the Histories of Helen Hunt Jackson and Gertrude Simmons Bonnin," attempted to present a decolonized rendition of the history of Helen Hunt Jackson for scholarly debate especially concerning her book, *A Century of Dishonor*. Rather than cast her work aside as that of a do-gooder or philanthropist (both colonized concepts), I argue that a critical look at both *Ramona* and *A Century of Dishonor* is necessary to determine how the work of Victorian Age women both Native American and Euro American fits into Native American historiography. Jackson and Bonnin were chosen for this analysis because of the commonalities between them. They shared such things as education, using the media to further their goals, a love of writing, and individualistic determination. The next two chapters decolonize the life story of Gertrude Simmons Bonnin where it becomes clearer that both women dedicated their lives to the fight for Native American rights.

[178] Warrior, *Tribal Secrets*, xiii-xiv.

Chapter 4

A Biographical Review of Gertrude Simmons Bonnin, 1876-1900

This chapter recants the life story of Gertrude Simmons Bonnin (Yankton Nakota) up to the year 1900 when she began publishing her autobiographical essays. Decolonizing Gertrude's history entailed using the Dakota language when possible, reporting her story using an Indigenous lens, and adding her history to the annals of Nakota history. Born in 1876, the year of the Battle of the Greasy Grass (Little Big Horn), Gertrude proved to be high-spirited and tenacious.[179] Gertrude's mother, *Táte I Yóhin Win* (Ellen, Yankton Nakota), witnessed the slaughter of many of her people, forced starvation, devastation of the land, and social chaos. She knew that life on the reservation held no future for her daughter. *Táte I Yóhin Win's* son, *Dawée* (David, Yankton Nakota), had attended White's Manual Labor Institute, a boarding school.[180] When he returned home, Gertrude, in her naïve excitement, wanted to hear all about it because she wanted to attend school as well. *Dawée* tried to dampen his sister's enthusiasm about the boarding school but to no avail.[181] Regardless, in 1884, eight-year-old Gertrude left the reservation in South Dakota for White's Manual Labor Institute at Wabash, Indiana. Life for Gertrude and her mother would never be the same.[182]

The situation faced by Gertrude and her mother was not unique in Indian country. Many Native American families faced social and cultural devastation when their children were forced into boarding schools. Building upon previous scholarship, this chapter recants the narrative of the Gertrude's childhood and education while attempting to decolonize her story. A number of

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[179] Hafen, *Dreams and Thunder,* xiii.
[180] Zitkala-Ša, "The Big Red Apples," *American Indian Stories* (New York: Barnes and Noble Publishing Inc., 2005), 22. Dawée is the name of her big brother.
[181] Washburn, "Zitkala-Ša," 277.
[182] Hafen, "Bonnin, For the Indian Cause," 128.

questions arose while researching Bonnin. What name should be used in rewriting her history? How does the Nakota Nation view this woman in their history? Is the use of the word Sioux correct? If she is Nakota, why did she give herself a Lakota name? This research project attempts to answer a few of those questions in pursuit of decolonizing the history of Gertrude Simmons Bonnin.

Born on the Yankton reservation, Gertrude was a part of the first generation of children born away from the Dakota homeland of "*Minisota Makoce* (Land Where the Waters Reflect the Skies)."[183] Her mother, *Táte I Yóhin Win* (Reaches for the Wind), had been among the people who experienced the 1862 Death March from the Dakota ancestral homeland to the reservation set aside for them by the U.S. government.[184] The paper trail for the life of Gertrude began with her enrollment in White's Manual Labor Institute in Wabash, Indiana at the age of eight.[185] Her autobiographical writings represent the only glimpse of her life before the missionaries came to the reservation looking for young recruits. Gertrude never knew her father, a *Wasicu*, because her mother dismissed him before her daughter was born.[186] The last name of Simmons came from her mother's second marriage and was the last name of her brother *Dawée*. Frequently, Gertrude returned home to help her mother but she always returned to her education. P. Jane Hafen (Taos Pueblo) stated, "When visits home became unpleasant, she returned to school."[187] Suffering through the humiliation and shame experienced in her boarding school years, something drove her to continue her education. Gertrude's education consisted of attending the Santee Agency School 1889-1890, White's Manual Labor Institute 1891-1895, and Earlham

[183] Wilson, "Decolonizing the 1862 Death Marches," 185.
[184] Hafen, *Dreams and Thunder*, xiii. Hafen credited the translation of Táte I Yóhin Win to Agnes M. Picotte but stated in her footnote that the suffix Win suggested the translation as Woman Who Reaches for the Wind. For Death March of 1862, see Wilson, "Decolonizing the 1862 Death Marches," 185.
[185] Hafen, *Dreams and Thunder*, xiv.
[186] Wilson, "Decolonizing the 1862 Death Marches," 186. Wasicu is the Lakota word for white man. Zitkala-Ša used "palefaces" instead probably because she did not want to alienate her audience.
[187] Hafen, *Dreams and Thunder*, xv.

College in Indiana 1895-1897.[188] In 1897, at the age of 21, she left Earlham due to illness, and accepted a teaching job at Carlisle Industrial Training School under the school's founder Col. Richard H. Pratt.[189] In 1900, she left Pennsylvania to attend the New England Conservatory of Music because her relationship with Pratt was contentious.[190] An accomplished orator and musician, education shaped Gertrude's ability to articulate with the dominant culture. Her experience in boarding schools shaped her resistance writing, political activism, and passion for helping all Native American people.

Several humiliating incidents occurred during Gertrude's school years that probably served as the impetus for her resistance writing. She suffered humiliation as soon as she sat down on the train bound for the boarding school in Indiana. *Zitkala-Ša* wrote, "We had anticipated much pleasure from a ride on the iron horse, but the throngs of staring palefaces disturbed and troubled us."[191] The train arrived at the school sometime after dark. The palefaces were excited and stood in the doorway waiting for the children to come in the house. Gertrude described the depth of her fear, "My body trembled more from fear than from the snow I trod upon."[192] Her second humiliation occurred shortly after entering the house when a woman grabbed her and threw her in the air as if she were an infant. The excited *Wasicu* woman caught the child and proceeded to bounce her up and down with "increasing enthusiasm." Frightened and insulted from being treated as a plaything, Gertrude began to cry.[193] Her first day at the school was no less disturbing. They took her blanket and lined her up with the other girls going to the dining room. As Gertrude looked around, she remarked that the other girls, "seemed not to care that

[188] Ibid., xvi.
[189] Ibid., xvii.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Zitkala-Ša, "The Land of the Red Apples," *American Indian Stories* (New York: Barnes and Noble Publishing Inc., 2005), 29. Palefaces was the term used by Zitkala-Ša for Euro Americans.
[192] Ibid., 30.
[193] Ibid.

they were even more immodestly dressed than I, in their tightly fitting clothes."[194] Her friend, *Judéwin*, overheard a woman talking about cutting off the children's hair. *Judéwin* warned young Gertrude about the impending humiliation. Gertrude exclaimed, "No, I will not submit. I will struggle first."[195] This may have been her first act of rebellion. Thus began a life of resisting the culture of the *Wasicu*, the palefaces.

