

I DON'T: A STUDY OF MARRIAGE, ETHNICITY, AND CITIZENSHIP IN ETHNIC
WOMEN'S WRITING

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I DON'T: A STUDY OF MARRIAGE, ETHNICITY, AND CITIZENSHIP IN ETHNIC WOMEN'S WRITING

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For the 19th and well into the 20th century, marriage was the most formative institution that defined women's civic presence in the American community. Nancy Cott's Public Vows provides crucial context for my study. Cott shows how marriage not only implied a structure for private life but also participated in public order, namely the wife's civic status was subsumed by the status of her husband. An unmarried woman's civic identity was ambiguous absent a husband who could represent her in the public sphere. For ethnic women, marriage did not guarantee access to the benefits and protections of U.S. citizenship, but, in some cases, further marginalized her from mainstream society. The four ethnic women writers in this study all belong to ethnic groups who were deemed unfit for U.S. citizenship. In different ways they all engage discourse about marriage and its limitations on female agency. The writers featured here are: Sioux activist and writer Zitkala-Sa, Jewish American fiction writer Martha Wolfenstein, biracial Anglo-Chinese writer Sui Sin Far, and African American writer Zora Neale Hurston. All of these ethnic women writers reject a narrow normative definition of U.S. citizenship and offer alternative paradigms from redefining womanhood to rejecting the marriage relationship altogether. They use fiction as a platform to agitate for change and as writers act with the full conviction of citizenship to voice opposition to unjust government policies.

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INTRODUCTION

The Statue of Liberty is a conspicuous emblem of the conflicting positions about who is entitled to U.S. citizenship, and its very orientation provocatively symbolizes how citizenship was conferred or denied certain categories of people. The statue faces east, toward Europe, implying that immigrants from there would be welcomed into American society. Despite this seeming welcoming embrace of European immigrants, as Peter Schrag argues in Not Fit for Our Society, those who have argued against immigration throughout American history have recycled arguments over and over again. Nativists from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the era most associated with the Statue of Liberty as an emblem of welcome to European immigrants, recycled old arguments about the inability of immigrants to assimilate (1-4). They simply targeted different immigrant populations for critique, namely the large influx of Jewish and Southern Europeans they deemed unfit for U.S. citizenship because their values clashed with Anglo-American ones.

Notably, the Statue of Liberty's back faces the continental U.S., symbolizing how Native Americans, African Americans, and Asian immigrants were systematically barred from full belonging to the American political community. The 1790 Naturalization Act stipulates that citizenship by naturalization could be conferred only on "a free white person...of good character...who supports the Constitution of the United States...[and who] renounce[s] allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state or sovereignty." Furthermore, the Act stipulates that a child of naturalized citizens would also be considered U.S. citizens whether born domestically or abroad, but only if their "fathers had never been resident in the United States." Free white women born in the

U.S. were clearly citizens, and free white women who immigrated to the U.S. could become naturalized citizens, but for women, citizenship did not carry with it the right to vote until 1920. Ethnic women's civic status was even more constrained. If she was of a race that was not considered "white," if she had not adopted the outward markers of Anglo-American culture, or if she married a man who was not naturalizable, her access to the protections, benefits, obligations and rights of U.S. citizenship was tenuous at best.

Nancy Cott's Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation provides crucial context for my project. In her wide-ranging history of marriage and the formation of the republic, Cott argues that women, white and ethnic, were barred from full citizenship in the U.S. because their civic status was tied to the status of their husbands. "Under common law," she explains, "a woman was absorbed into her husband's legal and economic persona upon marrying, and her husband gained the civic presence she lost" (7). Marriage was the most formative relationship for a woman, and it defined how she belonged in the American community. Married women of all races, whether or not their husbands were citizens, were arguably invisible and could not access protection, benefits and rights conferred by U.S. citizenship. Thus, as Cott's study suggests, marriage, as an institution that formalized gender discrimination and sexism, prevented women from claiming full citizenship, even though such exclusion would seem to conflict with the nation's founding democratic principles.

