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"Yours For the Indian Cause": Zitkala-Sa's Expansion of Indigenous Rights through Female Correspondence

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“Yours For the Indian Cause”

Zitkala-Ša’s Expansion of Indigenous Rights through Female Correspondence

Honorable Mention in the 2020 Susa Young Gates essay contest.

GLAD YOU ARE GOING TO FIND YOUR RIGHT PLACE. Opportunities will be plenty, and you are going to be the intellectual and spiritual Joan of Arc of your people, not in a sensational way, but a way that will TELL for their good.”¹ In November 1921, Marianna Burgess, friend and publisher of *Zitkala-Ša*, praised her friend for her tireless efforts connecting local and national women’s clubs’ agendas with self-determinate Indigenous activism. Women’s clubs in the early twentieth century gave women the opportunity to produce long-lasting legislative and social changes through their diverse correspondence across the United States, and *Zitkala-Ša* used her position in women’s clubs to expand, protect, and create positive U.S.-Indigenous relationships.

Zitkala-Ša’s connections with women in various women’s clubs, political organizations, and different Indigenous nations specifically allowed her to travel and spread awareness about the “Indian Cause” throughout the nation. Burgess, for instance, arranged not one, not two, but ten lectures for *Zitkala-Ša* to give while in California, on top of connecting *Zitkala-Ša* with her brother to arrange a lecture in Chicago, adding to four other speaking engagements at various local women’s club meetings.² This was not a unique incident; *Zitkala-Ša* consistently received invitations to speak on Indigenous-related topics for women’s clubs across the states, precisely because of the lasting relationships she formed with women’s clubs’ leaders. The networking relationship between *Zitkala* and

1 Letter from Marianna Burgess to Gertrude Bonnin. Los Angeles, CA, 8 Nov 1921. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 2, Folder 14. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

2 Ibid. Letter from Gertrude Bonnin (*Zitkala-Ša*) to Dr. C.A. Burgess. Washington, D.C., 30 Dec 1921. Box 2, Folder 14. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

Burgess exemplifies how Zitkala-Ša gained an empathetic audience for Indigenous visibility and legitimized Zitkala-Ša's identity as a self-determined, Yankton Sioux Indian through her support and participation in women's organizations.

Zitkala-Ša also used her education and identity to persuade women to advocate for Native peoples' rights. She wrote back and forth with many women, all of them in various states of life and with diverse levels of privilege. They all remained involved in Zitkala-Ša's mission to bring Indigenous communities justice. Zitkala's strong correspondence with various women also created spaces for her to spread information that legally shaped Indigenous nations across the United States. By doing so, she legitimized herself as a resolute Dakota Sioux woman who not only successfully networked with prominent politicians, but also developed sincere relationships with the people she met through her work. People listened to her and contributed to Zitkala-Ša and her husband's legal resistance against oppressive policies, bills, and laws.

Many historical narratives focus on Zitkala-Ša's Indigenous leadership and identity to understand political shifts in Indigenous-U.S. policies and personal relationships during the early twentieth century. They also expand the scope of Indigenous participation in U.S. politics during a time when many in Native nations still did not consider themselves citizens of the United States. Scholars broadly explore Zitkala-Ša's activism through gender and racial theory as well. They offer an inclusive interpretation of her tactics to progress her vision of Indigenous justice. Similarly, scholars explore how Zitkala-Ša's involvement in Indigenous legislation expanded Native-led lands claims. For instance, in "Claims to Political Place through the National Council of American Indians: Locating Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin in the Nation's Capital," historian Julianne Newmark argues that Zitkala-Ša's position as president in the National Council of American Indians promoted political visibility for Indigenous nations across the United States.³ Likewise, historian P. Jane Hafen's "'Help Indians Help Themselves': Gertrude Bonnin, the SAI, and the NCAI" explores Zitkala-Ša's motivations behind creating the National Council of American Indians (NCAI): to protect, expand, and encourage Indigenous participation in the U.S. Government.⁴ These scholarly works establish Zitkala-Ša as a person motivated by her experiences and intelligence as well as an

3 Julianne Newmark, "Claims to Political Place through the National Council of American Indians: Locating Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin in the Nation's Capital," *Modern Language Studies* 45, no. 1 (2015): 68–93.

4 P. Jane Hafen, 2013. "'Help Indians Help Themselves,'" 199–218.

activist devoted to her Indigenous community and other Native nations within the United States.⁵

Historians Lucy Maddox and Ruth Spack supplement Zitkala-Ša's historiography by showing how gender, politics, and ethnicity intersected with Zitkala-Ša's experiences as a Dakota Sioux woman.⁶ Maddox's *Citizen Indians* explores Native peoples' resistance to colonial authority by analyzing the resilience of Indigenous communities throughout the U.S. and illuminating Zitkala-Ša's dedication to upholding Native sovereignty.⁷ Moreover, Spack's essay, "Re-visioning Sioux Women: Zitkala-Ša's Revolutionary American Indian Stories," analyzes Zitkala-Ša's Indian legend writings as a form of female Sioux actualization framed within colonial gender theories.⁸ Both of these scholars develop Zitkala-Ša's historical narratives and interpret how other Indigenous women may have participated in Indigenous activism during the early twentieth century.