Several scholars have discussed Gertrude's determination to attend school. Franci Washburn stated that Gertrude would return to her mother's home between school sessions looking for solace from her family and community.[196] Gertrude's fragile relationship with *Táte I Yóhin Win* (Ellen) steadily grew burdensome because she mother disapproved of her daughter's desire for learning the ways of the *Wasicu*. *Táte I Yóhin Win* probably suffered from extreme depression resulting from the Dakota Death March and the horrors she witnessed along the trail. As such, it may have been difficult for her to understand her only daughter. Caught between two worlds, Gertrude struggled with her responsibilities to her mother and a desire to return to school. She exclaimed, "The following autumn I ventured upon a college career against my mother's will."[197] After boarding school, Gertrude knew what to expect from the non-Native people surrounding her. Nonetheless, she endured "the cold race whose hearts were frozen hard with prejudice."[198] Why? She could have stayed home on the reservation with her mother and brother. When her brother *Dawée* graduated from White's, he returned home with no interest in higher education. They both suffered the same dishonor yet Gertrude decided to face what could potentially be more humiliation. Something caused her to decide the benefits of a higher

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[194] Zitkala-Ša, "The Cutting of My Long Hair," *American Indian Stories* (New York: Barnes and Noble Publishing Inc., 2005), 32.
[195] Ibid., 33.
[196] Washburn, "Zitkala-Ša," 278.
[197] Zitkala-Ša, "Incurring My Mother's Displeasure," *American Indian Stories* (New York: Barnes and Noble Publishing Inc., 2005), 46.
[198] Ibid., 47.

education would be greater than suffering degradation and racism. She gave readers a small glimpse of what prompted the decision to go to college. In her essay, “The Big Red Apples,” she stated, “Thus, my mother discouraged my curiosity about the lands beyond our eastern horizon; for it was not yet an ambition for Letters that was stirring me.”[199] This statement intimated the young woman was inspired to become a writer, a skill that served her well as a proponent of Native American treaty rights. By the time she entered Earlham, Gertrude had learned the *Wasicu* people placed a great deal of value on language, especially their own. She discovered the power of language and embraced the written word as a tool to reach a larger audience in hopes her expository essays would generate public interest. One literary scholar, Catherine Kunce, argued, "Fighting fire with fire through her subversive and extended metaphor, *Zitkala-Ša* articulates, through the oppressor's own language, the hypocritical and sadistic underpinnings of an attempted silencing of her native tongue."[200] Kunce was referring to the boarding school practice of forbidding the children to speak in their Native tongue.

A study of Gertrude’s autobiographical essays demonstrated her resistance against subjugation by the *Wasicu* began as soon as she got on the train. Some children left the school and never returned, others capitulated to the demands to abandon their culture, but Gertrude chose neither. Instead, she stayed the required four years and earned a diploma. Gertrude chronicled another instance of humiliation. “One day I was called in from my play for some misconduct. I had disregarded some rule which seemed to me very needlessly binding.”[201] Her punishment was to mash turnips for the evening meal. She exclaimed, “With fire in my heart…I

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[199] Zitkala-Ša, “The Big Red Apples,” *American Indian Stories*, 23.

[200] Catherine Kunce, “Fire of Eden, Zitkala-Ša’s Bitter Apple,” *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 73.

[201] Zitkala-Ša, “The Snow Episode,” *American Indian Stories* (New York: Barnes and Noble Publishing Inc., 2005), 36.

bent in a hot rage over the turnips. I worked my vengeance upon them."[202] Apparently, she mashed the turnips with such force the jar broke. She reveled at her success and wrote, "As I sat eating my dinner, and saw that no turnips were served, I whooped in my heart for having once asserted the rebellion within me."[203] It was unclear as to the year this happened but this young girl entered into a struggle that lasted her lifetime. In using the words fire, hot rage, vengeance, and rebellion, Gertrude made a clear statement that she had no use for the *Wasicu* culture. Her comment about a rule that was "needlessly binding" indicated her individuality and determination to maintain her own cultural identity. Fear of punishment did not deter her from thwarting the rigid rules of the *Wasicu* school.

In "The Devil," Gertrude described yet another instance when she exercised her right to resist. A woman dared to control the child's behavior by showing her a hideous picture of the "king of the evil spirits."[204] The woman told Gertrude that this creature roamed the Earth and tortured little girls who disobeyed the rules of the school. The Dakota culture taught children not to fear evil spirits anymore than a human who walked about in "material guise."[205] However, the threat of being tortured by the *Wasicu* devil terrified the girl so much she had nightmares. The frightened child confronted her fears when she woke the following morning. Gertrude wrote, "I took my revenge upon the devil."[206] Stealthily she went into the room where the books were stored. She found the book *The Stories of the Bible* and promptly defaced the picture of the devil inside the book. The author exclaimed victory when she wrote, "there was a ragged hole in the page where the picture of the devil had once been."[207] Apparently, Gertrude was not a good and

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[202] Ibid.
[203] Ibid., 37.
[204] Zitkala-Ša, "The Devil," *American Indian Stories* (New York: Barnes and Noble Publishing Inc., 2005), 38.
[205] Ibid.
[206] Ibid., 39.
[207] Ibid.

compliant student. She consistently took advantage of any opportunity to resist the onslaught of *Wasicu* culture and religion.

Exposure to *Wasicu* Christianity left a lasting mark on the young Yankton girl. Several of her essays provided a look into her feelings and beliefs about spirituality. A heartbreaking story about the death of one of Gertrude's classmates in "Iron Routine" told the tale of her ambivalence towards the Christian god of the *Wasicu*. She exclaimed, "I blamed the hard-working, well-meaning, ignorant woman who was inculcating in our hearts her superstitious ideas."[208] On her deathbed, the classmate uttered the name of Jesus and Gertrude reacted in anger blaming the innocent paleface woman who attended the dying child.[209] The young activist made a clear statement of her spiritual beliefs in her story, "The Great Spirit." She exclaimed, "I prefer to their dogma my excursions into the natural gardens where the voice of the Great Spirit is heard in the twittering of birds, the rippling of mighty waters, and the sweet breathing of flowers."[210] Gertrude never abandoned the religion of her ancestors. She recanted the story about the time she visited a tribal medicine man. Desiring friends for the new school year, Gertrude asked the holy man for help. He provided her with a tiny medicine bundle that she carried for an entire year indicating the extreme cruelty of the boarding school left the child doubting the religion of the *Wasicu* people. [211] Even so, Gertrude's choices were seemingly contradictory and confusing. Washburn stated, "It is a strange contradiction that after her own boarding school experiences and her criticism of the system, she chose to place her own son, *Ohiya*, in a Catholic boarding school."[212] Considering her strong belief in education, especially for Native Americans,

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[208] Zitkala-Ša, "Iron Routine," *American Indian Stories* (New York: Barnes and Noble Publishing Inc., 2005), 41.
[209] Ibid.
[210] Zitkala-Ša, "The Great Spirit," *American Indian Stories*, (New York: Barnes and Noble Publishing Inc., 2005), 67.
[211] Zitkala-Ša, "Incurring My Mother's Displeasure," *American Indian Stories*, 46.
[212] Washburn, "Zitkala-Ša," 296.

she probably chose one of the best educational institutions available. Using this perspective, Gertrude's choices do not seem so contradictory.

During her tenure at Carlisle, Gertrude went back home to the reservation for a visit. The young teacher was happy because she had not been to see her mother in a long time. The reality of life on the reservation soon dampened that cheer. Her mother and brother were destitute. *Táte I Yóhin Win*'s failing eyesight and arthritic hands prevented her from making beaded items to sell. *Dawée* lost his job when the government sent a non-Native as a replacement. Gertrude's mother lamented, "Since then, *Dawée* has not been able to make use of the education the Eastern school has given him."[213] Gertrude found herself unable to speak. She stated that she "found no reason with which to cool my inflamed feelings."[214] The guilt she felt must have been paralyzing. Her mother was near blind and the house was in desperate need of repair. Her brother could no longer provide for his own family. This last trip home was a pivotal experience for the young activist. Filled with sadness, she returned to school.