The ethnic women in this study were members of groups excluded, in varying degrees and in different ways, from full participation in Anglo-American society. As members of ethnic minorities, these women faced both social prejudices and discriminatory laws, and they also sometimes faced sexism and discrimination as women

within their own ethnic groups. In a study of how marginalized groups place restrictions on women's subjectivity, cultural theorist Anne Phillips suggests that despite agitation for cultural independence, marginalized groups also tend to oppress women in their own group (271). In the case of Chinese Americans, patriarchy based on Confucian values severely curbed Chinese women's ability to act independently in American society. Patriarchal structures in African American and Jewish communities also limited women's access to mainstream society. In traditional Native American cultures, women were strong and consequential participants in the tribe (Hoxie 54), but U.S. government policies aimed to inculcate patriarchal family values. In important ways, the four ethnic women writers in this study write against patriarchy within their ethnic groups in order to formulate alternatives to the systematic oppression of ethnic women by ethnic men. They provocatively explore the marriage relationship as a means by which ethnic women are oppressed and excluded from power in both their ethnic communities and the larger American community. Sometimes, the women characters in their fictions triumph over marriage's restrictions to find new ways to claim agency and identity separate from their husbands.

The four ethnic women writers in this study all engage in different ways the marriage relationship as central paradigm for women's belonging in the American community. This study surveys the semi-autobiographical writings, journalism, and fiction of the prominent Native American activist in the early 20th century, Zitkala-Sa. As I will demonstrate, her writings express a deep concern about Native American women's access to the benefits of U.S. citizenship during the Dawes Act era and through the various genres, Zitkala-Sa shows how unmarried women are the best warriors for the

cause of her people. Martha Wolfenstein is the second author featured in this study. She is a Jewish American writer who emigrated from Central Europe in the 1870s. As I will show, her stories reflect the debates of her time about the difficulties of balancing Jewish tradition with the inevitable modernization that Jewish American women must adapt to in order to keep Jewish traditions alive. Sui Sin Far is a writer of mixed racial heritage who places the marriage relationship squarely in the center of her fictional characters' lives. In important ways, these Chinese American wives embody the best qualities of American womanhood and demonstrate the lengths that Chinese women will go to keep their families together. My survey of Sui Sin Far's fiction shows various versions of the marriage relationship to show the different ways that Chinese American wives defend themselves against assimilation that their husbands force upon them. They withstand the cultural assaults and show the inhuman effects of the Exclusion Act era as it rips Chinese American families apart. Zora Neale Hurston is the only writer whose stories appeared after the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. But, as I will show, her stories show how American government policy in the south prevented both African American women and men from meaningful access to the benefits, rights, and obligations of U.S. citizenship. Her characters are all birth-right citizens, but they are systematically prevented from acting on those rights. Hurston chooses marriage as a paradigm to explore her characters' isolation in Jim Crow south as well as the ways and lengths their husbands will go to transfer their feelings of oppression onto their overburdened wives. Both Zitkala-Sa and Martha Wolfenstein reject the marriage relationship as a model of civic identity. In Sui Sin Far's stories, Chinese wives rebel against the strictures of marriage to claim agency over husbands who keep them isolated to try to force them to

assimilate. In Hurston's story "Sweat," an African American marriage ceases to be mutually sustaining, prevents a woman from achieving full self-actualization, and ends in violence and death. In all of these marriages, gender as a social construct makes women invisible in the civic sphere, and they can gain access only through their husbands. Looking at the marriage relationship as a social phenomenon, we can begin to see how it produces gender inequality.¹ By making social construct visible, these four ethnic women authors seek to change it and to formulate a new role for all women. The four women writers here all posit alternatives to the marriage relationship, in which ethnic women claim agency and gain control over their lives.

Several landmark laws and legal decisions were designed to, and largely succeeded in, limiting access to full citizenship in the U.S. The passage of the so-called Reconstruction Amendments to the Constitution after the Civil War sparked controversy and motivated activism by those who sought to expand the scope of citizenship for women. The Fourteenth Amendment granted birth-right citizenship to former slaves, both men and women, but the Fifteenth Amendment, which granted the right to vote to only male former slaves, inaugurated a debate about who was better suited for full enfranchisement: white women or former slave men. As historian Ellen Dubois observes, previous to the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, the "case for suffrage had consistently been put in terms of the individual rights of all persons, regardless of their sex and race. Angered by their exclusion from the Fifteenth Amendment, women's rights advocates began to develop fundamentally different arguments for their cause. They claimed their right to the ballot not as individuals but as a sex... The reason women should vote was not that they were the same as men but that they were different. That

made for a thorough reversal of classic women's rights premises" (340). While women's rights activists agitated for the right to vote, ethnic women were largely left behind. Indeed, while the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments gave African American men both citizenship and the right to vote, the late 19th century saw the passage of laws that excluded men and women from other racial groups from citizenship. The two most consequential pieces of legislation designed to regulate and limit who could become a U.S. citizen were the Dawes Act and the Chinese Exclusion Act.