Clubwomen as well as Indigenous women were fundamental in promoting Indigenous social reform. Scholars like historian Karen L. Huebner discuss the significance of women's clubs in Indian reform. Huebner's "An Unexpected Alliance: Stella Atwood, the California Clubwomen, John Collier, and the Indians of the Southwest, 1917–1934," explores Stella Atwood's activism without mentioning Zitkala-Ša once, even though Zitkala-Ša's records prove that she was an integral asset for Atwood's Indian reform initiatives within the General Federation of Women's Clubs.⁹ David L. Johnson and Raymond Wilson's "Gertrude Simmons Bonnin, 1876–1938: 'Americanize the First American,'" highlights Zitkala-Ša's specific roles within several women's clubs, thus adding scope to this paper while also specifying Zitkala's involvement and contributions.¹⁰

As best explained by historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz:

I use 'Indigenous,' 'Indian,' and 'Native' interchangeably in the text. Indigenous individuals and peoples in North America overall do

5 P. Jane Hafen. "Claims to Political Place through the National Council of American Indians: Locating Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin in the Nation's Capital." 68–93.

6 Lucy Maddox, *Citizen Indians*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005);

Ruth Spack, "Re-visioning Sioux Women: Zitkala-Ša's Revolutionary American Indian Stories." *Legacy* 14, no. 1 (1997): 25–42.

7 Lucy Maddox. *Citizen Indians*.

8 Ruth Spack. "Re-visioning Sioux Women."

9 Karin L. Huebner. "An Unexpected Alliance: Stella Atwood, the California Clubwomen, John Collier, and the Indians of the Southwest, 1917–1934." *Pacific Historical Review* 78, no. 3 (August 2009).

10 David L. Johnson, and Raymond Wilson. 1988. "Gertrude Simmons Bonnin, 1876–1938: 'Americanize the First American.'" *American Indian Quarterly* 12 (1): 27–40.

not consider ‘Indian’ a slur. Of course, all citizens of Native nations much prefer that their nations’ names in their own language be used . . . Except in material that is quoted, I don’t use the term ‘tribe.’ ‘Community,’ ‘people,’ and ‘nation’ are used interchangeably instead. I also refrain from using ‘America’ and ‘American’ when referring only to the United States and its citizens. Those blatantly imperialistic terms annoy people in the rest of the Western Hemisphere, who are, after all, also Americans.”

“Zitkala-Ša” will be used throughout this paper to honor her indigeneity and if “Gertrude” is used, it will be within primary evidence. Drawing upon primary correspondences within the Gertrude and Raymond Special Collections, this paper argues that Zitkala-Ša’s correspondence with various clubwomen throughout the United States provided the financial foundation of the National Council of American Indians (NCAI); her confidence to build such an organization was based in women’s abilities to pass along and advocate for Indigenous visibility. Various Indigenous nations represented in the NCAI’s battles against oppressive policies localized Zitkala-Ša’s political efforts and spread U.S.-Indigenous awareness due to Zitkala-Ša’s annual traveling and advocacy. Her correspondence with women showcases an intimate analysis of Zitkala-Ša’s influence and opportunities to further the Indian Cause. Zitkala’s correspondence and activism must therefore be contextualized within her life experiences and background in women’s clubs.

Zitkala-Ša’s Background

Zitkala-Ša—“Red Bird” in her native Lakota language—was born in 1876 as the granddaughter of Sitting Bull and in “the same year as the Battle for Little Big Horn.”¹² She was a Yankton Sioux, born in the South Dakota Sioux lands. When Zitkala-Ša was eleven years old, the Dawes Act of 1887 was passed. It mandated Indigenous lands as United States property, split up reservations into individual family land-units, and attempted

11 Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz. 2014. *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States*. Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press. Print.

12 *Atlanta Journal*. Nov. 15, 1921. “Women to Hear Indian Princess.” Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 1, Folder 8. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

P. Jane Hafen. 2013. “‘Help Indians Help Themselves’: Gertrude Bonnin, the SAI, and the NCAI.” *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 25 (2): 199.

to assimilate Native peoples into Anglo-centric society.¹³ Zitkala-Ša saw the effects of the Dawes Act on her community and opposed the ramifications in her activism work.¹⁴ Four years prior to the Dawes Act, she convinced her mother to let her attend boarding school, but came back to the Yankton Reservation in 1887 after experiencing cultural and religious assimilation. Saddened by the effects of the Dawes Act on her home, she decided to go back to school, against her mother's wishes.¹⁵ Shaped by the United States' attempts to assimilate and erase Indigenous communities and peoples, Zitkala-Ša's mother remained apprehensive of the idea of her daughter attending "the white man's" institutions.¹⁶

Zitkala-Ša "was an unusual girl, talented in school and music," and noticed by peers and teachers alike for her precocity.¹⁷ Successfully graduated from the boarding school, she attended Earlham College in 1895, leaving in 1897 to teach at the Carlisle Federal Indian School in Pennsylvania. After going home to recruit more students and purposefully turning up empty-handed, she quit her teaching job. She wanted to pursue more education, so she traveled to the New England Conservatory of Music in 1899, graduating with a specialty in violin. Zitkala-Ša understood her mother's warning of the "tardy justice" of the "palefaces . . . large debt for stolen lands," so she utilized her education to achieve legal strides for many different Indigenous communities' lost lands.¹⁸

Her first book brewing, Zitkala-Ša moved back home to collect Sioux oral histories, publishing *Old Indian Legends* in 1901. There, she met Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs (FBIA) employee Raymond Bonnin.

13 Laura Briggs. "Taking Native Children." In *Taking Children: A History of American Terror*, 46–75. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2020.

14 Karin L. Huebner. "An Unexpected Alliance: Stella Atwood, the California Clubwomen, John Collier, and the Indians of the Southwest, 1917–1934." *Pacific Historical Review* 78, no. 3 (August 2009): 341.; Laura Briggs. "Taking Native Children."

15 Zitkala-Ša. 2003. "The School Days of an Indian Girl." In *American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings*, edited by Cathy N. Davidson and Ada Norris, 87–103. N.Y., New York: Penguin Group.