The article "Retrospection," revealed a Gertrude emerging with a new perspective of the world she had created for herself. "I slowly comprehended that the large army of white teachers in Indian schools had a larger missionary creed than I had suspected. It was one which included self-preservation quite as much as Indian education."[215] The image of her mother's debilitated home and her brother's struggle to provide food still fresh in her mind, Gertrude must have felt trapped between the responsibility to care for her family and her desire to challenge and expose the failures of U.S. government policies towards it's Indigenous inhabitants. In that article, she wailed at the ineptitude of government employees. She spoke out against the Indian schools built

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[213] Zitkala-Ša, "The Trip Westward," *American Indian Stories* (New York: Barnes and Noble Publishing Inc., 2005), 57.
[214] Ibid.
[215] Zitkala-Ša, "Retrospection," *American Indian Stories* (New York: Barnes and Noble Publishing Inc., 2005), 61.

by the *Wasicu* and the belief that Native Americans needed to be civilized. She disclaimed the *Wasicu* god when she wrote, "At this stage of my own evolution, I was ready to curse men of small capacity for being the dwarfs their God had made them."[216] Learning that one teacher was an "opium-eater," her ire ignited. Initially unable to understand how this person could retain a teaching position, a "Christian in power" told her that the "pumpkin-colored creature had a feeble mother to support."[217] Gertrude's reaction was explicit, "An inebriate paleface sat stupid in a doctor's chair, while Indian patients carried their ailments to untimely graves because his fair wife was dependent upon him for her daily food."[218] Stunned, she must have found herself questioning what she was doing as a teacher at Carlisle. In that story, the teacher recanted one epiphanous moment when she decided to resign from her teaching position and enroll at the New England Conservatory of Music.

The collection of essays discussed here were originally articles that Gertrude began publishing in 1900. Collectively, they represent an autobiography of her life up to about 1900. Her early experiences among the *Wasicu* shaped her perspective of their world, solidified her love of Native culture, and created a social and political activist. In *Tribal Secrets*, Robert Warrior (Osage) cautioned Native American scholars to be more critical and less celebratory in historical discourse recognizing that the political climate of the era heavily influenced the literary output. Bonnin's resistance to *Wasicu* culture began at the Indian boarding school in Indiana at eight years of age. A critical review of the material unfolded the story of the genesis of an activist. Because Gertrude was high spirited and determined, she found the strength to continue her education, subjecting herself to humiliation and isolation. Her autobiographical essays depict a girl whose childish pranks of resistance morphed into published works that exposed boarding

[216] Ibid., 62.
[217] Ibid.
[218] Ibid., 61.

school atrocities and racism. Her speech titled “Side by Side” delivered at the 1896 Indiana state oratorical contest evidenced her disdain for the culture of the *Wasicu* people. According to Hafen, the speech “was a stinging indictment of white society and hypocritical Christianity.”[219] The oratory she delivered at the Indiana state contest won second place and was reprinted in the Earlham and Santee Agency school papers. While delivering the oratory, some students erected a banner behind her on the stage that read “squaw” displaying their displeasure of having an Indian representing Earlham.[220] Gertrude’s anger was evident, “I gleamed fiercely upon the throngs of palefaces. My teeth were hard set, as I saw the white flag still floating insolently in the air.”[221] Her rhetoric pleaded with the god of the *Wasicu*, “Look with compassion down, and with thine almighty power move this nation to the rescue of my race.”[222] In beseeching the god of the oppressors and revealing the desperation of all Native American Nations, Gertrude made a statement about persecution and racism. Yet, she still won second place. Gertrude became ill and left Earlham without graduating. Tom Hamm, archivist for Earlham College, remarked in 1998 “Her ambivalence about Earlham remained, however, as after 1900 she cut virtually all ties with the college.”[223] Interestingly, she began publishing expository articles in *Atlantic Monthly* that same year.

The above rendition of the early years of Gertrude’s life contains a number of examples of how to apply the principles of decolonization in rewriting the history of this activist for Native American rights. The most glaring issue that needs addressing is Gertrude’s name. One assumption is that *Táte I Yóhin Win* gave her daughter the English name of Gertrude. There was

[219] Hafen, *Dreams and Thunder*, xvi.
[220] Zitkala-Ša, “Incurring My Mother’s Displeasure,” *American Indian Stories*, 46.
[221] Ibid., 48.
[222] Ibid., 46. This quote is part of a speech originally written and delivered by Gertrude Simmons in 1896 at the Indiana state oratorical contest.
[223] Tom Hamm, “Side by Side: Zitkala-Sa at Earlham, 1895-1897. From Campus to the Center of American Indian Activism,” *The Earlhamite* (Winter 1998): 22.

no evidence that her mother gave her a Yankton name as well. However, Gertrude frequently used the Dakota names of relatives in her writings. In "My Mother," she wrote of her older cousin, *Warca-Ziwin* (Sunflower).[224] In "The Coffee-Making," she introduced a "crazy man" named *Wiyaka-Napbina* (Wearer of a Feathered Necklace).[225] In "The Dead Man's Plum Bush," she wrote of a public feast provided by a young warrior named *Haraka Wambdi*.[226] Gertrude introduced her brother as *Dawée* in her essay "The Big Red Apples." Was *Dawée* the name given to her brother by her mother or was it the translation of the name David? Raised on the reservation until the age of eight, Gertrude spoke her Native language easily. Why then would she choose a Lakota name for herself instead of a Dakota name? In the introduction of *Dreams and Thunder*, P. Jane Hafen provided background information on the languages of three nations, Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota. An understanding of the structure of the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota Nations presented a clearer perspective of the world Gertrude's mother experienced before the systematic genocide of Native nations reached the Dakota people. According to Hafen, "Beatrice Medicine (Lakota) and Vine DeLoria Jr., (Dakota) refer to the Yanktons as Dakotas."[227] Hafen recanted the following classification of the Sioux Nation by Karen D. Lone Hill (Oglala Lakota),

> The Sioux Nation has seven major council divisions, which are eastern Dakotas (*Mdewakantonwan, Wahpekute, Wahpetonwan and Sisitonwan*); the Nakota with the southwest *Ihanktonwan* (Campers of the End, Yankton) and *Ihanktonwanna* (Little Campers at the End, Yanktonai); and the western Lakotas, or Tetons, comprised of seven bands (*Sicangu, OOhenunpa, Itazipacola, Miniconjou, Sihaspa, Hunkpapa and Oglala*).[228]

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[224] Zitkala-Ša, "My Mother," *American Indian Stories* (New York: Barnes and Noble Publishing Inc., 2005), 4.
[225] Zitkala-Ša, "The Coffee-Making," *American Indian* Stories (New York: Barnes and Noble Publishing Inc., 2005), 14.
[226] Zitkala-Ša, "The Dead Man's Plum Bush," *American Indian Stories*, 17.
[227] Ibid., xiv.
[228] Ibid.

Thus, by this account, Gertrude Simmons belonged to the council division of Nakota, the *Ihanktonwan* people. In her forward to *Old Indian Legends*, Agnes Picotte (Lakota) described Gertrude as "the Yankton Sioux woman who spoke the Nakota dialect but had a Lakota name."[229] If Karen Hill and Agnes Picotte are correct, then identifying Gertrude Simmons Bonnin as a Yankton Dakota is incorrect. This is a good example of the importance of making tribal involvement a priority in any research project involving their people. All three dialects, Nakota, Dakota, and Lakota belong to the family of languages known as Siouan.[230] All three nations were fairly close to each other and conducted trade. It is likely that Gertrude was fluent in all three dialects and may explain her choice of the Lakota name *Zitkala-Ša*. In this case, contacting a tribal historian or linguist would be a good start to understanding Gertrude's tribal identity. Since all three nations follow the rules of matrilineal descent, out of respect for *Táte I Yóhin Win*, this monograph uses the name given to Gertrude by her mother. Instances excepted are in the use of direct quotes and when referring to her stage persona or her published works. Gertrude predominantly used *Zitkala-Ša* as her performance moniker, pen name and in her correspondence to once proposed husband, Carlos Montezuma. Otherwise, she used her English name.