In 1882, Congress passed a law limiting the number of Chinese laborers who could enter the country, but Section 14 went further, excluding Chinese not only from immigration but also from citizenship. Chinese Immigration, a landmark analysis by early 20th century historian Mary Roberts Coolidge, exposed the injustice of the Exclusion Act and its practical consequences for the Chinese in America. In her book, Coolidge outlines the major arguments for the passage of the Exclusion Act, ranging from the unwillingness of the Chinese to change their allegiance to the U.S., to their perceived clannishness, to the sojourner habits of the Chinese workers, and their ostensible unwillingness to conform to white, Anglo-American culture by learning the language or practicing Christianity (402). Critics of Chinese immigration and citizenship targeted Chinese women in particular for exclusion on moral, cultural, and economic grounds. In the late 19th century, social critic and economist George F. Seward wrote about the challenges Chinese immigrant women faced. Restricted from entering the country legally because they were thought to be mostly prostitutes, Anglo-Americans also considered them to be weak and subject to corruption by Chinese men (269, 286). Many Chinese men returned to China to marry Chinese women, but the strict laws

requiring immense and detailed documentation to leave and return to the U.S. had the effect of breaking up these Chinese families. Chinese men who returned to the U.S. without their wives often financially supported their families in China, but because it was so difficult to obtain the necessary paperwork to reunite families, marriage did not afford Chinese women meaningful protection under the law or help to keep their families intact. Indeed, even if a Chinese immigrant man successfully brought his Chinese wife to the U.S. and she gave birth to children who could claim status as birth-right American citizens, she herself had no access to citizenship. She thus was at a double remove from the mainstream American community.

The Dawes Act, also passed in the late 19th century, laid out a path to U.S. citizenship for Native Americans who became yeoman farmers, separated from their tribes living instead in individual nuclear families. The Act allotted land to individual families for a 25-year trust period, on the theory that during that period they would establish self-sufficiency and become prepared for full citizenship. At the end of the trust period, the land and citizenship were supposed to be granted to them permanently, but only if they had shed their native ways and adopted Anglo-American cultural practices, speaking English, living in nuclear families, taking up Christian religion, and living in Anglo-American style dwellings instead of traditional housing forms, such as teepees. Section 6 of the Act states, “And every Indian born within the territorial limits of the United States to whom allotments shall have been made under the provisions of this act...and every Indian born within the territorial limits of the United States who has voluntarily taken up...his residence separate and apart from any tribe of Indians therein, and had adopted the habits of civilized life, is hereby declared to be a citizen of the

United States.” The consequences of the land allotment process under the Dawes Act were grim. When Native Americans renounced their tribal customs, Native American women lost their power in the family and their status in the tribe because Native American men became patriarchal heads of household. Allotment and the cultural transformations it fostered also destroyed traditional practices in relation to land, with Native American men replacing Native American women as the main agriculturalists. Adopting the habits of “civilized” life also meant that indigenous peoples would conform to Anglo-American marriage, in which wives were subordinate to husbands, even though such subordination of wives was alien to Native American sensibilities. In her study of Native American culture during the period of the Dawes Act, Louise Newman suggests that one of the main goals of the U.S. imperial expansion westward was to destroy Native American culture via modeling Anglo-American domestic roles; and white women were, as she demonstrates, complicit in the systematic sexism they transposed from their own lives onto the lives of Native American women. “One of the most profound ironies of this history,” Newman writes, “is that at the very moment that the white women’s movement was engaged in various critique of patriarchal gender relations in the United States, it called for the introduction of patriarchy into those societies deemed ‘inferior’ precisely because they did not manifest the supposedly civilized gender practices of the United States” (171). Indeed, the emancipation of Native American women from a perceived oppressive relationship to her husband was the marker that the Native American society had become “civilized” enough for Native American individuals to become citizens. Ironically, however, turning Native American women into housewives actually caused them to lose status, while only men gained status (Newman 166).