16 Ibid.

17 Letter from Mrs. Stewart to Mrs. Burgess. October 29, 1921. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 2, Folder 14. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

Zitkala-Ša. 2003. "An Indian Teacher Among Indians." In *American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings*, edited by Cathy N. Davidson and Ada Norris, 104. N.Y., New York: Penguin Group.

18 Zitkala-Ša. 2003. "Impressions of an Indian Childhood." In *American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings*, edited by Cathy N. Davidson and Ada Norris, 85–86. N.Y., New York: Penguin Group.

Both celebrated the other for their desires to fight for their home and people, and they married in 1902. Raymond's experience as an FBI employee as well as his law education complemented Zitkala-Ša's writing expertise and educational background. So, when Raymond got a new posting in the Uintah and Ouray Reservation, she contributed her passion and experience toward improving the living conditions of the Ute people. She taught at Whiterocks Boarding School, started an Indigenous community center, facilitated community classes for Indigenous women, supplied food for Native communities in need, and wrote about various topics relating to Indigeneity. She experienced firsthand the poverty that various Indigenous communities faced because of U.S. governmental policies and laws. Zitkala-Ša and Raymond both recognized the need for self-determinate Indigenous people and merged their respective experiences to fulfill that need.

Zitkala-Ša dove into political writing during her time with the Ute community. She joined the Society of American Indians' (SAI) advisory board in 1914, an Indigenous organization designed to encourage Indigenous self-determination through education and literature.¹⁹ Exhausted by the political pushback from Indian Bureau officials, Zitkala-Ša and Raymond moved to Washington, D.C. in 1916. Zitkala-Ša continued to write for SAI, promote her literature, and participate in women's circles, while Raymond joined the army.²⁰ In 1920, however, she left SAI because of the organization's decision "to make its journal 'quiet in tone,'" feeling like they only appealed to educated Indigenous folk rather than working directly with tribal nations.²¹ At this point, she had "been working for the Indian cause for many years" and recalled that "all my time is now devoted to that work and all funds received by me goes to the support of the cause."²² Scheduling lectures and book signings, Zitkala-Ša built and maintained webs of correspondence with women across the United States to advocate for Indigenous nations' rights. She used these connections later to create the National Council of American Indians in Indigenous communities across the United States. The NCAI, Zitkala-Ša, and Raymond Bonnin in turn became financially dependent upon their friends'

19 Jane P. Hafén, "'Help Indians Help Themselves': Gertrude Bonnin, the SAI, and the NCAI." *American Indian Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (2013): 199–218.

20 Ibid.

21 David L. Johnson, and Raymond Wilson. 1988. "Gertrude Simmons Bonnin, 1876–1938: 'Americanize the First American.'" *American Indian Quarterly* 12 (1): 27–40.

22 Letter to Dr. C.A. Burgess. December 30, 1921. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 2, Folder 14. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

generosity because of the poverty that many Indigenous communities faced, including Zitkala-Ša herself.

Zitkala-Ša's Network of Women's Clubs

Moving to D.C. in 1920, Zitkala-Ša entered a world in major transition: World War I, a new president, and the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment evoked a shift in political winds. Women's clubs were a prominent method of female political power before women's suffrage became part of the U.S. Constitution, and many clubs rooted themselves in the heart of the U.S. government. Zitkala-Ša's experiences lecturing and publicizing her literature led her to women's clubs composed of passionate women ready to listen to her message of Indigenous sovereignty.

Women's clubs' field of influence varied depending on class status, religion, race, level of education, political leanings, and region. Meetings focused on speaking engagements, essay readings, weekly educational activities, and exploration of diverse cultures. Many women's clubs began as a way to fight for women's right to vote. The structure of women's clubs included elected members to a presidency and cabinet. While Zitkala-Ša was not part of many women's club boards until the 1920s, she long attended as the speaker, so she knew how women's clubs operated and what kind of issues they cared about; she took advantage of her identity and experiences to get the "Indian Cause" on the minds of many middle-class, white American women.²³

Indeed, Zitkala-Ša utilized her lectures and literature to promote a self-determinate vision for U.S.-Indigenous relations among women's clubs. Essays, columns, and stories like "Americanize the First American," "Bureaucracy versus Democracy," and "The Indian Woman" humanized Zitkala-Ša and established her as an educated, passionate woman within women's club social circles.²⁴ Her book, *American Indian Stories*, spoke to many women who previously did not understand how U.S. policies affected Indigenous peoples or, more generally, how life was in

²³ David L. Johnson, and Raymond Wilson. 1988. "Americanize the First American." 27-40.

²⁴ Gertrude Bonnin. "The Indian Woman." *The Suffragist* 6, no. 23, June 29, 1918; Zitkala-Ša. 2003. "Bureaucracy versus Democracy" In *American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings*, 245-247.

Zitkala-Ša. 2003. "The School Days of an Indian Girl." In *American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings*, 242-245.

Indigenous communities.²⁵ Zitkala-Ša sold books at speaking engagements “where they would naturally sell like hotcakes.”²⁶ She then put the proceeds toward organizational work and travel.²⁷ She also prompted her friend Mrs. Atwood and the larger General Federation of Women’s Clubs to advocate for Indigenous people by studying Indigenous literature, providing them an Indigenous-centered educational resource in the form of her own publications.²⁸ Doing so gave non-Indigenous women the opportunity to engage with Indigenous-sourced resources and increased the likelihood that the women attending her lectures and buying her publications would support the passage of U.S.-Indigenous enfranchisement. In addition, Burgess facilitated the organization of lectures and book displays so that Zitkala-Ša could “point Friends to the way out for the Indian, through the abolishment of the Bureau” herself.²⁹ Zitkala-Ša’s acceptance of non-Indigenous women working with her fueled her mission for positive U.S.-Indigenous relations and garnered strong support for Indigenous citizenship.