The name of *Zitkala-Ša* was not acquired solely as a pseudonym. Hafen revealed Gertrude's story as to why she adopted a different name. Apparently, the wife of *Dawée* was angry with Gertrude for choosing to pursue an education. She asked Gertrude to cease using the name Simmons.[231] Hafen quoted Gertrude from a letter written to Montezuma, "Well – you can guess how queer I felt away from my own people – home-less – penniless – and even without a

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[229] Agnes M. Picotte, foreword to *Old Indian Legends*, 1901 Reprint. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), xi.
[230] Hafen, *Dreams and Thunder*, xiv.
[231] Ibid., xvii.

name!"[232] Evidently, she felt abandoned by her own family. She chose the name *Zitkala-Ša* because "I guess I have made '*Zitkala-Ša*' known – for even Italy writes it in her language!"[233] One other curious detail noticed while researching the historiography on Gertrude was the spelling of *Zitkala-Ša*. In Speroff's book about the life of Carlos Montezuma, there was a reproduction of a hand written note to Montezuma from Gertrude.[234] She signed the note with her Lakota name but she spelled it with a 'c' instead of a 'k', *Zitcala-Ŝa*, with a different mark above the 'S'. This seems like a small detail not deserving of much attention but changing one letter in a word can sometimes result in a new and different word. Regarding the surname Simmons, it was not the name of Gertrude's biological father. It was the last name of *Táte I Yóhin Win's* second husband, the same as her brother's. Hafen reported, "her mother became disaffected with her father, Felker" giving Gertrude the last name of Simmons.[235] Generally, there was nothing equivalent to a surname in the naming convention of many tribes and for reasons unknown, Gertrude's mother felt compelled to comply with the naming convention of the *Wasicu*.

The use of the word Sioux was perplexing. The Lakota people do not recognize the word Sioux, nor do they use it. Hafen acknowledged this incongruity, "During the period of the opera, she refers to herself as 'Sioux' and Hanson uses the same term. 'Sioux' will be used throughout this paper." [236] Nevertheless, some Native American scholars commonly use the *Wasicu* word Sioux. *Waziyatawin* Angela Wilson was one Dakota scholar who embraced the tenets of Indigenous discourse in her article "Decolonizing the 1862 Death Marches." Published in 2004,

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[232] Ibid.

[233] Ibid., xviii.

[234] Leon Speroff, *Carlos Montezuma, M.D. a Yavapai American Hero: The Life and Times of an American Indian, 1866-1923* (Portland: Arnica Publishing, Inc., 2004), 214.

[235] Hafen, *Dreams and Thunder*, xvii.

[236] P. Jane Hafen, "A Cultural Duet Zitkala Ša and The Sun Dance Opera," *Great Plains Quarterly* 18 (Spring, 1998): 110.

the article was an excellent example of the practical application of the principles of decolonization. In the commentary, the author only used the word Sioux in articles and book titles or when using a direct quote.

Native nations have made a concerted effort to revitalize their Native language and teach the younger generations. In Oklahoma, Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Kiowa, and Creek Nations have installed language revitalization programs. Susan Miller (Seminole) argued, "At the heart of the Indigenous decolonization movement is a desperate effort to bring back tribal languages."[237] The process of language revival has begun but until the next generation has learned their Native language, current scholarship will need to remain a blend of both Native language and English. According to Miller, "Ultimate decolonization would involve the production of tribal literatures, including historiography, in tribal languages."[238] As such, this narrative endeavored to utilize the few Dakota words available to the author. In the lost manuscripts found by Hafen, *Zitkala-Ša* had begun using Dakota proper names such as *Pi-Yeh-Kah-Nump* (Little Sugar) and *Pe-Šnija* (Sparks of Fire).[239] Gertrude was fluent in reading and writing in English. She could have used the translated English name alone but she chose otherwise. In this manner, Gertrude utilized one of the principles of Indigenous discourse long before modern scholarship would define those principles. This chapter presents a historical analysis of the events in the childhood of Gertrude Simmons Bonnin that gave rise to a woman fiercely dedicated to changing the political landscape for all Native Americans. The next chapter begins in 1900 when Gertrude stopped publishing poetry and short stories. Her efforts

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[237] Miller, "Native America Writes Back," 15.
[238] Ibid.
[239] Zitkala-Ša, "Child Dancer, Pi-Yeh-Kah-Nump–Transfigured," *Dreams and Thunder*, 87. Also, "Prayer of Pe-Šnija—Shriveled Top," *Dreams and Thunder*, 97.

culminated in the formation of the first organization comprised of only Native Americans dedicated to restoring treaty rights of all Native nations.

Chapter 5

“Yours for the Indian Cause”: Bonnin’s Activism From, 1900 to 1938

This chapter discusses the reform years of Gertrude Simmons Bonnin (Yankton Nakota) from 1900 to her death in 1938. The purpose is to provide a decolonized view of her activist efforts for Native American rights. In 1901, at the age of 25, Bonnin published her first book *Old Indian Legends* which coincided with a more active and overt campaign for Native American rights and sovereignty. The outspoken and sometimes brash activist, Gertrude, began looking for a successful conduit she could use to stop the implementation of the federal assimilation policies. Once she became part of the fabric of political bureaucracy as Secretary for the Society of American Indians, it seemed *Zitkala-Ša* began to fade from public view.

A number of scholars touched upon Bonnin’s seemingly futile efforts to help Native Americans, but no one has attempted to decolonize her history. Ada Mahasti Norris wrote her dissertation on *Zitkala-Ša’s* use of storytelling as a method of teaching. The focus of her thesis was pedagogy and the relevance of Bonnin’s work to modern American Indian struggles. Norris’s dissertation revitalized the image of Bonnin as an activist for tribal sovereignty and became an important contribution to the body of work on Gertrude.[240] Delinda Day Wunder wrote her dissertation on Gertrude Simmons Bonnin, Sarah Winnemucca (Paiute), and *Hum-ishu-ma* (Mourning Dove, Okanogan) because “the defiance of these three women takes a new route, that of writing as political action.”[241] Her analysis of the work of these three women recast them as outspoken activists for Indigenous rights. Wunder also discussed the image of the “Indian Princess,” bi-cultural descent, and the misinterpretation of the work of women like

[240] Ada Mahasti Norris, “Zitkala-Ša and the National Indian Pedagogy: Storytelling, Activism, and the Project of Assimilation” (PhD. diss., Duke University, 2003), iii.
[241] Delinda Day Wunder, “Performing Indianness: Strategic Utterance in the Works of Sarah Winnemucca, Zitkala-Sa, and Mourning Dove,” (PhD. diss., University of Colorado, 1997), iii.

Bonnin. Barbara Chiarello argued the Indian Princess “treatment anestheticizes her as an object to be admired, not as a voice to be heard, encouraging the audience to interpret her arguments as performance rather than a call to change.”[242] Quoting Agnes M. Picotte (Lakota), Wunder stated that *Zitkala-Ša*, like Winnemucca was “distrusted many times by both sides [Indian and white], due to her tenuous bicultural condition.”[243] The media played a significant role in creating and perpetuating the Indian Princess persona. Indian and non-Indian people compared Native women to the Princess myth which probably contributed to the distrust Native women like Bonnin experienced. One such example appeared in 1921 when the newspaper *The Tomahawk* printed an article titled “Lo, ‘The Poor’ Indian is Out of Date” and stated, “our modern Indian princesses are women of wealth and accomplishment.”[244] Wunder, like Norris, added the stories of these women to the discourse concerning Native American women at the turn of the twentieth century.

Other scholars such as P. Jane Hafen (Taos Pueblo) published works dedicated to scholarly discourse on Bonnin and her contributions to the political and social struggles for Indigenous nations. Hafen stated, “Despite even 'playing Indian' at times, she remained firmly committed to her tribal sovereignty.”[245] Conversely, Robert Warrior (Osage) insisted the Native intellectuals of the Era of Assimilation (1887-1943) possessed “blinding progressivistic optimism.”[246] Warrior failed to recognize that Bonnin stood apart from some of her intellectual peers in that she advocated tribal sovereignty and treaty rights. In contrast to Warrior’s perspective, Julianne Newmark added another dimension to the history in her discussion of the pressures of American nativism between the years of 1890 to 1924. Similar to previous scholars,

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[242] Barbara Chiarello, “Deflective Missives Zitkala-Ša’s Resistance and Its (Un)Containment, *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 17, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 7.
[243] Wunder, “Performing Indianness,” 86-7.
[244] “Lo, ‘The Poor Indian’ is Out of Date,” *The Tomahawk*, October 20, 1921, 1.
[245] P. Jane Hafen, “Zitkala Ša: Sentimentality and Sovereignty,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 12, no. 2 (Autumn 1997): 31.
[246] Warrior, *Tribal Secrets*, 7.