African American women were granted citizenship under the Fourteenth Amendment, if not suffrage under the Fifteenth. Even though they were not excluded from citizenship, like Chinese women, or forced to undergo a process of cultural exclusion to gain citizenship, African American women were nevertheless alienated from meaningful participation in the American community until well into the 20th century by the institutionalized sexism of the marriage relationship and by Jim Crow laws in the Southern States and social segregation and exclusion in other regions, both of which often prevented African American men and women from exercising rights granted by the Reconstruction Amendments. In Critical Social Theory in the Interests of Black Folks, African American cultural historian Lucius Outlaw analyzes the processes that created and reinforced the disparities between people of different races and the white mainstream culture. Those in power believed that there were “natural kinds” – races, sexes, and social orders of caste and class – whereby place in the hierarchy was determined by capacity and character as a function of kind that thus determined the absolute (in themselves) and relative (compared to others) and moral and social value of persons and peoples” (165). Those of races or “natural kinds” that were outside of the mainstream were considered to be, among other things, intellectually incapable of carrying out the obligations of U.S. citizenship (Outlaw 165). Racism, sexism, and social alienation thus combined to prevent African American women from participating fully in the American community. African Americans were citizens by birth, but they were still at a double remove from the American mainstream because patriarchal marriage, strongly promoted to former slaves as a social ideal, and Jim Crow laws in the south constrained the daily lives of African Americans, both men and women. Although birth-right citizens, African

American women were even further marginalized by Anglo-American cultural imperialism.

For immigrants from Western and Central Europe, selective assimilation and cultural adaptation to Anglo-American values came relatively easily. These immigrants were not excluded from either immigration or naturalization. Neither were Jewish immigrants from Europe excluded from immigration or citizenship, but many in Anglo-American culture considered them undesirable as citizens and argued for their exclusion. Eric L. Goldstein considers the case of Jews from Central Europe from the mid 19th century forward in The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity. Jews from Central Europe were considered white and therefore, under the Naturalization Act of 1790, were eligible for U.S. citizenship. They also shared important values with Anglo-American culture (84). Indeed, some considered Jews to be a model for other immigrants to the U.S. Horace Kallen and other proponents of cultural pluralism thought that the Jewish immigrants were not that different from the first English settlers in North America: they came with the same spirit, prepared to start new lives, and adapted easily to American customs. As Avraham Barkai demonstrates in his study of German-Jewish immigration to the U.S., these immigrants did not come destitute to America's shores, but rather had education, skills, and enough capital to start businesses (34). But many immigrant Jews found it difficult to balance their commitment to Judaism with their desire to assimilate and Americanize. Hasia R. Diner's study of the second Jewish migrations in the mid 19th century, A Time for Gathering, highlights how difficult it was for immigrants to strike such a balance. For all of their preparedness to start new lives in the U.S., many Jews were unwilling, for instance, to abandon certain Jewish religious and

cultural practices, such as burial rites and Jewish charitable groups, to fit in with their Anglo-American neighbors (Diner 165). As Jewish immigrants sought to balance assimilation and preservation, Jewish women were tasked with transmitting Jewish culture to the children of the family. They were often isolated from the broader secular American society, while Jewish husbands worked outside of the home and assimilated enough to be able to make a living and support the family (Goldstein 13). Much of the discourse that surrounded Jewish domesticity was based on gender and race as immutable aspects of Jewish culture that limited Jewish women to the home and prevented them from integrating into Anglo-American culture (Goldstein 22). Gender roles and the pressure to create good Jews (as distinct from American citizens) put the cultural pluralism of a large democratic society like America beyond Jewish American women. Although cultural ideologues like Kallen supported multiculturalism, Jewish women's integration and experience with American democratic principles remained ambiguous. A gendered and racialized ideal of Jewish womanhood limited Jewish women's access to Anglo-American society. It was also an ill-fitted and out-dated ideal that ill-equipped them to deal with the pressure to assimilate that their children and husbands faced.