Zitkala-Ša pushed for U.S.-Indigenous suffrage because she saw the vote as a powerful way to shape attitudes, policies, and laws in favor of Indigenous sovereignty. Leaning on the recent fight for the Nineteenth Amendment in her writings and pitches, Zitkala-Ša specifically addressed the “Womanhood of America” to encourage empathetic action for disenfranchised Indigenous people.³⁰ Her move to Washington, D.C. in 1921 provided her the time and ability to join women’s clubs.

25 John Walker Harrington, August 10, 1919. “Native Race Proposed for Full Citizenship in a Bill Now before Congress: Self-Determination for American Real Man.” *New York Times* (1857–1922), Aug 10, 2.

Zitkala-Ša. 2003. *American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings*.

26 Letter from M. Burgess to Zitkala-Sa. May 6, 1922. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 2, Folder 14. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

27 Letter from President (Zitkala) to Mrs. E.D. Cawley. November 1, 1927. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 4, Folder 5. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

28 Letter from Gertrude Bonnin (Zitkala-Sa) to Miss Marianna Burgess. December 12, 1921. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 2, Folder 14. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

29 Letter from M. Burgess to Gertrude Bonnin. October 20, 1921. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 2, Folder 14. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

30 Zitkala-Ša. 2003. “Americanize the First American.” In *American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings*, edited by Cathy N. Davidson and Ada Norris, 244. New York: Penguin Group.

She joined the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC) and quickly began lecturing for more women's organizations, including the National Women's Party, on why Indigenous people deserved citizenship rights.³¹ She met Mrs. Stella M. Atwood through the GFWC, and Atwood's leadership positions in both the GFWC and her local California chapters offered Zitkala-Ša the opportunity to travel to different areas of the United States to spread awareness about U.S.-Indigenous issues. As Zitkala-Ša encouraged more women to support Indigenous citizenship, more women advocated for the creation of Indian Welfare committees within various women's clubs, including the General Federation of Women's Clubs.³² The more the state women's clubs' added Indian Welfare committees, the greater chance the GCFW would establish an official Indian Welfare board. Zitkala-Ša sent networking suggestions to Mrs. Atwood, and Mrs. Atwood returned the favor: she wrote many women across the states—like Florida, Georgia, and New York—to tell them about Zitkala-Ša's mission and to include Zitkala-Ša's contact information so that she could personally arrange times for her to travel to various women's clubs' meetings to share why Indigenous political representation was important to their overall missions.³³ Zitkala-Ša's contributions to women's clubs' agendas and efforts to personally educate women on Indigenous issues created long-lasting relationships with women's clubs' leaders to push for Indigenous citizenship rights.

Often Zitkala-Ša would make sure that different groups or people were “sincerely interested in helping the Indians.”³⁴ In one such clarification, Mrs. Atwood explained to Zitkala-Ša the uncertainty her “chief,” Mrs. Elmer Blair, felt about broadening General Federation of Women's Clubs support of Indigenous citizenship not only to states with high Indigenous populations, but also to states with little to no Indigenous peoples, and demanded that she write to the Illinois women's club president without Mrs. Blair's knowledge. She [Mrs. Atwood] expanded it to the larger national community: “I feel this is the biggest question before

31 *The Washington Herald*. (Washington, D.C.), February 18, 1921. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress.

32 Barbara J. Brown, “Zitkala-Ša, The Red Bird Activist,” *Better Days* 2020; Letters to and from Mrs. Stella Atwood and Gertrude Bonnin (Zitkala-Sa). Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 2, Folder 14. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

33 Letter from Mrs. Stella Atwood to Mrs. Bonnin. December 30, 1921. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 2, Folder 14. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

34 *Ibid.*



MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF AMERICAN INDIANS TAKE PART IN CEREMONY AT UNVEILING OF STATUE OF THE GREAT SITTING BULL, March 9, 1926, Washington, D. C. The sculptor, U. S. J. Dunbar, stands next to the President of the organization, Gertrude Bonnin (Zitkala-Sa) with the group. Testimony of the Sioux, Bartholomew, Yalden, Hinn, Kinn, Anand, and Otago were the unveiling. The statue was made for the Wyoming Historical Society and paid for by contributions of White school children of Pennsylvania.

Members of the National Council of American Indians, March 9, 1926. Photograph obtained and used with permission from the Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection, Box 15, Folder 15, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

the nation to-day and every person in the nation should take interest—do not let the Illinois president know what position Mrs. Blair has taken but send her a marked copy of your article with a letter in your most appealing style begging her to get in touch with me and get organized so that with the help of the whole Federation we may get this business cleared up.”³⁵ Zitkala-Ša’s response highlights an integral aspect of her activism: “I will help you with Mrs. Blair in my own way. Will give her a little time and think she will broaden her view.”³⁶ Zitkala-Ša’s gentle yet firm response to Mrs. Atwood highlighted the complicated nature of her position as an Indigenous activist and as a woman; Zitkala-Ša’s subtle reclamation of the “Indian Cause” both legitimized her goal for Indigenous-led movements as well as urged white people, especially women, to learn and grow without expecting the person or group experiencing oppression to provide the educational burden (unless offered). Doing so allowed Zitkala-Ša to

³⁵ Letter from Stella M. Atwood to Zitkala-Ša. 1921. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 2, Folder 14. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

³⁶ Letter from Gertrude Bonnin (Zitkala-Ša) to Mrs. Stella M. Atwood. December 9, 1921. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 2, Folder 14. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

focus on and connect with people genuinely invested in helping Indigenous people gain visibility and representation and created long-lasting support for Native sovereignty, even after the passage of the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act.