Newmark argued Bonnin's anti-assimilation ideology as counter to immigrant nativism.[247] Devon Abbott Mihesuah (Choctaw) discussed Gertrude's loss of respect and cultural identity within her own tribe in spite of her "strong concern for her people's welfare."[248] In the midst of all this scholarship, the idea of mitigating the effects of colonized thinking in the discourse never surfaced.

An understanding of the surrounding political, economic, and social climate at the turn of the twentieth century helped clarify some of what pressured Bonnin to become an outspoken activist. The Era of Assimilation (approximately 1887-1943) and the Victorian Age (approximately 1837-1901) overlapped and affected the lives of all women. The convergence of the two periods marked a critical period in the evolution of civil rights for women and Native Americans. The rigid social rules of the Victorian mind set placed *Wasicu* women as subjects to their male counter parts. During that same era, the government policy of assimilation made people believe that Native Americans would soon disappear. As such, when Bonnin began to perform as an "Indian princess," she chose the socially acceptable vehicle of the educated and civilized Victorian woman. Taking advantage of her light skin, she dressed up according to the *Wasicu* image of what a civilized Indian should look like. She gave herself the Lakota name of *Zitkala-Ša* for personal reasons as described in the previous chapter. However, it is likely she saw the benefit in adopting this persona to endear herself to a predominantly *Wasicu* audience who believed her race was disappearing. In her discussion on Gertrude's persona of *Zitkala-Ša* Hafen asserted, " she reinvented herself by declaring her traditional language." [249] Ruth Spack stated, "On the one hand, her channeling of a highly romanticized Native culture could satisfy

[247] Julianne Newmark, "Pluralism, Place, and Gertrude Bonnin's Counternativism from Utah to Washington, DC," *American Indian Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 321.
[248] Mihesuah, *Indigenous American Women*, 52.
[249] Chiarello, "Deflected Missives," 130.

her mainstream audiences' hunger for sentimental fantasy. At the same time, her embodied recitation had the potential to have an impact beyond mere entertainment."[250] Franci Washburn succinctly summed up the dichotomous roles of female Native American intellectuals at the turn of the century in her analysis of Bonnin. She stated, "Gertrude Simmons Bonnin was not inconsistent or vacillating but rather pragmatic, a complex person whose stance depended on the issues and what she believed was best for American Indians at any particular time and place."[251]

Walking in two worlds so culturally different required resourcefulness, intelligence, and tenacity. The young Yankton woman possessed all these qualities and more. Like many of their peers, women during the Era of Assimilation accomplished their goals through pragmatism and adaptation. Washburn astutely analyzed the contradictory choices made by Bonnin and stated "these choices and attitudes grew out of Bonnin's own experience in negotiating her constantly changing geographical and social position between her Yanktonai Dakota [sic] upbringing with traditional cultural values and her education and career in white society and all the space between."[252] In 2002, Jessica Enoch argued that, "Because of her education, she had no place in nature and exists in the unfortunate space between the 'neithers' and the 'nors' located somewhere on the borders of white and Indian worlds." [253]Bonnin traversed the paths of two different cultures oscillating between the Indigenous world into which she was born and the world thrust on her by the conquering culture. Decolonizing her story required a critical look at the social and political climate Bonnin experienced. She was always required to negotiate between two opposing cultures often making her choices appear contradictory.

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[250] Ruth Spack, "Zitkala-Sa, The Song of Hiawatha, and the Carlisle Indian School Band: A Captivity Tale," Legacy 25, no. 2 (2008): 222.
[251] Washburn, "Zitkala-Ša, A Bridge," 273.
[252] Ibid.
[253] Jessica Enoch, "Resisting the Script of Indian Education: Zitkala Ša and the Carlisle Indian School," *College English* 65, no. 2 (November 2002): 129.

Upon examining the writings of *Zitkala-Ša*, it became clear that her message of resistance was often disguised. Carpenter observed, "If *Zitkala-Ša* were to document in first person the unfortunate history of conquest, her Euroamerican readers might be outraged by the first chapter and discontinue reading."[254] Ruth Spack reported Bonnin gave a talk in September of 1897 entitled "The Achievements of the White and Red Races Compared," an early attempt by this activist to enlighten the public that the history of American Indians had been "wrongly written."[255] In the nineteenth and twentieth century, the written annals of American history were sacrosanct and unforgiving of those who wanted to change it. As such, it took a great deal of courage for Gertrude to declare the existing narrative was wrong. By 1900, her disillusionment with *Wasicu* culture complete, she began publishing autobiographical and expository articles for "Atlantic Monthly." Her submission "An Indian Teacher Among Indians" exposed the cruel practices of an unnamed boarding school that could easily have been Carlisle Indian School. Carlisle officials protested as she continued to publish her critiques.[256] Spack reported that in one letter to Carlos Montezuma, Bonnin had exclaimed that it was selfish and cruel to force Indian children to abandon their elders and homeland.[257] Discussed in chapter four, her early monographs demonstrated Bonnin's unique ability to couch a message of resistance within the verbiage appropriate to the romanticism of the period. Eventually these articles were combined and published as *American Indian Stories* in 1921. Gertrude was passionate about recording the old stories and legends of her people. On the occasions that she would return to the reservation in between school sessions, she often talked to the community elders and wrote down the old

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[254] Ron Carpenter, "Zitkala-Sa and Bicultural Subjectivity," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 16, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 10.
[255] Ruth Spack, "Dis/engagement: Zitkala-Ša's Letters to Carlos Montezuma, 1901-1902," *Melus* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 176.
[256] Ibid., 176.
[257] Ibid., 185.

stories in her Native language.[258] She translated the stories when she returned to school or work. In 1901, after translating them into English, she eventually compiled fourteen stories that became *Zitkala-Ša's* first published book, *Old Indian Legends*. She was clever enough to realize that her message of resistance needed to be hidden from direct discovery by an unsympathetic audience. Gertrude and her work have not gone unnoticed by scholars. In 1993, P. Jane Hafen received a fellowship allowing her to do further research on Bonnin. She discovered unpublished stories, speeches, and diary excerpts by the Yankton author.[259] Hafen's research culminated in her publication *Dreams and Thunder* printed in 2001 in which she asserted Bonnin's dedication to the fight for tribal sovereignty.

Zitkala-Ša's publications have survived over 100 years and stand as a testament to the timelessness of her work. However, Bonnin's activism continues to remain in the realms of the historically misunderstood. In other words, the persona of *Zitkala-Ša* survived as the beautiful but forlorn "Indian Princess" whereas the Indigenous woman, Gertrude Simmons Bonnin remained the mislabeled and contradictory half-blood Nakota woman in Native American history. The images and work of Native American women at the turn of the twentieth century were obscured by the romanticism of the era. The fantasies of the Indian Princess and romantic tales of Pocahontas and Sacagawea masked the real stories of the women who faced the daily struggles of a rapidly changing society. Bonnin's performances as *Zitkala-Ša* hid messages of resistance in her poetry and stories behind the romantic Indian Princess myth facade. Helen Hunt Jackson published *Ramona*, a romance novel, designed to color the truth about the sufferings of the Native nations of California behind the love story between two young Indigenous people. Both women used the media to reach the widest possible audience to garner public support for

[258] Agnes M. Picotte, foreword to *Old Indian Legends*, 1901 reprint (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), xiii-xiv.
[259] Hafen, *Dreams and Thunder*, ix.

their advocacy for Native American rights. The contributions of women like Jackson and Bonnin set the precedent for future movements in the quest for tribal sovereignty and land rights.