Much of the discourse surrounding who was fit to join the American community centered on a concept of nation that seems both rigid and pliable. Debates about how to define the American nation and the experience of being a citizen were wide-ranging, simultaneously offering inclusion and emphasizing exclusion. Early 20th century cultural theorist Emory Bogardus suggests in Essentials of Americanization that American society is built on a concept of "neighborism," an inclusionist ideology defining how the nation is built. Those who practice "neighborism," he writes, "[enter] into the spirit of our

country...Americanization means helping the foreign to acquire an American standard of living and an American loyalty...Americanization means giving the immigrant the best America has to offer and retaining for the Americans the best in the immigrant...Americanization is the uniting of new and native-born Americans in fuller common understanding and appreciation to secure by means of self-government the highest welfare of all (32). Defining Americanization as a process of inclusion, with existing citizens welcoming immigrants into the nation by enacting the Golden Rule philosophy, Bogardus defines the nation as built on the promise of transformation and the making of new citizens. When they themselves have been transformed into members of the national community, peoples originating from different cultures can also cultivate the practice of “neighborism” and feel equal to native-born Americans. Similarly Horace Kallen saw the American nation as one that could bring in elements of many cultures, a symphony of multiple cultures (12). Randolph Bourne, another early 20th century cultural theorist, described American pluralism as a form of cosmopolitanism: Americans were citizens of the world, not citizens of a narrowly defined nation, as others at the turn of the 20th century argued.² However, the nativist line of reasoning was powerful at the turn of the century. Royal Dixon, a special lecturer on Americanization in the early decades of the 20th century, argued that America’s distinct culture required those who wanted access to citizenship transform themselves: “The formal act of registering citizenship in the United States should be only the outward sign of an inward and patriotic grace” (Dixon 68). Those who aspire to citizenship should not bring with them elements of their home culture that might enrich Anglo-American culture they must change fundamentally to reflect their assimilation into a new culture.

In the early 20th century, then, nativism was based on a principle of exclusion rather than inclusion. Many late 20th century theorists have suggested that the rigidity of nativists' ideas about who could belong to the American community is based on the logic of family belonging and a collective agreement on the fundamental principles of democracy.³ Considering these questions in light of the texts by ethnic women authors I analyze in the chapters of this dissertation and ethnic people's access to American citizenship, it seems that at the turn of the century, the American nation was constituted by the acceptance of common myths, memories, symbols and values by a well-defined mainstream culture connected to a specific homeland and patriotism (Weber qtd in Leoussi 3). Indeed, one of the more common critiques of ethnic peoples was their unwillingness to declare allegiance to the U.S. and their determination to keep their traditions alive in ways that might conflict with the dominant culture's understanding of loyalty to the U.S.

For ethnic women, the road to full belonging in the American community at the turn of the century was beset with obstacles. It was decidedly difficult to reconcile a desire to embrace the principles of American democracy and to retain their cultural identity. Marriage profoundly shaped the ways that ethnic women, as well as white women, could access the American community. The women writers I feature in my study all write about marriage and womanhood as central paradigms for belonging. In important ways, these ethnic women write about the experience of marriage as a rigid institution, anti-democratic in spirit. In their fiction, marriage is not fitted as a metaphor for citizenship as a form of belonging, nor does it qualify women for Americanization or guarantee them access to full U.S. citizenship. Full citizenship was denied all women

until the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1920 granted women the vote, but ethnic women were even further alienated from full participation in the American community because they were socially barred from accessing the benefits of and acting on the obligations that American citizenship confers. Thus, many of the female characters in the fiction that I foreground in this project break with marriage conventions to defy narrow normative definition of American citizenship and offer alternative paradigms, from redefining womanhood to rejecting the marriage relationship all together. Unable to participate in the consensus constitution of the nation and barred from transformation, their fiction challenges both conceptions of nation formation and citizenship.

Family as a metaphor for who “belongs” to American society had powerful implications for both ethnic and white women, and in many respects, it was more than a metaphor. Ethnic women and their families were marginalized, prevented from accessing the full protection of U.S. citizenship, and denied the opportunity to act on its obligations or to voice opposition to unfair and unjust social policies through the ballot box. Furthermore, the Cable Act of 1922 stipulated that a woman lost her U.S. citizenship if she married a man who was unnaturalizable by law (Cott 164-165). Thus marriage to the “wrong” man could cause even a birth-right, cradle-American woman to lose the legal protection and the rights that she had as a U.S. citizen, and conceivably, her family could be deported and she would have little recourse. The Cable Act seemed designed to prevent the contamination of the American national family through intermarriage, or at least to isolate mixed families in American society to the point that wives, mothers, fathers, and husbands were virtually powerless.