Unfortunately, she still faced discrimination from prominent women's clubs' leaders, like the president of the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC), Mrs. Alice Ames Winter. Zitkala-Ša's correspondence with Mrs. Atwood mentions how Mrs. Winter excluded Zitkala-Ša from meetings she previously accepted invitations to, whether on her behalf or on Mrs. Atwood's behalf.³⁷ While Mrs. Winter approved of Zitkala-Ša's book and listed it in the GFWC official magazine earlier in her presidency, she still did not treat Zitkala-Ša as a legitimate leader among the ranks of political women three years later, even though her direct activism created the Indian Welfare Committee in the GFWC.³⁸ This, coupled with her early experiences of colonial assimilationist tactics, fortified Zitkala-Ša's mission to fight for self-determined Indigenous communities.³⁹

As Zitkala-Ša transitioned from her Indigenous suffrage work with women's clubs into her role as president of the National Council of American Indians (NCAI), most women in GFWC leadership remained steadfast in support of her cause. In one letter shortly after the creation of the NCAI, Secretary Mr. Morrell informed Illinois Federation of Women's Club president Mrs. Fowler that "We feel greatly encouraged and assured that the Indian cause, which is after all America's problem, will ultimately succeed, with the support of the organized women of America. It will mean justice to the Indian citizens, and honor to our country."⁴⁰ While shared only with Mrs. Fowler, this sentiment captured the essence of Zitkala-Ša's mission for Indigenous justice and emphasized the role clubwomen played in the expansion of Indigenous rights in the United States.

While the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act passed with the broad support of clubwomen, there were many oppressive policies, attitudes, and laws left to dismantle for Indigenous communities to fully access their citizenship rights. Zitkala-Ša's education, relationships with women leaders,

³⁷ Letter from Stella M. Atwood to Mrs. Gertrude Bonnin. January 24, 1924. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 2, Folder 14. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

³⁸ Letter from Gertrude Bonnin (Zitkala-Ša) to Miss Marianna Burgess. December 12, 1921.

³⁹ P. Jane Hafen, "Help Indians Help Themselves."

⁴⁰ Letter from Mr. Morrell to Mrs. Fowler. April 30, 1926. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 3, Folder 4. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

and community outreach experience, coupled with her husband's Bureau of Indian Affairs work history and law education, prepared them both for the next step toward Indigenous sovereignty: abolishing U.S. governmental organizations, policies, and laws intended to oppress Indigenous communities. To achieve these goals, they needed Indigenous people to use their hard-earned citizenship status to hold U.S. government officials accountable.

The National Council of American Indians

Successfully having obtained Indigenous citizenship through lobbying in the GFWC, Zitkala-Ša turned her focus to eliminating legal barriers to Indigenous enfranchisement and self-determination. Her experience in GFWC bled into her and Raymond's structuring of the National Council of American Indians; she structured leadership just like women's clubs presidencies, and her lobbying approach was also the same as the GFWC.⁴¹ Additionally, her grassroots experience with the Ute community in Utah and her time as secretary of SAI provided her with broad Indigenous support.⁴² Zitkala-Ša's relocation to Washington D.C. placed her in the heart of U.S. power, and she utilized her state and local support to found a strong lobbying base in D.C., similar to that within national women's organizations.

Thus, Zitkala-Ša became the president of the National Council of American Indians and Raymond assumed the role of Executive Secretary-Treasurer on February 27, 1926. Together, they established the first all-Indigenous-run national organization determined to practice peace without regard to religion or politics; oppose any action that places Native peoples at risk; present, preserve, and emulate the "true history of the American Indian"; promote and share knowledge among Indigenous groups and "all other people" about their basic "human and legal rights" as American citizens; increase public education among Indigenous youth; encourage "Indian women to participate in the activities of American citizens"; assist and guide NCAI members in any and all legal issues; study the "local conditions and the possibilities of the various Indian communities"; utilize any resources to create self-sustaining Indigenous communities; establish chapters of the NCAI in each Native community to unify U.S.-Indigenous activism; and to protect, preserve,

41 Amherst College Digital Collections. Article 2–Object. "Constitution and by-laws of National Council of American Indians." E91. N38 1926.

42 P. Jane Hafen, "Help Indians Help Themselves."

promote, and encourage the local, state, and national “interests of the American Indian People.”⁴³ The NCAI bylaws outlined Zitkala-Ša’s vision of Indigenous self-determination centered in women’s participation and empowerment.

Raymond and Zitkala-Ša embarked on a trip in June 1926 across the United States with only their car and camping equipment to establish localized Indigenous NCAI chapters. They relied on other people’s generosity to pay for all other necessities—they gave up any paying jobs during this period of time so they could focus solely on building up the National Council of American Indians’ local chapters.⁴⁴ John Collier, in an effort to help with the financial burden, reached out to Mrs. Fowler for any ideas about financial sponsors in or around the Chicago area. Financial support also came from publicity at GFWC events, like the Fair held in April 1926.⁴⁵ Mrs. Fowler and Mrs. Atwood advocated on Zitkala-Ša’s behalf for the GFWC to promote the NCAI. These connections kept Raymond and Zitkala afloat; the support allowed them to network and establish NCAI chapters so that political change occurred in local Indigenous communities as well as in other political organizations.

Zitkala-Ša’s correspondence shifted from discussing Indigenous-based women’s club activities to supporting bills deliberated in Congress to better fulfill the NCAI’s objectives. She called upon the GFWC, Mrs. Stella Atwood, Mrs. Tavia Fowler, and many other women to get the word out and financially support Indigenous-centered activism. Active membership of the NCAI remained open only to those “members of Indian blood,” but those without “Indian blood” took advantage of associate membership.⁴⁶ The distinction of membership and the shift in Zitkala-Ša’s correspondence placed Indigenous advocacy back into Native communities’ hands while acknowledging the lack of financial stability in those communities because of oppressive policies. Letters specifically between Zitkala-Ša, Mrs. Fowler, Mrs. Atwood, and John Collier illuminate the tireless work they engaged in to learn and spread information about different bills and provisions written on local and national levels on behalf of Native communities.⁴⁷ John Collier’s position within the U.S. Government and

43 Ibid.

44 Letter from John Collier to Mrs. J. Marc Fowler. April 30, 1926. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 3, Folder 4. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid. Article 4—Membership.