Two men figured prominently in Bonnin's life, Carlos Montezuma (Yavapai) and her husband Raymond Bonnin. Carlos tried many times to get Gertrude to marry him but to no avail. Montezuma saved many of the letters he received from his fiancé and eventually, in 2004, Leon Speroff used these archives for a chapter on Bonnin in his book, *Carlos Montezuma, M.D., A Yavapai American Hero, The Life and Times of An American Indian, 1866-1923* (2004).[260] In 1902, Gertrude finally broke off her tumultuous engagement to Carlos Montezuma. Later that year, she married Raymond Telephause Bonnin who supported her activism for Native American rights. Shortly after being married, the Indian Service assigned the young couple to the Uintah Ouray Ute Agency where they lived until 1916. Gertrude encountered an entirely different reservation at Uintah Ouray compared to her. Deborah Welch stated, "At Uintah, she encountered a different problem – a society almost untouched by the benefits of Anglo culture."[261] Raymond received a job as a clerk in the office of the agency and Gertrude petitioned for a job as a teacher at the agency school. The Indian Bureau ignored her request until 1905 when an agency teacher resigned. At first, it was a temporary teaching position until the man they hired, Mr. Lawrence, failed to report for the permanent teaching position whereby she was awarded the job.[262] Before receiving the teaching job, the need to help the Ute people motivated her to start basket weaving classes in her home. Seizing the rare opportunity to encourage education, she often spoke to these women about education and health care.

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[260] Speroff, *Carlos Montezuma,* 526-7.
[261] Deborah Sue Welch, "Zitkala-Sa An American Indian Leader 1876-1938," (PhD. diss., University of Wyoming, 1985), 57.
[262] Ibid., 59.

During the years the Bonnins lived among the Ute people, they started their infamous anti-peyote campaign and Gertrude became involved with the Society of American Indians. Her anti-peyote sentiments frequently gained disapproval from many Native American leaders. An Oglala Lakota named Lone Bear came to the Uintah Ouray Ute for work as a sheepherder until the peyote religion arrived in Utah. William Willard reported, "he became the first peyote missionary among the Ute communities there."[263] The Bonnins witnessed the physical effects of the plant and likened it to alcohol. The effects of alcohol were evident among the Yankton people and undoubtedly, this impacted their decision to actively campaign against the use of peyote. According to Willard, "The annual report of the Lake Mohonk Conference for 1916 contained some sensational material peyote driven by way of Matthew K. Sniffen and S. M. Brosius, of the Indian Rights Association (IRA) from Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin and the Reverend M.J. Hersey."[264] The Bonnins compiled a report and sent it to M. Brosius titled "The Ravages of Peyote." Some of the main points presented in the report were that peyote excited the baser passions, created false notions in the minds of users, had affected close to 50 percent of the tribe in the last two years, appeared to have caused the death of 25 individuals, provided a breeding ground for unscrupulous agents to pander the plant, and undermined the work of churches. In 1918, *The Washington Times* reported Bonnin came to Washington to "secure legislation forbidding the use of peyote amongst the Indians."[265] The article went on to say she was scheduled to testify to the effects of peyote before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. The Bonnin's stance on the use of peyote was not well received by many Native leaders. This may account for some of the trouble they had gaining support for the organization they founded a

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[263] William Willard, "The First Amendment, Anglo-Conformity and American Indian Religious Freedom," *Wicazo Sa Review* 7, no.1 (Spring 1991): 27.
[264] Ibid.
[265] *The Washington Times* "Indian Woman in Capital to Fight Growing Use of Peyote Drug by Indians," February 17, 1918, 9.

few years later. Hafen stated Gertrude's experience campaigning against peyote in Washington D.C. gave her the necessary "skills and connections as a lobbyist that would serve her the rest of her life."[266] Gertrude and Raymond left the agency in 1916 and moved to Washington D.C. to work with the Society of American Indians. *The Tomahawk* reported on June 21, 1917 that Gertrude had moved to Washington, D.C. to dedicate her all of her time to the Society. The SAI was the first organization that brought Native intellectuals together for debate on a specific political project.[267] The membership of the SAI consisted mostly of Native intellectuals. Many were one-half Native or less and some favored assimilation. Contemporary Native scholarship has treated the story of the SAI cautiously because the sentiments of the membership leaned heavily towards assimilation. Once again, the media perpetuated anti-Native sentiments when on October 12, 1912, *The San Francisco Call* described the constituency of the SAI as, "the nobler red men without the bloodthirstiness of their sires and their capacity for rum and mischief."[268] In 1913, the year Bonnin joined the SAI, there were 200 active members and 400 associate members.[269] That same year, the *El Paso Herald* reported the SAI debated a proposed list of six demands to be presented to Congress. The demands were debated at the annual convention in Denver, Colorado. They asked for a definition of the legal status of Indians, to open the US Court of Claims to Native Americans, for the reorganization of the school system, for the disbursement of funds held by the government on behalf of Native nations, for individual ownership of land in fee simple, for full citizenship, and for the right to vote for Native people.[270] The new registrar of the SAI treasury, Gabe E. Parker (Choctaw), was quoted in the news as

[266] Hafen, *Dreams and Thunder*, xx.
[267] Warrior, *Tribal Secrets,* 10.
[268] *The San Francisco Call*, "Modern Red Indians," October 12, 1912, 5.
[269] Speroff, *Carlos Montezuma,* 238.
[270] *El Paso Herald,* "Indians Demand Right to Vote," October 18, 1913, 3.

saying tribes should abandon tribal life for individual land ownership.[271] As pointed out by Robert Warrior, many SAI members supported assimilation.[272]

After working with the SAI for a few years, Gertrude took the position of secretary of the organization and became editor of it's publication *American Indian Magazine.*[273] This meant that her voice would reach an audience of Native intellectuals but she wanted more. The common thread through all of Bonnin's activities was that she gave a voice to Native American people at a time when they had no voice at all. Indian people were not even citizens of the United States until 1924. By 1917, Gertrude was popular with the American public and well-known by her colleagues at the SAI. Her reputation as an activist grew among Native leaders. Bonnin was labeled a radical evidenced by a letter she wrote to the editor of *The Tomahawk* emphatically declaring she was not a radical.[274] Once Gertrude joined the SAI, she quickly adapted to the male dominated power structure that usually relegated women to clerical positions. Bonnin found difficulty in garnering support from SAI members for tribal self-determination and lost credibility among her peers.[275] Nonetheless, the SAI was the first organization dedicated to Native American issues. Warrior stated, "Native writers protested against Anglo injustice from the beginning of the extant written record, but before SAI no organized movement of any Native political position documented itself in writing."[276] Disappointed with the leadership of the SAI, Gertrude and her husband left the organization. Shortly thereafter, it began to spiral into chaos under the leadership of Thomas Sloan. With that said, the membership of SAI was not exclusively Native American, which may explain why the policy of assimilation was accepted.

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[271] *The Appeal*, "Indians ask Citizenship," February, 28, 1914, 1.
[272] Warrior, *Tribal Secrets, 6.*
[273] Speroff, *Carlos Montezuma*, xx.
[274] *The Tomahawk*, "Mrs. Bonnin Speaks," December 6, 1917, 1.
[275] Welch, "Zitkala-Sa: An American Indian Leader," 200.
[276] Ibid., 131.

The 1920 SAI convention held in St. Louis lacked attendance and was poorly organized. The organization's financial coffers were rapidly depleting and the sales of their new glossy American Indian Magazine were disappointing. Dissenting opinions about federal restrictions on peyote use and political endorsements created a rift amidst the membership. Only eight members attended the 1921 convention in Detroit. The society's final convention was held in Chicago in 1922.[277] The SAI helped bring Native American rights issues to the forefront of the national conscience. The organization frequently lobbied Congress for citizenship for all Native people. In 1924, two years after the dissolution of SAI, their lobbying efforts were rewarded when the United Stated passed the Indian Citizenship Act granting citizenship to all Native Americans. The contributions of Bonnin and her colleagues at the SAI provided a vehicle for Native American scholarship and activism thus, offering a conduit for lobbying Congress for legislative change concerning Native Americans.