The family metaphor also constructed a particular version of the nation and national “character.” If the American community is a family unit, citizenship is a matter of inheritance, something that is “passed down” through generations of a family. In Walter Benn Michaels’ influential account of turn-of-the-century American culture and literature, nativism depends on just such concepts of bloodlines and nuclear family structures. According to Michaels, “nativism is wanting to belong to a family [which] transforms American identity to the sort of thing that could be acquired (through naturalization) to the sort of thing that had to be inherited (from one’s parents)” (8). None of the four women in this study belonged to this national family as nativists defined it. U.S. citizenship, then, is a status that is deferred and denied whole populations of people by race and reasons for the exclusion of whole sectors of people are based on familiar and well-worn arguments. Citizenship could not be an equalizer if whole categories of people were excluded from citizenship based on race or culture, two aspects of a woman’s background that were seemingly indelible parts of her character. Nativists effectively deployed a definition of U.S. citizenship to white-wash American society. The ethnic women in this study defy in important ways the marginalization of people of their same ethnic and racial heritages. These women use their fiction to reject government policy and point out its inconsistencies and injustices. Fiction thus becomes a means to protest the treatment of their communities. Nevertheless, hope is also an important theme in their stories. They write in hopes that U.S. immigration law and marriage will change and that their stories might be the impetus for change. Peter Schrag argues that time is an important leveler for ethnic people in the U.S. (or at least for immigrants). “Often, as most of us should know,” he writes, “the immigrants who were

demeaned by one generation were parents and grandparents of the successes of the next generation. Perhaps, not paradoxically, many of them, or their children or grandchildren, later joined those who attacked and disparaged the next arrivals, or would-be arrivals, with the same vehemence that had been leveled against them or their forebears” (1). The nativist concept of nation as family changed and evolved over time, seemingly reversing the discrimination against ethnic peoples as policies change. The family metaphor is a powerful reminder of the ebb and flow of immigration policy in the U.S. from the turn of the 20th century to the 21st century. However, for ethnic women in the early decades of the 20th century, family and marriage were precisely the social constructs that marginalized them. While Schrag argues that given time, generations of immigrants and their descendants will be included in the American family, the price could be quite steep for an individual ethnic woman and her family, and the logic of change over time cannot explain the situations faced by Native American and African American women.

The four ethnic women writers in this study all position themselves in the same way relative to their cultural and racial heritage: they are expert interpreters of their people’s experiences because of their status as insiders to their communities. Their fiction is clearly tailored to a reading audience from the dominant Anglo-American culture and is designed to educate them about ethnic people and communities. They do not only seek to educate or give exposure for marginalized people, however. They want to inspire their readers to activism. Their stories might entertain readers by giving them access to “exotic” lives, but these ethnic women writers also write to preserve their culture from being absorbed by Anglo-American culture. In “Mapping the Field,” Daniele Conversi studies how marginalized groups agitate for the preservation of culture,

suggesting that marginalized peoples might not be motivated by material gains, but rather by the preservation of cultural heritage (17). Indeed, preservation of cultural heritage is a core aim of these ethnic women, but they also seek fundamental change in the dominant society. That dominant culture they seek to reform is the crucial historical context for the stories, which were not written in isolation or in a vacuum. Rather through their stories these writers actively engage with policies that limit agency and ability of ethnic peoples to operate independently from the dominant Anglo-American culture or to exercise power within as citizens. The characters in their stories fight against oppressive laws and the social and legal structures of marriage, dramatizing what full citizenship for ethnic women might look like. Marriage is the crucible for these writers to explore the dynamics of the social constructs of gender and sexism. If marriage is a socially sanctioned institution that oppresses women (as these ethnic women writers demonstrate), then society must reform itself and marriage so ethnic women can be liberated and ushered into full U.S. citizenship. Their fiction demonstrates that marriage itself cannot protect ethnic women in American society. Their fiction also suggests that single women must be granted full agency in the American community, rather than being marginalized by a dominant culture that defines the relationship of all women in the nation, whether married or single, through marriage, giving them access to citizenship only secondarily through men.