47 Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Boxes 3–5. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

Zitkala-Ša's connection with the women leaders of Indian Welfare committees across the United States gave Zitkala-Ša necessary foundations for the repatriation of lost tribal lands and rights.

As the NCAI established their legal legitimacy for Native peoples and communities, financial support became crucial for the survival of the organization, and by extension, Zitkala-Ša and Raymond Bonnin. Many funds came from associate members of the NCAI, and most of the associate members were women Zitkala-Ša previously met or worked with in women's clubs. For instance, Mrs. Fowler often sent checks from associated women and clubs to further Zitkala-Ša's mission.⁴⁸ She also received financial help from Princess Chinquilla, a Cheyenne Native and prominent Indigenous activist who wrote Zitkala-Ša immediately after learning about her activism work.⁴⁹ She donated consistently to the NCAI, after meeting Zitkala-Ša at an Indian Defense dinner banquet in New York, and offered additional help through the American Indian Association.⁵⁰ Both of these Native women used their positions of leadership to encourage other Indigenous women to participate in U.S. politics. As one of the pillars of the NCAI, Zitkala-Ša understood the power within each woman to act and promote Native justice. While Princess Chinquilla and other clubwomen had the means to donate money, Indigenous women with less financial stability found other ways to contribute.

Zitkala-Ša's correspondence with Hattie Feather, member of the Cherokee Lodge in Cherokee, North Carolina, illuminates the active role Indigenous women played in the establishment and endurance of NCAI local lodges. Having known Hattie from Washington D.C., Zitkala-Ša and Raymond traveled to Hattie's community during the beginning of their trip and successfully established a local NCAI chapter.⁵¹ Hattie passed on information about elected leadership, the creation of a committee to build new membership within the lodge, and the community's enthusiasm to fight against discriminatory actions of Congress, like provisions in the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 that still prevented Indigenous individuals from certain rights of property and due process.⁵²

48 Letter from Tavia to Dearest Zitkala, June 13, 1926.

49 Letter from President [Gertrude Bonnin], NCAI, to Princess Chinquilla, December 4, 1926. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection, Box 3, Folder 12. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

50 Ibid.

51 Letter from Hattie Feather to Gertrude Bonnin, July 20, 1926. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection, Box 3, Folder 7. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

52 Ibid.

Zitkala-Ša and Raymond's establishment of local NCAI chapters promoted pan-Indigenous unity while still preserving diversity among Indigenous communities to better combat oppressive U.S. practices; it also centered activism around Indigenous women's leadership roles in the local NCAI chapters.⁵³

Zitkala-Ša spent most of her time communicating with local NCAI chapters, women leaders, and government officials about the corrupt Indian Bureau during her time in Washington, D.C. Mrs. Fowler and Mrs. Atwood consistently connected women with Zitkala-Ša to enroll as associate members of the NCAI.⁵⁴ Women's clubs as simple as the Austin Club or the Berwyn Club wanted to support the NCAI in any way they could, sending checks and questions through Zitkala's GFWC contacts.⁵⁵ Their contributions kept the NCAI alive while Indigenous activists worked and communicated with Zitkala-Ša to disrupt any policy-making designed to impede Native sovereignty or citizenship rights. In return for their financial support and community networking, Zitkala-Ša sent out educational folders to Mrs. Atwood, NCAI presidencies, Mrs. Fowler, and other contacts to distribute to their members.⁵⁶ She relied directly on women's organizations and female members of NCAI lodges to spread information about the corruption of the Indian Bureau, establishing that informed action was the best way to achieve equality. After traveling over 10,600 miles across "Indian country," through her "fine personality, who always carried such st[r]ong appeal," Zitkala-Ša established the localized informed action needed to fight against the Indian Bureau and U.S. Congress.⁵⁷

53 Amherst College Digital Collections. "Constitution and by-laws of National Council of American Indians" E91. N38 1926.

54 Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Boxes 3–5. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

55 Letter from Tavia to Zitkala. December 20, 1926. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 3, Folder 12. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.;

Letter from [Gertrude Bonnin] to "Dearest Tavia." April 29, 1927. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 3, Folder 16. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

56 Letter from GB (Gertrude Bonnin) to Mrs. Atwood. March 4, 1927. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 3, Folder 15. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

57 Letter from Stella M. Atwood to Mrs. Gertrude Bonnin. March 10, 1927. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 3, Folder 15. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.;

Memo from Secretary Raymond T. Bonnin to "Active Member". April 12, 1927. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 3, Folder 16. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

Zitkala-Ša's physical presence at Indigenous-related Congressional hearings, the support of the NCAI's local chapters, and the financial assistance from clubwomen were not wasted. These elements of the NCAI pushed Congress to investigate the Indian Bureau's practices, convinced Congress to reject or reform legislation that stole from Indigenous tribal nations like the Navajo or the Flathead communities, and increased the amount of attentive Congressional officials to their Indigenous constituents' needs and concerns.⁵⁸ Her mission, above all, was to protect and preserve "all Indians and their property" from the ignorant prejudice of U.S. government officials, largely composed of middle-class white men; the thoughtful elements of the NCAI strived for Indigenous preservation—recognizing the need for financial support, honoring Indigenous contributions (usually non-monetary), and understanding the importance of physically representing diverse Native communities.