Gertrude worked tirelessly on projects that resulted in political changes for the civil rights of Native Americans. In 1924, Gertrude co-authored a pamphlet titled *Oklahoma's Poor Rich Indians: An Orgy of Graft and Exploitation of the Five Civilized Tribes – Legalized Robbery*. Chiarello stated this publication affected political change and eventually led to the formation of the Meriam Commission.[278] In an introductory paragraph to a reprint of the Bonnins' report in his recent anthology, David Martinez stated the report "testifies to the travesty of persons living as wards of the federal government and the corrupted individuals who prey on them in full view of the Bureau of Indian Affairs."[279] The following excerpt from the report adequately illustrated the amount of investigative work done for the pamphlet.

[277] Frederick E. Hoxie, *This Indian Country* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2012), 268.
[278]Chiarello, "Deflected Missives Zitkala-Ša's Resistance," 8.
[279] David Martinez, ed., *The American Indian Intellectual Tradition, An Anthology of Writings from 1772-1972* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 225.

> That an examination of 14,229 probate cases in six countries where the Indian population is largest shows the average cost of administration to be TWENTY per cent, and in some instances it has been as high as SEVENTY per cent. That there is no provision limiting the cost of administering an Indian estate in Oklahoma: the amount is optional within county courts. Incidentally, the cost for probating Indian estates in other sections of the country cannot exceed a total of $75. In most cases the cost is not over $20 – which is less than two per cent.[280]

The investigation revealed the government's inability to control and administrate the program for the benefit of Native people. Segment after segment of the Bonnins' research cataloged one case after another. Even so, it took the government four years to commission the Meriam report.[281]

Seven years after leaving the SAI, the Bonnins founded a new organization called the National Council of American Indians (NCAI).[282] The Bonnin's intended that the NCAI would act as a lobby group for Native Americans concerns. Some Native scholars who continued to entertain the pan-Indian concept labeled the Bonnin's efforts as supportive of pan-Indianism. The pan Indian idea was widely unpopular among Native leaders because it appeared to propose one government for all Indian people without regard to tribal affiliation. In her dissertation, Welch stated, "Zitkala Sa still adhered to a belief in the pan-Indian concept." [283] The decolonization effort should treat the pan-Indian concept carefully. Gertrude supported the idea of all Indians coming together to organize and lobby for tribal sovereignty. There was no evidence the Bonnin's believed in the dissolution of the existing tribal governmental structures in favor of one government for all Tribal nations. However, the Bonnins were treated suspiciously because it was thought they supported an idea that was detrimental to existing tribal governments.

[280] Zitkala-Sa (aka Gertrude Bonnin), "Oklahoma's Poor Rich Indians: An Orgy of Graft and Exploitation of the Five Civilized Tribes – Legalized Robbery," in *The American Indian Intellectual Tradition, An Anthology of Writings from 1772 to 1972*, ed. David Martinez (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 226.
[281] Ibid., 225.
[282] Hafen, *Dreams and Thunder*, xxi.
[283] Welch, "Zitkala Sa, An American Indian Leader," 200.

One reason the Bonnins founded the NCAI was to lobby Congress for individual land and financial claims. They also organized voting blocks in an attempt to establish political power.[284] The organization was never successful in securing a large membership and financial support for the NCAI came primarily from Gertrude's speaking engagements and Raymond's law practice. The couple used all their resources to keep NCAI financially solvent eventually leading to personal ruin. Gertrude tirelessly continued to work for tribal independence until her death in 1938. One landmark passed during the incarnation of the NCAI was the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act (IRA). The act provided a way for Tribal nations to practice self-determination and governance. However, Gertrude and Raymond felt the act was another instance "of federal policy dictated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs." [285] As such, the Bonnins successfully convinced the Yankton Council to turn down the IRA. [286] Oddly, this act has been the most successful piece of legislation fostering tribal self-governance. Today, the IRA acts as the primary vehicle for establishing tribal self-determination and gambling revenue has provided the economy.

Currently, there is more work by non-Native scholars on Bonnin than by Native scholars possibly because Native historians do not recognize Bonnin as a key player in the struggle for Native American rights. Decolonizing Native intellectualism requires exercising prudence in using words heavily laden with colonization sentiments such as assimilation and pan-Indian. By looking past the Indian Princess veil and reviewing the whole of Gertrude's life, the story becomes one of a woman deeply dedicated to Native American rights and sovereignty. Her work with the SAI culminated in the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924. Her report on the abuses to Native nations in Oklahoma resulted in a government investigation that produced the

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[284] Hafen, *Dreams and Thunder*, xxi.
[285] Ibid., 245.
[286] Ibid., 245.

Meriam Report of 1928. In both cases, for the first time in Native American history, the activist efforts of a Native American woman prompted government action thus making Gertrude's activism the progenitor to modern Native activism that began with the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC) and the American Indian Movement (AIM) in the 1960s.

Gertrude Simmons Bonnin led a complex life filled with competing responsibilities, insecurities, complications, and sadness. It began with the stories learned by a little Yankton Nakota girl from the elders of her community as part of daily life. Her love of the freedom of that life was evident in her stories. The harsh realities of existing under the rule of a different dominant culture became glaringly apparent once she entered into the years of her education. Disappointed and outraged, the young girl made choices that her ancestors never had to make. Her mother's wisdom prevailed when she let her young daughter leave the reservation at the age of eight. She had no way of knowing that her daughter's work would live for the next 100 years as it continues to be read, analyzed, and debated. *Zitkala-Ša*, the frail young girl forever hopeful she could change the *Wasicu* hearts with her poetry and prose, left a lasting literary legacy. Gertrude Simmons Bonnin, the brash woman determined to change the course of political history for all her brothers and sisters, remained a questionable historic character until recent decades.

Robert Warrior pointed to the Bonnins anti-peyote campaign as a good "example of how reading our own tradition critically can be more honest and less celebratory."[287] The decolonizing effort in retelling Gertrude's history required a critical look at the effects colonization has had on writing our own tradition. Does this narrative celebrate the life story of Gertrude Simmons Bonnin? The goal was to decolonize her history, celebrate her successes, and understand her motivations with respect to Indigenous protocol. With reserve, Warrior eventually recognized the important work of this historic figure,

[287] Warrior, *Tribal Secrets*, 10.

> She had moved so completely to this protribal position that in 1926 she found a new organization, the National Council of American Indians, hoping to bridge the gap between the professional, educated, educated middle-class roots of SAI and grassroots Native leadership in American Indian communities around the country.[288]

I argue that Bonnin did not move into a pro-tribal position. She was always pro-tribal even when she was anti-peyote. Her anti-peyote campaign was not synonymous with anti-tribal. She simply had witnessed far too many Native people suffer from the debilitating effects of alcohol and wanted to prevent the further degradation of Native people. Bonnin negotiated between two different cultures never settling exclusively for one or the other. Decolonizing her reform efforts revealed a courageous Yankton Nakota woman whose reform activities at the turn of the twentieth century on behalf of Tribal nations belong in the discourse of Native American historiography and scholarly debate. Dexter Fisher described Gertrude as a "curious blend of civilized romanticism and aggressive individualism."[289] Bonnin's persona of *Zitkala-Ša* epitomized the romantic Indian Princess myth and won the hearts of the American public. After 1900, the woman known as *Zitkala-Ša* stopped publishing the oral histories of her people and Gertrude Simmons Bonnin began an active campaign for Native American rights.