One of the most important rights of U.S. citizenship is the right to vote, a key means for expressing dissent against unjust government policies. In a representative democracy like the U.S., the vote is a crucial form of voice in government, and yet female citizens were not granted the vote until 1920, years after the most exclusionary

immigration and citizenship policies had become deeply embedded in society (and, indeed, immigration policy became even more restrictive after women were granted suffrage, and civil rights enforcement continued to decline). Ethnic women had even less of a voice in shaping law and policy designed to break up their families and send them to the margins of society. The four women in this study had very different legal relationships to the U.S. nation. Zora Neale Hurston was a birth-right citizen, although she faced the same obstacles to exercising her citizenship rights as did other early 20th century African Americans. Martha Wolfenstein was an immigrant who became a naturalized citizen in the late 19th century. Zitkala-Sa did not become a full citizen until 1924, when Congress passed a statute granting all Native Americans citizenship. As a subject of the British Empire, Sui Sin Far was not an American citizen at all but she felt a deep connection to the Chinese American immigrant women she wrote about and understood the complexity of U.S. laws affecting them. While their citizenship status was varied, they all acted and wrote with the full conviction that citizenship confers, expressing their disagreement with unjust U.S. immigration and citizenship policies and drawing attention to the plight of those most deeply affected. Acting on their duties as citizens, (whether or not the U.S. nation recognized them as such), they voiced their dissent, urging their own people to rebel against policy that did not affect their lives directly. In their fiction, they take on the responsibility to act on behalf of the people they write about, those who have no voice by law, and demonstrate that they are worthy of U.S. citizenship. Acting on their sense of themselves as citizens, these four ethnic women writers use writing as a way to fulfill their duties as citizens and implicitly argue that other marginalized peoples, and especially ethnic women, should be granted

citizenship. Conversi compellingly argues intellectuals should act as interpreters rather than manipulators (26). These four women act as interpreters of a particular experience in American culture, but they also try to effect change, to make the lives of all ethnic peoples better and give them access to independence.

Zitkala-Sa wrote the majority of her fiction during the fifty years that the Dawes Act was in place. In her early semi-autobiographical essays published in the Atlantic Monthly in the first decade of the 20th century, she chronicles her life on the reservation on the Great Plains with her mother and contrasts it with her experience at a boarding school and at a college in Indiana. She effectively expresses the irony of “civilizing” efforts of the teachers at the school and the benefactors who seek to change Native American sensibilities and tribal culture, demonstrating that the civilizing process is inhumane and violent. She makes it clear that the Dawes Act and its prescription for Native American citizenship is a bad policy that fails to bring Native Americans into the mainstream in a meaningful way. Later, when she gained editorship of the American Indian Magazine, she used the journal as a platform to argue for selective assimilation of Native Americans, most importantly by learning English. She also urged Native Americans to take land allotments under the Dawes Act, but contrary to the logic of the law, to use them to keep tribes together. She thus simultaneously fomented native rebellion against American government policy and urged Native Americans to modernize in ways that did not conflict with their cultural sensibilities. Her later fiction, including the two stories featured in this study, “A Dream of Her Grandfather” and “The Wide-Spread Enigma Concerning Blue-Star Woman,” takes on the role of women in native society while also imagining how Native American women can engage mainstream

society as representatives of their communities. In both of these stories, single women are the inheritors of Native American traditions, and they are savvy and alert to the Anglo-American threats to their people and culture. In “A Dream of Her Grandfather” Zitkala-Sa suggests that single young women are the inheritors and future activists for the Native American cause, mirroring Zitkala-Sa’s own activism. In “The Wide-Spread Enigma Concerning Blue-Star Woman” she shows how an older single woman functions in native society and attempts to resist the treachery of male Native Americans who have adopted white ways and seek to undermine native culture. The men in these two stories, native and white, are proven to be treacherous and untrustworthy, or, as is the case with Chief High-Flier in the latter story, are completely impotent. In this way, Zitkala-Sa suggests that single Native American women unburdened by powerless men represent the best hope for rebellion against policies like the Dawes Act and can lead their tribes in strategic modernization efforts designed to help them survive in the new century and beyond.

Although Martha Wolfenstein’s stories take place in a European Jewish ghetto, they implicitly present a model of Jewish womanhood that might be adopted by American Jewish women who seek to navigate narrow normative prescriptions for U.S. citizenship. Wolfenstein’s Jewish women are all strong characters who feel keenly the sorrows and troubles of their people, who are marginalized in a predominantly Christian society. These women try to keep Jewish traditions alive in the face of certain violence against them in the form of pogroms. There were no pogroms in the U.S., but Wolfenstein implicitly exposes the complacency of Jewish Americans in a democratic society that allows religious freedom and cultural diversity. Jewish Americans from the