In her role as president, Zitkala-Ša balanced the role of spokesperson and communicator between Indigenous and white communities by practicing transparency with as many people as she could. She, for example, declared that:

The organization proposes to get in closer touch with other Indian Welfare organizations sponsored and governed by white people to learn if possible what they are attempting to do for the Indians and try to discuss Indian matters with them and offer suggestions as to what the Indians believe is best for themselves. . . . The Indians who organized the National Council know that there are many good white people who desired to help the Indians get fair play and therefore provision was made in the By-Laws to take in associate members.⁵⁹

Zitkala-Ša referenced her various connections with women and women's clubs as a temporarily necessary financial resource while they worked for "a changed condition . . . brought about permitting Indians freer use of their own funds."⁶⁰ The NCAI's acknowledgment of Indigenous communities' hesitation at white people's involvement strengthened their credibility among many Native NCAI members and expanded their ability to make genuine legal and political change.

⁵⁸ Ibid. Memo to Active Member.

⁵⁹ Letter from NCAI to friend. July 15, 1927. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 4, Folder 1. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Zitkala-Ša took the brunt of the workload for the NCAI. She only had the direct help of Raymond, and both worked without salaries. She continued to rely heavily on the financial generosity of old and new friends, especially as her health declined throughout the years of tireless, exhausting activism, traveling annually until her death. Mrs. Edith F. Cawley became an avid financial sponsor and friend of the NCAI beginning in late 1927.⁶¹ She, upon learning about Zitkala-Ša's life's work, began sharing information with both "friends and strangers" in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.⁶² The GFWC, "numbering more than three million voters" across the United States, also continued to sponsor the NCAI.⁶³ On June 2, 1927, for instance, alongside their public support for the investigation of the Indian Bureau, they "passed a resolution calling for the support of 'such legislation as is designed to give him (Indian) his rights as a citizen under the Constitution, including the right to due process of law, peaceful assembly, religious liberty and a review of the act of his guardian.'"⁶⁴ Without Zitkala-Ša's previous incorporation of Indian Welfare Committees into various women's clubs, the NCAI likely would not have had such public support from the largest women's organization in the United States. The GFWC's political credibility helped establish the NCAI's legitimacy as both an Indigenous and women's organization.

One of Zitkala-Ša's biggest motivations was the "abject poverty in which the Indians live."⁶⁵ She worried that Indigenous people would never have the ability to sustain themselves and their communities because of the appropriation of Indigenous funds. As a result, much of Zitkala-Ša's correspondence concerned funding for hers and Raymond's needs so that they could continue appearing in Congressional hearings and meetings with influential government officials. Mrs. Edith Cawley, Mrs. Fowler, and Mrs. Atwood lobbied on their behalf through their relationships with other women and their continuing respective roles in Illinois, California,

61 Card from Mrs. E.D. Cawley to NCAI. October 19, 1927. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 4, Folder 4. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

62 Ibid. Letter from (Mrs. E.D.) Edith F. Cawley to Mrs. Bonnin. October 28, 1927. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 4, Folder 4. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

63 Informational letter from the NCAI to Members. November 16, 1927. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 4, Folder 5. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

64 Ibid.

65 Letter from Zitkala-Ša to Tavia. November 8, 1927. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 4, Folder 5. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

and General Federation of Women's Clubs leadership.⁶⁶ Mrs. Fowler persuaded twenty-five clubwomen to donate one dollar a month for one year to provide rent money for the NCAI office, while Zitkala-Ša made arrangements with John Collier to share an office for the remainder of the NCAI's existence in an attempt to save money.⁶⁷ Such generous arrangements allowed Zitkala to continue working, using "what strength and health remains to me for this work."⁶⁸

Zitkala-Ša stirred change slowly but surely. She sat in Congressional hearings, read and replied to several letters from Indigenous organizers, and corresponded with close friends' all in one sitting. Requests piled onto the NCAI's desk, and Zitkala-Ša answered them as swiftly and precisely as possible while Raymond's legal cases concerning tribal land claims grew.⁶⁹ But Zitkala-Ša's efforts proved successful as letters piled into Commissioner of Indian Affairs Mr. Charles H. Burke's mailbox; the NCAI's Local Lodges took action against proposed legislation further limiting the amount of land allotted to Native tribal lands, instead offering that land up for "reservoir and power site purposes" without the ability for Indigenous people to claim that land as theirs.⁷⁰ Such violations of personal property were not acceptable to Indigenous communities across the United States, and Zitkala-Ša's efforts to establish local NCAI chapters, maintain her relationships with women's clubs, and spread information to those two groups fought against U.S. encroachments on Indigenous life.

In fact, Zitkala-Ša regularly sent out memos detailing the latest developments in Congress to call upon the NCAI community to take action against oppressive legislation becoming law. Frequent NCAI pamphlets urged members of the NCAI to act as fast as they could to prevent discriminatory bills from being passed. Zitkala-Ša specifically advocated for NCAI members, chapters, and women's organizations to call, write, and meet with elected officials to share their concerns because of its long-term

66 Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Boxes 3–5. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

67 Letter from Zitkala-Ša to Tavia. November 8, 1927.

68 Letter from Zitkala to Tavia. January 23, 1928. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 4, Folder 9. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

69 Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Boxes 3–5. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

70 Letter from the Yakima Delegation in Washington D.C. to Mr. Charles H. Burke. January 31, 1928. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 4, Folder 9. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

effects. Zitkala-Ša taught NCAI members effective lobbying strategies by sharing her own experiences. One such example was the S. 700 Conservancy Bill—designed to force Indigenous communities into U.S. government-sanctioned labor agreements in order to financially supplement their communities temporarily, it would have placed millions of dollars of debt back on Indigenous communities in the long run.⁷¹ Upon finding out about this bill, Zitkala-Ša wrote to the president of the United States, Calvin Coolidge: “I had hoped Congress would put through a measure that would safe-guard the Indians absolutely but instead it has passed a bill that is exceedingly unfair to them and therefore I feel compelled to take this means of calling upon you to protect the Indians as they should be protected. There is yet time to get through Congress the proper kind of Legislation.”⁷² While she received a reply from the secretary to the president that President Coolidge would carefully consider the bill once presented to his office from Congress, there is no record of whether he actually vetoed the bill.⁷³ Whether or not this bill passed, Zitkala-Ša’s immediate memos to each NCAI member detailing what action needs to be taken and how to do it, and the responsive activism seen from local NCAI lodges illuminates the gradual improvement of relations between the NCAI and the U.S. government.