"Decolonizing the Histories of Helen Hunt Jackson and Gertrude Simmons Bonnin" presents a new narrative of the life stories of two women activists for Native American rights using decolonization, one component of the Indigenous paradigm as defined by Susan A. Miller. Jackson and Bonnin were different from their peers. There were well-known poets such as Emily Dickinson and there were other Native American women orators such as Sarah Winnemucca. What made Jackson and Bonnin different and why compare these two women? They both dedicated their lives to improving conditions for Native American people by interacting directly

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[288] Ibid., 20.
[289] Dexter Fisher, "Zitkala Sa: The Evolution of a Writer," *American Indian Quarterly* 5, no. 3 (August 1979): 236.

with the U.S. government. Jackson became an Indian agent for the Native nations of California. Bonnin co-founded the National Council of American Indians with the mission to lobby Congress for land and financial claims as well to organize voting blocks to establish political power. Jackson reported on the conditions of the Native people of California while attempting to secure their land rights. She also wrote *A Century of Dishonor,* the most powerful expository of the mistreatment of Native American nations and broken treaty promises of the era. Bonnin co-authored a report on the legalized robbery of the Native people of Oklahoma and is credited with spurring the government to form the Meriam Commission that investigated and reported on reservation conditions and the effects of the Dawes Act on Native nations. During the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the United States was changing dynamically due to a large number of immigrants from Europe that created an environment of dynamic social transformation. Jackson and Bonnin were two extraordinary women whose work actually influenced future legislation in favor of Native Americans by holding the United States government accountable for the well-being of Native people. Their work would stand as an example of how to interact with the bureaucratic structure of the United States to affect positive changes for Native people. They were the first women to lobby Congress on behalf of Native Americans and as such, their activism was the progenitor to modern Native American rights movements.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I utilized the case studies of two women reformers to demonstrate how decolonizing history using an Indigenous lens can construct a more comprehensive history and produce a distinct narrative from a Native American perspective. I argued that using this methodology would recast the activism of Helen Hunt Jackson and Gertrude Simmons Bonnin (Yankton Nakota) as the progenitor to the modern Native American rights movements. The purpose of the narrative was to provide an example of how the principles of decolonization can be applied to the histories of people. Additionally, this thesis sought to bring the histories of these two women reformers into Native American scholarly discourse for discussion and debate encouraging other Indigenous historians to reclaim their histories by rewriting their narratives employing the tenets of Indigenous methodologies as set forth by Susan Miller (Seminole) in her article "The Origins of the Indigenous Paradigm in Historiography." A number of scholars have written about decolonization but few have put it to practical use. Susan A. Miller, James Riding In (Pawnee), and *Waziyatawin* Angela Wilson (Dakota) have contributed valuable insight regarding Indigenous methodologies and decolonization. As such, Native historians now have the tools to commit to the process of decolonizing Native American history.

I selected Helen Hunt Jackson and Gertrude Simmons Bonnin for their relevance to resistance writing for Native American peoples during the turn of the twentieth century when Native nations were struggling to survive the devastating effects of the Indian Removal Act of 1830. Jackson and Bonnin confronted the government and society with the truth about Native people living in conditions of sickness, starvation, and death. Although non-Indian and Indian, both reformers fought for the sovereign rights of the Indigenous nations of America. Eventually, each woman decided the ugly truth about government treatment of Native people needed to be exposed. Helen Hunt Jackson published *A Century of Dishonor* and worked as an Indian agent

for the government with the Mission Indians of California. Published in 1884, her novel *Ramona* was based on her experiences with Indian tribes of California. Her novels were expository narratives and she used the media prolifically to expose the failures of the government in their dealings with Native nations. Jackson's work nudged the conscience of the American public in an attempt to get support for stopping the government's practice of shrinking reservations in favor of giving more lands to immigrant settlers. Gertrude Simmons Bonnin began a life of resistance at eight years old when she began attending boarding schools. In 1913, Bonnin joined the Society of American Indians, the first organization to bring Native intellectuals together in pursuit of shared goals for Native nations.[290] She left that organization because she could not garner enough support for her belief in tribal self-determination. Eventually, Bonnin and her husband Raymond founded the National Council of American Indians, the precursor to the largest organization promoting Native American rights today, the National Congress of American Indians. Her pamphlet "Oklahoma's Poor Rich Indians: An Orgy of Graft and Exploitation of the Five Civilized Tribes – Legalized Robbery" eventually led to the formation of the Meriam Commission.[291] The efforts of Bonnin and others involved in SAI eventually led to the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924. Following the Meriam Report was the passage of the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 still in force today. Indeed the early reform work of both women prepared the American public, American government, and Native American leaders for future Native American rights movements.

The turn of the twentieth century in American history witnessed women, Native Americans, and African Americans challenging the existing Euro centered, patriarchal paradigm pushing the government to take responsibility for the actions of its citizens and the actions of the

[290] Warrior, *Tribal Secrets*, 6.
[291] Chiarello, "Deflective Missives Zitkala-Ša's Resistance," 8.

lawmakers. Decolonizing the histories of Helen Hunt Jackson and Gertrude Simmons Bonnin required a different perspective and purpose. The purpose of this narrative was to bring their stories into the discourse of post-colonial Native American history. Each woman maintained a firm stance for Native American rights and supported tribal land claims. Decolonizing the history of Jackson consisted of using an Indigenous lens to examine the impact of her work for tribal land retention to determine if her story belonged in the annals of post-colonial Native American history. Decolonizing the history of Bonnin required the use of Indigenous language, Indigenous scholarship, and Indigenous perspective. I used the principles of Indigenous methodologies focusing on using the published work of Native American scholars for the bibliography. I hope that it will encourage other students and scholars to produce historical manuscripts with a focus on the principles the Indigenous paradigm. The more Native scholars add to the discourse, the easier it will be for future scholars to create bibliographies that include a large number of Native American scholarly resources.

One tenet of Indigenous methodologies is to privilege the work of Indigenous scholarship for primary and secondary sources. A summary of the literature on decolonization included the work of Susan A. Miller (Seminole) and James Riding In (Pawnee), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Maori), and Waziyatawin Angela Wilson (Dakota). The historiography on Helen Hunt Jackson contained the work of Ruth Odell, Valerie Sherer Mathes, and Kate Phillips. The publications of P. Jane Hafen (Taos Pueblo) and Ruth Spack were the primary sources on Gertrude Simmons Bonnin. A second principle of Indigenous methodologies is to use Indigenous languages. The use of a few words from the Dakota language came from the published article, “Decolonizing the 1862 Death Marches” by Waziyatawin Angela Wilson (Dakota). Helen Hunt Jackson and Gertrude Simmons Bonnin selflessly committed their lives to advocating for Native American

rights. As such, they were totally dedicated to the fight for tribal sovereignty, tribal land rights, and self-governance. The review of their successes revealed their intentions were solely focused on benefitting Native nations and their people. Their life story is told here for Indigenous people to use for any purpose they choose. Scholarly debate is encouraged to determine where the stories of non-Native women and Native women fit into Native historical discourse.

Helen Hunt Jackson and Gertrude Simmons Bonnin had several things in common. The life story of both women presents a look at the social and political changes occurring during their lifetime. Jackson and Bonnin were well educated in literature. They each wrote poetry and prose to earn an income as young adults. Each woman used their literary skills to engage the American public and tell them about the sufferings of Native nations. They both turned their literary skills towards investigative reporting. The Victorian Age and the Era of Assimilation converged during the lifetime of both women and limited their ability to attain all their goals. In different ways, each woman interacted directly with U.S. government agencies on behalf of Native Americans. Jackson wrote hundreds of letters to prominent newspaper editors, many of which were published, in order to stir the conscious of the American public. Bonnin co-founded a new organization dedicated to lobbying Congress for Native American civil rights. Jackson and Bonnin were stubborn individualists who empowered themselves to be the spokesperson for Native nations. Each woman continued working for Native people until the day she died. They were the first two women to engage Congress directly on behalf of Native Americans. As such, their activism is the progenitor to modern Native American rights movements and deserves a respectable place in Native American history.

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