



# **Voices of American Indian Assimilation and Resistance: Helen Hunt Jackson, Sarah Winnemucca, and Victoria Howard**

*Siobhan Senier*

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Between 1879 and 1934, the United States government made a concerted effort to dissolve American Indian tribes by allotting communally held lands and forcing them to adopt Euro-American practices. Yet women seized a wave of national fascination with American Indians to fashion themselves as public storytellers and to challenge the national drive to assimilate indigenous peoples.

This book focuses on three women of this era--the white writer and activist Helen Hunt Jackson, whose 1884 bestseller *Ramona* has been dubbed "the 'Indian' *Uncle Tom's Cabin*"; the Paiute performer Sarah Winnemucca, whose *Life Among the Piutes* is believed to be the first Native woman's autobiography; and Victoria Howard, the Clackamas Chinook storyteller, who worked with Melville Jacobs in 1929 to transcribe hundreds of narratives, ethnographic texts, and songs.

During this time, public officials and white citizens advocated the destruction of tribal cultures and identities, which they viewed as a threat to the legal and social traditions of the United States. Jackson, Winnemucca, and Howard countered these fears by providing opportunity for public thought and discussion through their writing and speaking. Senier is the first to offer a reading of the texts of these three women together and her unique presentation of American Indian oral narrative alongside written narrative recovers a discourse of resistance to assimilation in general and allotment in particular in the voices of American Indian and women artists.

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