The lack of responses from U.S. government officials only strengthened Zitkala-Ša’s determination to represent those who reached out to the NCAI for political and legal justice. As she and other NCAI leaders kept calling, writing, and meeting with local, state, and national officials, they started to listen. She wrote to potential state and federal representatives about their dedication to the Indian Cause, one such being Governor Alfred E. Smith, and sent information about political candidates out to NCAI Lodges to vote for.⁷⁴ Doing so motivated elected officials or those running for office to cultivate positive relationships and policy agendas specific to preserving Indigenous sovereignty.

71 Letter from Gertrude Bonnin, President, to Members of the United States Senate. February 12, 1928. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 4, Folder 10. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

72 Letter from President to His Excellency, the President of the United States. March 6, 1928. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 4, Folder 11. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

73 Reply from Secretary of the President to Gertrude Bonnin. March 7, 1928. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 4, Folder 11. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

74 Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 5. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

They saw success in February of 1929 with the passing of the Yankton Bill, S. 2792.⁷⁵ This Congressional act not only reinvested “title to certain lands in the Yankton Sioux Tribe of Indians”⁷⁶ but also symbolized the hard work put in by Zitkala-Ša, Raymond, and their extensive network of supporters collecting evidence, promoting education, and creating an intersectional community. Zitkala-Ša and Raymond gave far more time and energy fighting oppressive legislation over the next eight to nine years. Both declined in their physical health as they took little to no time to rest. They continued to attend Congressional hearings as long as their health allowed, and Zitkala pushed for change until her dying breath, with the support of her friends, family, and allies.

Conclusion

Zitkala-Ša’s confidence in her Indigenous identity, coupled by her education and passion, created a powerful legacy for Indigenous activism now. She endured assimilative schools and jobs to develop herself intellectually; she collected and documented treasured Indigenous stories to humanize the Sioux nation and, generally, Native peoples; she wrote direct political essays to call out the injustices of the U.S. government; she used her voice to promote a positive pan-Indigenous among white, middle-class Americans; and she utilized various women’s networks to spread the message and center Indigenous activism within Native communities.

She utilized her identity as a woman to gain support and empathy for Native peoples’ abject circumstances, calling upon similar tools of action used to fight for women’s suffrage to pass U.S.-Indigenous citizenship. Getting women to support Indigenous causes provided needed funds and word-of-mouth to recenter Zitkala-Ša’s activism in various Native tribes, communities, and nations. It also established support for the development of the NCAI.

Zitkala-Ša’s relationships reflected a lifelong journey of institutional change. She understood and took advantage of the shared experience of womanhood to expand the number of those who cared about and acted on the “plight of the Indian.”⁷⁷ Zitkala-Ša’s work for Indigenous suffrage

⁷⁵ Letter to Indian Kinsmen from President Gertrude Bonnin. February 8, 1929. Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 5, Folder 4. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Gertrude and Raymond Bonnin Collection. Box 3. L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

and the ensuing activism needed to gain full rights illustrates the tireless time, energy, and money it takes to change a system designed to benefit only a small part of its inhabitants. She framed U.S.-Indigenous activism as a pan-Native initiative, appealing to various Indigenous communities and women's groups. Zitkala-Ša's ability to balance her opportunities with her experience of oppression allowed her to educate, empathize, and call upon anyone interested in her mission.

While the National Council of American Indians died with Zitkala-Ša and Raymond Bonnin, it laid the necessary groundwork for future pan-Indigenous organizations to work toward U.S.-Native sovereignty. Zitkala-Ša spent her whole life not only exposing the physical, emotional, and spiritual damage inflicted upon Indigenous communities in the United States but also channeling those experiences into Indigenous advocacy work. She relied on the generosity of others for financial support throughout her later years, as she gave most (if not all) of her money to the Indian Cause. The letters and literature she wrote tell of her consistent battle with U.S. representatives and officials who knew nothing of Indigenous culture, beliefs, and practices. Not only did she donate all her money to Indigenous activism, but she also gave her body, mind, and spirit to the Indian Cause. Her devotion shines through her interactions with close friends, family, acquaintances, and officials.

Today, many Indigenous communities do not have access to basic rights and liberties available to the general U.S. population. There are various U.S. laws and policies preventing access to them, some laws which passed during Zitkala-Ša's time. Perhaps her example can motivate each of us to educate ourselves and get involved in Indigenous-led causes that advocate for the rights and visibility of Indigenous cultures, beliefs, practices, and people at risk in the United States. May we all heed Zitkala-Ša's wise call to action:

[I]t is necessary that we organize, that we may act as a body; that we may put our ideas together and choose the best. We must support this organization, we must see that it grows stronger. We will all have a chance to express our opinions and then we will try to use the best. That is our work. Let us all express what seems to us the thing that is needed, and we will assort and choose that which we must strive for at this time.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Zitkala-Ša. 2003. "Address by the Secretary-Treasurer, Society of American Indians Annual Convention (Summer 1919)." In *American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings*, edited by Cathy N. Davidson and Ada Norris, 216. N.Y., New York: Penguin Group.

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